



## **Leisure Activities of Young People as a Predictor of Life Satisfaction**

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The aim of this study was to determine to what extent leisure activities affect life satisfaction in young people. 670 students attending the University of Zagreb (Croatia) took part in the study, out of which 209 (31.2%) were males and 461 were females (68.8%). The largest number of students stated they have 2-3 hours of leisure time per day (n = 210; 31.3%), while the lowest number of students stated they have up to 1 hour of leisure time per day. The respondents filled in a survey which consisted of 2 parts: The Leisure Time Questionnaire and The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). For the purpose of this study and based on the relevant literature, The Leisure Time Questionnaire was designed in which 6 composite variables were formed (Cultural activities, Relaxing activities, Electronic media and the Internet, Useful activities, Sports, Socializing and going out). According to the findings, the respondents tend to spend most of their leisure time in Relaxing activities, and the minimum of their time engaging in Cultural activities. Out of all 6 composite variables relating to young people's leisure activities, only one, Socializing and going out, has proved to be a statistically significant predictor of life satisfaction in young people.

Keywords: leisure activities, life satisfaction, socializing and going out, students, young people

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Leisure Time**

Leisure time is a changing social and historical phenomenon which has been present in various forms since the beginning of humankind (Livazović, 2018, p. 11). In the past, leisure time was a privilege which only the few affluent members of society were entitled to, while nowadays, in the contemporary society, leisure time is an integral part of our everyday lives. Williams (2003) defines leisure time as the time which a person has after fulfilling all private and professional obligations. That time is shaped according to one's own wishes and can be composed of diverse forms and content of relaxation, pastime, and creative expression (Potkonjak, 1989). Janković (1973) believes that leisure time is the time free of organized work, and it encompasses relaxation, various family and social obligations, physiological needs, additional work, etc. Newman, Tay and Diener (2014) view leisure time as a multidimensional construct

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which includes both structural (e.g., leisure activities and time spent outside the compulsory working hours) and subjective (e.g., perceived leisure frequency and perceived participation in leisure) aspects.

Chan et al. (2023) point out that young people (aged 18 – 25 years) who are about to realize their full potential have more leisure time than their peers in the past. Nowadays, young people spend their leisure time in various ways and engage in diverse activities. Generally, leisure activities can be described as a set of activities in which individuals participate in their free time (Paggi et al., 2016). These are non-obligatory activities, unrelated to work, and are based on one's own pleasure and interests (Holder et al., 2009). Janković (1973) points out that leisure activities can be best divided in the following way: *relaxing activities*, *pastime activities* and *personality development activities*. *Relaxing activities* are related to the process of regeneration and renewal of one's depleted capacity and psychophysical energy, either in an active or passive way. *Pastime and fun activities* are aimed at creating a happy mood by playing boardgames, doing sports, going to the cinema or theatre, going dancing, watching TV shows, searching the Internet and social media, etc. *Personality development activities* are gaining more importance nowadays. These activities are suitable for gaining new knowledge and developing skills and abilities which enable us to adjust better to the challenges and demands of the modern society.

Leisure activities have multiple benefits. They play an important role in shaping the identity of young people, have a strong impact on mental and physical health, release stress and fulfil the needs for belonging and self-realization (Belošević & Ferić, 2022; Kaya & Gürbüz, 2015; Shaw et al., 1995; Vicary et al., 1998). Without doubt, young people tend to pursue different interests in their leisure time (Spruyt et al., 2016). Leisure activities enable them to show their creative potential, express their feelings, develop self-confidence, acquire new skills, socialize with their friends, and create new friendships. These activities frequently pose mental and physical challenges for young people, as well as opportunities to take risks.

The importance of participating in leisure activities is enormous, with multiple benefits for one's mental and physical well-being (Shin & You, 2013). Research has shown that there is a relationship between leisure time and happiness (Adams et al., 2011; Newman et al., 2014; Tükel & Temel, 2020), leisure time and fulfilment (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2010), leisure time and reduced stress (Folse & DaRosa, 1985) and leisure time and life satisfaction (Lapa, 2013; Schmiedeberg & Schröder, 2017). Motivation and experience of participating in leisure activities can also be considered as other benefits (De Leersnyder et al., 2018).

Leisure time is an important segment of a balanced lifestyle and its importance for an individual's well-being is frequently emphasised (Wiese et al., 2018). Leisure time satisfaction is a predictor of life satisfaction (Chick et al., 2016).

### **Life Satisfaction**

Life satisfaction is defined as one's assessment of their own life (Diener et al., 1999). It can be seen as general assessment, but also as satisfaction with particular areas of life, such as health, job, leisure time, and social and family relationships (Diener, 2006).

As an attempt to explain life satisfaction as a concept, various models have been developed (the so-called top-down models and bottom-up models), depending on whether they give preference to the top-down or bottom-up perspective in studying the factors which affect life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Headey et al., 1991). Theories based on the top-down perspective, the so-called top-down models, start from the assumption that life satisfaction is relatively stable and that there is a tendency to perceive various situations as positive or negative. This perspective is focused on personality traits and other stable characteristics as the factors which affect life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 2003; Steel et al., 2008). Theories based on the bottom-up perspective, the so-called bottom-up models, start from the assumption that one's general life satisfaction depends on their satisfaction in various domains of life, such as family, friendships, job, leisure time, etc. Life satisfaction is taken as something relatively unstable, depending on the exchange of positive and negative experiences (Diener & Diener, 1996; Heller et al., 2004; Pavot & Diener, 2008). The contemporary view on life satisfaction rejects the exclusive focus on the top-down or bottom-up perspective and emphasizes the importance of its synthesis. Based on what has been said, the Dynamic Equilibrium Model was created, which is sometimes also referred to as the Set Point Theory. According to this contemporary model, the influence of various personality dimensions, certain objective indicators, and subjective assessment are the factors which affect life satisfaction (Headey, 2006; 2008).

Life satisfaction is an important element of healthy life and an important factor of mental and physical health (Mahmoud et al., 2012). In the last few decades, most of the research on life satisfaction was conducted with adult respondents. It was not until the 1990s that research on life satisfaction was also conducted with children and young people (Drost, 2012). Acun (2020), according to the test results, found that the average satisfaction with life level of university students differ significantly by gender and grade average points.

Iwasaki (2007) points out that leisure activities create meaning in life and therefore lead to a better quality of life. Based on scientific literature analysis, Kara and Sarol (2021) claim that the time people spend at university is among the most important periods of life, as it is then that people start thinking about and understanding perceptions and assessment of life, and they internalize their habits of spending leisure time. It can be said that at this period of life, young people seem to attach more importance to life satisfaction and happiness than money, and they identify space for leisure time. Çelik and Koçak (2018) claim that upon enrolment in university young people face new and various challenges which can reduce the level of their life satisfaction. Therefore, research on leisure time and life satisfaction in young people is highly relevant.

If we analyse the topic from the perspective of the humanistic approach of Abraham Maslow (1954) and his self-actualization theory, the purpose of life is actualization of human potential or abilities. Each person has a need for self-actualization, but it can be reached only after other needs have been satisfied, including physiological, biological and safety needs, as well as needs for love, belonging, and esteem. Self-actualized individuals tend to choose the activities which enable them to grow and avoid those which inhibit them (Bačlija Sušić, 2016). That is why the activities which young people engage in during their leisure time are important, as they can contribute to young people's self-actualization, well-being, and satisfaction.

## METHOD

The aim of the study was to determine how much leisure activities affect life satisfaction. The following hypothesis was formed:

H1 Leisure activities are predictors of life satisfaction.

### Sample

The sample comprised 670 students at the University of Zagreb. The study was conducted during the academic year 2022/2023 at six faculties (Table 1). The largest number of students stated they have 2-3 hours of leisure time per day ( $n = 210$ ; 31.3%), while the lowest number of students stated they have up to 1 hour of leisure time per day ( $n = 46$ ; 6.9%). In terms of gender, 209 respondents were males (31.2%) and 461 were females (68.8%).

### Data Collection

The data were collected through a survey, using a paper-and-pencil method. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. The participants were informed about the aim of the research and their informed consent was obtained. It took about 20 minutes for the respondents to fill in the questionnaire.

Table 1  
Distribution of respondents according to faculties

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Academy of Music	110	16.4	16.4
Faculty of Kinesiology	116	17.3	33.7
Faculty of Science	114	17.0	50.7
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences	109	16.3	67.0
Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences	108	16.1	83.1
Faculty of Teacher Education	113	16.9	100.0
Total	670	100.0	

### Measuring Instruments

The survey consisted of 2 questionnaires: *The Leisure Time Questionnaire* and *The Satisfaction with Life Scale* (Diener et al., 1985). For the purpose of this study (which is part of a broader research on leisure time of students at the University of Zagreb), and based on the relevant literature, *The Leisure Time Questionnaire* was designed (Barnett,

2006; Barradas et al., 2019; Dirzyte et al., 2022; Livazović, 2018; Opić & Đuranović, 2014; Schmiedeberg & Schröder, 2017; Trainor et al., 2010). The first part of the questionnaire was designed to collect data on gender, faculty, year of study and average amount of leisure time per day (leisure time referring to the time students have after fulfilling all their faculty, family and social obligations, and their physiological needs). In the second part of the questionnaire, students assessed how frequently they engage in the listed activities, using a five-point scale (*never – rarely – sometimes – often – very often*).

The original *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (Diener et al., 1985) consisted of 5 items which the respondents rated with values 1 to 7, 1 expressing the lowest level of agreement with the listed item (item example: *In most ways my life is close to my ideal.*). The Croatian version adapted by Rijavec, Brdar and Miljković (2006) was used. Previous studies showed the scale as valid and reliable for the Croatian context (Jurčec & Rijavec 2015; Merkaš et al., 2011; Olčar et al., 2019; Rijavec et al., 2011). In the study, a modified 5-point scale was used. The scale was designed to measure global cognitive judgments of one’s life satisfaction. The scale reliability was  $\alpha = .787$ .

**Data Processing**

The quantitative approach was applied in this research. IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 programme software was used for the analysis of the collected data. Descriptive statistics was used to determine the values of the leisure time composite variables and the values of particles on the Life satisfaction scale. A linear regression analysis with bootstrapping was performed to explain the effect of leisure time activities on life satisfaction in young people. The values of beta coefficients were calculated to determine which predictors are statistically significant for life satisfaction.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Leisure Activities**

Table 2  
Descriptive values of the composite variables

Composite variables	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
	Stat.	Stat.	Stat.	Stat.	Std. Error	Stat.	Std. Error
V1	2.90	1.00	3.90	1.9049	.02000	.51772	.645
V2	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.1507	.02460	.63664	-.110
V3	3.43	1.29	4.71	2.9262	.02117	.54792	.023
V4	3.33	1.00	4.33	2.2065	.02288	.59225	.449
V5	3.00	1.00	4.00	2.0254	.02233	.57809	.567
V6	3.29	1.43	4.71	2.9546	.02388	.61804	-.060

Note: V1 - Cultural activities; V2 - Relaxing activities; V3 - Electronic media and the Internet; V4 - Useful activities; V5 - Sports; V6 - Socializing and going out

Tao et al. (2022) point out that leisure time has become an important way for people to achieve self-actualization and pursue a better life. The research focus was placed on the

following activities: doing sports, browsing social media, socializing with friends, watching TV, etc. These activities have been present in research on leisure time for many years. 6 composite variables were formed (*Cultural activities, Relaxing activities, Electronic media and the Internet, Useful activities, Sports, Socializing and going out*) and the basic descriptive parameters were calculated: range, the minimum and maximum result, the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis (Table 2). As can be seen, the respondents seem to spend most of their leisure time engaging in Relaxing activities ( $M = 3.1507$ ,  $SD = 0.63664$ ), and the smallest amount of their leisure time engaging in Cultural activities ( $M = 1.90049$ ,  $SD = 0.51772$ ). The composite variable Relaxing activities encompasses the following activities: sleeping, having a lie-down, reading books and listening to music, while Cultural activities include: going to the cinema/theatre/concerts/exhibitions, reading newspapers/literary classics, going to the library, drawing, singing, and playing musical instruments.

The obtained result could have partly been influenced by the respondents' age. During their course of study, students spend a great amount of time attending lectures or preparing for exams, so that is why they might be spending most of their leisure time engaging in Relaxing activities such as sleeping, having a lie-down, listening to music, etc. Videnović, Pešić and Plut (2010) state that adults usually provide structure for a great portion of young people's everyday lives. However, when choosing leisure activities themselves, young people tend to choose those which correspond to their authentic interests, and which shape their identity. One of the reasons why students spend the minimum amount of their time engaging in Cultural activities might be the financial aspect – a lot of cultural activities, such as going to the cinema, theatre, etc., require money. Also, as we live in the age of technology, everything is available at the click of a mouse, and numerous films, concerts, exhibitions, etc. are available on the Internet.

Similar results were obtained in the research on leisure time of young people in Great Britain, conducted in 2015. The results indicate that young people spend the minimum amount of their leisure time doing sports and engaging in cultural activities (Office for National Statistics, 2017). Đuranović and Opić (2016) also mention research results which reveal that young people in Croatia spend little time going to the theatre/cinema, visiting exhibitions, that is, engaging in cultural activities. However, there are research results which reveal that the most frequent leisure activity of students at a state university in southwestern USA is socializing with friends and pursuing hobbies (Ackerman & Gross, 2003). Fosnacht et al. (2018) also claim that young people spend a significant amount of time socializing with their friends.

Similar research, involving students from several faculties of the University of Zagreb, was conducted by Rupić and Buntić (2005), who found that students spend their free time mostly going to cafés and socializing, and that they prefer sedentary activities. Sedentary activities are associated with poorer health, so it is necessary to encourage young people to spend their leisure time actively (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019, according to Al Sulaimi et al., 2022).

### Life Satisfaction

Table 3  
Descriptive values of items in the Satisfaction with Life Scale (N = 670)

Items	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis			
							Std. Error	Std. Error	
My living conditions are excellent.	1	5	3.48	.043	1.117	-.500	.094	-.343	.189
I am satisfied with my life.	1	5	4.01	.034	0.893	-.698	.094	.158	.189
So far, I have achieved some important things in my life.	1	5	3.69	.037	0.958	-.433	.094	-.255	.189
If I lived my life again, I wouldn't change almost anything.	1	5	3.20	.046	1.202	-.135	.094	-.863	.189
My life is very close to what I consider the perfect life.	1	5	3.20	.039	1.018	-.273	.094	-.322	.189

As is evident in Table 3, all items had an average and above-average assessment. The item with the highest assessment value on the Satisfaction with Life Scale was *I am satisfied with my life*. ( $M = 4.01$ ;  $SD = 0.893$ ). Apart from the fact that it has the highest arithmetic mean value, its standard deviation is lowest, which indicates the dispersion of results on this item. Two items with the lowest assessment value were *If I lived my life again, I wouldn't change almost anything*. ( $M = 3.20$ ;  $SD = 1.202$ ) and *My life is very close to what I consider the perfect life*. ( $M = 3.20$ ;  $SD = 1.018$ ). It seems that although students' life satisfaction is relatively high, there are segments which they would change, and some of them do not consider their lives almost perfect.

### Analysis of Leisure Activities as a Predictors of Life Satisfaction

In order to test the set hypothesis, the composite variable *Life satisfaction* was formed ( $M = 3.5173$ ;  $SD = 0.76705$ ) (Table 4). The obtained results reveal relative life satisfaction, considering the direction of the scale and the number of points (5).

Table 4  
Descriptive values of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (N = 670)

	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis			
								Std. Error	Std. Error	
Life satisfaction	3.80	1.20	5.00	3.5173	.02963	.76705	-.357	.094	-.168	.189
Valid N (listwise)										

A bootstrap linear regression analysis was used to test H1. The regression model is presented in Table 5.

Table 5  
The Regression Model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.229 <sup>a</sup>	.052	.044	.75007	.052	6.105	6	663	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cultural activities, Relaxing activities, Electronic media and the Internet, Useful activities, Sports, Socializing and going out

b. Dependent Variable: Life satisfaction

As can be seen, the regression analysis results reveal a regression coefficient  $R = 0.229$ , that is, 5.2% of the explained life satisfaction variance based on the used predictors. These are determination coefficients with low values, which indicates that 5.2% of life satisfaction variability can be predicted based on the prevalence of leisure activities. ANOVA values ( $F(6.663) = 6.105$ ,  $p = .000$ ) indicate that the regression model was satisfactory, that is, the predictors can predict the dependent variable well. Beta coefficient values are shown in Table 6.

Table 6  
Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t		Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	2.991	.219		13.640	.000		
Cultural activities	.055	.064	.037	.863	.389	.764	1.308
Relaxing activities	-.056	.052	-.046	-1.082	.279	.777	1.287
Electronic media and the Internet	-.121	.063	-.087	-1.920	.055	.700	1.428
Useful activities	.027	.057	.021	.472	.637	.731	1.368
Sports	.081	.055	.061	1.470	.142	.835	1.198
Socializing and going out	.247	.057	.199	4.355	.000	.685	1.459

a. Dependent Variable: Life satisfaction

$p < 0.01$

Data presented in Table 6 indicate that out of the initial 6 predictors, only one, *Socializing and going out*, is a statistically significant predictor of *Life satisfaction*. It is obvious from the values and the beta value sign that students who socialize more and have more fun during their leisure time are more satisfied with their lives. That means that we can predict that socializing and going out as leisure activities have a significant role in life satisfaction assessment.

In the scientific literature, the results of research carried out on this topic are different. Schmiedeberg and Schröder (2017) conducted a longitudinal study about testing the impact of 5 leisure activities of adolescents (sports, resting, meeting friends, using the Internet, and watching TV) on their life satisfaction. The research findings showed that socializing with friends, doing sports and resting have a positive impact on life satisfaction. The choice of certain leisure activities activates the support of people close



to us, leads to interaction and satisfaction, all of which are beneficial to mental health, as leisure time then becomes a source of happiness and personal growth (Kleiber et al., 2011). Kim, Heo, Dvorak, Ryu and Han (2018) cite research findings according to which life satisfaction is significantly related to outdoor activities, physical activities, activities carried out at home and social activities. Bae (2022) reports that participants in leisure sport activities tend to exhibit a higher level of happiness and satisfaction in comparison with those who participate in leisure time activities which do not involve sports. Zhang, He and Chen (2020) also point out the relationship between doing sports and life satisfaction. Similarly, people who exercise their physical capacities to an intermediate degree (heavier) and an extreme (vigorous) record higher levels of satisfaction and physical enjoyment (Al Sulaimi et al., 2022). Dirzyte, Patapas and Perminas (2022) state that life satisfaction of young people is significantly influenced by the time they spend with their families and by participation in social events.

From the VIF values it is evident that neither collinearity nor autocorrelation of residual (Durbin Watson = 1.974) are present. Also, the outliers of residual values higher than 3 standard deviations ( $n = 78$ ) were controlled. In addition, Cook's distance was max = 0.2, which does not indicate an outlier problem. Figure 1 shows linear dependence, heteroscedasticity/homoscedasticity of the statistically significant predictor, and the regression equation value.

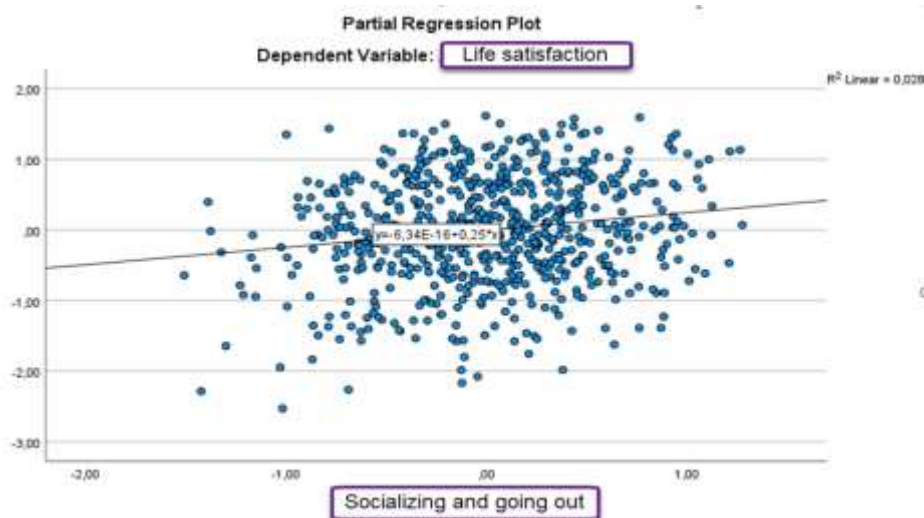


Figure 1  
 Linear dependence

As can be seen, the heterogeneity of predictor variances and the dependent variable was not confirmed, which indicates the reliability of the regression equation.

Therefore, the results show that out of the 6 leisure activities, only one, *Socializing and going out*, is a statistically significant predictor of life satisfaction, which partially refutes H1.

Akyüz and Aydın (2020) also obtained a low level of positive significant relationship between leisure time satisfaction and life satisfaction in their own study.

### **CONCLUSION**

Leisure time is an important segment of young people's lives. It is the time in which they engage in various activities, according to their own preferences, abilities, interests and wishes. These activities are often related to relaxation, fun and personal development. As all activities are equally important for mental and physical health of young people, they should be well balanced. By choosing the activities which enable their personal growth, young people fulfil the need for self-actualization.

Young people's leisure time has a significant impact on their life satisfaction. According to our findings, only socializing and going out with peers seem to be statistically significant predictors of life satisfaction. Still, the results should be taken with a pinch of salt. Had we used interviews, we would probably have obtained some other types of young people's leisure activities.

Finally, it seems that leisure time management competencies should be developed in young people, as some of the listed activities which might be beneficial to young people's well-being have been assessed with lower values. In Croatia, there is no systematic support for young people in terms of leisure time management, so this study might be an incentive for starting counselling programs at universities which would help students find quality ways of spending leisure time.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

The limitation of this study can be found in the choice of sample, as we used convenient sample. Furthermore, only a quantitative approach was applied, so future studies should combine a qualitative and a quantitative approach, in order to obtain a holistic picture. Apart from that, we recommend that future studies examine other ways in which young people spend leisure time and explore the relationship between leisure time activities and life satisfaction.

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