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An analysis of the relationship between leisure participation and perceived quality of life

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between leisure participation and perceived quality of life among respondents in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Using a cross-sectional research design, data were collected from 247 participants at four community events. The results reveal a positive relationship between leisure participation and perceived quality of life. However, no statistically significant differences were found between selected independent variables and quality of life, and the effect sizes indicated minimal impacts. In view of the positive effects of leisure involvement on perceived quality of life, the study recommends, inter alia, that the government play a leading role in encouraging leisure practice through policy implementation within communities.

Keywords: Leisure participation; quality of life; Eastern Cape province; South Africa.

Introduction

Leisure research has grown significantly in recent years, due to technological advances that have greatly increased leisure options (Elisondo et al., 2022), increased access and speed of internet connectivity (Zach et al., 2016) and increasing awareness of benefits of leisure participation among community members (Raza et al., 2020). Similarly, literature (Global Wellness Institute (GWI), 2018; Tamminen et al., 2020) has focused on the relationship between leisure and quality of life (QOL), particularly because of the possible benefits of

leisure participation to mental health. Interest in studies exploring specific aspects of leisure participation in relation to self-fulfilment (McCabe & Johnson, 2013), improved mental health (Nicolaidis & Grobler, 2017), physical health benefits (Forsman et al., 2015) and improved performance in the workplace (De Bloom et al., 2013), has also grown significantly.

Leisure and social wellbeing

Pyke et al. (2019) assert that leisure activities foster social and personal development in individuals by providing opportunities to interact with people from different income groups, education levels, social status and cultural backgrounds. From a slightly different perspective, Chang (2015) and Dillette et al. (2018) postulate that participation in leisure activities helps to alleviate the stresses of life that impact negatively on the quality of life.

Studies by Tao et al. (2022) and Iwasaki (2007) show that leisure participation significantly improves QOL in older people by reducing stress, while Filho et al. (1998) found that women who had extra family responsibilities after formal jobs experienced reduced occupational stress, as a result of taking part in leisure activities. Furthermore, certain attributes of leisure have been found to be favourable to improvements in the quality of life. Craike and Coleman (2005) indicated that the aspect of self-determination that is pivotal to the exercise of leisure equally resonates favourably with quality-of-life enhancements.

In other words, the fact that leisure participants exercise the freedom to choose the activities they engage in, is central to the relaxation experienced by those who take part in leisure. People taking part in leisure activities also choose the time they prefer to engage in leisure practice. In addition, the social participation aspect of leisure tends to result in improvements in perceived quality of life (Chang & Yu, 2013). This relates to the social support that participants in leisure activities receive from other companions (Aksoy et al., 2017). The fact that leisure participants know that support is readily available when needed indirectly empowers and alleviates potential anxieties about the unknown (Pyke et al., 2019).

Leisure and personal well-being

Leisure participation is generally considered a means of escape from the daily routine of work and other life obligations (Kroesen & Handy, 2014). In this regard, Dillette et al. (2018) assert that leisure activities offer people an opportunity to relax rest and rejuvenate. Similarly, research has highlighted the important role that leisure participation plays in both physical and mental health (Chen & Petrick, 2013; Pritchard et al., 2011). Moreover, Raza et al.

(2020) affirm that leisure time offers some people the opportunity to pursue higher goals of life satisfaction which they would otherwise not be able to engage in during work time.

From a wellness perspective, studies have found that participation in leisure activities can have health benefits by boosting the immune system (Pressman & Cohen, 2005), mitigating the incidence of cardiovascular disease, reducing stress levels (Seeman et al., 1994) and nurturing self-esteem (Cornman et al., 2003). Furthermore, involvement in leisure activities avails opportunities for individuals to learn new ways of life, new ways of doing things, and to acquire new knowledge (Nawijn & Veenhoven, 2011).

In this regard, the new sociocultural skills acquired during leisure time could unveil greater awareness, sensitivity and understanding of humanity, and even help the individual identify a new role that they could play in society (Chen & Petrick, 2013). Building on this view, Higgins-Desbiolles (2006) asserted that participation in leisure tourism and leisure activities could develop a strong social force capable of transforming the world and humanity. Deci and Ryan (2002) emphasised that the social and community bonds which are developed through leisure participation enhance the individual's well-being, while simultaneously fostering an environment for forging successful relationships and friendships in the future (Nawijn & Veenhoven, 2011).

McCabe and Johnson (2013) and Chen and Petrick (2013) suggest that the social skills and bonds formed through leisure involvement are instrumental in building successful and happy families and communities. In support of this proposition, Minnaert et al. (2009) affirmed that, further to helping people live healthier and longer lives, leisure participation is a form of social investment that provides long-term returns in the form of stronger family and community bonds which make people lead happier lives and enjoy an improved quality of life. It is in this vein that the study of Minnaert et al. (2009) and a number of others (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Hemingway & Jack, 2013; McCabe, 2009; Randle et al., 2018; Sedgley et al., 2011; Waldinger, 2016) validate the positive co-relation between leisure involvement and quality of life.

However, Dolnicar et al. (2012) contest the presumptive assertion that leisure participation impacts positively on everyone's quality of life. They argue that some aspects of leisure activities are detrimental to the participants' health, such as in cases where the journey to the place of leisure engagement is stressful to the participant. In the same vein, Rundle (2018) reveals that the travel experience is riddled with incidents that could lead to a deterioration in

the quality of life of tourists, such as, among others, airport luggage and security checks and flight delays.

This scepticism regarding the generally positive effects of leisure participation on quality of life is shared by Randle et al. (2018), who provide empirical evidence to the effect that people's perceptions of vacations and leisure participation differ substantially when they do not have the opportunity to participate in those activities, from when they actually do have exposure to the leisure activities. Tao et al.'s (2022) recommendation is that further studies be undertaken to ascertain the nature of the relationship between leisure participation and quality of life. This study is a response to this call for further research, by exploring the nature of the relationship between leisure participation and the perceived quality of life in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

Leisure participation and quality of life

Academics have been greatly challenged in arriving at a generally accepted definition of the term 'quality of life' (QOL), because of the multiple definitions that have been put forth (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Dillette et al., 2018). However, the diverse approaches to the QOL question can be analysed from two points of interrogation, namely: whether QOL should be measured objectively or subjectively, and if the measurement index should be uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Pyke et al., 2019; Randle et al., 2018). Proponents of the objective assessment debate advance the view that QOL should be measured according to a set of generally agreed constructs, while those of the subjective school of thought advance the suggestion that QOL should be self-assessed, based on each individual's determination of their life satisfaction (Blishen & Atkinson, 1980).

From a uni-dimensional perspective, QOL should be measured based on a set of survey items designed to determine an individual's satisfaction with life as a whole (Juniu, 2010). On the other hand, multi-dimensional indicators seek to measure QOL from diverse life domains such as social life, family life and work life (Neal et al., 2007). Based on the fact that leisure participation is premised on freedom of choice, the current study approaches QOL as subjectively experienced by the respondents. This perspective is uni-dimensional, as life is viewed as an individual's evaluation of life satisfaction, gratification, and degree of contentment with regard to their experiences after involvement in a leisure activity.

Study background

Eastern Cape provincial context

With a population of approximately seven million inhabitants, the Eastern Cape province is ranked third, after Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, of the nine provinces of South Africa (Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), 2016). The province is largely rural, with subsistence agriculture as the economic lifeline of most families (Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC), 2019). In terms of economic performance, the Eastern Cape is rated as the poorest province in South Africa, with the lowest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of R81875 in 2017 (Stats, SA, 2019). The Eastern Cape Vision 2030 Provincial Development Plan (PDP) (Province of the Eastern Cape, 2014) has identified a number of challenges to be addressed by the year 2030, the top eight challenges including high unemployment, poor standard of education, poor infrastructure, poor spatial planning, over-dependence on the motor vehicle manufacturing industry, widespread disease burden, uneven and poor public services, and corruption.

Administratively, the province is divided into eight municipalities, with two metropolitan municipalities (Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality and Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality) and six district municipalities (Chris Hani District Municipality, OR Tambo District Municipality, Joe Gqabi District Municipality, Alfred Nzo District Municipality, Amathole District Municipality and Cacadu District Municipality). Economic opportunities in the Eastern Cape have been identified as comprising the rich biodiversity, an extensive ocean economy potential characterised by the over800-kilometre coastline of the Indian Ocean, and mineral and energy resources (Province of the Eastern Cape, 2014).

Many of the economic opportunities in the Eastern Cape remain untapped, however, thereby explaining the huge social burden of the province as evident in the high percentage of people living below the upper-bound poverty line (UBPL) of 67.3% (Stats SA, 2019b), a high unemployment rate of 35.6% (ECSECC, 2019) and a high disease burden (Province of the Eastern Cape, 2014), with a mental illness prevalence rate of 16.8% (Madala-Witbooi & Adeniyi, 2019; Stewart-Brown et al., 2015). It is against this socio-economic background that the current study aims to analyse the relationship between leisure participation and perceived QOL in the Eastern Cape province.

Theoretical background

Delving into the theoretical framework of this study requires a deconstruction of the notions of happiness and well-being, both of which have been associated with QOL (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Nicolaides & Grobler, 2017; Randle et al., 2018) and leisure (Croes & Rivera, 2017; Dillette et al, 2018). In a leisure context, happiness has been described as a psychological state of fulfilment and well-being experienced by individuals in anticipation, during and after participation in a leisure activity (Filep, 2014). Corvo (2011) and Gilbert and Abdullah (2004) have asserted that studies exploring the link between happiness and leisure have largely adopted a subjective approach, thereby, in general, neglecting the eudemonic or welfare attributes of leisure experiences and tourism. Key indicators of subjective well-being include the positive effects of joy, excitement, contentment and ecstasy (Diener, 2000).

Gilbert and Abdullah (2004) studied people who participated in leisure and those who did not, in order to determine if leisure involvement does indeed impact positively on well-being or life satisfaction, and found that there is a positive correlation between leisure involvement and subjective well-being. Similarly, a study by Kroesen and Handy (2014) sought to determine the extent to which leisure participation correlated with happiness in the long term. Still using the subjective well-being approach as the premise, the results were mixed, as while affirming the positive correlation between leisure and the cognitive component of happiness in the long run, they revealed a negative relationship between leisure and the affective component of happiness.

In an attempt to provide greater clarity on the measurement of subjective well-being in a holistic manner that would include the eudemonic considerations, Seligman (2011) refined his original theory of authentic happiness to develop the PERMA model of well-being. The PERMA model proposed the measurement of the ultimate state of well-being (happiness) to include five key pillars, namely: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). Filep (2014) argues in favour of the suitability of the PERMA model, and supports its application in leisure and tourism studies.

Butler and Kern (2015) suggest the inclusion of health and negative emotions in the PERMA model, to enhance its use in the measurement of quality of life. It is in this regard that the QOL constructs used in this study are informed by the PERMA model, and adjusted in consideration of the socio-economic peculiarities of residents of the Eastern Cape province, in order to determine the relationship between leisure participation and perceived QOL

among the respondents. Hence, six final QOL measurement variables retained for used in the study were captured: peace with self,perfect life,satisfaction, material contentment, absence of anxiety, and relaxation in sleep.

Methodology

The purpose of this paper was to analyse the relationship between leisure participation and perceived QOL among respondents in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Considering the prevailing socio-economic challenges identified in the background of this study, the goal was to determine the effects of leisure practice on perceived quality of life. Quantitative research methods were employed to achieve the goal of this study. The following sections explain the development of the research instrument, data collection and data analysis.

Study instrument

The questionnaire that was used in the collection of data in this study was arrived at through the process of an extensive literature review, as detailed out in the theoretical underpinning of this study; however, the operational constructs of the study can be traced to the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) and a study by Dillette et al. (2018). These QOL constructs were subsequently modified in consideration of the specific socio-economic circumstances operating in the Eastern Cape province.

The retained questionnaire was divided in two sections: section A – measuring the respondents' perceived QOL experiences after participating in a leisure activity, and section B – gathering demographic information on the respondents. The demographic variables served to provide a socio-economic context to the QOL experiences of the respondents. The three-way categorisation of the demographic variable, household income, was designed to reflect the description of income distributions in South Africa by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2019b). Hence,the upper-bound poverty line threshold of R1227 (amount of money required to purchase food and other lifeessentials per person per month at 2019 prices) (Stats SA, 2019a), was retained. In this regard, annual household income was estimated and categorised as follows: below the upper-bound poverty line (less than R25 000), within the upper-bound poverty line (R25 000 – R100 000), and middle income and above (more than R100 000).

Data collection

The data collection took place during four leisure events in the Eastern Cape province, namely: beachfront relaxation, the Berlin November horse race in Berlin (Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM)), watching a local football match in Mdantsane township, and participating in a church event in Butterworth municipality. Data were collected at the eastern waterfront in East London over four weekends between 10 November and 15 December, 2019, while data collection at the other three events (Berlin November horse race, Mdantsane football match, and church event in Butterworth) took place over one day (30 November 2019, 6 December 2019 and 14 December 2019, respectively). In preparation for the data collection, five fieldworkers were trained.

To qualify for the training and subsequent data collection, interested candidates had to prove that they had obtained a National Diploma qualification, to ensure that they could understand and explain the questionnaire, and also demonstrate proficiency in the local language (Xhosa), in order to be able to communicate with the local inhabitants who might not understand English. The training focused on understanding the questionnaire and ethical guidelines for data collection. The data collection procedure involved randomly approaching participants at the abovementioned events and asking them if they would be willing to participate in the study. Participants who consented to taking part in the study were handed the questionnaire and a pen, to express their views. Each completed questionnaire was checked for errors, and stored in a safe place.

Data analysis

Data collected at the four events were captured in Microsoft® Excel, and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The combined data sets had a total of 261 returned questionnaires, of which 14 were discarded as they were not completed in full or had multiple responses. Two hundred and forty-seven (247) duly completed questionnaires were processed for mean values and effect sizes, in order to determine the significance of specific independent variables (gender, income level and level of education) on the QOL experiences of the respondents).

Findings

The study findings and discussion are presented in the sections that follow, starting with the descriptive statistics on the respondents' profiles, and a discussion on the analysis of variance

with regard to gender, income, level of education (independent variables) and various constructs of the dependent variable (QOL).

Profile of respondents from various leisure activities

The findings reported in Table 1, below, indicate that the gender representation between males (57%) and females (43%) is close. Furthermore, most of the respondents can be described as being of a youthful age (63%) as they were 40 years old or younger. From a socio-economic perspective, most of the respondents had obtained a school-leaving (matric) certificate (39%), closely followed by those with a diploma qualification or degree (38%). The economic situation of most of the respondents can be described as average, considering that their annual income ranged between R25 000 and R100 000 (56%), within the upper-bound poverty line (Stats SA, 2019a), and many of them worked in their own businesses or were employed by the government (54%).

Table 1: Profile of leisure participants

Demographic characteristic	Category description	Frequency (N)	Percentage
Gender	Female	107	43%
	Male	140	57%
Age (in years)	18 - 20	53	22%
	21 - 30	102	41%
	31 - 40	53	22%
	41 - 50	25	9%
	51 - 60	13	5%
	60+	1	1%
	Employment status	Unemployed	86
Self employed		74	30%
Government employee		59	24%
Private sector employee		28	11%
Education	No schooling	10	4%
	Grade 1-11	23	9%
	Matric	96	39%
	Diploma	62	25%
	Degree	31	13%
	Postgraduate	25	10%
Annual income	<R25, 000	89	36%
	R25, 001 – R100, 000	139	56%
	R100, 000+	19	8%
Respondent recreation activity	Beach walking	138	56%
	Watching a football match	31	13%
	Having fun at Berlin November Horse race	48	19%
	Participating at a church group day out	30	12%

Source: Authors, 2020

Data reliability

In order to ascertain the suitability of the dataset for further analysis, it was tested for reliability, to ensure internal consistency. Hence, the data was run on IBM'sSPSS, Version

25. The results revealed an acceptable Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) score of .665 (Table 2), as it was above the threshold of 0.60 (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 2:KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.665
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	319.406
	df	15
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors, 2020

Analysis of variance

The study found relevance in exploring insights concerning relationships between key independent variables such as gender, annual income group and level of education of the respondents, and various aspects of the dependent variable, quality of life (QOL). While the gender variable was subjected to an independent-samples t-test, the annual income and level of education variables were put through a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Results of the independent-samples t-test and effect sizes

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the QOL scores for males and females (Table 3, below):

Table 3: Results of t-tests and effect sizes for gender and quality of life (QOL)

Gender	Female (n=107)		Male (n=140)		t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect sizes
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev.			
After participating in leisure activities ...							
I have perfect peace	4.07	.954	3.91	1.14	1.14	.257	0.01
My life is perfect	3.79	1.01	3.64	1.09	1.11	.268	0.01
I am completely satisfied	3.45	1.18	3.27	1.35	1.08	.283	0.01
I feel I have everything I want	2.73	1.27	2.74	1.40	.04	.969	-6.5
I am not anxious anymore	3.47	1.19	3.30	1.14	1.11	.267	0.01
I sleep better	3.88	1.09	4.01	.993	.97	.332	.003
Total	21.39 (3.57)	6.69	20.87 (3.48)	7.11			

Source: Authors, 2020

The results reveal no statistically significant difference in scores for females and males, as all values were above the 0.05 significance level (Pallant, 2013, p. 250). The magnitude of the effect sizes was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Eta squared} = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + (N1 + N2 - 2)}$$

$$t^2 + (N1 + N2 - 2)$$

All effect sizes yielded scores less than .01, hence the conclusion that the independent variable (gender) has a minimal effect (Cohen, 1988, as cited in Pallant, 2013, p. 251) on the impact of leisure participation on QOL among respondents in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

Results of the one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA)

The analyses of variance (ANOVA) sought to establish if there were any statistically significant differences between the respondents based on annual income levels and level of education, and quality of life experiences. Six key QOL constructs were obtained from literature: peace with self, perfect life, life satisfaction, contentment, absence of anxiety and restful sleep.

Results of the analysis of variance between annual income levels and QOL

The independent variable, annual household income, was categorised in three groups following Stats SA's description of poverty levels in South Africa (Stats SA, 2019a). Hence, three annual income groups were defined as follows: Group 1 - below the upper-bound poverty line (less than R25 000); Group 2 - within the upper-bound poverty line (R25 000 – R100 000); and, Group 3 – middle income and above (more than R100 000). The results are reflected in Table 4, below:

Table 4: Results of the analysis of variance based on income levels

	Income Level						P-value	Effect sizes
	(< R25 000 n ₁ =89		(R25 000 – R100 000) n ₂ =139		(more than R100 000) n ₃ =19			
After participating in leisure activities ...	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev		
I have perfect peace	4.17	.92	3.86	1.11	4.00	1.25	.09	.02
My life is perfect	3.91	1.04	3.54	1.04	3.89	1.15	.03	.03
I am completely satisfied	3.69	1.23	3.12	1.29	3.42	1.12	.01	.04
I feel I have everything I want	2.99	1.35	2.49	1.14	3.32	1.11	.003	.05
I am not anxious anymore	3.42	1.15	3.38	1.15	3.11	1.37	.6	.005
I sleep better	4.07	1.02	3.90	1.03	3.79	1.13	.4	.008
Total	22.25	6.71	20.29	6.76	21.53	7.13	0.2	.03

Source: Authors, 2020

Although the results reveal statistical significance in four of the items at the P=.03, P=.01, P=.003, P=.4, considering that the significance value is defined as $P \leq .05$ (Pallant, 2013), the overall significance value at the P=.2 does not indicate statistically significant difference between the annual income groups and quality of life.

Furthermore, the results of the effect sizes, calculated as,

$$\text{Eta squared} = \frac{\text{sum of squares between groups}}{\text{Total sum of squares}}$$

revealed scores of between .008 to .4, thus confirming the impact of the effect sizes to be minimal (Cohen, 1988).

Analysis of variance between the level of education and QOL

The study further examined the degree of variance in the level of education factor. For this purpose, the eight levels of education applied during data collection were redefined into four groups, and labelled as follows: Group 1 – no school-leaving certificate; Group 2 – school-leaving certificate and diploma qualification; Group 3 – first degree and honours qualification; and, Group 4 – master’s and doctoral degree. The results obtained are presented in Table 5, below:

Table 5: Results of analysis of variance in level of education and quality of life

After participating in leisure activities...	LEVEL OF EDUCATION								P-value	Effect sizes
	No school certificate		Matric - Diploma		Degree - Honours		Masters – Doctorate			
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev		
I have perfect peace	3.64	1.22	3.96	1.09	4.23	.831	4.38	.744	.06	.03
My life is perfect	3.67	1.16	3.65	1.10	3.83	.834	4.00	1.07	.6	.007
I am completely satisfied	3.36	1.34	3.23	1.35	3.73	.962	3.38	.916	.1	.02
I feel I have everything I want	2.79	1.43	2.60	1.34	3.06	1.33	3.13	.835	.2	.02
I am not anxious anymore	3.55	1.15	3.33	1.21	3.44	1.05	3.13	.991	.7	.006
I sleep better	4.00	1.17	3.94	1.06	4.04	.859	3.50	.926	.6	.008
Total	21.01	7.47	20.71	7.15	22.3	5.87	21.52	5.48	.4	.1

Source: Authors, 2020

Considering statistically significant difference at $P \leq .05$, (Pallant, 2013), the above results reveal no statistically significant difference, as all P values are above .05. Once more, the effect sizes indicate minimal effect, as all values are below .02 (Cohen, 1988).

It is evident from the results of the analysis of variance and effect sizes above, that important insights can be derived from this study regarding how participation in leisure activities impacts on perceived quality of life. The absence of statistically significant differences among the independent variables only goes to illustrate that the positive impacts of leisure

participation on QOL arenon-discriminatory, regardless of gender, income level and education status.

Discussion

This study set out to analyse the relationship between leisure participation and perceived QOL among respondents in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. This was motivated, inter alia, by the quest to contribute to research on the nexus between leisure and QOL, and hopefully provide novel insight that could lead to the improvement of the quality of life of people in the Eastern Cape province. The following conclusions emanate from the analysis conducted in this study:

Firstly, the results of the t-test reveal that female respondents have a higher perceived QOL experience (21.39) than their male counterparts (20.87), even though both genders share appreciation for the same top three variables of perfect peace ($F=4.07$; $M=3.91$), perfect life ($F=3.79$; $M=3.64$) and sleep better ($F=3.88$; $M=4.01$). The conclusion that females tend to benefit more from leisure participation is in line with previous studies (Chatzitheochari & Arber, 2012; Craig & Mullan, 2013; Henderson & Hickerson, 2007; Mara et al., 2018). However, the current study indicates that male participants have a slightly improved QOL experiences in terms of getting better sleep (4.01), even though this advantage is not significant.

Secondly, results from the analysis of variance between the independent variable, income levels and QOL indicate that even though perceived benefits from leisure participation spread across all income groups, people from the lower income strata with an annual household income of less than R25 000 have a higher score (22.25), followed by those in the middle-income bracket and above (21.53), and individuals living within the upper-bound poverty line (20.29). Mansfield (2021) articulates a similar view, that people in lower income groups tend to have greater exposure to leisure participation, even though they do not necessarily derive more psychological benefits.

Thirdly, based on the results from the different educational status groups, it is clear from the mean values that the perceived QOL benefits contrast with those of the income groups. Respondents with a degree and honours qualification reveal a higher mean value (22.3) of perceived QOL experience, followed by those with a master's degree or doctoral qualification (21.52). Although the variance and effect sizes are minimal, there are noticeable differences. Researchers (Giles-Corti & Donovan, 2002; Gordon-Larsen et al., 2006;

Robinson & Godbey, 2010) attribute the edge in QOL experience within the higher education groups to greater exposure to quality leisure facilities and attractions gained through education.

Finally, there is evidence from the analysis in this study to suggest that there is a positive relationship between leisure participation and quality of life. This can be substantiated by the positive mean values of all constructs surveyed in this study. In this vein, the study aligns itself with previous studies (Cusatisa & Garbarski, 2019; Dillette et al., 2018, Nicolaides & Grobler, 2017; Verbooy et al., 2018).

Implications of the study

A number of implications and recommendations flow from the results and conclusions of this study. These can be interpreted from the point of view government, communities and individuals:

Firstly, the generally positive relationship between leisure participation and quality of life is encouraging as it gives an indication that people who take part in leisure could experience improvements in the quality of lives they live. This could serve as a motivation for more people to increase their leisure participation in order to benefit from improved their individual well-being.

Secondly, the results and conclusions from this study also allude to, and imply, the changing role of leisure in society. In other words, by drawing attention to the quality of life benefits of leisure participation, the findings of this study differ from those of a recent study by Tao et al. (2022) who dwell on the entertainment aspect of leisure participation.

Thirdly, from an individual perspective, the conclusions from this study imply greater awareness and responsibility, on the part of individuals, for leisure involvement and participation. There is the inherent recognition that reducing the burden of disease, and improving community well-being, implies having healthy individuals living in harmony (responsible relationships) with one another.

Within the context of the PERMA model (Seligman (2011), this study tends to align itself with the view expressed by Filep (2014) through the positive association between leisure participation and quality of life, while stopping short of including the suggestions made by Butler and Kern (2015).

Recommendations

The implications from this study require that actions be taken to improve the quality of life of communities and individuals. Once again, all stakeholders in community development would be required to remain engaged.

In this regard, the key recommendation from this study refers to the role of government in taking the lead through the provision of leisure infrastructure, facilities and public awareness. It is recommended that the Eastern Cape Provincial Government operationalise, through their Provincial Development Plan (PDP), a structure for community engagement in leisure activities.

The second recommendation from this study alludes to the role of communities in leisure engagement. Communities are at the centre of leisure delivery, as leisure activities take place within the local environment, customs and norms. It is therefore recommended that local communities actively create an enabling environment for conducive leisure participation. This could be initiated through community events, Indigenous games and local leisure activities.

It is further recommended that community members be sensitised on the QOL benefits from leisure participation. This will be instrumental in ensuring that leisure participation becomes part of the individual psyche.

Contributions of this study

The unique contributions of this study can be noted in the following areas:

In exploring the nexus between leisure participation and quality of life, this study seems to have contributed to a new knowledge area in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This is because most studies on leisure participation in this region have previously focused on the economic benefits of leisure.

Considering the peculiar circumstances of the Eastern Cape Province with high poverty and unemployment levels, it is evident that this study has contributed to literature on leisure and quality of life, particularly among underprivileged communities. The fact that data was collected across four separate leisure activities in local communities further strengthens its literature contribution.

Most studies on the relationship between leisure and quality of life focus on single leisure activities. However, this study adopted a cross-sectional approach in collecting data across four leisure activities thereby making a contribution in its methodological approach.

Finally, through the introduction of the PERMA model in this study it was realised that many of the constructs articulated in the model do not apply to leisure participants in communities such as in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This difference is also worth noting.

It is important to conclude this study by pointing out that the limitations in the scope of the study. The events at which the data were collected were mainly local in nature thereby attracting limited participants. This explains the low sample size. Therefore, the findings of this study should be generalised with caution.

It is therefore recommended that future studies on the relationship between leisure and quality of life be conducted with a larger sample size in the Eastern Cape Province. The findings from such a study will be important in testing the veracity of this study.

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