

AIM: The purpose of this study was to investigate the activity choices, experiences, constraints and benefits of family groups in New Zealand as they relate to outdoor recreation in natural settings.

Methods

Families were invited to participate in in-depth interviews through a) snow ball technique and b) advertisements placed in different locations. Invitations were sent via email networks and flyers distributed with school newsletters in Dunedin and Wellington. Chosen families represented a variety of socio-demographic backgrounds and diverse family structures. The methodology included a whole-family participation approach to gain a better understanding of shared practices and meanings; thus, the family unit was interviewed as a whole. 25 interviews were undertaken in family homes: 13 in Dunedin, 9 in Wellington and 3 in Twizel.



Photograph: A. Reis

Key Themes & Families in the Outdoors

Family Life-Stages

1. Decreased Participation with Young Children
2. Gender Participation Imbalance

Constraints

1. Lack of Time, Energy and Cost
2. Safety and Risk

Cultural Influences

1. Social Contingencies and Cultural Identity Influence Participation
2. Māori and Pacific Island Families Connect with Water-Based Activities



Photograph: A. Reis



Photograph: A. Thompson

FINDINGS

Constraints to Participation

Lack of time and lack of energy were the major obstacles for increased participation. Also, **urban families felt cost was sometimes prohibitive**. Thus, there is a need for outdoor activities that are low cost and close to home, particularly within the city boundaries.

"It's cheaper to go for a walk or go for a bike than buy a boat and go fishing. [...] Yeah. Just staying local, more day trips that we can do here and that's good for the kids or the kids that we have with us at the time." (W9, Father)

Safety issues and opportunities to encounter risk were a consideration affecting where and when parents took children, such as the ability to explore risky environments, both within organised group activities such as at school camps, but also as a result of management decisions.



Photograph: A. Thompson

Cultural Influences

Extended family relationships associated with having Māori or Pacific Island heritage and **cultural identity influences were major determinants of the level of engagement with recreation** by some participants.

Examples are 'Nohoanga', or campsites, resulting from Treaty settlements were a unique setting for Māori to participate in family based activities in the outdoors whilst connecting with their whanau and cultural heritage. **Both Māori families and Pacific Island families reported strong links with access to coastal areas and beaches**, affecting frequency of participation.

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Family Life-Stages

Parents interviewed reported **significant decrease in participation in leisure and recreation in the first years of child bearing**.

"Well, we couldn't tramp when the children were younger, I mean they couldn't carry a pack, it's just an excuse really, but you know, they'd whine and moan and fall over, and you'd have to carry all their stuff as well as your own so it would be too hard to do tramping like we used to do." (D2, Mother)

It was apparent that there exists an **imbalance in recreation patterns based on gender roles**. There are also new experiences to discover depending on the family life-stage.

"Yeah. It's all very one-sided at the moment. I keep trying to encourage her [wife] out because I am happy to look after the kids but it is very hard..." (W2, Father)

Conclusions

- Key reasons for families to participate in outdoor recreation: health/fitness, family bonding or spending time together.

- Family life-stage was an important aspect that influences and sometimes dictates involvement with outdoor recreation. Mothers experience a more dramatic change in (outdoor) recreation patterns than fathers.

Recommendations

- Collaboration is needed between relevant government agencies and local authorities to offer home-based recreation advice for families suited for their family life-cycle.

- Develop promotional materials and support systems to encourage and facilitate family outdoor recreation participation.

- Develop nation-wide initiatives to promote and support recreation activities within local communities that encourage safe inter-generational use of the outdoors.

