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Finding determinants of leisure participation among older adults in Kosovo: a cross-sectional study

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Abstract

Background. The proportion of the population over 65 years is continuously increasing worldwide. This trend reflects global patterns, emphasizing the need for policies that promote active aging.

Aim. To investigate participation in leisure activities and compare it with sociodemographic variables among older adults in Kosovo.

Methods. A cross-sectional study was carried out among individuals aged 65 and older in three largest cities in Kosovo. The assessment of leisure activities was performed using the validated Leisure Participation Questionnaire, which includes 25 activities categorized into four types: recreational (physical), cognitive, social, and productive. The frequency of participation was evaluated on a 6-point scale, and its relationship with sociodemographic factors was examined through multiple linear regression analysis.

Results. 366 participants completed the questionnaire (53.3% women; 46.7% men). The majority were married (69.4%) and lived with their families (66.4%). Overall, the most commonly reported daily activity was watching TV (52.7%), while the least common was fishing (0.3%). Factors associated with lower recreational activity included older age ($B = -0.30$, $p < 0.01$), being female ($B = -0.33$, $p < 0.01$), graduating from primary education ($B = -0.40$, $p < 0.01$), poor health ($B = -0.45$, $p < 0.01$), and having a chronic illness ($B = -0.22$, $p < 0.01$).

Conclusions. Several sociodemographic variables (i.e., education level, overall health condition, gender, and locality) were significant determinants of leisure participation among older adults in Kosovo.

Keywords: active aging; physical activity; leisure engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

The proportion of individuals aged 65 and older in Kosovo has steadily increased from 4.4% in 1961–1981 to 8.4% in 2024 (CIA World Factbook, 2024). Despite being the youngest population in Europe (CIA World Factbook, 2024), Kosovo faces growing demands from this vulnerable demographic. This trend mirrors global patterns, and highlights the need for policies promoting active aging.

Numerous studies emphasize the importance of determinants such as physical activity, social environments, and leisure activities in enhancing health among older adults. However, the concept of successful aging remains vague, with traditional variables like age failing to fully explain health outcomes (Borodulin et al., 2016). Key factors emerging from the literature include education, social environment, and leisure activities.

Education thrives in supportive contexts, facilitating the application of prior knowledge (Minhat & Amin, 2011; Biernat & Tomaszewski, 2011). The social network perspective suggests that diverse social exposure mediates better physical health and lower mortality (Ali et al., 2018). Leisure activities, in particular, show strong associations with improved health, cognitive function, and overall well-being in older adults (Ali et al., 2018; Iwasaki et al., 2006; Paggi et al., 2015; Pressman et al., 2009; Sala et al., 2019). This aligns with the biopsychosocial model, which views biological, psychological, and social factors as interrelated influences on health.

Despite varied conceptualizations of leisure (Armstrong & Morgan, 1998; Lee & King, 2003), leisure is generally defined as time spent away from work-related tasks (Pressman et al., 2009). However, distinguishing between leisure activities and an active lifestyle is essential, as leisure offers unique benefits that an active lifestyle may not (Iwasaki et al., 2006). While existing research primarily relies on quantitative, cross-sectional methods that enhance reliability, validity remains unclear due to limited measurement diversity. Qualitative studies could provide richer insights into the subjective experiences of health, which are often overlooked.

In Kosovo, the absence of concrete policies and programs promoting healthy aging highlights the need for initiatives that raise awareness about the importance of physical activity and the integration of the elderly. Addressing these gaps can significantly improve their health and overall well-being. Given the lack of comprehensive data on this topic, this study aims to bridge the research gap regarding leisure activities and compare it with sociodemographic variables among older adults in Kosovo.

2. METHODS

Study design: A cross-sectional study design was chosen. The study was conducted during January 2022. The ethics committee of the Heimerer College approved the study. All participants were informed about the aims, methods, and course of the study, and each signed a consent form agreeing to participate.

Study population and sample size: The sample was targeted in the three largest cities in Kosovo: Prizren, Gjakovë, and Ferizaj. We set the age limit of 65 years and older as the only inclusion criterion for the study. According to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2011), the total number of individuals over 65 years in these cities was 36,130. The same source indicates that only the capital city, Prishtina, reported a number of elderly individuals aged 60 to 85+. Based on a pre-study sample size calculation, we needed approximately 380 participants to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error for the targeted population of 36,130. We invited 380 participants to take part in the study.

Instrument and data collection: All data were collected using the validated Leisure Participation Questionnaire. The first section included questions to determine the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants. A 6-point Likert scale was employed to measure leisure participation across 25 activities. Those were categorized as recreational, cognitive, social, and productive. The frequency scales for each activity were: every day (5), almost every day (4), at least once a week (3), at least once a month (2), at least once every few months (1), and never (0). The statements used to assess leisure activities were based on the research of Cheung BScOT (2009) and Minhat & Mohd Amin (2012). The reliability of the Leisure Participation Questionnaire (LPQ) was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.79.

Statistical analyses: Descriptive statistics were used to calculate standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages for the variables. The normality assumption was assessed using skewness and kurtosis

values, which fell within the range of -2 to +2. This indicated that the variables exhibited a normal distribution. To identify the sociodemographic and health-related determinants of leisure activities, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using the enter method. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. The significance level was set at 0.05.

3. RESULTS

Participants: The response rate for the survey was 96.3% (366/380). The majority of participants were in the 65–70 age range (50.3%). Slightly more women (53.3%) than men (46.7%) were included. Most of the elderly participants were married (69.4%), lived with their families (66.4%), and had graduated from primary school (43.5%). Additionally, a significant portion resided in urban areas (61.8%). Further characteristics of the 366 elderly individuals who participated in this study are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. **Participants' characteristics**

Characteristics		**Frequency**	**%**
Sex	Female	170	46.7
	Male	194	53.3
Age	65–70	183	50.3
	71–75	111	30.5
	76–80	37	10.2
	81+	33	9.1
Marital status	Married	254	69.4
	Single	110	30.1
Residence	Rural	138	38.2
	Urban	223	61.8
Level of education	Primary education	156	43.5
	Secondary education	79	22.0
	Higher education	48	13.4
	University	76	21.2
Incomes	No income	23	6.3
	Less than €100	50	13.7
	€100–250	138	37.9
	€250–400	72	19.8
	€400–500	33	9.1
	Over €500	48	13.2
Who do you live with	Alone	39	10.8
	Spouse/husband	79	21.8
	In family	244	67.4
Life satisfaction	Yes /I agree	228	62.5
	No/not agree	43	11.8
	Neutral	94	25.8
Good living condition	Yes	207	56.6
	No	40	10.9
	Neutral	119	32.5

Characteristics		Frequency	%
Chronic disease	Yes	171	46.8
	No	194	53.2
Health condition	Very Good	78	21.5
	Good	105	28.9
	Medium	113	31.1
	Not Good	67	18.5

In terms of recreational activities, the most commonly reported daily activity was exercise, such as cycling (25%), while the least common was playing golf (1.1%). For cognitive activities, watching TV was the most frequently engaged activity (52.7%), whereas performing on musical instruments was the least common (1.9%). When it comes to social activities, having conversations while relaxing ranked as the most frequent (47%), while involvement in community activities (such as volunteering, associations, or politics) was the least common (3.3%). In productive activities, cooking or baking for pleasure was the most popular daily activity (18.3%), while fishing was the least common (0.3%). A detailed description of the distribution of leisure activities among the elderly is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. **Leisure participation among respondents**

Leisure activity	**Every day (6) n (%)**	**Almost every day (5) n (%)**	**At least once a week (4) n (%)**	**At least once a month (3) n (%)**	**Once in several months (2) n (%)**	**Never (1) n (%)**	**Mean ± SD**
Recreational Activity (RA)							2.53 ± 0.94
1. Exercise (cycling, etc.)	93 (25.4)	68 (18.6)	70 (19.1)	50 (13.7)	35 (9.6)	46 (12.6)	3.99 ± 1.70
2. Going for walks (in the park etc.)	68 (18.6)	62 (16.9)	55 (15.0)	49 (13.4)	54 (14.8)	20.5 (20.0)	3.49 ± 1.80
3. Playing sports	5 (1.4)	3 (0.8)	26 (7.1)	22(6.0)	36 (9.8)	268 (73.2)	1.54 ± 1.08
4. Playing golf	4 (1.1)	2 (0.5)	4 (1.1)	2 (0.5)	10 (2.7)	338 (92.3)	1.15 ± 0.70
Cognitive activity (CA)							2.88 ± 0.89
1. Reading books	34 (9.3)	37 (10.1)	70 (19.1)	40 (10.9)	32 (8.7)	144 (39.3)	2.79 ± 1.77
2. Playing cards, chess, etc.	45 (12.3)	28 (7.7)	60 (16.4)	35 (9.6)	57 (15.6)	134 (36.6)	2.79 ± 1.79
3. Using computer/browsing internet	57 (15.6)	60 (16.4)	34 (9.3)	24 (6.6)	36 (9.8)	148 (40.4)	2.98 ± 1.98
4. Performing musical instruments	7 (1.9)	5 (1.4)	23 (6.3)	13 (3.6)	30 (8.2)	282 (77.6)	1.50 ± 1.12

Leisure activity	Every day (6) n (%)	Almost every day (5) n (%)	At least once a week (4) n (%)	At least once a month (3) n (%)	Once in several months (2) n (%)	Never (1) n (%)	Mean ± SD
5. Writing or drawing for pleasure	13 (3.6)	18 (4.9)	21 (5.7)	21 (5.7)	49 (13.4)	238 (65.0)	1.81 ± 1.39
6. Teaching	43 (11.7)	28 (7.7)	45 (12.3)	41 (11.2)	55 (15.0)	149 (40.7)	2.66 ± 1.79
7. Watching TV	193 (52.7)	98 (26.8)	35 (9.6)	14 (3.8)	7 (1.9)	11 (3.0)	5.18 ± 1.19
8. Listening to radio/music	116 (31.7)	85 (23.2)	65 (17.8)	30 (8.2)	24 (6.6)	39 (10.7)	4.34 ± 1.65
9. Attending exhibition, cultural show, performances etc.	14 (3.8)	17 (4.6)	36 (9.8)	31 (8.5)	62 (16.9)	201 (54.9)	2.02 ± 1.44
Social activity (SA)							3.83 ± 0.80
1. Meeting or visiting friends or other family members	104 (28.4)	81 (22.1)	96 (26.2)	29 (7.9)	25 (6.8)	24 (6.6)	4.38 ± 1.48
2. Involved in community activities (volunteers, association, politics, etc.)	12 (3.3)	19 (5.2)	42 (11.5)	35 (9.6)	51 (13.9)	201 (54.9)	2.06 ± 1.46
3. Window shopping	42 (11.5)	77 (21.0)	96 (26.2)	49 (13.4)	31 (8.5)	62 (16.9)	3.62 ± 1.61
4. Religious activity	107 (29.02)	41 (11.2)	39 (10.7)	24 (6.6)	21 (5.7)	122 (33.3)	3.50 ± 2.12
5. Having conversations while relaxing	172 (47.0)	111 (30.3)	43 (11.7)	9 (2.5)	10 (2.7)	13 (3.6)	5.08 ± 1.23
6. Spending time with grandchildren	141 (38.5)	66 (18.0)	60 (16.4)	34 (9.3)	23 (6.3)	37 (10.1)	4.43 ± 1.68
Productive activity (PA)							2.35 ± 0.97
1. Cooking/ baking for pleasure	67 (18.3)	44 (12.0)	34 (9.3)	33 (9.0)	34 (9.3)	150 (41.0)	2.97 ± 2.00

Leisure activity	Every day (6) n (%)	Almost every day (5) n (%)	At least once a week (4) n (%)	At least once a month (3) n (%)	Once in several months (2) n (%)	Never (1) n (%)	Mean ± SD
2. Rearing or taking care of pets or domestic animals	49 (13.4)	24 (6.6)	23 (6.3)	24 (6.6)	15 (4.1)	225 (61.5)	2.31 ± 1.90
3. Gardening	51 (13.9)	45 (12.3)	64 (17.5)	30 (8.2)	33 (9.0)	138 (37.7)	2.99 ± 1.89
4. Making handicrafts (sewing, knitting, etc.)	21 (5.7)	27 (7.4)	35 (9.6)	22 (6.0)	35 (9.6)	220 (60.01)	2.10 ± 1.63
5. Cleaning/ decorating housing area	29 (7.9)	42 (11.5)	49 (13.4)	48 (13.1)	37 (10.1)	164. (42.1)	2.65 ± 1.74
6. Fishing	1 (0.3)	-	9 (2.5)	11 (3.0)	23 (6.3)	316 (86.3)	1.21 ± 0.66

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis are presented in Table 3. Factors associated with lower recreational activity included older age (B = -0.30, $p < 0.01$), being female (B = -0.33, $p < 0.01$), graduating from primary education (B = -0.40, $p < 0.01$), poor health (B = -0.45, $p < 0.01$), and having a chronic illness (B = -0.22, $p < 0.01$). For cognitive activity, older age (B = -0.58, $p < 0.01$), graduating from primary education (B = -0.85, $p < 0.01$), and having a chronic disease (B = -0.17, $p < 0.01$) were identified as factors associated with lower scores. In terms of social activity, older age (B = -0.28, $p < 0.01$) and poor health status (B = -0.27, $p < 0.01$) were linked to lower engagement. For productive activity, being older (B = -0.30, $p < 0.01$), having an income less than €100 (B = -0.43, $p < 0.01$), living in a rural area (B = -0.49, $p < 0.01$), and having poor health (B = -0.27, $p < 0.01$) were associated with lower scores. Conversely, being female (B = 0.66, $p < 0.01$) was associated with higher productive activity.

Table 3. **Multiple linear regression analysis on the potential demographic factors leisure activities**

Variable	Recreational Activity			Cognitive activity			Social activity			Productive activity		
	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p
Age (ref: <75)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
75+	-0.30	-0.12	0.01*	-0.24	-0.11	0.03*	-0.28	-0.14	0.02*	-0.58	-0.23	0.00*
Gender (ref: Male)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Female	-0.33	-0.18	0.00*	-0.02	-0.01	0.77	-0.01	-0.01	0.84	0.66	0.34	0.00*
Marital status (ref: Married)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Single	-0.12	-0.06	0.18	-0.01	-0.00	0.82	-0.11	-0.06	0.23	-0.10	-0.05	0.29

Variable	Recreational Activity			Cognitive activity			Social activity			Productive activity		
	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p
Education level (ref: secondary and up formal education)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Primary education	-0.40	-0.21	0.00*	-0.85	-0.48	0.00*	-0.04	-0.02	0.71	0.07	0.03	0.52
İncomes (ref: €100 and upper)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Less than €100	-0.04	-0.01	0.73	-0.02	-0.01	0.84	-0.17	-0.08	0.16	-0.43	-0.18	0.00*
Residence (ref: Urban)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural	0.03	0.01	0.69	-0.05	-0.03	0.49	0.04	0.02	0.63	-0.49	-0.24	0.00*
Health condition (ref: Very/ good/good/ medium)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Not good	-0.45	-0.19	0.00*	-0.19	-0.08	0.09	-0.27	-0.13	0.03*	-0.27	-0.10	0.00*
Chronic Disease (ref: No)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	-0.22	-0.12	0.01*	-0.17	-0.09	0.04*	-0.12	-0.07	0.18	-0.11	-0.05	0.27

In cases where p=0.00. it represents p<0.01; *p<0.05; recreational activity. $R^2 = 0.31$. Adjusted $R^2 = 0.29$; cognitive activity. $R^2 = 0.41$. Adjusted $R^2 = 0.39$; social activity. $R^2 = 0.12$. Adjusted $R^2 = 0.09$; productive activity. $R^2 = 0.24$. Adjusted $R^2 = 0.22$.

4. DISCUSSION

To the best of our knowledge. the present study is the first to report data on leisure participation among elderly people in Kosovo. The primary finding was that several sociodemographic variables were significantly linked to the level of leisure participation among older adults in Kosovo. The main determinants found to have a connection to the investigated leisure activities (physical, cognitive, social, and productive) were education level, overall health condition, marital status, and locality. These findings align with those reported in a similar study of Malaysian elderly people conducted previously (Minhat & Mohd Amin, 2012).

Conversely, this study offered in-depth insights into the engagement of older adults in specific leisure activities. The strong correlation between the regression and descriptive analyses indicates that participation in certain activities is influenced by socioeconomic and cultural factors. Notably, nearly half of the respondents had only completed primary school, which may have limited their connection to cognitive activities. Consequently, most participants demonstrated minimal engagement in activities such as reading books, using computers or browsing the internet, and writing or drawing for pleasure. Similarly, Minhat and Mohd Amin (2012) reported a high level of engagement among elderly people in passive and sedentary activities, which may adversely affect their health.

The importance of engaging in leisure activities in elderly is widely researched. Lennartsson and Silverstein (2001) found that engagement in most activity domains is linked to a reduced risk of mortality. However, in many cases. the greater involvement of healthier individuals in these activities serves as a key explanation for these associations. Additionally, engaging in mentally or socially stimulating activities may help protect against dementia. highlighting the importance of social interaction and intellectual stimulation for maintaining mental function in older adults (Wang, 2002). However, despite these benefits. studies have also reported that older adults have become more sedentary. A large-scale study on participation in leisure activities in China. conducted over a 20-year period and involving an extensive sample of 66,789 interviews. found a negative trend in leisure activity engagement among the elderly Chinese population.

Overall, the data reported in this study provide valuable insights into this under-researched population in Kosovo. These findings can inform the development of public health interventions aimed at addressing the variables that negatively impact participation in leisure activities.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Overall, a trend toward higher engagement in sedentary activities (such as watching TV or having conversations while relaxing) is observed among elderly individuals in Kosovo. Participation in leisure activities is associated with several sociodemographic factors. In summary, older age, being female, graduating from primary education, poor health, and having a chronic illness are linked to lower participation in recreational and cognitive activities. In terms of social activity, older age and poor health status were associated with reduced engagement. Regarding productive activity, being older, having a low income, living in a rural area, and experiencing poor health were related to lower levels of participation. In contrast, being female was associated with higher levels of productive activity.

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Vyresnio amžiaus asmenų laisvalaikio užsiėmimų ypatumai Kosove: skerspjūvio tyrimas

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Santrauka

Tyrimo pagrindimas. Vyresnių nei 65 metų amžiaus asmenų dalis pasaulio populiacijoje sparčiai didėja. Ši tendencija atspindi globalius modelius, pabrėžiant poreikį skatinti aktyvų senėjimą.

Tikslas. Ištirti laisvalaikio veiklų dalyvavimą ir jo ryšį su sociademografiniais veiksniais tarp vyresnio amžiaus asmenų Kosove.

Metodai. Skerspjūvio tyrimas atliktas tarp vyresnių nei 65 metų amžiaus asmenų trijuose pagrindiniuose Kosovo miestuose. Laisvalaikio veiklos vertinamos naudojant patvirtintą Laisvalaikio užsiėmimų klausimyną, apimantį 25 veiklas, suskirstytas į keturias kategorijas: rekreacines (fizines), kognityvines, socialines ir produktyvias. Dalyvavimo dažnis vertintas pagal šešių balų skalę, o ryšys su sociademografiniais veiksniais analizuotas taikant daugialypės linijinės regresijos analizę.

Rezultatai. Klausimyną užpildė 366 dalyviai (53,3 proc. Moterų, 46,7 proc. vyrų). Dauguma respondentų buvo susituokę (69,4 proc.) ir gyveno su šeima (66,4 proc.). Dažniausia kasdienė veikla buvo televizoriaus žiūrėjimas (52,7 proc.), o rečiausia – žvejyba (0,3 proc.). Mažesnis rekreacinių veiklų dalyvavimo lygis buvo susijęs su vyresniu amžiumi ($B = -0,30$, $p < 0,01$), moteriška lytimi ($B = -0,33$, $p < 0,01$), pagrindiniu išsilavinimu ($B = -0,40$, $p < 0,01$), prasta sveikata ($B = -0,45$, $p < 0,01$) ir lėtinėmis ligomis ($B = -0,22$, $p < 0,01$).

Išvados. Keletas sociademografinių veiksnių (pvz., išsilavinimas, bendra sveikatos būklė, lytis ir gyvenamoji vieta) turėjo reikšmingą poveikį vyresnio amžiaus asmenų dalyvavimui laisvalaikio veiklose Kosove.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: aktyvus senėjimas, fizinė veikla, laisvalaikio užimtumas.

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