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The Effect of University Students' Participation In Recreational Sports Activities on Their Life Satisfaction and the Utility of Recreational Activities

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of university students' participation in sports activities on their life satisfaction and recreational benefit levels. Another aim of the study is to examine whether life satisfaction and recreational benefit levels vary according to some demographic characteristics. In the study, relational screening and causal comparison models were applied. Life satisfaction and recreational benefit scales were applied to the participants. The universe of the study consisted of students of Istanbul Gelişim University School of Physical Education and Sports, and the sample consisted of 441 volunteer participants selected from this universe by simple random sampling method. Recreational benefit scale and life satisfaction scale were used as data collection tools in the study. The analyzes of the study were defined in SPSS 25.0 package program system and the relevant analyzes were performed using this program. Mann Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis and Spearman Correlation analysis were applied as statistical analysis. As a result, it was determined that there was a significant difference in the sub-range of recreational benefit and reproductive benefit in the gender variable. In the age variable, the differences observed in the psychological benefit sub-systems in the 21-23 age range and 30 and above age range and in the 18-20 age range and 21-23 age range are permanently significant.

Conclusion: A weak negative correlation was found between life satisfaction and recreational benefit level.

Keywords: Benefit, Life satisfaction, Recreation.



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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, the lifestyles of individuals have become progressively more sedentary in conjunction with the advent of advanced technologies and the expansion of urbanisation. In particular, the younger demographic is witnessing a notable decline in social engagement and physical activity as a consequence of their reliance on digital technologies and online platforms (Helvacı & Taylan, 2025). This situation has a detrimental impact on both physical and psychological health. These effects are particularly pronounced among university students, who are subject to both academic responsibilities and evolving social dynamics. The period of university life is typified by a number of processes, including identity formation, the development of social networks and the planning of future careers (Xiao et al., 2025). It is also a time characterised by periods of intense stress and uncertainty. It is therefore crucial for university students to engage in activities that will support both their physical and mental health (Diener, 1984). Recreational sports are physical activities in which individuals engage during their leisure time. They are typically undertaken for purposes of entertainment, relaxation and social interaction, rather than for competitive purposes. Such sports provide numerous benefits to the individual, including spiritual and social advantages, as well as protection and enhancement of physical health. The principal objective of recreation is to bolster both physical and mental wellbeing through pursuits that individuals engage in according to their own preferences and inclinations, apart from the pressures and obligations of daily life. The relaxing and regenerating effects of recreational sports are of significant benefit in coping with the pressure and stress that can result from intense academic and professional life (Grasdalsmoen et al., 2020).

Recreational sports have been demonstrated to enhance the physical activity levels of individuals, while simultaneously offering the chance to socialise and expand their social networks. The findings of research studies indicate that regular physical activity has a beneficial impact on an individual's general health status, reduces the risk of disease and prolongs life expectancy (Rhodes et al., 2025). Furthermore, recreational sports have been demonstrated to have a beneficial impact on mental health (Ekinci et al., 2025; Karaman et al., 2024). In particular, participation in sports has been shown to contribute to a reduction in stress levels, an increase in self-confidence and an increase in overall life satisfaction (Collins et al., 2018). In this context, the psychosocial effects of recreational sports on individuals are related not only to physical development but also to emotional and social development (Ryff and Singer, 2008). For university students, recreational sports are regarded as an efficacious method of coping with the demands of both academic and social life. The undertaking of recreational activities based on physical activity has been observed to enhance individuals' motivation, improve their mental health and enhance their quality of life by creating opportunities for social interaction (Sarol et al., 2024). It can therefore be posited that participation in recreational sports by university students may have a significant impact on their overall life satisfaction and general well-being (Li et al., 2024).

The impact of recreational sports activities on life satisfaction is contingent upon individuals' endeavours to ascertain meaning and happiness in their lives (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The concept of life satisfaction is subjective and based on the general evaluation of individuals' lives. It can be defined as the level of satisfaction that individuals receive from their lives. The life satisfaction of young adults, particularly university students, is contingent upon a number of factors, including expectations for the future, personal goals and interactions with the social environment (Ryff & Singer, 2008). In this process, recreational sports both support physical health by increasing the physical activity of individuals and contribute to the psychosocial development of students by creating opportunities for interaction with the social environment (Chalip, 2006). Furthermore, the manner in which university students employ their leisure time and the recreational benefits they derive from this process are among the factors that influence

their life satisfaction. The term 'recreational benefits' is used to describe the physical, psychological and social gains that individuals obtain from leisure time activities. Such benefits assist individuals in relieving stress, enhancing social interactions, bolstering self-confidence, and fostering general well-being. In particular, participation in sports activities enables university students to cope with the considerable academic pressures they face and to establish stronger ties with their social environment (Penedo & Dahn, 2005). In this context, the psychological and social benefits of sport are acknowledged as a significant stabilising factor in the multifaceted challenges of university life. The principal objective of this study is to investigate the impact of university students' engagement with recreational sports on their levels of life satisfaction and recreational utility. While the impact of recreational sport on individual quality of life has been extensively examined in existing literature, the specific effects on university students have been addressed in only a limited number of studies. In this context, the objective of our study is to make a contribution to the existing literature by elucidating the effects of recreational sports that facilitate the social, psychological and physical development of university students on life satisfaction (Doğan & Ünal, 2024). Furthermore, the study is expected to yield significant insights into the role of sport-based interventions in enhancing the life satisfaction of university students and the necessity of expanding such activities (Ye et al., 2025).

This study offers significant insights by examining how university students allocate their leisure time and which activities they find beneficial to enhance their overall life satisfaction. Additionally, it underscores the potential impact that universities can have on enhancing students' life satisfaction.

METHOD

This section provides a comprehensive account of the research model, the population and sample, the data collection tools and the data analysis processes.

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of university students' participation in sporting activities on their life satisfaction and perceived levels of recreational utility. Specifically, the study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) Does a significant relationship exist between university students' life satisfaction and their recreational utility levels? Secondly, we inquire whether this relationship varies according to students' demographic characteristics, such as gender and age. (3) How does participation in recreational sports affect students' life satisfaction and perceived utility from recreational activities? By addressing these inquiries, the study seeks to underscore the significance of recreational sports in enhancing the well-being of university students and their contribution to life satisfaction.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: first, the participant must be a student at Istanbul Gelisim University School of Physical Education and Sports; second, the participant must voluntarily agree to participate in the study. Exclusion criteria included being a student at the aforementioned educational institution and declining to participate in the study.

Research Model

The research was conducted using the relational screening model (Karasar, 2017) in order to disseminate the life satisfaction of universities' participation in recreational sports activities and their distribution in the region. Benefits from recreational activities. Within the scope of the research, an online survey was used as a data collection tool, and the data was obtained from the owners on a voluntary basis.

Universe and Sample

The study population comprises students from Istanbul Gelisim University School of Physical Education and Sports. A simple random sampling method was employed as the

sampling technique, whereby all individuals within the population are afforded an equal chance of inclusion in the sample (Yazıcıoğlu and Erdoğan, 2004). The total number of participants in the research sample was 441, with all of them having volunteered to take part.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection tools employed in the study are delineated below.

The Descriptive Information Form is provided below for your reference. The form includes demographic information on the participants, such as gender, age, and department.

The Recreation Benefit Scale (RFS) is a measurement tool designed to assess the benefits derived from recreational activities. This scale, which was developed by Ho (2008) and subsequently validated by Akgül et al. (2016) through the use of confirmatory factor analysis, is employed to assess the benefits that participants derive from recreational activities. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale comprising 24 items and three sub-dimensions:

- a) Physical (7 items),
- b) Psychological (8 items),
- c) Social (9 items).

The Life Satisfaction Scale This scale, developed by Diener et al. (1985) for the purpose of measuring life satisfaction and subsequently adapted into Turkish by Bekmezci and Mert (2018), comprises five items. The item expressions include the following statements: "I have a life close to my ideals," "my life conditions are perfect," "I am satisfied with my life," "I have had the important things I want from life so far," and "I would not change almost anything in my life if I were born again." Participants were invited to indicate their level of agreement with each item on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Data Analysis

The data were subjected to analysis using the IBM SPSS 25.0 package programme. The normality of the data was evaluated through the examination of normal distribution curves, the calculation of skewness-kurtosis (skewness-skewness) values, and the analysis of histograms. Furthermore, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed when the group size exceeded 50. It was established that the data set did not exhibit a normal distribution, thus necessitating the utilisation of non-parametric tests. Spearman correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships between the variables. The objective was to examine the relationships between recreational sport participation and life satisfaction and recreational benefit levels. The Mann-Whitney U test was employed to assess the disparities between the life satisfaction and recreational benefit levels of disparate groups. The aforementioned methods were selected in accordance with the characteristics of the data set, and the analyses were conducted accordingly.

Ethical Approval

The research was conducted with the permission of Istanbul University-Cerrahpaşa Rectorate Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Date: 03.06.2025, Decision No: 2025/430).

FINDINGS

The findings obtained in the research are presented below.

Table 1*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-20	136	30.8
	21-23	174	39.5
	24-26	69	15.6
	27-29	50	11.3
	30+	12	2.7
	Total	441	100.0
Gender	Women	155	35.1
	Men	286	64.9
	Total	441	100.0
What is the subject area in which you are studying?	Department of Coaching Education	92	20.9
	Department of Sports Management	122	27.7
	Department of Recreation	79	17.9
	Department of Exercise and Sports Sciences	99	22.4
	Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences for People with Disabilities	49	11.1
	Total	441	100.0

An analysis of Table 1 shows that 30.8% of the subjects participating in the study were between 18 and 20 years old, 39.5% were in the age group 21-23 years, 15.6% were in the age group 24-26 years, 11.3% were in the age group 27-29 years, 2.7% were in the age group 30 and above, 35.1% were female, 64.9% were male, 20.9% were from the Department of Coaching Education, 27.9% were from the Department of Sport Management, 17.9% were from the Department of Recreation, 22.4% were from the Department of Exercise and Sport Science and 11.1% were from the Department of Exercise and Sport Science for the Disabled.

Table 2

Presents the Results of the Skewness, Kurtosis and Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Significance Level for Life Satisfaction and Recreational Utility Scale Scores.

Dimensions	N	Skewness	Kurtosis	P
Physical Benefits	441	-.233	.432	,000
Psychological Benefits	441	-.582	.987	,000
Social Benefits	441	-.213	.482	,000
Total Score of Recreation Utility Scale	441	-.687	1.065	,000
Total Life Satisfaction Scale Score	441	.175	-.854	,000

Upon examination of the life satisfaction and recreational benefit scales in Table 2, it becomes evident that the scores obtained from the sub-dimensions deviate from the normality assumption. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is one of several methods used to ascertain whether the data in question follows a normal distribution. The normal distribution curves were

examined and it was determined that there were deviations from normality. As Büyüköztürk (2007) observed, if the skewness and kurtosis values of the variables employed fall within the range of ± 1 , this indicates that there are no significant deviations from normality. Similarly, Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) noted that if the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the variables are between ± 1.5 , the data can be considered to exhibit normal distribution. It was thus established that the scale scores exhibited deviations from normality, with the coefficients falling outside the ± 1 and ± 1.5 range and the data failing to display a normal distribution.

Table 3

A Descriptive Analysis of the Responses Provided by the Participants in Relation to the Life Satisfaction and Recreational Benefit Scale.

Sub Dimensions	N	Min	Max	Mean \pm Sd
Physical benefits	441	7.00	34.00	20.72 \pm 4.01
Psychological benefits	441	7.00	39.00	25.21 \pm 4.47
Social benefits	441	10.00	40.00	25.21 \pm 4.48
Total Score of Recreation Utility Scale	441	30.00	100.00	68.17 \pm 10.10
Total Life Satisfaction Scale Score	441	9.00	35.00	20.97 \pm 6,00

Upon analysis of Table 3, it becomes evident that the participants' responses to the life satisfaction and recreational benefit scale, the physical benefit sub-dimension, exhibit an average of 1.79 ± 0.72 . The psychological benefit sub-dimension, on the other hand, demonstrates an average of 3.85 ± 0.77 . The social benefit sub-dimension averages 3.83 ± 1.00 . The total scores for the recreation benefit scale are 2.49 ± 0.54 , while the life satisfaction scale total scores are 3.11 ± 0.89 .

Table 4

Evaluation of Life Satisfaction and Recreational Benefit Levels of the Participants according to Their Gender

Sub Dimensions	Gender	N	Rank Mean	Rank Total	U	Cohen's d	p
Physical benefits	Women	155	219.53	34026.50	21936.50	0.05	.858
	Men	286	221.80	63434.50			
Psychological benefits	Women	155	238.55	36974.50	19445.50	0.21	.033
	Men	286	211.49	60486.50			
Social benefits	Women	155	218.32	33839.00	21749.00	-0.02	.744
	Men	286	222.45	63622.00			
Total Score of Recreation Utility Scale	Women	155	228.16	35365.50	21054.50	0.08	.384
	Men	286	217.12	62095.50			
Total Life Satisfaction Scale Score	Men	155	226.28	32334.50	19652.50	-0.01	.952
	Women	286	221.25	34293.50			

Upon closer examination of the life satisfaction and recreational benefit scale scores of the participants according to their gender, as illustrated in Table 4, it becomes evident that there

is no statistically significant difference between the total scores of the physical benefit and social benefit sub-dimensions and the total scores of the recreational benefit scale and the total scores of the life satisfaction scale. In the psychological benefit sub-dimension, the difference in the direction of women is statistically significant.

Table 5

Evaluation of Life Satisfaction and Recreational Benefit Levels of the Participants according to Their Ages

	Age	N	Rank Mean	sd	X ²	η ²	p	difference
Physical benefits	18-20 ¹	136	214.28					
	21-23 ²	174	223.02					
	24-26 ³	69	231.70		3.658	1.21	.454	-
	27-29 ⁴	50	231.18					
	30 + ⁵	12	163.96					
Psychological benefits	18-20 ¹	136	217.29					
	21-23 ²	174	231.55					
	24-26 ³	69	230.45		9.490	0.96	.050	2>5
	27-29 ⁴	50	204.55					
	30 + ⁵	12	124.25					
Social benefits	18-20 ¹	136	196.42					
	21-23 ²	174	244.00					
	24-26 ³	69	236.09	4	16.124	0.04	.003	1<2
	27-29 ⁴	50	203.21					
	30 + ⁵	12	153.46					
Total Score of Recreation Utility Scale	18-20 ¹	136	206.00					
	21-23 ²	174	235.24					
	24-26 ³	69	232.09		8.254	3.44	.083	-
	27-29 ⁴	50	213.42					
	30 + ⁵	12	152.33					
Total Life Satisfaction Scale Score	18-20 ¹	136	227.85					
	21-23 ²	174	205.25					
	24-26 ³	69	239.28		7.382	3.32	.117	-
	27-29 ⁴	50	217.06					
	30 + ⁵	12	283.04					

1 = 18–20 years, 2 = 21–23 years, 3 = 24–26 years, 4 = 27–29 years, 5 = 30 years and above

Table 5 reveals that there is no statistically significant difference between the physical benefit sub-dimension of the recreational benefit scale and the total scores of the recreational benefit scale and the total scores of the life satisfaction scale, when the life satisfaction and recreational benefit levels of the participants according to their ages are examined. A statistically significant difference was identified between the psychological benefit sub-dimension and the social benefit sub-dimension, with individuals aged 21-23 exhibiting a higher level of benefit than those aged 30 and above, and individuals aged 18-20 demonstrating a higher level of benefit than those aged 21-23.

Table 6*Relationship between Life Satisfaction and Recreational Benefit*

		Physical benefits	Psychological benefits	Social benefits	Total Life Satisfaction Scale Score
Life Satisfaction	r	-.073	-.065	-.145**	-.109*
	p	.124	.172	.002	.023

Upon examination of Table 6, it becomes evident that there is a weak negative correlation between life satisfaction and the recreational benefit scale, as well as the physical, psychological and social benefit sub-dimensions and the total scores for the life satisfaction scale.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study demonstrated that there was no statistically significant discrepancy between the physical benefit, social benefit sub-dimensions, and total scores of the recreational benefit scale and the life satisfaction scale total scores of women and men. However, it was observed that women reported higher scores in the psychological benefit sub-dimension compared to men, indicating that women derive more psychological benefits from recreational sports activities. The study's findings suggest that women's engagement in recreational sports leads to notable psychological benefits, including reduced stress, enhanced mood, and elevated self-esteem. These outcomes potentially contribute to an increase in their overall life satisfaction. This observation aligns with the findings of previous studies (Lee et al., 2016).

The study also revealed that there were differences in life satisfaction and recreational benefit levels according to the age groups of the participants. In particular, individuals in the 21-23 age group were found to report higher levels of psychological benefits compared to individuals aged 30 years and older. Similarly, individuals in the 18-20 age group perceived more social benefits than those in the 21-23 age group. These findings suggest that young adults may derive more psychological and social benefits from recreational sport activities (Ertüzün et al., 2020). Moreover, these results are in line with previous studies emphasizing the potential of recreational sports to provide young adults with social support, a sense of belonging, and peer interaction.

The study also identified a weak negative relationship between life satisfaction and recreational benefit level, suggesting that individuals with higher life satisfaction may perceive less benefit from recreational activities. This finding aligns with the literature suggesting a complex relationship between life satisfaction and the benefits obtained from leisure activities (Güldür and Yaşartürk, 2020). Consequently, individuals with elevated life satisfaction may have a diminished need for recreational activities because they are generally satisfied with their lives. Conversely, individuals with diminished life satisfaction may regard such activities as a means of enhancing their quality of life.

The present study is not without its limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional design precludes definitive inferences regarding the causal direction of the relationship between life satisfaction and recreational utility. Secondly, the convenience sample of students from a single university in Istanbul may limit the generalizability of the findings. Thirdly, the self-reported nature of the data introduces the risk of social desirability bias.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings offer significant implications for enhancing university students' life satisfaction and recreational benefits. It is recommended that

universities provide students with opportunities to participate in recreational sports activities and inform them about alternative methods to increase life satisfaction (Chen et al., 2013).

Future research should include longitudinal designs to examine the causal dimensions of the relationship between life satisfaction and recreational utility, particularly among participants from diverse cultural contexts, as this may offer valuable insights into the generalizability of these findings to other populations.

The present study observed that female subjects reported a greater degree of psychological benefits from recreational sports than their male counterparts. The findings further indicated that individuals within the 21-23 age bracket reported higher levels of psychological benefits compared to those aged 30 and above. Additionally, individuals in the 18-20 age group exhibited a stronger perception of social benefits compared to those in the 21-23 age group. A modest negative correlation was identified between life satisfaction and the level of recreational benefit.

Conclusion

Despite the assumption that engagement in recreational activities leads to greater pleasure and enjoyment, this may not always be the case. Although it is widely acknowledged that engagement in sports and physical activity can alleviate feelings of loneliness and foster a sense of well-being and positivity (Kaya, 2021; Demirci and Çavuşoğlu, 2022), the pursuit of alternative forms of gratification can also contribute to an individual's happiness. For some individuals, participation in sports and recreational activities represents a source of happiness. For others, however, activities such as spending time with family and friends may prove more conducive to positive affect.

Recommendation

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations have been developed. Training and seminars can be given for managers to use humor effectively in the workplace. In addition, the importance of using humor correctly and the harms of excessive humor to businesses can be conveyed in the trainings. In addition, managers should use humor as a tool to involve employees, strengthen team spirit and relieve stressful situations. In particular, humor can increase employees' flexibility and reduce stress levels in the workplace in stressful or challenging tasks. Managers can strategically adjust the use of humor when necessary by evaluating the effects of humor on productivity and morale.

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Author(s)' statements on ethics and conflict of interest

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