

What barriers are parents in Bishop's Stortford facing in participating in outdoor recreation with their children?

Louise Stubbs, MA Outdoor Education Postgraduate Student. Supervisor: Nalda Wainright

Introduction

The aim of this study is to identify the barriers that parents in Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire are facing that may prevent or make it more difficult for them to participate in outdoor recreation with their children. Once these have been identified, strategies could be implemented based on the needs of the specific demographics identified within the study to increase the frequency of outdoor recreation for local families.

This study's objectives are to determine:

- What barriers families in Hertfordshire are facing in participating in outdoor recreation.
- If the barriers they are facing differ based on their varying demographics, and how.
- How parent's habits prior to having children are related to their outdoor recreation habits after having children.
- The difference in outdoor recreation habits of these families since the Covid-19 pandemic.
- How these findings can be used to mediate the barriers and make frequent outdoor recreation more attainable for local families.

The research question in this study is 'What barriers do parents experience when participating in outdoor recreation with their children?'. It is hypothesised that the main barriers will be similar to those found in other rural communities, such as financial and time constraints, and safety concerns (Johnson, Bowker and Cordell, 2001; Reis, 2010; Winter, Crano, Basáñez and Lamb, 2019). Similarly, it is also hypothesised that families' frequency of outdoor recreation will have increased since the beginning of the pandemic (Howlett and Turner, 2021).

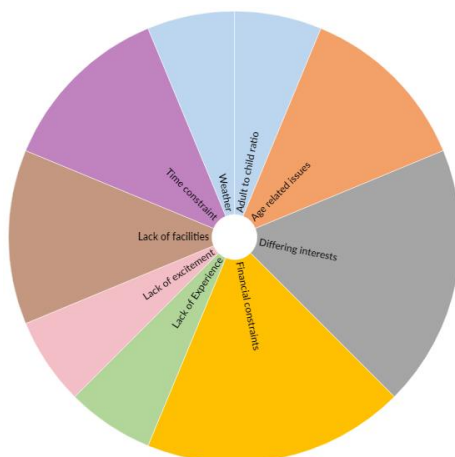


Fig 1. All barriers identified during the analysis of the interviews.

Methods

A qualitative approach will be utilised in this study, in order to gain a deep and subjective understanding of the participants own experiences and barriers.

3 participants were recruited, who are parents of children between the ages of 4 and 14. Participants were invited to attend a 30-minute interview in a public location such as a park, library or coffee shop. Upon arrival they were given an information sheet to read and a consent form to sign. The researcher then verbally explained the purpose and aims of the study, the research and interview process, and what will happen with their interview and responses after they have given it. Once this had been explained and they were happy to proceed, the researcher set up their phone to record the interview. After the interview, the researcher checked in with the participants to ensure they were still comfortable with their responses being used, and that they are feeling alright afterwards. They were then provided with a debrief sheet to take with them which included the researcher's contact details and their participant number.

After the interviews were concluded, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were then analysed using thematic analysis to identify any common themes within the interviews.

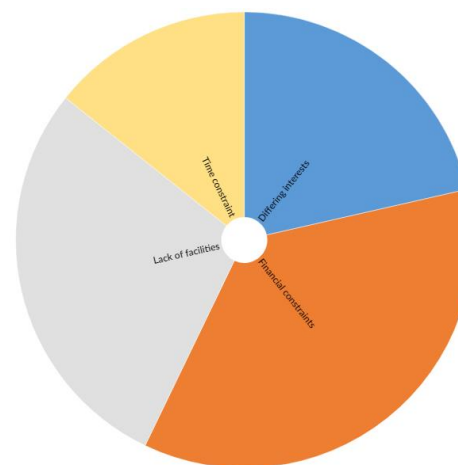


Fig 2. The themes identified during analysis of the transcripts, reflecting the quantity of references within the interviews.

Results

Within the interviews there were 9 barriers identified, that the parents from Bishop's Stortford noted were preventing them from participating in outdoor recreation with their families. The barriers identified were; the weather, time constraints, lack of facilities, lack of excitement, lack of experience, financial constraints, differing interests, age related issues, and adult to child ratio. Of these 9 barriers identified throughout the interviews, there were 4 themes in common across all of them. These common themes were; lack of facilities, financial constraints, time constraints, and differing interests.

The barrier that was spoken about most frequently was financial constraints, which seems to have been exacerbated with the recent rise in the cost of living. This was spoken about multiple times by each participant, encompassing the costs of travel, entry fees, food, facilities, and advertising targeting children in outdoor recreation environments that increases the cost of the trip.

Conclusion & Summary

The results of this study suggest that:

- Local authorities could increase families' participation in outdoor recreation by improving public transport links to local greenspaces, and ensuring they are affordable for families from all socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Design local greenspaces with families of differing age groups in mind, offering a variety of environments and activities.
- Ensure that there are facilities such as personal hygiene and food & beverage available to the public within a reasonable distance from local greenspaces, to ensure these are user friendly for families with young children.
- Local authorities work with schools and parents to educate on the benefits of participating in outdoor recreation, which in turn will encourage families to find the time for and prioritise outdoor recreation in their day to day lives.

All of the barriers identified within this study could be mediated by action from the local authority on increasing accessibility and awareness on outdoor recreation, as well as ensuring that adequate greenspaces are made a priority during town planning and development.

References

- Howlett, K. and Turner, E., 2021. Effects of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on parents' attitudes towards green space and time spent outside by children in Cambridgeshire and North London, United Kingdom. *People and Nature*, 4(2), pp.400-414.
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