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# **PARTICIPATION OF MUSLIM IN THE LEISURE AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN KUCHING, SARAWAK**

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## **Abstract**

There is a lack of research on leisure constraints and the types of leisure opportunities for Muslim when participating in leisure and recreational activities. Therefore, the present study explores the participation of Muslim in the available leisure and recreational opportunities in Kuching, Sarawak. The purposes of the present study were: a) to examine Muslim community with particular reference to leisure and recreational activity and b) to study their views of their leisure and recreation opportunities and constraints. The participants were 20 Muslim in Kuching, who agreed to be interviewed for the study. A qualitative face to face interview approach was used for the study. Results revealed that: a) respondents took advantage of the leisure and recreation opportunities provided by the Kuching City Council; b) constraints and barriers were not the limiting factors in respondents' use of provided facilities such as national parks, swimming pools and recreation centres, in part because of the flexibility of interpretation of the requirements of Islam. As a conclusion, respondents took advantage of the leisure and recreation opportunities provided by the Kuching City Council and constraints and barriers were not the limiting factors for them to use all the facilities provided.

**Keywords:** Muslim; behaviour; leisure and recreational.

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## **1. Introduction**

Leisure participation has multiple personal, family and community benefits including community integration. Kelly and Fresinger (2000) contended that participating in leisure and recreation gives opportunities for individuals or groups to experience and understand different cultures through social interaction with participants from different cultural backgrounds. In addition, people can share activities such as different games, entertainment, customs, resources and traditions arising from different ethnic identities, thereby encouraging social integration (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000).

However, to date, there is only limited research literature available on the participation of Muslim to leisure and recreational activities. Thus, there is still a lack of research on questions relating to whether there are specific leisure constraints and the type of opportunities for Muslim when participating in leisure activities.

## **2. Research objectives**

The main objectives of this research are to investigate whether and how Muslim take advantage of the recreation and leisure activities in Kuching provided by the public, and the voluntary sectors. This main objective is supported by intermediate objectives:

- To determine how Muslim in Kuching, Sarawak deal with particular reference to leisure and recreational activity.
- To investigate the views of Muslim regarding their leisure and recreational opportunities and constraints.

## **3. Brief Literature Review**

This literature examines two elements related to Muslim leisure participation. The first section discusses on Muslim leisure and recreation opportunities and the second section discusses barriers and constraints to leisure opportunities faced by Muslim.

### *3.1 Muslim leisure and recreation opportunities*

People, who take advantage of leisure and recreation activities, may have different lifestyles and patterns in their way of involvement, while participating in leisure and recreation activities. Regarding participation in leisure activities by Muslim, it has been found that the Muslim community in Malaysia likes to be involved in most leisure and recreation activities such as walking, playing with children, gardening, having picnics, playing sports, eating out, enjoying arts and having social gatherings (Aman, 2004). However, Cousineau (1995, cited in Aman, 2004) found that the most popular leisure activity among Malaysians, including Muslim, is watching television. The other top three activities are visiting friends and family, shopping and socialising around food. There are also other recreational activities which interest Malaysian Muslims according to Cousineau, such as sports, fitness (gymnasium) and outdoor recreation.

The selection of activities depends on Muslim tendency and types of opportunity that they might perceive. Leisure and recreation activities also play an important role in changing Muslim life, including their lifestyle and leisure patterns. In addition, participation in leisure and recreation activity may change the perceptions of Muslim regarding their leisure and recreation opportunities.

### *3.2 Barriers and constraints to leisure opportunities faced by migrants*

While leisure and recreation activities offer opportunities to help the settlement and adjustment process for migrants, including Muslim, they may experience or be aware of constraints and barriers to participation in addition to the constraints already imposed by their own cultural and religious traditions, beliefs and preferences. Jackson (1988, as cited in Tcha & Lobo, 2003) defined constraints to leisure participation as anything that inhibits people's ability to participate in leisure time. These include the opportunity to have more time for leisure, to take advantage of leisure and recreation services, or to achieve a desired level of satisfaction. Similarly, Juniu (2002) noted that barriers and constraints are perceived by individuals as inhibiting their participation and enjoyment in leisure.

Several studies have found that barriers and constraints in leisure and recreation activities may lead people to discontinue participation, restrict their full involvement, diminish enjoyment in leisure and discourage their desire to take advantage of opportunities offered to them to participate in leisure and recreation activities (Harrington & Dawson, 1995; Jackson, 1990; Show, Bonen, & McCabe, 1991; Tsai & Coleman, 1999, as cited in Tsai, 2000).

In the case of Muslim, Ibrahim (1982, cited in Martin & Mason, 2003) concluded that 'Islam never sanctified time or frowned on leisure activities. However, Neulinger (1981, as cited in Martin & Mason, 2003) argued that freedom to participate in leisure activities might be restricted for some Muslim, yet, freedom is usually seen as a defining characteristic of the Western concept of leisure.

Leisure participation on the part of Muslim is influenced by type of activities and in some countries by gender. Sfeir (1985, as cited in Martin & Mason, 2004) noted that there are many constraints that Muslim women face regarding their leisure activities. He comments that, for Muslim women, even the acceptable activities of sport and physical recreation may become unacceptable, if they involve activities that are against and disobey Muslims' teachings relating to the modesty and dress code.

In supporting Sfeir's finding, studies of Turkish migrants' children in Arnhem and Enschede in the Netherlands by Kloeze, (2001) showed that girls have more restrictions placed on them relating to their participation in leisure and recreation activities compared to boys. When girls grow up, cultural and religious beliefs expect them to behave in ways that preclude their participation in sports. This includes families' insistence on girls' strict adherence to the religious mode of dressing that covers their hair and most parts of their bodies and segregation from the opposite sex in public activities. Opposed to this, boys can spend their time in leisure and recreation activities and as they grow older, they can still continue (Kloeze, 2001).

In Egypt, Iran and Turkey, there are attempts by the local people to provide and support active sports and recreation as a healthy lifestyle and acceptable forms of leisure, particularly, for young adults (Martin & Mason, 2003). This counters the emphasis on traditional activities such as socialising and mingling with family and friends and participating in religious festivals and events. However, the lack of suitable facilities and resources, as well as

traditional cultural barriers to women's participation in sport, have prevented those changes from becoming widespread. Constraints and barriers, especially in Iran, have been growing continually since 1979.

#### **4. Methodology**

##### *4.1 Choice of methods*

A qualitative approach through interviews was considered to be the most effective research method. Patton (1990) argued that qualitative methods are particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery and inductive logic. Henderson (1991) indicated that face to face interviews allow in-depth exploration. Further, the interview method allows in-depth investigation about issues from fewer people and produces descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions and observed behaviour (Casley and Kumar, 1988). Based on these arguments, a face-to-face interview was chosen to gather the required information.

##### *4.2 Sample selection*

All Muslim who live in Kuching were eligible to be included in the sample. The most important criteria used to determine appropriateness for leisure and recreation participation include age, gender in family and other related areas.

I have run a preliminary survey within this Muslim community. It was found that about 20 Muslims were suitable to be samples for this study. Issues related to parents with children and their participation in leisure and recreation activities are also addressed.

Before carrying out the interview, two families of Muslim in Kuching, who were acquaintances of the researcher, were contacted for assistance. They, in turn, were asked to provide the contact details of other families. With their help, the details of other families including their addresses and telephone numbers were obtained. Then, the researcher visited the identified families to explain the purpose of the research and to obtain permission and seek their written consent. They were informed that participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time. They were also informed that all information provided by them was strictly confidential and that no individual families would be identified in the discussion of the results. Additionally, part of the consent process involved asking the respondents' families if they were willing to have the interview tape-recorded to ensure accuracy of the information gathered and for verification of the respondents' comments.

The interview questions were designed to elicit information about respondents' personal history, life in Kuching and participation in leisure and recreation activities, including barriers or constraints that Muslims encounter. The respondents were encouraged to answer each question and elaborate on their experience and perception related to leisure and recreation activities. This strategy was used to collect as much information as possible from all respondents.

The interviews were conducted in the place of respondents' choice and at a time that was convenient for them. The duration of each interview session with Muslims families varied between approximately 40 and 60 minutes.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Results revealed respondents took advantage of the leisure and recreation opportunities provided by the Kuching City Council because of the country itself, the activities provided and the environment of the state. In addition, Sarawak offers lots of attractive places for the Sarawakian including Muslim to carry out their leisure and recreational activities. Concerning this, most of the respondents observed that the facilities provided were adequate and they like to use the public facilities such as parks, walking tracks and the nature-based environment such as rivers and beaches.

According to one of the respondents, there are many opportunities provided in Sarawak especially in Kuching that encourage him and his family to take advantage of, including public areas and natural environments such as parks and open spaces.

He said:

“I love fishing. In Kuching you can do fishing and whatever sea sport or water sport that you want to do. One good thing about this place is that they allow you to do any activity such kayaking, Jet Ski, boating and others. They also allow you to camp. There are proper camp sites where they have a barbeque site and other facilities to do leisure and recreational activity such as Gunung Gading Natural Park, Matang Wildlife, Bako National Park and Santubong area. Every year we have Sarawak Regatta. There is no restriction on using the facilities. This is actually the way they help you to make it possible to take part in leisure and recreational activities.”

Constraints and barriers were not the limiting factors in respondents' use of provided facilities such as national parks, swimming pools and recreation centres, in part because of the flexibility of interpretation of the requirements of Islam. Most of the respondents expressed that barriers and constraints that they experienced whilst participating in the leisure and recreational activities are part of challenging.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the respondents took part in leisure and recreation activities. As respondents indicated, there were lots of opportunities available to them in Malaysia. Some respondents liked to use public areas and natural environments, such as parks and open spaces. Some preferred to get involved in social activities, such as gathering with people from other communities. Most of them love fishing and boating. Children in their families have the freedom to choose their own activities, however, Islam and their parents become their guide to choose suitable activities.

As a conclusion, respondents took advantage of the leisure and recreation opportunities provided by the Kuching City Council and constraints and barriers were not the limiting factors for them to use all the facilities provided. Culture and spiritual factors play a vital role in guiding respondents' ways of life. It will determine the types of activities that they can, or want to participate in. They are free to participate as long as the selected activities obeyed the rules of Islam. Overall, respondents enjoyed living in Kuching and took advantage of all the opportunities provided including the leisure and recreational services. Constraints and barriers will not prevent them from participating in the available leisure and recreation activities. Respondents perceived that Islam is a very flexible religion and it encourages its followers to enjoy themselves in a healthy lifestyle.

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