

WOMEN'S PATTERN OF USE AT TWO RECREATIONAL PARKS IN KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how Malaysian women use the recreational parks in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Previous studies in Malaysia have shown that women are engaged less in leisure and recreational activities than men due to their family commitments and other constraints. The aim of this paper is to discuss concerning the visits in urban recreational parks and the related feelings by women park users. The objectives are to gather information on park users' demographic backgrounds, and to identify the pattern of use and feelings related to the recreational parks by Malaysian women. The method used was self-administered questionnaire surveys where the total of 510 women park users were surveyed at two recreational parks in Klang Valley. Site observations were used to support the survey data. The results show that majority of the respondents prefer to visit the parks on weekend, usually with companions such as friends or/and family members. Most of the women mentioned having positive feelings while in the parks such as they were more relax and energetic after visiting the parks. The results may contribute and assist park managers, city planners and designers to design and having better management of parks for women users in the future.

Keywords: Positive feelings, pattern of use, women park users, women's recreation

1. INTRODUCTION

Recreation and leisure activities give many benefits to people either they engage with active or passive activities such as strolling or reading. Recreation and leisure time for women are often fragmented and usually occurs throughout the day in tandem with other work (Deem, 1986). However, according to the study by Krenichyn (2006), women prefer physically active in the urban recreational parks as they valued their health and sense of freedom as well as the time spent carrying out the activities. The fitness motives and stages of change had the highest correlation score compared to other motives, which were the social motives, the appearance motives, the interest-enjoyment motives, and the competence-challenge motives for the physical activity participation level (Zambri et al., 2013). The passive engagement had received the highest mean score, which was slightly greater than the mean score of relaxation needs, followed by comfort needs, discovery and active recreational needs (Ayeghi & Ujang, 2014). Women were also reported to choose to spend their time involved in the physical activities in the recreational parks with family members and friends rather than being alone. They chose to play with other women because of the skill compatibility and enjoyment of companionship (Bialeshki, 1999).

To date, there is a lack of research regarding the women user in the recreational parks in Malaysia. Most conducted studies in women's recreation in Malaysia have been carried out in relation to issues such as the constraint to participate in recreational activities, determinants and factors of recreational activities participation (Abdul Aziz, 2006; Minhat, 2014). Research in Malaysia also suggested that there were

many constraints and limitations regarding the women's attachment towards the recreational parks such as cultural values (Abdullah et al., 2008), domestic responsibilities, physical capability, lack of transportation to recreational facilities and unavailability of such facilities and space (Abdul Aziz, 2006; Minhat, 2014), safety issue (Minhat, 2014), career commitment, fatigue, distances to travel and family commitments (Ishak, 1996). Despite these constraints, it is important to understand how Malaysian women use the recreational parks so that recommendations can be made according to their needs and preferences.

Klang Valley is the largest and one of the fastest growing cities in Malaysia (The Star Online, 2013). However, there is a lack of women user in the recreational parks (Ahmad Kamal et al., 2010). Thus, it is important to improve the use of the recreational parks among women in Malaysia, especially in the Klang Valley area. In addition, it is important for the women citizens to be healthy physically and mentally as these factors will lead a happy and productive society. A broader study is to investigate women's childhood and attachment to recreational parks in Klang Valley. However, this paper will only focus to discuss the nature of visits in urban recreational parks and the feelings related to the recreational parks supported by demographic datas. Thus, the objectives of this paper are:

- i) To gather informations on park users' demographic backgrounds
- ii) To identify the pattern of use and feelings related to the recreational parks by Malaysian women.

This paper will also give some implications towards policies related to women's use of recreational parks and green spaces, thus add value to the women's health and well-being. Thus, suitable programmes can be developed to encourage women to use parks frequently.

2. . LITERATURE REVIEW

Women in Malaysia nowadays play an important role in the family institution, the society, the nation as well as the worldwide. Women had involved and success in the diverse field, it is a proven with the women's ability to fulfil an equal role in all aspects of the life. Generally, women especially a married woman is very busy with their role and responsibilities as a mother, taking care of her children and do the household activities and career. Thus, women are less likely to participate in active leisure activities (Miller & Brown, 2005). A study in the United States by Wilhelm Stanis et al. (2009) about visitor constraints to physical activity in park which are time, family obligations and

lack of energy. The women were less active in the recreational parks due to their time mostly were used for the household activities (Lee, 2005). On the other hand, mothers of dependant children have the least amount of free time (Miller & Brown, 2005).

Women's leisure is the phenomenon that is not easily separable from other aspects of women's lives (Henderson et al., 1989). Recreation and leisure time for women are often fragmented and usually occurs throughout the day in tandem with other work (Deem, 1986; Encyclopedia of Recreation and Leisure in America, 2004). Leisure defined as activities that are willing to do by people and the outcomes are experiences, and emotions that can give meanings and enriched someone's life (Iwasaki et al., 2010). Different people use recreational park and green spaces for a range of recreational and amenity purposes based on their needs, preferences, available times and physical capabilities (Dahmann et al., 2010). Women's recreation is also a part of leisure time of women that is usually seen as very limited compared to men. Besides, women are less likely than men to participate in active leisure activities (Miller & Brown, 2005).

Studies on women's access to green spaces and involvement in recreational activities have found that fear of crime, particularly in relation to woodlands and enclosed landscapes, resulted in women choosing to restrict their use of green spaces in some way in comparison to men. These restrictions ranged from not visiting green spaces at all to taking a dog, child, friend, male partner, or son, so that they are not alone (Burgess, 1998; Valentine, 1989). In a recent study, Maruthaveeran and Van den Bosch (2015) also mentioned the attributes which evoke fear of crime in urban parks. There are also studies by Zambri et al. (2013) on women's participation in physical activity and another study on the perceptions and constraints of recreational activities among female students of Universiti Teknologi MARA (Ahmad Kamal et al., 2010). Ahmad Kamal et al. (2010) found that half of the female students in the University Technology MARA, Malaysia regularly participated in outdoor activity as recreation. All the respondents (n=60) strongly agreed that the lack of time was the major reason for not participating regularly in recreational activity.

In the study by Miller and Brown (2005), they found that active women with high socioeconomic and gaining their partner's support tended to be involved in more organized activities such as the gym, tennis, and golf. However, in a study by Minhat (2014), the physical

activities were found to be significantly influenced by gender, thus, he found that women at an elder age generally more sedentary and less active than older men. Women tend to choose more passive activities than men, for example in the study by Maruthaveeran and Van den Bosch (2015) stated that women user in the urban parks in Kuala Lumpur usually enjoying walking in the park with their husband and children rather than involve in more active and adventurous activities. As stated by Humberstone (2000), outdoor have been identified as an area for masculine activity, subsequently denying access to many women. This is explained in a study conducted on rock climbing sites in eastern Australia (McIntyre, 1991) which is demonstrated this pattern as typical, with only 23% of the 150 respondents being female. This is supported by Azevedo et al.'s study (2007) in Brazil where men presented higher activity levels than women in terms of moderate-intensity and vigorous-intensity activities. However, in the study by Little (2002), there are 42 women respondents involved in adventurous recreational activities stated that their understandings on adventure recreation incorporate not only traditional masculine qualities of challenge, uncertainty and danger, but also entail learning, newness, and the exploration of risk in its social and esteem based elements. Thus, their adventure recreational experiences included pursuits such as rock-climbing, kayaking, sailing, bush-walking, and caving.

3. THE METHODS

A set of self-administered questionnaire was distributed to respondents (n = 510) at two recreational parks (Bukit Kiara and Bukit Jalil Recreational Parks) in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Prior to that, site observations and sampling frame calculation were conducted on 22nd October 2015 to 8th November 2015 for both parks. The purpose of the site observations was to identify types of activities in the parks, contextual of the parks with surrounding landuses, issues related to the parks, and to get the sampling frame for the final field surveys. The sampling frame technique was conducted by counting manually by an enumerator at the parks' entrance. The sampling frames for both parks are 693 for Bukit Kiara Recreational Park, and 411 for Bukit Jalil Recreational Park. From that numbers, the authors referred to the Krejcie and Morgan's table (1970) for the final sample survey. The table states the optimal sample size and a given population. Based on their table, thus the final field surveys involved 280 users at Bukit Kiara Recreational Park, and 230 at Bukit Jalil Recreational Park.

Both parks were located in the urban area of Klang Valley. Both have similar characteristics such as near to residential areas, easy access to the park, the

facilities availability, and popular to the visitor (Figure 1 & 2). The surveys were conducted with the help of an enumerator from March to May 2016; during the weekdays and on weekends and covering both morning and the evening. The respondents were chosen by using the quota random sampling method of the women age ranging from 18 to 57 years old and above from the three main races in Malaysia (Malays: 180, Chinese: 317 and Indians: 13). This method was used as the specific subgroup within the population can be highlighted and can be represented equally or proportionately within the samples (Clark-Carter, 2010). The self-administered questionnaires consisted of 5 sections which included the 'Nature of visits to the recreational park', the 'Feelings related to park', the 'Childhood experience with nature', the 'Meaning attached to the park' and the 'Demographic' backgrounds. However, only the 'Nature of visits to the recreational park' and 'Feelings related to the park' sections are discussed in which determine the pattern of use of women at the recreational park and the feelings related to the recreational parks. The questions were measured using the 5-Likert scale; 5: Strongly agree, 4: Agree, 3: Not sure, 2: Disagree, 1: Strongly disagree (Ayeghi & Ujang, 2014). Likert scales (typically the number is 5, sometimes 7, 9, or 11 levels) are used in the attitude measures that could reasonably be interpreted as measurements on a proper metric scale (Uebersax, 2006).



Figure 1: Bukit Kiara Recreational Park
(Source: Google Maps)

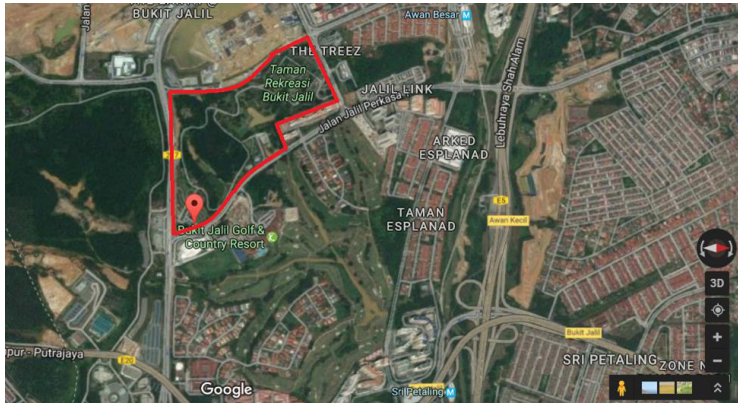


Figure 2: Bukit Jalil Recreational Park
(Source: Google Maps)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the results, it can be summarized that Malaysian women did realize and were concerned about maintaining a good health and having a positive well-being. Based on the site observations, they are practicing a healthy lifestyle and being able to enjoy themselves in the social activities such as Zumba and ‘senamrobik’. From the total of 510 of the women respondents that have answered the self-administered questionnaire, there were only 57 (11.2%) of them were the first timer at the parks. They never visited both parks before. Thus, there were not required to answer some of the questions in the questionnaire. The results from the the self-administered questionnaire were analyzed using the frequency analysis. The results are intended to give a general view of the women users at the two parks as a whole.

The term ‘majority’ for a number that is greater than half of a total and ‘most’ for the greatest in amount or degree was used (Meriam-Webster Online) in explaining the results. All of the respondents were women and majority of them were Chinese. About forty-eight percent of the respondents were first-degree holder. Majority of them were employed (Private servant, government servant or self-employed). Forty-one percent of the respondents were also in the age group of 26 to 35 years (Table 1). Majority of the women were married (62%) and have a family, thus they usually visit the park to spend their quality family time together, thus chose the family and children as the best companions preference. Supported by Maruthaveeran’s finding (2017) that most female respondents in Kuala Lumpur urban parks basically spend more time with their husbands and kids.

Table 1: The respondents’ demographics background

Category	Demographics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ethnicities	Malay	180	35.3
	Chinese	317	62.2
	Indian	13	2.5
Age Group	18-25	126	24.7
	26-35	207	40.6
	36-45	118	23.1
	46-56	44	8.6
	57 and above	15	3.0
Employment Status	Private servant	218	42.7
	Government servant	48	9.4
	Self-employed	73	14.3
	Student	76	14.9
	Retiree	35	6.9
	Housewife	58	11.4
	Other	2	0.4
Education Levels	High school/below	97	19.0
	Vocational/diploma	131	25.7
	First degree	244	47.8
	Master/PhD	37	7.3
	Other	1	0.2
Marital status	Single	193	38.0
	Married	317	62.0

Table 2: The respondent’s pattern of use in the recreational parks

Category	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Time of visit	6-8am	162	35.8
	9-11am	215	47.5
	12-2pm	2	0.4
	3-6pm	74	16.3
Duration of visits	half hour or less	9	2.0
	about 1hour	190	41.9
	1-2hour	239	52.8
	3-4hours	13	2.9
	more than 4hours	2	0.4
Frequency of visits	daily	33	7.3
	weekly	173	38.2
	once a month	141	31.1
	3-5times per year	106	23.4
Day of visits	weekdays	50	11.0
	weekend	304	67.1
	both weekdays and weekend	99	21.9
Mode of transportation	walk	5	1.1
	motorcycle	15	3.3
	car	433	95.6
Companions preference	alone	27	6.0
	with spouse/partner	92	20.3
	with friends	120	26.5
	with children/family	214	47.2
Proximity from home to the park	less 1km	19	3.7
	1-5km	196	38.4
	5-10km	164	32.2
	more than 10km	131	25.7

Table 2 shows the respondent's pattern of use at both parks. Most of the respondents used a car as the mode of transportation to visit the park with a percentage of about 96%. This is because majority of them stayed 1 to 10 kilometer away from the park. The size of family members, availability of parking area, good access to the parks as both parks were located nearby the housing area make them feel convenient to go there by using the car. Ujang et al. (2015) in their study also stated that a frequent visit, proximity to the residences and the landscape features as the contribution to attachment of people to the recreational park, thus makes the respondents to visits the park more often and use it wisely.

The respondents at both of the recreational parks preferred a similar pattern of time of visit, in which about 48% of them more likely to visit the parks during 9.00 a.m to 11.00 a.m, this is due to the cooler temperature in Malaysia during morning compared to at noon. The majority of the respondents in both recreational parks were more likely to stay 1 to 2 hours in the parks and preferred to have visited on the weekends on a weekly basis. This result has shown that the attachment to the parks created a bonding to the respondents to visit the parks in every week (See Table 2).

Some of the respondents preferred to do the activity 'relax and enjoying myself' (16.0% in the Bukit Kiara and 14.7% in the Bukit Jalil), followed by the activity 'enjoy the scenery' (13.6% in the Bukit Kiara and 13.4% in the Bukit Jalil), 'jogging' (12.7% in the Bukit Kiara and 11.9% in the Bukit Jalil), 'exercising' (12.5% in the Bukit Kiara and 8.3% in the Bukit Jalil), and 'spend a quality time with family' (8.1% in the Bukit Kiara and 11.8% in the Bukit Jalil) (Figure 3). These result show that the women were more likely to involve in the activities they preferred, where they involves either in the passive activities or in the physical activities such as jogging. Our finding is similar to the study by Zhang et al. (2015) in Beijing. They found the majority of respondents participated in one or more types of activities, mainly used urban green spaces for physical activities with low intensity where walking was the most popular physical activity, besides sightseeing and jogging were the second and the third choices.

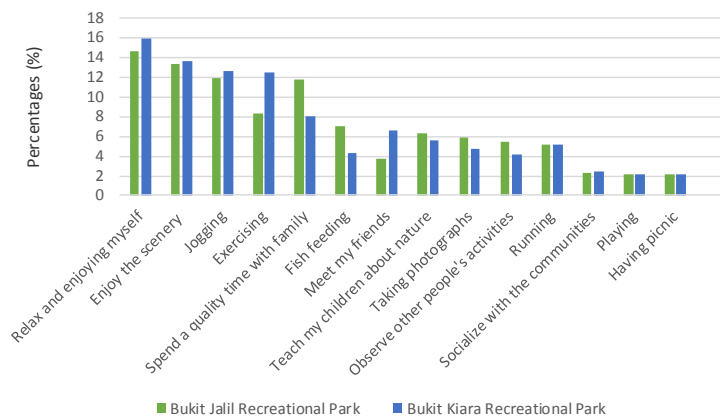


Figure 3: The recreational activities done by the respondents in each of the parks

In general, most of the respondents experienced a positive feeling when in the recreational park, as shown in Table 3. The questions asked were 'the feelings related to the park that best describes what you think?' by using the measure of 5-Likert scale. The highest percentage of agreement (more than 91%) was with the items 'It is important for me to relax' (95.1%), 'I feel energetic' (95.1%), 'I feel at peace and comfort' (94.9%), 'I feel enjoyable' (94.7%), 'I feel attached to nature' (94.5%), 'I like to spend time here' (93.6%), and 'I feel alive' (92.7%). This shows that the respondents mostly had positive feelings and more attached to the recreational parks. The respondents felt that the recreational parks can bring positive vibes for the respondents such as to have a positive and healthy lifestyle and well-being. Most of the respondents stressed of the important to relax while in the recreational parks. While the majority of them felt the parks are very special to them (66.4%); and the parks remind them to old time in their childhood (52.4%). The positive feelings while in the recreational parks proved that the respondents use and attach to the recreational parks for good benefits. A recreational park also functions as a medium for people to release their stress and gain a positive psychological effect (Mohamed & Othman, 2012). Besides, the recreational parks give a positive impact on public mental well-being in terms of the feeling of pleasure, enjoyment, relaxation, peaceful and comfort (Stigdotters et al., 2010). Visitors were offered a high value and experiences such as a place to observe and get close to nature, peaceful and quiet, relieve stress, social space, and sense of life while visiting the recreational parks (Mohamed & Othman, 2012). This positive element of good implications thus makes the respondents feeling positively attached to the recreational parks as well.

Table 3: The feelings of the respondents while in the recreational parks

Feelings in the recreational parks	Level of agreement (%)	Mean
	91% to 100%	
It is important for me to relax	95.1	4.12
I feel energetic	95.1	4.06
I feel at peace and comfort	94.9	4.21
I feel enjoyable	94.7	4.15
I feel attached to nature	94.5	4.14
I like to spend time here	93.6	4.04
I feel alive	92.7	4.01
	71% to 90%	
I just like to play here	83.1	3.88
I satisfy with this park more than other	81.6	3.88
I feel familiar with the park	76.9	3.87
I feel safe in the park	73.3	3.79
	51% to 70%	
This park is very special to me	66.4	3.67
It reminds me to old time in childhood	52.4	3.43
	41% to 50%	
I am feeling at home	45.7	3.29
I feel vulnerable	33.5	2.85

However, there were also a percentage of respondent (33.5%) felt vulnerable when they were in the parks and this factor was reflected in their level of comfort while doing the activities in the parks. Based on the literature, it can be said that they were worried about their own safety and security or/ and their children while being in the recreational parks. The feeling of vulnerable is also occurred when the users came alone to the parks. Some of the children generally afraid of the high vegetation and unmanaged trees, and the parent prevented their children to play alone in the parks. Supported by Maruthaveeran and Van den Bosch's finding (2015), they stated that the park user mostly avoided the area with thick and tall vegetation which created the closed environment and reduced their visibility as it will increase their fear of crime. From the observations, it was also found that some of the park users were vulnerable of the presence of wild monkeys and dogs that might disturb them while in the recreational parks. Maruthaveeran (2010) stated that the landscape treatment must be placed for a way to enhance the safety and security in the recreational parks. In addition, a good access and linkage plays a role in the degree of human comfort and increased of users and activities (Md Sakip et al., 2015).

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has managed to identify the pattern of use of the women users at the urban recreational parks in Klang Valley. The pattern of use which included mode of transportation, the frequency of visits, companion's preference, time of visits, the day of visits, duration of visits, proximity to the parks, and the choices of activities. It was found that women were keen on both physical and passive recreational activities in the urban recreational park and prefer to do the recreational activities with their spouse and family rather than being alone in the park. The results have proven that women nowadays highly realize the importance of being healthy and like to involve in the community activities in the park which are done on the weekends. Being alone in the park make them feel unsafe, vulnerable and not comfortable to do the recreational activities in the park. The proximity to the park from home also influenced the pattern of use and the frequency of visit of the women. The respondents have also mentioned having frequent visits to the parks once a week and they like to visit the park in the morning due to the refreshing and cool weather compared to the afternoon. Both parks in Klang Valley area are active with the social activities and family quality time by women age ranging from 26 to 35 years old during the weekend. The majority of the women experienced a positive feeling when in the recreational park and stressed the important to relax while in the recreational parks, as many of the respondents were preferred to do the activity 'relax and enjoying myself'. Thus, the recreational parks seem able to fulfill the women needs and demands.

The findings have managed to provide informations on the demographics and backgrounds of the park users, particularly in the Klang Valley where the information is important for future park planning and design. The results may assist park managers, planners and designers in design and management of parks especially for women users in the future.

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