

FREE TIME AND LEISURE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

International research suggests:

- Free time and leisure activities provide important context for youth development
- Provides an opportunity to acquire specific social, physical and intellectual skills
- Has positive benefits for society
- Beneficial in terms of reducing and controlling anti-social activities
- Internationally recognised that youth from low-income backgrounds are disadvantaged with respect to participation in free time and leisure activities

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Broad range of behaviours and activities considered under the domain of free time and leisure

- Structured and organised – unstructured and informal
- Organised activities considered a good use of young person's time (Eccles et al., 2003)
- Extracurricular activities linked to decreasing rates of early school dropout (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997)
- Middle class youth more likely to be involved in structured activities than working class counterparts (Hendry et al., 1997; Ridge 2002)

- Transition in leisure patterns (Hendry et al., 1997; Zeijl et al., 2001)
- Use of the street 'hanging around' often the only option for young people living in disadvantaged areas (Matthews et al., 2000; Morrow, 2001)
- 'Hanging around' perceived as a threat to public order (Valentine et al., 1998)
- 'Problem youth' has led to spatial curfews for young people (Wyn & White, 1997)
- Increasing privatisation of public spaces (Colozzi & Giovannini 2003)

IRISH STUDIES

- Within an Irish context dearth of research into how young people spend their free time
- Lack of regional and area specific studies in this field
- Largely rely on studies that examine other relevant social issues such as poverty, educational disadvantage and adolescent sexual health to provide data
- Research report NCO/Consultation Process

de Roiste and Dinneen (2005)

- Most recent and comprehensive study conducted in this area in Ireland and investigated the opportunities, supports and barriers to recreation and leisure
- Survey undertaken with over 2,260 young people aged between 12-18 years

Main Findings

- Some activities were universal across adolescent population e.g. watching television, music and hanging around with peers
- Belief among young people there is little leisure provision in their localities
- Young people from lower socio-economic groups experience financial barriers to leisure activities
- Rural youth experience transport difficulties

School based studies

Whyte (1995)

- Provides baseline data for leisure interests and activities of 12 years olds in Dublin, Belfast and London
- Participants were drawn from second level schools serving areas of social disadvantage

Main Findings

- Leisure activities were similar for all groups
- Greatest difference was gender

Fitzgerald et al. (1995)

Quantitative study of leisure needs of adolescent school children 211 young people from an disadvantaged area in Dublin (120 young men and 91 young women)

Main Findings

- High correlation between participation and interest in leisure pursuits – considerable differences between the sexes
- Young men preferred sports and watching T.V
- Young women enjoyed discos and talking to friends
- Most frequent and preferred leisure activities were social and passive

Fahey et al., (2005)

Quantitative survey consisting of 3,527 second level students and 3,833 primary level pupils

Main Findings

- Boys spend more time at and enjoy sports more than girls
- Decline in sports participation as students move through second level
- 40% of the young people watch 2-3 hours television per day
- One in five second level students were obese or overweight-figures were broadly similar in primary school pupils

Studies of Poverty and Social Exclusion

Daly and Leonard (2002)

Investigation of 30 Irish families urban and rural living in poverty

Main Findings

- Authors described how 12-16 year olds engaged in unstructured activities with little cost attached
- Only 2 out of 25 teenagers interviewed participated in structured activities
- More boys than girls were involved in sports
- Meeting friends and 'hanging around' most frequently cited activity

Mayock & Byrne (2004)

Qualitative study of adolescent sexual health with 41 early school leavers aged 13 – 18 years

Main Findings

- Glaring lack of social amenities and recreational facilities
- Main leisure activities were unstructured e.g hanging around with friends, watching T.V., listening to music, playing computer games
- Alcohol and drug consumption featured strongly in young people's description of free time

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

- Part funded by the Combat Poverty Agency under the Poverty Research Initiative 2004
- Additional funding provided by the Children's Research Centre
- Primary objective of study was to investigate the free time and leisure needs of young people living in disadvantaged areas
- Specifically targeted young people aged 12-18 years in four areas designated as disadvantaged under RAPID programme

The four areas selected for study were:

- An inner-city Dublin neighbourhood
- A suburban housing estate outside a city
- A neighbourhood within a large rural town
- A small rural community

STUDY AIMS

- Describe the physical and social environments that characterise the four neighbourhoods where the young people live
- Explore how the young people spend their free time
- Identify factors that facilitate and/or inhibit the choices young people make about how they spend their free time
- Provide policy orientated recommendations that will contribute to the development and provision of appropriate leisure and free time facilities for young people

RESEARCH METHODS AND STUDY SAMPLE

- Qualitative multi-method approach using individual interviews, focus groups and pre-coded baseline data questionnaire
- Breakdown of study participants (N=80)

Age	12-14 Years, N=31	15-18 Years, N=39
Gender	Female, N = 42	Male, N = 38
Location	Inner-City, N=21	Suburbs, N=20
	Small Town, N=20	Large Town, N=19

Research Instruments

- Individual in-depth interviews with 37 young men and women
- Focus group discussion with 43 young people
- Pre-coded baseline data questionnaire (age, gender, school history etc)
- Individual interview with 6 service providers
- Data Analysis

Access and Recruitment

- Issue with most potential to affect implementation – data collection
- Access to the young people through ‘Gatekeepers’
- Recruitments sites included: Schools, Youthclubs, Garda Diversion Programmes

Ethical Considerations

- Consent from participants
- Parental Consent
- Confidentiality and Anonymity
- Overdisclosure

Sample Profile

- 56 of the young people lived with both parents
- 20 lived with one parent – usually the mother
- 2 lived with grandparents
- 1 lived with an older sibling
- 1 was a single parent who lived with her partner
- Nearly ¾ reported that father was in full time employment
- Over ¾ reported that mother was in full time employment

- Vast majority of participants (72) were attending school
- 8 were early school leavers – have attended second level for at least one year
- 16 of the young people reported multiple suspensions
- 6 had been formally expelled
- Majority of young people were actually aware of importance of education – critical to future employment opportunities
- 5 were attending Youthreach

PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

■ Age	13-15 Years, N = 7	16-18 Years, N = 22
■ Gender	Female, N = 12	Male, N = 17
■ Location	Inner City, N = 7 Large Town, N = 4	Suburbs, N = 6 Small Town, N = 12
■ No. of Hours	4-6 Hours, N = 7 10-15 Hours, N = 7	7-10 Hours, N = 9 15 – 20 Hours, N = 6
■ Type of Work	Services Sector, N = 23 Babysitting, N = 4	Law Office, N = 1 Farm Work, N = 1

- Young people engaged in part-time employment for a variety of reasons
- As a means of generating income – financial independence
- Purchase clothes, mobile phone credit etc
- Support their free time and leisure activities
- Finance 'lifestyle'

'I work maybe one or two evenings during the week and on a Saturday. Like the money pays for trips to the gym and nights out. Like if you go out on a Friday night it'd be 19 euro to get into a club and I'd suppose you'd pay another 20 or so on drink...it all depends (yw, small town, age 17)

Research Findings

- Area Profiles – Social Environment
- Free time and Leisure Activities
- Free time and Leisure Needs: The Views of the Study's Young People
- Discussion
- Recommendations

Area Profile

- **Inner-City Area:**
Long history of social problems, currently undergoing a major physical, economic and social regeneration

'Like I think that people think that everybody here is real bad and that the place is dirty and all that, but its not true. Like they say 'oh they're horrible flats' and they think everyone is looking for trouble, but its not true, like they don't know us like' (ym, inner-city, age 14)

■ **Suburban Area:**

Two neighbouring local authority estates developed in the 1970s – little or no infrastructure or services and has a high prevalence of heroin use. Recent developments –Local Community Rooms and Leisureplex

'I don't know like it makes you feel different compared to everyone else...because they think they're better than us because just the name of where we live, we're always getting called scumbags' (yw, suburban estate, age 15)

■ **Large Town:**

Urban location within the town, differing patterns of tenure, experiencing social problems and has been portrayed as 'heroin blackspot'

'Yeah, like they call us knackers, they say that the town is full of knackers and we're not like, you know. Like this would be people that don't even know us like (ym, large town, age 16)

■ **Small Town:**

Like many rural towns experiencing a drop in population, currently undergoing development in housing, planning and infrastructure. Most recent development Cultural and Entertainment Centre

'If you say you're from the town like people would be taking a step back. It's not very popular to say you're from the town, you're seen as a tough person' (yw, small town, age 17)

- **R1:** *I don't believe this town is ever going to take off, it seems to be falling down*
- **R2:** *The town is always left behind, the other places in the country are booming at the moment, like the town next to us they've been getting everything. They've almost every major fast food restaurant and a good lot of brand name shops as well*
- **R3:** *That's because all the chippers in the town all came together and bought up buildings so that the likes of McDonald's couldn't come in*
- **R1:** *See, that's why the town is getting left behind...like I say nearly 80% of the people in the town have to work outside the town* (fg, ym, small town)

Involvement in Structured Leisure Activities

- All 4 areas offer some form of structured activities
- Most are community/school based –free or nominal payment – under 14

CLUBS	LOCATION	MEMBERSHIP
■ 8	Inner-city Dublin	14
■ 2	Suburban Estate	10
■ 4	Small Town	8
■ 4	Large Town	3

3 Broad Categories:

- Community Based Clubs
- Mainstream Youth Clubs
- 'At Risk' Provision

Community Clubs: Staffed by local volunteers, fund raise locally or charge nominal fee

'At Mary Kelly's she's pure robbery that woman...it would be like 50 cent and she says its to buy things, but you come back the next week and it's the same thing. Like if you're looking for colouring pencils and there's none she'd say 'well sit there and do nothing' you'd have better fun sitting on the steps outside. I wouldn't mind but you pay you're money to do this' (yw, large town, age 13)

- **Mainstream Youth Groups:** Staffed by professional youth workers, charge a nominal fee each week

'Well there's more clubs for kids my age. Like there's the homework club and that's for people in 6th class, but you get to go out with them as well like to the pictures and for instance I'm going ice-skating next week (yw, inner city, age 12)

'Yeah it's good, it's better than doing nothing, standing around outside like a fool, standing around on corners or something. I suppose it's like anywhere really, any other building, no drinking, no smoking, good behaviour and not speaking bad language. A bit like school really' (ym, suburbs, age 18)

[Did you target a specific group of young people?]

'Yeah, I set out to target those kids that were hanging around every night. The ones that are in your face. I've done outreach work where I've walked around the estate and there are gangs of boy's and girl's drinking and talking and I'm saying we're doing a youth group or whatever...but it's been very hard to target them

[So how did you eventually get them on board]

'I bribed them loads (laughs) I started ordering pizzas and told them to follow the smell...and I'd stand outside and chat with them and just try and coerce them into coming in (laughs) (service provider)

- **'At Risk' Provision**

'We're funded to work with the most at risk young people in the community. The core of our work is about trying to reach the ones that are gonna end up on drugs, the ones that are dropping out of school early, the ones who are in the criminal justice system. We don't do that in a variety of ways and we use a variety of different programmes to do that. We also do more 'normal' sort of educational, sexual health programmes, stuff like that, social development skills, so that's what we're doing' (service provider)

Leisure Plex

[Do you ever go to the Leisure Complex]

R1: *Yeah, there's one up the road, but we're not allowed into it*

R2: *You have to be over 18*

R3: *Yeah, but like it was supposed to be built for us years ago and we're not even allowed do anything in it and that'd be the only thing I'd be interested in going to*

[So who actually uses the complex then?]

R3: *People that aren't even from the area, like there's all different people from everywhere that goes*

R1: *It's an open place like, but they should at least let the people from the area go as well...do you know what I mean (fg, inner city)*

Unstructured Leisure Activities

- Preferred activity 'hanging around' with friends – inside or outdoors setting (12-14 years)

[What's your favourite way to spend your free time?]

'Hanging around with me friends...we just go over to the playground really and that's it' (ym, inner city, age 13)

[When you're hanging around what do you do?]

'We just go over across the road and there's a green ESB box and we sit on it and talk, that's all we do' (yw, large town, age, 13)

Alcohol Consumption and Illicit Drug Use

- Over ½ of the young people interviewed drank alcohol
- Average age of first alcoholic drink – 13 years
- Most popular location – 'free gaff' or 'the street'
- Reported consumption levels similar across 4 sites
- Both young men and young women reported that on average they drank 7 drinks on a typical night out (15-18 years)

[What's your favourite way to spend your free time?]

'The best thing is when we're all in the field and get drunk and just stand around. It's the same every weekend cause there's nothing else to do' (ym, large town, age 15)

- Nearly 1/5 of young people reported using illicit drugs
- Cannabis was cited as drug of choice
- Average age of first use 13-14 years and activity more common among 15-18 year olds

[How do you spend your weekends?]

'Just hanging around with me friends. Like we'd just be standing around and having a few cans and just talking and smoking...like I smoke a bit of hash, get stoned and have a laugh. That's all there is to do. There's nothing else to do, they have nothing for us' (yw, suburbs, age 15)

- High visibility can bring young people to attention of neighbours and the Gardai
- Reports of problematic relationships with local Gardai

R1: *'Like I'd be out with me friends and we nearly got arrested a few times like. It's very hard 'cause you can't even mess in this town 'cause it's easy to get arrested like. I find that anyways. I must have that look or something*

R2: *'Yeah, there's no denying that now...I don't go out as much as I used to, you know, I try to stay away from all that'*

R3: *'I don't want to be going out and getting make a show of either. It happened to me a few times, so I don't go out much anymore. I stay in an awful lot, it's better'* (fg, ym, large town)

Free Time and Leisure Needs: The Views of the Young People

- Factors that Inhibit Free Time and Leisure Choices
- Age Related Issues
- Gender Issues
- Geographical Issues
- Involving Young People in Decision Making

Factors that Inhibit Free Time and Leisure Choices

- Lack of purchasing power 'commercial leisure'
- Exclusion from existing facilities – Leisureplex
- Lack of sporting facilities – local football pitch/overuse of existing pitches renders them unplayable
- Lack of leisure and recreational amenities and facilities in areas 'There's nothing to do'

'Like I think its stupid right, like in the summer they have clubs on for when the kids aren't in school. They say its to keep us out of trouble, from getting in robbed cars, robbed motor bikes, but then what are we meant to do in the winter? Are you meant to get in robbed cars everyday in the winter and then when the summer comes just stop' (ym, inner city, age 13)

'They should try to get a swimming pool and a snooker hall...because everyone would be having more fun instead of hanging around drinking and doing drugs and whatever. They'd be having fun, you know what I mean? Like...it keeps people of the streets and it keeps them out of trouble. At least they'd have somewhere to go' (yw, suburbs, age 15)

'The main risk, as I see it, to young people around here is the total lack of provision...for young people there is, I think, a total lack of self-esteem and a sense of depression. I see it all the time. Look, it can't be good for anyone's soul to be standing around having nothing to do, so they drink cans, they smoke hash because that's their only option. That's what they do. When they're stoned or drunk they become more aggressive towards society...there's so many of them suffer with depression, there really is' (service provider)

Age Related Issues

- Young people stressed the need different and separate services and facilities for different age groups (12-14) (15-17)

'They need more clubs and stuff and to do more stuff with us...like not mix the young ones in with the older ones 'cause that just annoys everyone'

[What do you consider to be younger and older]

'Right, well, 12 to 14 and maybe 15 is young but 16 and 17 and that is too old. Like sometimes the older ones do come into our club and they do be messin' an all 'cause they're not really interested in it and like we do be serious and want to do it' (yw, inner city, age 14)

Gender Issues

- Young men wanted more sports facilities – young women had more social requirements – somewhere to hang out with friends
- Most significant gender issue 'body image' limiting participation in sports, especially in public to avoid embarrassment

'I don't like doing sporting activities as I have a weight problem, and I don't enjoy sports as a result. I don't like people looking at me...I don't like exercising in front of other people. I don't find any bit of sweating and exercising in front of other people, I don't find any of that attractive, I don't find it attractive (yw, small town, age 15)

'I never did it (PE) I'd say I was sick or something so I used to just sit down and watch them' (yw, suburbs, age 15)

Geographical Issues

- Rural youth reported that isolated settings created a distinct set of problems
- Many leisure and recreational amenities situated just outside the town and were only accessible by public transport or by car

'Like it's hard if you want to go swimming or even play a game of tennis they're all outside the town. The only way to get there is if your parents drive you and sure that's not always possible' (yw, small town, age 12)

'I think there should be more to do in the town like 'cause everything is kinda outside the town. Like I'd like for there to be a swimming pool in the town 'cause the nearest one is like 2 miles away and you can't always get there' (ym, large town, age 16)

Having A Say

- Young people articulate a need to be include in decisions re: leisure facilities
- Viewed themselves as 'experts' and believe the lack of adequate provision is because adult 'assume' what young people want

'If you spend so much money on setting something up wouldn't you expect that it would be something young people want. I mean why bother spending half a million on an Art Gallery that young people aren't interested in...look if you're not going to be asked your opinion it's just like you're being ignored' (yw, small town, age 15)

'Yeah, there's no point in putting something in if young people aren't interested 'cause it'll just go to waste. You have to talk to kids to see if that's what they want' (yw, suburbs, age 18)

Summary and Conclusion

- While describing a strong attachment to community young people focused on negative characteristics
- Felt ignored and excluded by residents groups and development committees
- Reports of problematic relationships with local Gardai
- Exclusion from Leisureplex and other commercial leisure
- Significant number of the young teenagers attended structured activities
- Reports of dissatisfaction with local clubs – lack of basic equipment
- Lack of and/or overuse of local football pitches

- Preferred free time and leisure activity was 'hanging around' on the street with friends
- Alcohol consumption and drug use featured strongly in many of the older teenager's (15-18) descriptions of their free time activities
- Young people identified need for different and separate activities for different age groups
- Most significant gender issue 'body image'
- Rural youth have less access to mainstream youth clubs
- Rural youth have specific transports needs

Recommendations

- Specifically targeted drive by local authorities and development committees for the inclusion of young people in regeneration process
- Use creative means to engage young people in a meaningful consultation process – keeping technical language and jargon to a minimum
- Provision of financial support for local community groups
- Development of training for local volunteers
- Provision of multi-annual funding for mainstream youth clubs
- Development of links with community run activities – skills exchange
- Establishment of community owned leisure amenities and facilities

- Establishment of 'Youth Areas' within local communities
- Promote a better understanding between local youth and local Gardai
- Privately owned facilities within communities make amenities available to local youth at a reduced cost
- Additional research to be carried out to further our understanding of the free time and leisure needs of young people in general and those in disadvantaged communities in particular
- To inform policies regarding free time and leisure requirements of young people
- **This study sought to provide a fair and accurate representation of the young people's views and experiences. Makes no claim regarding generalisability of its findings to all Irish youth**

Final Word

'I think it's very important, to be asked your opinion, it gives people a certain kind of belief in themselves, they'll start trusting adults a lot more 'cause that's kinda a problem...a lot of them...if older people aren't even gonna listen, listen to you, why should you listen to them? Just because you're younger like...you know you don't treat a child badly, and expect them to treat you nice back. You just don't' (yw, small town, age 17)