



# The Effects of Leisure Time Activities on the Well-Being in Mid-to-Late Adulthood after Retirement

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**Received Date:** April 06, 2022; **Published Date:** April 26, 2022

## Abstract

One of the most important events of life is the transition from work to retirement. It might have negative and positive effects on health mentally and physically based on the lifestyles, and leisure activities adopted by the people. After retirement, most of the properties gained through the pre-retirement area might change and even be lost such as the social role. If the transition period is hard to get through, it might result in feeling lost, ineffective, and isolated. The current paper aims to present a literature review, focusing on different studies conducted in various countries, to get a general idea of how the transition period is going with outcomes. In addition, the article provides insight into the impact of leisure on adult well-being through a mixed comparison of cross-sectional studies on the topic. The paper also highlights the importance of retirement education and planning both before and after retirement, as recent findings on older adults suggest that trends in how to spend leisure time differently than in the past are changing. Therefore, further research is needed to be conducted to understand the impact of new leisure activities on well-being in later adulthood.

**Keywords:** Retirement; Leisure Time Activities; Mental and Physical Well-Being; Retirement Education; Hopefulness

## Introduction

According to a report by World Health Organization (WHO), the socio-economic developments in many regions, the decline in fertility, and the rise in life expectancy have caused the demographic characteristics of the world population to change. In other words, global population aging is seen to be related to the demographic transition process in which fertility and mortality decline from high levels to low levels, and the age structure of the world population is reshaped in favor of the elderly population. In countries undergoing 'demographic transition', where fertility rates have either stabilised or decreased, combined with falling mortality rates, there is an increase in the number of older people in population growth rates (across most of Sub-Saharan

Africa). In countries that move through later the stages of demographic and epidemiological transition, low fertility combined with decreasing or stable mortality means that more and more older people are living in stable or decreasing populations (across most of Europe). As the population ages, there are older people in any given scenario or place [1]. Besides, there are some predictions such as after 2050, half of the European population will be consist of elderly people. The fact that the decrease in childbirth and infant deaths in recent years and the differentiated migration processes have led to demographic transformation reveals the prediction that half of the European population will be over 50 years old by 2030 [2,3].

Increasing the older population should be concluded with more focus on the standards of late adult life. Especially after the retirement process, late adults step into a different life compared to the pre-retirement process in which most of them had established social roles and lifestyles. Loss of social roles and economical changes affect the well-being of retirees without a doubt. Rearranging life in the retirement process gains importance through leisure time activities that might help retirees to be part of society again by obtaining social roles. Therefore, the focus of the current paper will be on the effects of leisure time activities on late adulthood in terms of their health and well-being [2,4].

Leisure time might be defined as the time space for the non-obligatory and non-work-related activities that people do in their free time. As a result of retirement, people generally have much more free time compared to younger ages, so they spend much more time on activities that they love to do or do to just fill the time. Although there are no sufficient studies to explain how leisure time activities are related to mental health and adjustment, the effects of engaging in leisure time activities are associated with better mental, physical and cognitive health, and seem to increase with age comparison between retirees and workers. Engagement with leisure time activities in later life is mostly a continuation of the earlier life. When individuals have a step into another year in their lives, their engagement with those activities tends to decrease as a result of health [5,6].

In the upcoming pages, the paper will focus on which levels of leisure time activities have a great influence on adult life especially when they get retired, and most of the aspects of retirees' life such as their hopelessness levels with the comparison of the ones who attend leisure time activities and not.

### **Transition Period from Work to Retirement with Its Pros and Cons**

The transition from work to retirement might be seen as a space of life to make the early life wishes come true. Increasing longevity of life, weakening of social norms and expectations and globalization creates a new understanding of retirement.

Individuals have a longer life expectancy than previous generations, and they are expected to live longer and healthier lives in spite of differences between countries. Globalization gives individuals more aware of the choice. People tend to experience more diverse lifestyles than in earlier historical times. Also, it can lead to an increase in the range of life paths that are possible, which can weaken the rigid expectations about how to live one's life at any given point in time. This is called a phenomenon called

simultaneous attenuation. Historically, age-graded norms have weakened, which has led to more flexibility in the timing of many developmental transitions. This allows individuals to delay some key developmental tasks typically done in young adulthood, such as having a child [7]. There is a Western cultural understanding that is delaying pleasure by pursuing the goals such as work, family, then, being on the game after retirement with such leisure and social goals in a period of life with fewer obligations. This phenomenon called the bucket list effect might have an important impact on the way people choose different leisure activities compared to before the retirement phase [7]. Postponing the leisure time activities and goals into the next phase of the life cycle in the young and middle adulthood could backfire according to the economical conditions, social and national inequalities. Not having enough wealth to do goals that have been already postponed might affect the mental and physical health status of late adults. At that point, planning what the future brings after the retirement process has a vital role in the well-being of adults [7].

According to a qualitative study done by Aktin S, et al. [2], retirees not only give up on working life but also stay away from the social environment that they acquired during their employment process. Participants in this study stated the retirement process as 'isolating', 'feeling worthless', and 'feeling empty'. For instance, most of them developed different sorts of strategies to overcome those statements in daily life such as following cultural activities, participating in sightseeing tours, and enrolling in hobby courses. Thus, instead of breaking away from social life, it was seen that they continued their relationship thanks to these activities. Most of the studies made in this area found that when socializing at the minimum level, increases the risk of isolation.

Retirement is also might be defined as leaving working life behind which resulted in the loss of some income. Besides, social powers and roles of individuals are changing with getting retired. If the individual couldn't catch up and adapt to the changes, some crises might arise during that period. As a result, the individual feels unworthy, ineffective, and helpless. Work-life is not just a place to get income to meet needs. It is beyond the production function. It is a living environment. Work creates an environment in which individuals get 'identity' and a sense of belonging to the group. In other words, work-life helps individuals to create a social group. As individuals maintain their job, they put themselves into membership in the social group. This process continues after the individual gets retired when they start reviving themselves as 'old workers who used to work there'. Therefore, retirement is a break from these social groups. For instance, individuals used to visit their old workplaces, but then they give up this short habit period after a while [2].

The importance of being ready for the retirement process has a crucial role because as stressed above, loss of income, status, and social environment would be critical when the individuals are caught unprepared for these losses. Therefore, the individuals who are getting closer to retirement should experience the retirement process gradually and leave business life with a smooth transition.

### **Importance of Engagement to Leisure Time Activities after Retirement**

There are plenty of theories about older adults' lives and their preferences for leisure time activities after retirement. The article will focus on three theories, in general, to convey the ideas in a sensible manner.

Some individuals experience feeling disconnection from society after retirement, and this affects their overall well-being. The theory of disconnection states that people give up some of their social roles gradually with the approach of death, and the young members of society take on these roles. However, there are some counter theories such as activity in which no matter how old the people are, society needs social interaction from all segments and generations of the society. The social and psychological needs of older adults who are about to get retired or after the retirement process are the same as those middle-aged individuals, except for biological and medical changes [8]. This is the point where leisure activities come into play. Most of the studies done on the subject of the well-being of retired people stressed the importance of participating in those activities with positive outcomes on health. To make an illustration the theory of disconnection, some social leisure activities give a new identity or help the individual to regain social roles. These two theories are beneficial to giving a spotlight on the pre-retirement process in terms of social presence and psychological well-being during the retirement process [2,3]. After retirement, individuals have much more free time to spend on their own preferences compared to before. Continuity theory claims that people want to continue in the most significant aspects of their lives the way it is. For example, leisure time activities might help to maintain such aspects of pre-retirement life as cognitive stimulation, self-respect, and social contacts; therefore, there is a potential increase in engagement to leisure activities in the transition from work to retirement. Individuals are not likely to start new leisure activities as their age increases, and increased engagement in activities is important for late-life health [5]

Leisure time activities engagement might be distinguished into physical, social, and intellectual activities to understand the relationship between leisure activity and well-being in older adults. It has been reported that up to 50% of people aged 60 and over have a risk of social isolation and one-

third will face some degree of loneliness at some points of their lives [9]. Involvement in social activities is linked to better health and well-being results. Social leisure activities can help individuals in times of distress, attribution, and relevance under the title of social support [3,5].

For instance, some retired female workers get together on some specific days with their ex-coworkers as a social leisure activity. A qualitative study done by Aktin S, et al. [2] found that these women at first were staying away from their coworkers when they got retired. At that period, participants experienced feeling isolated and useless, and they again established connections with their ex-coworkers in the at-home days (kabal gunu) to overcome these feelings. The instance of at-home days practice helped participants of the study to feel better when they were in contact with each other. At-home days practices were not just in the houses of the retirees. Sometimes, they prefer to go outside for their meetings in a different way. In this respect, it has been observed that the participants prefer an "active" life instead of a passive retirement process.

Furthermore, according to a quantitative cross-sectional study in Romania, most frequently participants identified the leisure time activity category as watching television or films or listening to tapes and CDs. There are the same results from a study done in the US as watching television as a top leisure activity. At this point, the social isolation of the retirees is at higher risk compared to ones who prefer an "active" life. As in the instance of at-home days in Turkey, there are similarities in terms of attending social activities in Romania too. Some participants of the study said that walking in parks or mountain trips with other ladies together such as their former colleagues and neighbors helped them not only stay healthy but also stay socially and physically active. In another study, it was found that there is an increase in neighborly socializing for people in the 57-85 age groups [10]. As has been said over and over again, humans are social creatures, and recreational activities will eliminate hopelessness more effectively when undertaken in groups. Group activities relieve loneliness and create a kind of social support network, provide a kind of employment, and in this way people focus their attention on the activity they are doing [3].

Physical leisure activities also might be effective to cope with the stress, and well-being of older adults in terms of mental health. For instance, less engagement in general physical activities after retiring was linked to increases in depressive symptoms. The study done in Romania showed that sports participation decreased with age as other studies revealed too. Health problems may be an obstacle to the exercise of sport by older persons; however, studies have shown that older persons who engage in sports to improve their health

may still be physically active. According to studies, watching television, the most common sit-in activity in spare time, is related to cardiometabolic risk and mortality bio marks. Another example, one of the participants of the study done by Rada C, et al. [3] said that over time, companions of the participant passed away one by one, and their trips became shorter and rarer. The participant still wants to do the activity, but the body can no longer do it because of getting tired easily, feeling pains in bones as age progresses. There will be other limiting factors such as lack of a companion, childhood education, traveling problems related to older age, and lack of knowledge about the benefits of physical activity [3]. As is widely emphasized in the newspaper, after retirement people may feel lost and ineffective. Another study found that when people engaged in physical activity during their free time, feelings of hopelessness decreased. The level of hopelessness was lowest among those who played sports and highest among those who did not participate in any activity during their free time. It showed that choosing active activities in their free time is crucial for people to overcome despair. Intellectual leisure activities might be beneficial for mental stimulation and distraction. Mind stimulating activities provide ways to keep older adults sharp, helping to improve memory, problem-solving, creativity, and other cognitive functions such as word games, jigsaws, and chess. Intellectual activities are linked to better mental health [5].

## Discussion and Recommendations

Regular participation in leisure activities has long been regarded as an important factor in the transition to old age. In addition, several successful aging theories cite maintaining an active lifestyle as one of the main criteria for living well in old age. Participating in leisure time activities gains much more importance after the retirement process to active aging in terms of psychologically, physically, and intellectually. Loss of certain properties such as social identity gained through work-life, income, and social environment affects the well-being of retirees might result negatively. Decreasing hopefulness or engaging in leisure activities such as watching TV all the time not only affects the health of the individuals but also drags them into isolation from society and despair. It is possible to gain new social networks through participation in leisure activities, and those activities might help to promote a sense of purpose in life, even in the face of potentially detrimental role losses as mentioned above [4].

This research emphasizes the importance of retirement education in terms of physical and mental health. It was found that more than half of retirees enter the retirement period unprepared without a plan for the retirement period. Planning the retirement process has a vital role after retirement. For instance, the factors of 'social environment' and 'lack of information' were emphasized in the studies

as barriers to participating in leisure time activities [11]. Retirement education should be a priority for the ones who are in the retirement process to overcome the lack of information. Individuals need to be educated to prepare for retirement, plan their leisure time, develop hobbies, deal with old age problems, and solve the problems they normally face during retirement such as loneliness, boredom, meaningless feelings. Some countries already offer retirement training to help individuals who are about to retire. Studies show that individuals who receive this training show a more positive attitude towards retirement and adapt better [12].

This education might be formal or informal. For instance, there are ads on TVs in Romania that were found to be the top leisure time activity among older adults. Ads are emphasizing the importance of a balanced diet and exercise during breaks such slogans as 'Move at least thirty minutes each day' that promotes physical activity. Ads might be improved such as portraits like groups of older adults running in the park with the joy of spending leisure time outdoors with physical leisure time activity [10]. In Turkey, such strategies might be used as well since watching TV is so widespread among older people and retirees.

During the COVID pandemic, engaging in such leisure activities might be increased. According to a recent study, while the number of participants in the study who reported that they participated in practical leisure activities before the pandemic was six, this number increased to 12 with the pandemic, and the type of the activities changed. Video calls made from mobile phones or computers, watching series through digital platforms within the scope of modern leisure activities have increased [6]. There should be more focus on this transition, and the effects on the well-being of retirees and older adults. According to the most recent results of the Turkish statistical institute, 32.5 percent of citizens aged 65-74 use the internet actively. 40 percent of men and 25.9 percent of women in the elderly category actively use the internet. The point that future studies should focus on that the change over the years. In the research conducted in 2016, only 8.8 percent of the citizens in the same group were using the internet. There is a changing trend in older adults spending their leisure time differently than in the past [13].

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