Leisure Activities and Gender in Adult Life
Hyunsook Kang, Ph.D., Gina Causin, Ph.D., Mary Olle, Ph.D.
School of Human Sciences

Introduction
The positive relationship between leisure activities and health among older adults continues to find much support in recent research and to generate popular interest as well as more empirical investigation (Benjamin, 2004; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2005). Of a variety of measures of leisure activities, leisure activities are most solidly linked with physical and functional health indices in later life.

The mechanisms by which health is positively affected by leisure activities are unclear; however, several explanations have been considered including: formation of good health habits encouraged by leisure activities, reduction of stress from working, and the benefits of social support and connectedness to a community with common values. With the call to more fully explicate the theoretical basis for the link between leisure activities and health, some prior research has been viewed with varying degrees of approval.

Leisure activities are defined as the interests or events in which individuals engage during discretionary time (e.g., Kelly, Steinkamp, & Kelly, 1986). Sample leisure activities include spending time with family, doing hobbies, reading, watching TV, playing with pet, doing volunteer work, and doing spiritual activities (Strain, Grabusnic, Searle, & Dunn, 2002). Leisure has been considered an important factor to sustain socio-emotional health and self-concept, especially for aging adults (Hendricks & Cutler, 2003). For example, leisure activities provide benefits such as personal growth and development for older people (Dorfman & Kolarik, 2005).

In addition, since leisure activities are often conducted within social relationships, older individuals who engage in more leisure activities are likely to be less isolated (Silverstein & Lennartsson, 2001). Greater leisure satisfaction is associated with better health and more activities (Jang, Haley, & Graves, 2004) and specifically more leisure activities (Hendricks & Cutler, 2002). In addition, religious activities involvement is highly associated with new life adjustment (Patterson, 1996). Despite these findings, little attention had been given to studies of leisure activities among widowed adults.

It is possible that there are important variations in the leisure activities of older adults. Leisure might serve different purposes for each age group, so they engage in different activities. For older adults, leisure activities have been given to studies of leisure activities among widowed adults. Leisure activities among older adults. In addition, research can identify resources (e.g., time, limitations (e.g., housing, transportation) and benefits of leisure associated with older adults.

Leisure Activities among Older Adults

Table 1. Mean Differences on Leisure Activities Between Two Groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Female Adults</th>
<th>Male Adults</th>
<th>F value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spend time with family</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialize with friends</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time on hobbies</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating outside</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>12.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>13.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise or play sports</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play with pets</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>7.54**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do something religious</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>7.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do something cultural or educational</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01

Results
To address the research question, a MANOVA was conducted. The MANOVA revealed a significant main effect; there were leisure differences between the two groups.

Univariate follow-up tests revealed that the older female group engaged more frequently (a) visited family, (b) engaged in hobbies, (c) eating outside, (d) do something religious There were no group differences in doing cultural or education, travel, socialize with friends. However, male older adults engaged more the leisure activities, gardening, exercise than female older adults. Thus, there is a gender difference in engaging in leisure activities in later life.

Discussion
Overall, the findings indicated that female older adults had higher leisure rates than male older individuals. Given that studies have shown that female adults have more free time, and enjoy diverse activities (e.g., Dorfman & Kolarik, 2005), our findings are consistent with previous research findings. It is possible to assume that male older adults engage more frequently in leisure events that were not assessed (e.g., senior cruises, dances, hunting, community classes). Therefore, this study might not reflect their total leisure rates.

Alternatively, female older adults might actually engage in more leisure. They might be motivated to use leisure to deal with the stress of declining health and depression. This interpretation is consistent with life-course theory (McGoldrick & Walsh, 2004).

Further research is needed to clarify demographic differences (e.g., ethnicity, education, income) and leisure among older adults. In addition, research can identify resources (e.g., time, limitations (e.g., housing, transportation) and benefits of leisure associated with older adults.

References