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## Leisure Time of Young Due to Some Socio-demographic Characteristics

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### Abstract

Leisure time is an extremely important part of life for children and adolescents. It provides them with many opportunities to rehearse different social roles and activities. During childhood and adolescence and later in adulthood, leisure is an important context for the development of a number of individual competences. Children and young people, depending on their interests and preferences, but also the social environment, practice different activities in their free time. The aim of the research is to explore some demographic characteristics of youth leisure like gender, type of school (primary/middle) and place of residence. A sample of 1062 students in the academic year 2013/2014 in 13 schools in the Republic of Croatia (2 counties) was used to explore the differences in youth leisure considering independent variables of socio-demographic characteristics. Leisure variables were made up of the following composites: electronic media, Internet, sports, cultural activities, socializing outings and relaxing activities. Frequencies of the composite variables indicate the dominance of Internet over other forms of spending free time, although the prevalence of all forms of spending free time is low. Regarding the examined differences, specific gender and age differences on certain composite variables have been confirmed.

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### 1. Introduction

Today, leisure time can be defined in several ways. Researchers who explore it do not define this term unambiguously. One of the reasons is that research, and therefore defining free time, is conducted by experts of various profiles: philosophers, educators, sociologists, psychologists... However, no matter how we define free

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time, it is important to raise and emphasize awareness about using it in an active, cultural, creative and structured way.

If we want to define the concept of leisure time in relation to children and adolescents, we might say that it is the time that remains after fulfilling all school obligations. It refers to all those activities that children and adolescents undertake voluntarily for recreation or for some other personal interests (Bartko & Eccles, 2003, according to Trainor et al., 2010).

Leisure time is an extremely important segment of children and adolescents' lives. It provides them with many opportunities for trying different social roles and activities. Leisure time is a kind of a training ground for practicing many life skills like coping with and resolving conflicts, tolerant and democratic behavior, mutual respect and development of social and communication skills. Irby and Tolman (2002) see leisure time as an opportunity for self-expression, relaxation, practicing self-control, self-development and learning in a less stressful environment than school. Some of the stated positive effects of children and adolescents' leisure time activities are: socio-emotional development and engagement (maintaining friendships and having fun and socializing), professional development and engagement (skills necessary for employment, understanding and achieving professional career), physical development and engagement (health), cognitive development and engagement (critical thinking, problem solving) and civilian development and engagement (personal impact on social environment and responsibility toward others). Adolescents have about a half of their waking hours free, so it is very important how they spend it because it is a very important factor of their development (Larson & Verma, 1999). Leisure time activities also have a huge impact on forming an identity (Hendry et al., 1993, according to Piko & Vazsonyi, 2004; Shaw, Kleiber & Caldwell, 1995; Fink & Wild, 1995). According to research, leisure time activities, as well as other life patterns, have a strong impact on mental and physical health of adolescents, and what was also established is a connection with manifesting problems in behavior (Vicary et al., 2002).

During their childhood, and especially during adolescence, peers have a significant and very intense impact on a life of an individual (Maleš, 1995; Cook, Deng & Morgano, 2007). According to research, children and adolescents spend most of their leisure time in the company of their peers and their peer groups who, in many cases, represent their alternative family (Brown et al., 1986, according to Cullingford & Morrison, 1997). All peer influences (both positive and negative ones) happen mostly in free time. Therefore, there is a great responsibility of adults toward children and young people to develop a habit of active and meaningful free time. The younger the child is, bigger is the responsibility of adults because they have a more intensive impact in designing their free time and choosing activities they will engage in. However, the choice of activities in free time is not absolutely unconditioned, that is, it depends on the so-called subjective (social status of the parents, personal education, skills and habits) and objective factors (cultural heritage of narrow and wide environment, the existing supply and availability of certain content etc.) (Ilišin, 2001).

There is a wide variety of activities for children and adolescents to get involved with in their leisure time. Researchers who deal with a phenomenon of leisure time offer different classifications of the activities. Thus, for example, Hendry et al. (1993) distinguish three types of leisure activities: organized (sports and other similar activities); relaxing (socializing with friends) and commercial fun (going to a cinema or disco). Somewhat different classification of leisure activities was proposed by Dotterer, McHale and Crouter (2007) sorting them into the following three categories: academic activities (participation in academic clubs, etc.), non-academic (athletics, art, etc.) and other activities.

This paper will explore some of the demographic characteristics of adolescents' free time, such as gender, type of school (primary/middle) and place of residence.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Respondents sample*

The sample consisted of 1062 students in 8 primary and 7 middle schools in Sisak- Moslavina County (Republic of Croatia). The research was conducted in the school year 2013/2014. The distribution of respondents according to gender was: 508 (47,8%) male and 554 (52,2%) female; school- primary (n=505; 47,6%) and middle (n=557; 52,4%); according to place of residence- 900 (84,7%) in a house and 162 (15,3% in a flat).

2.2 Variables sample

For the purposes of this research, a questionnaire was constructed and consisted of 30 particles on a 5- level scale of ordinal type with the following values: 1- never; 2- seldom; 3- sometimes; 4- often, 5- very often. The particles were semantically structured into composite variables on ways of spending free time: electronic media, Internet, sport, cultural activities, socializing and outings, relaxing activities.

3. The results

Basic descriptive indicators for composite variables on ways of spending leisure time are presented in Table 1.

Table 1- Descriptive statistics

code	Composite variables on ways of spending leisure time	CV*		Mean	Std. Deviat.	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis		K-S test	
		Stat.	Stat.	Std. Error	Stat	Stat	Stat	Std. Error	Stat	Error	Stat	Sig.
V1	Electronic media	25,05	2,331	,0179	,58434	,341	,307	,075	,068	,150	,085	,000
V2	Internet	29,51	2,928	,0265	,86493	,748	,179	,075	-,379	,150	,081	,000
V3	Sports	31,82	2,489	,0243	,79273	,628	,390	,075	-,404	,150	,089	,000
V4	Cultural activities	31,88	1,578	,0154	,50318	,253	1,46	,075	3,493	,150	,148	,000
V5	Socializing and outings	31,19	2,639	,0252	,82331	,678	,365	,075	-,560	,150	,098	,000
V6	Relaxing activities	25,03	2,393	,0184	,5990	,359	,302	,075	,147	,150	,085	,000

\*CV= coefficient of variability

As seen in Table 1, low arithmetic means indicate that these ways of spending free time are actually relatively poorly represented; according to the number of scale degrees and its direction. A composite variable with the highest mean is Internet, meaning that students spend most time on the Internet, in comparison to other examined forms of spending free time. On the contrary, the least of free time (mean=1.578) is spent doing cultural activities. Regarding the asymmetry of the distribution, it is moderately positive, which is in accordance with low arithmetic means, i.e. lower frequencies. Regarding the kurtosis, distributions vary from moderate platykurtic (V2, V3, V5) to moderate leptokurtic (V1, V6). The V4 composite has a distribution with a high leptokurtic. Considering the normality of the distribution, the results of Kolmogorov Smirnov test implicate that the distributions deviate from normality. However, since distributions are not bimodal (or polymodal), the asymmetry and kurtosis are not highly expressed, and because of the central limit theorem, parametric tests will be used in further processing (although bootstrapping). Given the aim of the research, gender differences were tested on composite variables. The results of t-test (bootstrapping) are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Results of t test/bootstrapping (gender)

Composite variables	gender	mean		Bootstrapping*- t test			
				Mean difference	bias	Std.Error	Sig (2-tailed)
Electronic media	male	2,2528	Equal variances assumed	-,15122	,00018	,03607	,001**
	female	2,4040	Equal variances not assumed	-,15122	,00018	,03607	,001
Internet	male	2,9783	Equal variances assumed	,09658	-,00232	,05194	,054
	female	2,8818	Equal variances not assumed	,09658	-,00232	,05194	,054
Sports	male	2,6358	Equal variances assumed	,27987	,00002	,04783	,001
	female	2,3560	Equal variances not assumed	,27987	,00002	,04783	,001**
Cultural activities	male	1,4846	Equal variances assumed	-,18088	-,00043	,03119	,001**
	female	1,6655	Equal variances not assumed	-,18088	-,00043	,03119	,001
Socializing and outings	male	2,5528	Equal variances assumed	-,16710	-,00457	,05185	,001**
	female	2,7199	Equal variances not assumed	-,16710	-,00457	,05185	,001

Relaxing activities	male	2,206	Equal variances assumed	-,3591	-,0007	,0366	,001**
	female	2,565	Equal variances not assumed	-,3591	-,0007	,0366	,001

\*bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

\*\*  $p \leq 0,05$  (note; interpreted values were obtained in a t-test, with a fulfilled prerequisite of the homogeneity of variance)

As seen in Table 2, there is a statistically significant gender difference in all composite variables of spending free time, except on the composite variable representing Internet, which means that boys and girls in the sample spend their free time on the Internet equally often. The arithmetic means show that girls spend more time on electronic media, cultural activities, socializing and relaxing activities than boys, while boys spend more of their free time on sports activities. Similar results were obtained by other researchers. According to ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) data, in 2009 in Australia 74% of children aged between 5 and 14 years were engaging in sports or cultural extracurricular activities. Girls were more involved in cultural activities, while boys were more prone to sports activities (Simoncini & Caltabiono, 2012). By conducting research about students participating in extracurricular activities, Pejić Papak, Vidulin-Orbanić and Rončević (2012) point out that female participants are more represented in cultural activities while male participants are more represented in sports activities. By presenting the results of the conducted research, Šiljković, Rajić and Bertić (2007) state that boys are in a much greater number represented in sports and other extracurricular activities than girls are. In general, greater physical activity in boys, compared to girls, remains a constant category even later in life. By presenting a number of recent studies on the prevalence of physical activities in Croatia and world, Jurakić and Heimer (2012) report that in almost all studies a greater prevalence of insufficient activity were recorded in women, rather than men. Regarding the examined age differences (types of schools: primary/middle) on composite variables, the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3- Results of t test/bootstrapping (primary and middle school)

Composite variables	school	mean		Bootstrapping*- t test			
				Mean difference	bias	Std.Error	Sig (2-tailed)
Electronic media	elem.	2,4020	Equal variances assumed	,13412	,00018	,03609	,001**
	high	2,2679	Equal variances not assumed	,13412	,00018	,03609	,001
Internet	elem.	2,8797	Equal variances assumed	-,09202	,00108	,05473	,102
	high	2,9717	Equal variances not assumed	-,09202	,00108	,05473	,100
Sports	elem.	2,5442	Equal variances assumed	,10358	,00151	,04594	,026
	high	2,4406	Equal variances not assumed	,10358	,00151	,04594	,026**
Cultural activities	elem.	1,6050	Equal variances assumed	,04959	-,00055	,03098	,116
	high	1,5554	Equal variances not assumed	,04959	-,00055	,03098	,115
Socializing and outings	elem.	2,2487	Equal variances assumed	-,74590	-,00058	,04508	,001
	high	2,9946	Equal variances not assumed	-,74590	-,00058	,04508	,001**
Relaxing activities	elem.	2,221	Equal variances assumed	-,3284	-,0019	,0363	,001**
	high	2,549	Equal variances not assumed	-,3284	-,0019	,0363	,001

\*bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

\*\*  $p \leq 0,05$  ((note; interpreted values were obtained in a t-test (bootstrapping), with a fulfilled prerequisite of the homogeneity of variance)

As seen in Table 3, there is a statistically significant difference between the students of primary and middle schools, regarding the assessment of frequency of spending free time on: electronic media, sports, socializing and outings and relaxing activities. The arithmetic means show that primary schools students in the sample more often spend their free time on electronic media and doing sports, and middle school students on activities of socializing and relaxing activities. These results are not surprising since it is a well-known fact that a period of adolescence is a time of increased socialization and spending free time with peers. A large number of adolescents state that for them ideally spend free time is socializing with friends, girlfriends or boyfriends (Bouillet, 2008).

A statistically significant difference has not been found regarding the connection between place of residence (house, flat) and frequencies of spending free time (bootstrap t-test for independent samples,  $p > 0,05$ ).

#### 4. Conclusion

Leisure time of children and adolescents has in the last decade become a subject of numerous scientific studies. Time that is left to children and adolescents after completing all of their obligations is an important segment of their lives because it is a time when they are exposed to a number of influences from the environment, both positive and negative. Leisure therefore has a dual role. It can be a space for relief after every day stressful situations, personal development, self-creation, creative activity, but also a space suitable for developing and manifesting many forms of risky social behavior. Children and adolescents spend their free time in different ways and are in constant search of new activities. According to the conducted study, children and adolescents spend most of their free time on the Internet, and least in cultural activities. These results are worrying because Internet is an electronic medium that can contribute to developing many forms of risky behavior, such as gambling, betting, bullying, juvenile prostitution etc. It would certainly be interesting and useful, in future research, to examine what are the Internet content and pages where children and adolescents mostly spend their time on. Research has also shown a statistically significant gender difference on all composite variables of spending free time (except for the composite variable representing Internet) and it is visible from the arithmetic means that girls spend more time on electronic media, cultural activities, socializing/outings and relaxing activities, while boys spend more of their free time on sports activities. It can be stated that even today there are certain stereotypes, according to which socializing and cultural activities are more appropriate to females, and sports and sports activities to males. Research has also confirmed a statistically significant difference between primary and middle school students in estimating the frequency of spending free time on: electronic media, sports, socializing, outings and relaxing activities. Primary school students more often spend their free time on electronic media and sports, and middle school students on socializing/outings and relaxing activities. The obtained results are not surprising since, according to the period of development, children and adolescents have different interests and preferences. The research has not shown statistically significant differences in spending free time with respect to the respondents' residence (house, flat).

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