

**RECREATIONAL BEHAVIOR AND PREFERENCE OF URBAN
RESIDENTS IN IKOT EKPENE TOWN, AKWA IBOM STATE,
NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the recreational behaviour and preference of urban residents in Ikot Ekpene Town as well as the recreational constraints in the area. A cross-sectional survey of 375 randomly selected residents was conducted in the five residential zones that make up the town using questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, frequency count and simple percentages were employed for data analysis. Results showed that respondents had an overwhelming positive disposition towards recreation with a high preference for outdoor recreation particularly "sitting out at open spaces, Parks and Plazas with drinks and photography". The further finding revealed the top 5 constraints to recreation including insecurity, poor access to recreational facilities, inadequate recreational facility, poor sanitation at recreational centres and high cost of recreational services. Findings re-echo the need to inaugurate community policing in order to strengthen security at recreational centres as well as enhancing access to recreation through citizens empowerment, infrastructure upgrade and expanding facilities for outdoor recreation.

Keywords: Recreation; Behavior; Preference; Constraints; Urban Resident – Ikot Ekpene Town.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Recreation is a leisure-based social activity freely chosen and engaged to express creativity, achieve and master new things for personal satisfaction (Broadhurst, 2001). Recreation is an essential element of human biology and psychology and has been acknowledged to be a vital component of urban life in contemporary society. The benefits of recreation are enormous the physical, social, psychological, spiritual and economic domain of individuals impacting positively (Li and Wang, 2012). In the developed and developing cities of the world, there are documented pieces of evidence linking recreational activities in city parks and other outdoor recreational centres to improved moods reduced stress, and a general sense of health and wellness (Kara and Demirci, 2010; Godbey and Mowen, 2010). Specifically, studies in Taiwan have shown that green spaces have the potentials to significantly improves the

physical and mental health of urban residents as well as enhancing their sense of creativity and accomplishment (Li and Wang, 2012).

In China, it has been reported that recreation activities significantly raised the peoples' physical and mental health, strengthened relationship among family members, improve performance in business and also foster social integration among the people (Zou et.al, 2019). According to Godbey and Mowen (2010), recreation affords the city planners the opportunity to improve the aesthetic value of the urban space by creating open spaces, green areas, parks, plazas, gyms and other recreational facilities. In Nigeria, however, the gains associated with recreation are limited due largely to low levels of awareness and participation in urban recreation (Lawal and Bilesanmi, 2013). Among the factor constraining participation in recreation in Nigerian cities are inadequate and dysfunctional recreation facilities, security concerns, and low socioeconomic status (Chikagbum, Brown and Kpunpamo, 2015). These constraints individually and collectively act together to shape people's recreational behaviour and preferences. It is however believed that critical to urban recreation planning is the knowledge of the residents' recreation behaviour and preferences (Sulyman and Lorlian, 2016).

In Ikot Ekpene Town, where the present study is based, efforts have been scaled up to multiply and expand a range of recreational facilities to cater to the increasing demand for outdoor leisure experienced by residents. Some experts believe that needs assessment on the preferences and recreational behaviour of the residents is required to guide future efforts in the provision of adequate, equitable and relevant recreation and leisure opportunity for the people. This study represents an attempt to fill the gap in knowledge regarding the recreation behaviour and preference of the urban residents in Ikot Ekpene Town. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide the needed guide and framework towards urban recreation planning. Following this section is an outline of the specific objectives of the paper; materials and methods employed to prosecute the research; The study findings/discussion and the conclusion all in that order.

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study include:

- i. to evaluate the recreational behavior of the residents
- ii. to identify and examine the residents preferred recreational activities
- iii. to examine the factors constraining recreational development in the area

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

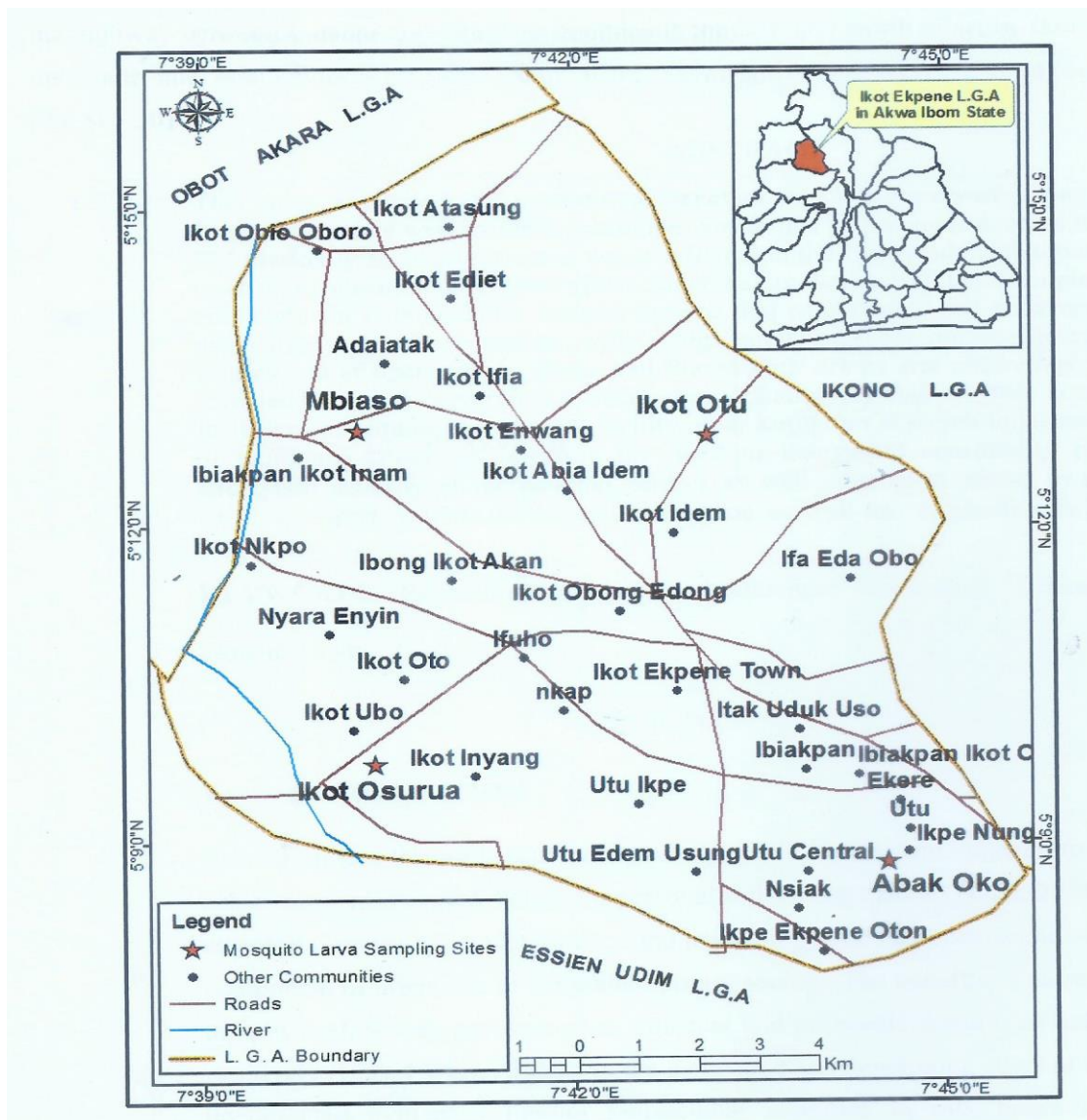
i. Study Area

Ikot Ekpene Town is one of the few urban centres in Akwa Ibom State, and among the oldest town in Nigeria (Akpan, 2010). It is located between longitudes 7o39' and 7o45' East and Latitudes 5o9' and 5o15' North (AKSG,1997). It occupies a landmass of 116sqkm with a population of 66,959 inhabitants (as projected in 2019, at 3.5% population growth rate for urban centres, NPC, 2006).

Traditionally, Ikot Ekpene is home to the Annang ethnic extraction with their unique culture in craftwork, wood carving, raffia weaving, masquerade and traditional dances (Effiong, 2019). In term of commerce and tourism, Ikot Ekpene serves as a regional commercial hub for the export of palm and raffia produce such as palm oil, palm wine, palm kernel, raffia bags and shoes, raffia cane furniture and other agro products. The town also serves as a unique tourist’s centre for cultural and business tourists – both domestic and foreign tourists visit Ikot Ekpene for a unique tourism experience especially during the “Ikot Ekpene cultural day celebrations” (Essien and James, 2019).

In terms of recreation and leisure, the town provides a range of recreational facilities such as the City Plaza, the Four Point by Sheraton Hotel/Recreation centre, a mini Sports Stadium, the Raffia Village, a Museum, Viewing Centers and Palm Wine/Entertainment Centers (Effiong, 2019).

Figure 1: Study Area



ii. Study Design and Sample

The study was designed as a cross-sectional survey of urban residents in Ikot Ekpene Town, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study population consists of a population of 66, 959 residents, out of which a sample of 400 residents was used for the survey. The Taro Yamane statistics was applied for estimating the sample size of 400 respondents from a total population of 66,959 residents. Furthermore, the proportional random sampling was adopted to select respondents across the five residential zones to add up to the overall sample of 400 (see table 1 for details)

Table 1: Distribution of the Study Sample

S/n	Residential zone	Population	Sample
1.	Abiakpo Ikot Essien	22,079	132
2.	Uruk Uso	18,371	109
3.	Ikot Obong Edong	13,041	78
4.	Ifuho	11,014	66
5.	Utu Ikpe	2,494	15
	TOTAL	66,959	400

Source: Field Survey, 2019

iii. Data Collection and Analysis

Three sets of data were collected and analyzed to address the study objectives:
They include:

- Data on socio-economic characteristics of the respondents (age, gender, educational status, employment status, occupation and income).
- Data on respondents' recreational behaviour and preferences
- Data on respondents perceived constraints to recreation measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree; 2-Disagree, 3-Undecided, 4-Agree and 5- Strongly Agree) as these indicated respondents degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements on the questionnaire.

The main instrument for data collection was the questionnaires. Four hundred sets of questionnaires were designed and administered randomly to the respondents during a field survey using field assistants. Of the 400 questionnaires administered, 375 were completed, returned and used for data analysis. This indicates a 93.75% returned rate.

Data analysis was performed using frequency counts of responses, simple percentages as well as descriptive statistics: Mean and Standard Deviation were used to rank the perceived constraints to recreation.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

i. Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Socio-economic variables such as age, gender, educational status, occupation and income are critical to investigating people's recreational behavior and preferences. The results on the respondents' socio-economic data are presented in Table 2. Findings revealed that 56% of the sample respondents were males while 44% were female. Also, the results indicate that majority of the sample (53.3%) were aged between 30 and 40 years; 40% of them were above 40 years while an insignificant proportion (6.7%) were less than 30 years of age. Regarding the educational status of the sample; 37.9% of them were either primary or secondary school graduates. 33.3% attained the educational height of NCE/OND; only 25.3% had First Degree or its equivalent (HND) while a paltry 3.5% of the sample had a higher Degree (M.Sc or Ph.D). In terms of employment, 320 respondents (85.3%) were employed. Of this number, 25% were in private business, 57.8% were either artisan or traders, while 17.2% were public servants. The income distribution of respondents showed that 40.6% of the sample earned less than N30,000 monthly; 33.1% earned between N30,000 and N50,000 while 26.3% earned above N50,000.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	No. of Respondents	% of totals
Age (n=375)		
< 30 years	25	6.7
30-40 years	200	53.3
>40 years	150	40.0
Gender (n=375)		
Male	210	56.0
Female	165	44.0
Educational Attainment (n=375)		
Primary/Secondary	142	37.9
NCE/OND	125	33.3
HND/B.sc (First Degree)	95	25.3
M.Sc/Ph.D (Higher Degree)	13	3.5
Employment Status (n=375)		
Employed	320	85.3
Unemployed	55	14.7
Occupation (n=320)		
Private Business/Practice	80	25.0
Artisan/Trading	185	57.8
Public Servant	55	17.2
Income Status (monthly in ₦) n=320		
< 30,000	130	40.6
30,000 – 50,000	106	33.1
> 50,000	84	26.3

Sources: Field Survey, 2019

The foregoing result revealed a largely youthful population dominated by the males. The implication of this finding for the recreational demand of the study area is far-reaching. A youthful population is physically stronger and would prefer more of outdoor recreation, while a male-dominated population is likely to participate in all manner of outdoor and indoor recreations (Sulyman and Lorlian, 2016). Furthermore, Zou et.al (2019) has documented significant evidence showing gender difference in recreational preferences. The study indicates that the male gender is favourably disposed to outdoor recreational sports compared to their female counterparts. The employment, occupational and income profile of the respondents can also be linked to their recreational behavior and preferences. For instance, majority of the respondents are employed (with greater proportion) in artisanal and trading occupation. Only a few are public servants and in private professional practice. However, the income profile indicates a largely low income monthly as the majority of them earn below the official Nigeria minimum wage (of N30, 000). The implication of these findings is that respondents have limited financial resources to access certain outdoor recreational facilities such as golfing, tourism, visiting sites, patronizing cuisines at sit-outs. According to Roskaft (2004), knowledge of the socio-economic characteristics of a population can guide planners and government authorities in the planning and development of recreational facilities in the city.

ii. Recreational Behavior of Respondents

Four items were used to evaluate the respondents' recreational behavior/preferences. On the questionnaire, respondents were required to indicate their participation, frequency, average time spent and travel distance to recreational facilities. Their responses were tallied alongside the equivalent percentages and displayed in Table 3. Results in Table 3 show that all the respondents had participated in some form of recreational activity. However, the frequency of recreation and the average time spent differs among them. Only a few respondents (6.1%) had daily recreational activity; 58.4% of respondents were engaged in weekly recreation, while 35.5% were on the bi-weekly frequency of recreation. The average time spent on recreation per week was 2-3 hours for 66.7% of the respondents; 4-5 hours for 17.3% of them, while 16% spent up to 6-7 hours on recreation per week. Furthermore, results indicate that majority of the respondents (69.3%) travelled for more than 1km to access their choice recreational facility; 20% travel a distance of about 1km, while 10.7% of respondents travel less than 1km to do recreation. The Roskaft (2004) however recommends recreational facilities to be located less than 1km within walking distance from users' home.

Table 3: Respondents Recreational Behavior/ Preference (N=375)

Variable	No. of respondent	% of total
Ever participated in Recreation		
Yes	375	100
No	Nil	Nil
Frequency of participation		
Daily	23	6.1
Weekly	219	58.4
Bi-Weekly	133	35.5

Average Weekly Time spent in Recreation		
2-3 Hours	250	66.7
4-5 Hours	65	17.3
6-7 Hours	60	16.0
Travel distance to nearest Recreation Facility		
> 1km	40	10.7
1km	75	20.0
> 1km	260	69.3

Source: Field Survey, 2019

From the foregoing result, it is obvious that the sample population has a positive attitude towards recreation in spite of its low socio-economic profile. As earlier noted in the preceding section of this paper, the youthful composition of the respondents predisposes them to participate actively in recreation. These findings were corroborated by Ononogbo (2014) whose findings revealed that residents in Bida, Niger State, Nigeria, exhibited an overwhelming positive attitude towards recreation. However, the long travel distance to the choice recreational facility (more than 1km from home) as reported by the majority of the respondents (69.3%) portend serious implications for redistribution of recreational facilities in the study area. Some authors (Li and Wang, 2012; Lawal and Bilesanmi, 2013; Kara and Demirci, 2010) believe that recreational facilities should be located within walking distance from home. There is no doubting the fact that poor and inadequate planning for recreational facilities has characterized most urban centres in Nigeria (Sulyman and Lorlian, 2016), and thereby limiting the quality and quantity of recreational facilities in Nigeria's urban space. This situation has posed significant recreational challenges to intended users. These findings re-echo the need for proper tourism and recreational planning in urban Nigeria.

iii. Recreational preference of respondents:

Table 4 displays the responses offered by respondents regarding their preference for a different form of recreational activity. A list of 10 recreational activities (both outdoor and indoor) was selected from literature and captured on the questionnaire administered to respondents. Results indicate that 81.3% of the sample had a preference for outdoor recreational activity, while 18.7% preferred the indoor activities. Based on the results, the most preferred outdoor activities were: "sitting-out at open space, and city parks with drinks/photography" accounted for 53.3%; "field sports/jogging, visiting museums, parks/city plazas and other interesting places" accounted for 10.7%. Regarding respondents preference for indoor recreation; data in Table 4 show that 53.3% of respondents preferred "drinking and relaxing at viewing centres with friends", 34.7% prefer sitting at home chatting with friends in social media/watching cinemas", 12.0% prefer to "play indoor games with a friend and family members". However, only 9.3% of respondents expressed "satisfaction" with the quality/quantity of outdoor recreational facilities in the town

Table 4: Respondents Recreation Preference

Variable	No. of respondents	% of totals
Preferred type of Recreational Activity		
Outdoor	307	81.3
Indoor	70	18.7
Most preferred outdoor Activity		
Field sports/jogging/games	135	36.0
Sit-outs at open spaces/photography	200	53.3
Visit to museum, parks, plaza	40	10.7
Most preferred indoor Activity		
Drinking relaxing at nearby centers	200	53.3
Playing indoor games with friend	45	12.0
Chatting with friends on social media	130	34.7
Satisfaction with quality of recreation facility		
Yes	35	9.3
No	340	90.7

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The findings of this study as highlighted in Table 4 reveal clearly the overriding recreation demand of the people. By far, the people have more demand for outdoor recreation compared to indoors. Again, the youthful nature of the sample reinforces their preference for outdoor recreation. Apart from the youthful factor of the sample, findings elsewhere in Minna (Razack, Nelson, Martins and Bello, 2013) and Port Harcourt (Obinna, Owei, Ayodele, and Okwakpam, 2009) confirm the fact that traditional African lifestyle of communalism has a strong influence on the recreational preference of the people in terms of “outdoor recreation”. These findings provide the needed empirical evidence for a concerted and robust effort towards the development of outdoor recreational facilities in Nigeria’s towns.

iv. Perceived Recreational Constraints in the Study Area

Respondents were asked to rank the constraints to recreation on a 5-point Likert scale (1- strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree; 3 – Undecided; 4 – Agree; and 5 – Strongly Agree). Their responses were subjected to a descriptive analysis to produce means and standard deviation. Given the mean score, an item was regarded as “significant” if it has a mean score of 3.0 and above. The mean scores, the standard deviation and the rankings of all the items are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics/Ranking of Recreation Constraints

Recreation constraints	Mean	SD	Ranking
Inadequate security at recreational centers	4.90	1.991	1 st
Poor access to recreational facilities	4.89	2.011	2 nd
Inadequate/poorly maintained recreation facilities	4.80	2.801	3 rd

Problem of sanitation at some recreational facilities	3.70	2.701	4 th
High cost of recreational services	3.61	1.791	5 th
Individual's financial limitation	3.55	1.726	6 th
Gender/age limitation	3.51	2.667	7 th
Inadequate town planning effort	3.27	2.022	8 th
Individual poor attitude towards recreation	3.18	2.177	9 th
Psychological limitations	3.02	2.110	10 th

Source: Field Survey, 2019

As data in Table 5 indicates, all items have mean scores ranging from 3.02 to 4.90 indicating that respondents view the 10 items as being the constraints to recreation in the study area. However, the top 5 important constraints to recreation (mean ≥ 3.61) as perceived by the respondents in descending order are; inadequate security (mean = 4.90) poor access (mean = 4.89); inadequate facilities (x = 4.80); problem of sanitation (mean = 3.70) and High financial cost of services at the facilities (x = 3.6).

These findings are consistent with previous studies by Obinna, Owei, Ayodele and Okwakpam (2009); Chikagbun, Brown and Kpunpamo (2015). In all these studies, the issue of inadequate recreation facilities, poor access to recreation and security concern was emphasized. Studies by Ononogbo (2014) have also identified "Gender", "Age", and Financial limitation as major constraints to recreation in Bida Town, Niger State, Nigeria. Whereas Kazack, Nelson, Martins and Bello (2013) found out that most Minna residents do not participate in outdoor recreation due to poverty, psychological factor rather than inadequate recreational facilities.

In view of the robust empirical support given to these findings, it is important to re-examine some of these constraints in the context of the study area. First, the issue of security in the study area cannot be over-emphasized. The study area is part of the Niger-Delta noted for its fragile security structure due to militancy and kidnapping. Outdoor recreation is a microcosm of tourism experience that requires adequate security to thrive. The inauguration of community policing will be a major morale booster to an individual who prefers outdoor recreation but are hampered due to security concerns and challenges.

Second, access to recreational facilities and inadequate stock of the facilities are twin problems that require a strong political will to address. Recreation just like tourism is sensitive to infrastructure (roads, electricity, water and sanitation). Improving the supply of recreational facilities must be accompanied with robust infrastructural support systems to guarantee access by the people.

Third, the constraint of high financial demands for outdoor recreation is a matter of citizen empowerment to reverse endemic urban poverty in the state and country in general. Recreation is social as well as economic goods. Improving the financial status of residents can enhance their access to choice outdoor recreation.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study succeeds admirably to examine the recreational behavior and preferences of residents in Ikot Ekpene Town, Akwa Ibom State. The observations made in this study have proven the fact that residents of the area possess an overwhelming positive disposition towards recreation particularly the outdoor recreation. However, there exist a strong preference for Sports, jogging, outdoor games, sit-outs at Open Spaces/Drinking in parks and photography. An insignificant proportion of the residents also prefer relaxation at viewing centres with a keg of palm wine and other drinks. Findings also highlighted the major constraint to recreation in the area to include insecurity, inadequate facilities, poor access to recreational facilities, the problem of sanitation, water and hygiene at some recreational centres as well as a financial limitation due to high cost of recreational services. In view of the multiple benefits of recreation, it is imperative for city managers as well as other stakeholders to create an enabling environment for recreation to accelerate for the urban residents. The following measures can help ameliorate the observed constraints to recreation in the area:

- i. The government should accelerate the process of instituting community policing to guarantee security at recreational centres.
- ii. Enabling environment should be created for the private sector to expand the supply of outdoor recreational facilities.
- iii. The financial limitations to accessing choice recreation can be halted through citizen empowerment and jobs creation.
- iv. Urban infrastructure – roads, electricity, water and sanitation should be improved to enhance access to recreational centres.

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