

LEISURE ACTIVITY PATTERNS AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION: THE CHANGING HOUSEHOLD

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Abstract

Our knowledge of the dynamics of the American family system is partial since we have limited research regarding the changing household make-up and its impact on recreation and leisure patterns. The present study attempts to fill that gap by using an analytical approach to recreation and leisure patterns using household composition segments. Participation in different recreation activities, as well as the frequency and style of participation would expect to vary by age, gender, education level, region, ethnicity, and financial resources. New recreation and tourism facilities should reflect the changes in the composition of households that we would expect to impact recreation demand and activity preferences.

1.0 Introduction

In 1984, the Journal of Leisure Research (JLR) published a review of the literature on leisure and families making a variety of recommendations for leisure research. Although progress has been made, challenges remain. Important variables in leisure that have been studied include contexts, motives, perceptions, patterns, and trends of recreation and leisure pursuits by different demographic and social groups (Horna and Lupri 1987, Kelly 1983, Mactavish, Sehleien, and Tabourne 1997, Shaw 1997). One area that continues to be important, however overlooked, is family types or structures. Considering the many lifestyle changes that have taken place since 1984, researchers still have not sufficiently addressed how families are enacted or constructed, thus there is a gap in the literature concerning how the concept of family should be redeveloped in order to address current trends

(Holman and Epperson 1984). Understanding shifts in demographics and lifestyle is especially important to businesses or communities seeking to develop tourism projects. According to Gunn (1994), tourism planning can and should be directed toward goals of visitor satisfaction, protected resource assets, and community and area integration, as well as the more commonly accepted goals of improved economy and business success. In order to meet these goals, it is important to understand the needs of potential visitors. Type, style, and frequency of recreation activities vary by age, gender, education level, region, ethnicity, and financial resources. Therefore, changes in the composition of a population would result in changes in recreation demand (Kelly and Warnick 1999).

Understanding the role of household composition can be beneficial in making educated decisions about which resources to use and programs to offer when developing any tourism project or destination. An example of an attempt to make educated choices is the proposed project. The Great Lakes Discovery Center, offers an opportunity to examine whether household composition plays a role in the design and programming issues involved in the project. A broad-based public/private partnership has formed with a vision of building a Great Lakes Discovery Center as part of the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services in the Bridgeport, Michigan area. The location of this center would be adjacent to Interstate 75 at the Bridgeport-Frankenmuth exit. To investigate the most beneficial use of the land, planning groups were formed consisting of engineer/architects, business planners and market researchers. The overall purpose of the study was to develop a better understanding of potential visitor markets to the Great Lakes Discovery Center and the Bridgeport district of the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. Michigan State University (MSU) was charged with the market research segment of the effort, with the specific goals of generating estimates of market demand, developing profiles of key markets, providing guidance for developing communication and

pricing strategies, and obtaining data to address key programming and facility design issues.

Kelly and Warnick (2001) reported demographic trends which include: a population increase, an aging population, fewer families, many single parent families and many parents in the workforce, fewer children in households and higher levels of education. In developing a new tourism project, such as the Great Lakes Discovery Center, consideration should be given to the changing household composition and how it affects leisure participation. By understanding which programs and activities appeal to certain household types, programs can be developed and marketed in such a way as to increase visitor satisfaction and offer programs to meet the needs of a variety of consumers, especially those that are underserved. In addition, recent articles in travel magazines and publications such as *American Demographics* (Seema 2001) have discussed the broadening composition of the American family and the many overlooked and under-served markets. The focus of this paper is the question, "Do family patterns and household composition influence leisure and recreation participation and interests?"

2.0 Methods/Instrumentation

A mail survey was viewed as the most appropriate method to study a large number of individuals in order to obtain information regarding their recreation and environment interests. These research findings will be considered during the development of the Great Lakes Discovery Center. The survey instrument was developed by the MSU research team with input from experienced researchers who conducted recreation studies in the Chicago area (Vogt, Andereck, and Klenosky 2002). The survey instrument was designed as an eight-page booklet consisting of 17 questions. The questions used were mostly closed-ended (e.g., yes/no, pick one, rate on a scale, etc.), although several open-ended questions were used as well. The questionnaire was structured to obtain information about respondents' general recreation habits and interests, intentions to visit the Great Lakes Discovery Center, likely visitation behavior, preferences for specific attraction features and programming options, marketing issues, and demographics.

Using the three-stage tailored method (Dillman 2000), the mail survey consisted of a personalized cover letter, a prepaid return envelope, the questionnaire, and a \$1 incentive. A postcard, which included both a thank you and a reminder, was sent to all respondents 1 week after the initial survey mailing. Three weeks after the initial survey mailing, those individuals who had not yet responded were sent another personalized letter, an envelope, and another copy of the survey. In addition, the potential of non-response bias (i.e., which occurs when survey respondents and non-respondents differ in how they would complete the survey) was examined by completing a nonresponse study. Households who had not responded were randomly selected, stratified by state, and mailed a one-page letter asking whether they would visit the Great Lakes Discovery Center complex, as a way of estimating visitation patterns of survey nonrespondents. Nonresponse, or lack of response to any of the mailings, suggests a lack of interest or ability to visit. Thus, in calculations of expanding our sample statistics to the general population, nonrespondents were treated as nonvisitors. Further, of the 16 households who responded to our nonresponse letter, 14 indicated they would "definitely not", "probably not", or "may or may not" visit, offering further support for treating nonrespondents as nonvisitors.

2.1 Method/Sample

In January 2004, the survey was sent to 1,500 individuals in the Midwest area, specifically, all counties in the lower peninsula of Michigan, two counties (Mackinac and Chippewa, to include St. Ignace and Sault Saint Marie) in the upper peninsula of Michigan, northern counties in Indiana to include Gary, South Bend, and Fort Wayne, and northern counties in Ohio to include Toledo and Cleveland. These geographic areas include approximately a 250-mile, one-way drive radius to the Bridgeport area, the proposed location of the Great Lakes Discovery Center. The list was randomly drawn from the general population using a list obtained from Survey Sampling International (Fairfield, CT). Worthy of mention is that although areas in Canada are located within the 250-mile drive radius, Canadians were not included in the sample due to a number of factors, the first being that Survey Sampling International did not provide Canadians on

Table 1.—Survey response summary

	Quantity of surveys
Original sample size	1,500
Less: Bad addresses	78
Less: Deceased	5
Net effective sample size	1,431
Less: Refusals (didn't want to answer, too old, no interest)	16
Less: Returned empty	11
Usable surveys	537 ^a
Overall response rate	38.0%

^aOf the 552 respondents, 56 were from Indiana; 373 from Michigan, and 107 from Ohio.

the list. Second, researchers were concerned about how business reply envelopes would be handled through the international post. Last, the high cost of postage would be prohibitive. Of the 1,500 surveys mailed, a total of 537 useable surveys were returned (Table 1). In all, a 38 percent response rate was achieved. This level of response is strong for a general population study and quite acceptable for the needs of this research.

2.2 Method/Variables

Households were the unit of sampling and analysis. In order to examine household composition, households were segmented into groups using the following variables; gender, number of adults in the household, number of children in the household and children's ages. Four major household types were formed from the sample (n=537) based on the demographic data. The four groups formed from demographic data were:

- Group 1 (n=109) Single adult households with no children in household = 20% "Single/with no kids"
- Group 2 (n=253) Two adults and no children in household = 47% "Couple/with no kids"
- Group 3 (n=23) Single adult households with at least one child living in household = 4% "Single/with kids"
- Group 4 (n=152) Two adults and at least one child living in household = 28% "Couple/with kids"

To gain understanding of respondents in comparison to the general population, demographic data were compared to the 2000 Census (US Census Bureau 2000). The results of this analysis indicated an overrepresentation of: Michigan residents, wealthier households, households without children, middle-aged adults, and Caucasians. The underrepresented groups included: Indiana and Ohio residents, lower income households, younger adults/households, and African American households. These over and under representations were slight and no adjustments to the data were made. However, these biases should be considered in marketing and programming efforts. Two additional variables were analyzed: participation experience or history in activities in the Great Lakes Region during the past 12 months and the importance of outdoor recreation experiences/features (5-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all important" to "extremely important").

3.0 Results

To measure participation experience or history in activities, participants were presented with a list of 30 activities available in the Great Lakes region and asked to indicate if they or another member of the household had participated in the prior 12 months.

The top five activities for each group were used to develop an experience history for each household type. The Single/with no kids households rated "driving for pleasure or sightseeing" as the number one activity (88%). "Walking or hiking for pleasure" fell into the number one or two spot for each group; Single/with no kids (88%), Couples/with no kids (96%), Single/with kids (91%), and Couples/with kids (95%). Interestingly, the only household group to indicate experience with "hunting or trapping" was those consisting of Couple/with kids (89%), which may be indicative of the tradition of fathers teaching sons to hunt. In addition, households consisting of Single/with kids were the least likely of the four groups to "drive for pleasure or sightseeing" (76%). Based on this information, we can determine the different recreation and leisure interests for the varying household compositions, specifically single adults versus households with two adults.

To examine whether there were significant associations between outdoor recreation past/experience history and household composition, cross tabulation analysis was employed. The household group “Single/kids” was excluded from the analysis because the sample size was small resulting in too few cases in cells which can cause inaccurate statistically results. According to Norusis (1988), if the sample is too small, differences, even large ones, are unable to be detected. Table 2 presents a summary of these cross tabulation results. The highlighted section shows those instances where a relationship between items was statistically significant

at a level of 5 percent or lower, based on the Pearson chi-square test for independence (Singleton, Straits, and Straits 1993). The most significant differences between household types and participation experience or history were found in hunting or trapping ($p=.001$) and swimming in the Great Lakes ($p=.005$). Also, the Couples/with kids household group indicated the highest participation in hunting and fishing (89%) compared to the Single/with no kids group (56%). The same pattern was found for swimming in the Great Lakes, where Couples/with kids participated to a greater extent (70%) than the Single/with no kids household group (52%).

Table 2.—Outdoor recreation past experiences/history

	Household type ^a			Composite Mean (n=537)	χ^2	Sig.
	Single/no kids (n=109)	Couple/no kids (n=253)	Couple/ kids (n=152)			
<i>Significant Differences Between Household Type Segments</i>						
Hunting or trapping	55.6%	83.1%	88.9%	80.0%	13.1	.001
Swimming in the Great Lakes	51.9	73.7	76.3	70.4	10.8	.005
Boating, motorized/nonmotorized, in other lakes or rivers	62.8	84.3	81.1	79.8	9.5	.009
Boating, motorized/nonmotorized, in the Great Lakes	48.8	67.3	74.7	66.5	8.2	.017
In-line skating	57.1	68.2	84.6	74.6	7.8	.020
Fishing in other lakes or rivers	61.4	78.6	81.1	76.5	7.0	.031
Walking or hiking for pleasure	88.0	95.6	95.2	93.9	6.5	.040
<i>Similarity Between Household Type Segments</i>						
Driving for pleasure or sightseeing	88.5%	95.3%	92.1%	93.0%	4.6	.099
Rock or fossil collecting	52.4	56.0	73.8	61.9	4.1	.131
Horseback riding	33.3	39.5	55.8	44.8	3.8	.148
Visiting nature or environmental education	82.2	71.3	67.1	72.0	3.3	.192
Observing wildlife	86.7	91.2	83.3	88.0	3.2	.201
Going to a zoo	52.7	65.2	61.3	61.4	2.5	.282
Viewing wildflowers and natural vegetation	85.2	88.2	80.6	85.7	2.0	.364
Orienteering	25.0	22.2	45.5	32.1	1.5	.475
Volunteering to do nature-related restoration	57.9	46.2	37.5	47.9	1.5	.480
Swimming in other lakes or rivers	79.5	80.4	85.6	82.4	1.3	.534
Camping in a vehicle or trailer	57.7	64.1	69.5	65.0	1.2	.559
						Continued

Table 2.—Continued

	Household type ^a				χ^2	Sig.
	Single/no kids (n=109)	Couple/no kids (n=253)	Couple/ kids (n=152)	Composite Mean (n=537)		
Bird watching	85.3	91.6	89.6	89.9	1.1	.566
Participating in neighborhood, river or park clean-up activities	59.1	54.8	68.2	59.3	1.1	.583
Fishing in the Great Lakes	59.4	68.8	67.1	66.7	1.0	.617
Gather plants/berries/ferns	80.0	82.8	75.9	79.7	0.9	.650
Backpacking overnight	46.7	34.8	46.7	41.5	0.8	.685
Picnicking	79.7	79.0	83.3	80.5	0.7	.698
Bicycling	84.4	81.4	85.6	83.7	0.7	.708
Camping in a tent	50.0	51.3	55.6	52.7	0.4	.818
Attending nature-based interpretive programs	64.3	56.8	57.1	58.3	0.3	.881
Going to a museum or heritage site	76.8	74.1	74.5	74.8	0.2	.926
Going to an arboretum/botanic garden	58.3	55.6	55.7	56.2	0.1	.945
Attending history-based interpretive programs	52.2	55.6	51.9	53.5	0.1	.948

^aNote: On this Chi-Square Analysis, household type “Single/kids” were excluded because of too few cases in cells which can cause inaccurate statistical results.

Next, the importance of various experiences was evaluated by providing a list of 28 outdoor recreation experiences/features. Those found to be most important were an outdoor experience that includes fresh air (mean=4.37), experiencing the outdoors (4.22), and natural/scenic landscapes and open-spaces (4.08). Equally important to outdoor experiences were safe and secure environments (4.34), offering comfort facilities such as restrooms and water fountains (4.29), that are both clean and well maintained (4.25), offered at a reasonable fee or price (4.25), and have a helpful and courteous staff (4.08).

The relationship between importance of outdoor recreation features and household composition was tested using one-way analysis of variance. Results indicated significant relationships among four features and household types (Table 3). Features related to the facilities (e.g., food or vending, good visitor services, clean restrooms and water fountains, trails, etc.) were found to differ amongst the segments, followed by features related to learning and preservation (e.g., river restoration

projects, environmental/conservation education programs, restoring and preserving land and open-spaces, etc.). Facilities attributes were most important to single parents and restoration and sustainability were most important to single adults without children in the household.

4.0 Conclusion

Recreation participation by household type varies for some activities. Researchers and practitioners alike should take note of the changes in the composition of a population and the impact these changes will have on recreation demand. While the majority of leisure research has focused on heterosexual married couples with children, it is apparent that researchers need to take into account the diversity of family types that now exist. In light of current trends (Seema 2001), some of the household compositions in need of further research include multigenerational households, single parent households, and gay and lesbian families. The Travel Industry Association of American (TIA 2004) conducted

Table 3.—Outdoor recreation experiences or features

	Household type				Composite Mean (n=537)	F-Test	Sig.
	Single/no kids (n=109)	Couple/ no kids (n=253)	Couple/ kids (n=152)	Single/ kids (n=23)			
<i>Significant Differences Between Household Type Segments</i>							
Restoring and preserving land and open spaces	3.92 (1.07)	3.61 (1.12)	3.51 (1.18)	3.57 (1.12)	3.64	2.74	.042
Attractions/facilities with food or vending available	3.24 ^a (1.21) b	3.15 (1.25)	3.35 (1.21)	4.04 (.92)	3.27	4.22	.006
Attractions/facilities accessible via trails	3.19 (1.16)	2.85 (1.19)	3.08 (1.19)	3.39 (1.15)	3.01	3.20	.023
Learning about sustainable communities/systems	3.30 (1.19)	2.91 (1.18)	2.89 (1.15)	3.09 (1.04)	2.99	2.95	.032
<i>Similarity Between Household Type Segments</i>							
Enjoying fresh air	4.44 (.74)	4.35 (.82)	4.32 (.72)	4.52 (.66)	4.37	.871	.456
Attractions/facilities in safe, secure environments	4.29 (.87)	4.33 (.84)	4.36 (.72)	4.52 (.59)	4.34	.558	.643
Attractions/facilities with comfort facilities	4.25 (.88)	4.24 (.91)	4.36 (.72)	4.57 (.59)	4.29	1.57	.194
Attractions/facilities available at reasonable fees and prices	4.29 (.88)	4.19 (.90)	4.29 (.76)	4.57 (.66)	4.25	1.64	.178
Attractions/facilities that are clean and well-maintained	4.23 (.89)	4.23 (.81)	4.28 (.77)	4.39 (.72)	4.25	.363	.779
Experiencing the outdoors	4.28 (.80)	4.23 (.85)	4.19 (.80)	4.00 (.90)	4.22	.775	.508
Attractions/facilities with helpful and courteous staff	4.05 (1.03)	4.06 (.92)	4.07 (.844)	4.52 (.59)	4.08	1.88	.131
Experiencing natural/scenic landscapes	4.07 (1.06)	4.14 (.87)	4.03 (.88)	3.91 (.94)	4.08	.740	.528
Attractions/facilities with ample parking available	3.97 (.96)	3.97 (.97)	4.02 (.85)	4.39 (.58)	4.00	1.53	.204
Attractions/facilities with good visitor services	3.94 (.99)	3.91 (.91)	3.89 (.902)	4.39 (.58)	3.93	2.05	.105
Experiencing a sense of solitude	3.98 (1.06)	3.78 (1.14)	3.80 (1.00)	3.91 (.90)	3.83	.912	.435
Being able to see and hear wildlife	3.68 (1.15)	3.84 (1.03)	3.81 (1.05)	3.70 (1.06)	3.79	.617	.604
Providing habitats for endangered or sensitive plants/wildlife	3.97 (1.10)	3.67 (1.20)	3.61 (1.15)	3.65 (1.15)	3.71	2.16	.091
Experiencing wilderness areas	3.45 (1.22)	3.56 (1.10)	3.53 (1.14)	3.09 (1.27)	3.51	1.31	.269

Continued

Table 3.—Continued

	Household type				Composite Mean (n=537)	F-Test	Sig.
	Single/no kids (n=109)	Couple/no kids (n=253)	Couple/kids (n=152)	Single/kids (n=23)			
Attractions/facilities location within an hour's drive from home	3.52 (1.11)	3.50 (1.07)	3.38 (1.16)	3.65 (1.15)	3.48	.633	.594
River restoration projects	3.49 (1.23)	3.47 (1.13)	3.32 (1.18)	3.17 (1.19)	3.41	.912	.435
Environmental/conservation education programs	3.53 (1.14)	3.40 (1.08)	3.27 (1.14)	3.30 (1.25)	3.38	1.04	.372
Attractions/facilities accessible via interstate highways	3.36 (1.14)	3.34 (1.13)	3.32 (1.14)	3.65 (1.15)	3.35	.592	.621
Nature/environmental programs	3.32 (1.20)	3.17 (1.09)	3.02 (1.12)	3.09 (1.24)	3.15	1.46	.223
Sites featuring Native American history	3.31 (1.18)	3.14 (1.16)	3.03 (1.14)	3.26 (1.35)	3.14	1.26	.285
Learning about the Great Lakes ecosystem	3.33 (1.21)	3.12 (1.12)	3.01 (1.04)	3.13 (.96)	3.13	1.63	.182
Viewing native flora (plants)	3.26 (1.29)	3.11 (1.08)	2.97 (1.10)	3.09 (1.04)	3.10	1.25	.288
Sites featuring farmstead and agricultural history	3.07 (1.14)	2.98 (1.06)	3.01 (1.17)	3.17 (1.23)	3.02	.302	.824
Technology presentation of nature	2.72 (1.16)	2.68 (1.16)	2.64 (1.06)	2.57 (1.03)	2.67	.164	.921

^aScale where 1= “not at all important” and 5 =“extremely important.”

^b Number in parentheses is the standard deviation.

a study of family travelers and predicted more “grand travel” in the years to come as the 77 million active, healthy Baby Boomers become grandparents. Special pricing to accommodate single parent families may also need to be addressed. In addition, changes in the country's ethnic and racial composition may increase demand for multi-generational travel, affecting the size of traveling parties. A constantly evolving marketplace will have a whole range of implications and household composition will continue to change, resulting in a new, more diverse “traditional” family.

Overall, this analysis showed outdoor recreation behaviors, as well as the importance or preference for outdoor recreation activities, is fairly similar across the household segments. Some differences were noted. For example, single adults were less likely to hunt,

fish, boat or swim in the out-of-doors. Single parents expressed that facility services were important to their outdoor experiences and found food service and trails to be necessary. Limitations of this study include the limited number of participants representing each group, especially single parents. For this reason, these results should be interpreted with caution. We recognize the shortcomings and suggest replication of this study with over increased representation of the single with children household group. Our knowledge of the dynamics of the American family system is limited due to the small amount of research currently available regarding household make-up and the role it plays in leisure and recreation participation. The present study takes an alternative analysis of recreation and leisure patterns, based on household composition. Changes in the composition of a population will have impacts

on recreation demand, underlining the importance of research in the area of recreation needs and household composition.

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Citation:

In: Peden, John G.; Schuster, Rudy M., comps., eds. Proceedings of the 2005 northeastern recreation research symposium; 2005 April 10-12; Bolton Landing, NY. Gen. Tech. Rep. NE-341. Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Research Station