

**PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF HIKING AS AN OUTDOOR RECREATION  
ACTIVITY IN HONG KONG<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT :** It is perceived that psychological benefits motivate people to seek outdoor experiences in addition to social and biological benefits. Individual needs are usually influenced by one's socio-demographic situation, past experience, personal attitudes and values among other factors. In this study, a survey was conducted that assessed individual perception and satisfaction of hiking activities (n=146). Enjoying nature and escaping from physical pressure are the most important outcomes perceived by respondents whereas developing leadership skills and family togetherness are least important. Paired t-test determined that a significant proportion of respondents were not satisfied with their needs for enjoyment. Implications of unsatisfactory experience in relation to environmental, personal and other factors are discussed. Five subgroups of participants in hiking activities among the respondents were identified as: 1) low demand on all benefits; 2) inactive youngsters; 3) young working adults with diverse interests; 4) active naturalists; and 5) well-educated working class, enthusiastic hikers. Furthermore, age is not the most significant factor in this analysis, instead, socioeconomic status and trip related factors highly contributed to the classification. The perception of psychological benefits also varied across the subgroups. Their roles, changes and prospects are also discussed based on the research findings.

**KEYWORDS:** Attitudes. Hiking experiences. Hong Kong. Psychological benefits. Satisfaction.

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## **BENEFÍCIOS PERCEBIDOS DA CAMINHADA COMO UMA ATIVIDADE DE RECREAÇÃO EXTERNA EM HONG KONG**

**RESUMO:** Observa-se que aspectos psicológicos motivam as pessoas a buscarem experiências externas em adição aos benefícios sociais e biológicos. Necessidades individuais são geralmente influenciadas pela situação sócio-demográfica de cada um, experiências passadas, atitudes pessoais e valores entre outros fatores. Nesse estudo, uma pesquisa foi realizada avaliando a percepção individual e a satisfação de atividades de caminhada (n=146). Desfrutar da natureza e escapar do estresse cotidiano são os efeitos mais importantes percebidos pelos respondentes enquanto o desenvolvimento de habilidades de liderança e a companhia da família são o menos importante. Os pares do t-testes determinaram que uma proporção significativa dos respondentes não estavam satisfeitos com as suas necessidades para o divertimento. Implicações de experiências insatisfatórias em relação ao ambiente, pessoal e outros fatores são discutidas. Cinco sub-grupos de participantes em atividades de caminhada entre os respondentes foram identificadas como : 1) baixa demanda em todos os benefícios; 2) jovens inativos; 3) jovens adultos trabalhadores com interesses diversos; 4) naturalistas ativistas ; e 5) classe trabalhadora bem educada, marchadores entusiasmados. Além disso, a idade não é o fator mais significativo nessa análise, já que, status sócio-econômico e fatores relacionados a viagem foram mais citados pelos participantes da pesquisa. A percepção de benefícios psicológicos também variaram entre os sub-grupos. Seus papéis, mudanças e prospectos também foram discutidos baseado nos resultados da pesquisa

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Recreação ao ar livre. Recreação - aspectos psicológicos. Satisfação. Lazer.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Walking, hiking and backpacking are related activities that are gaining popularity all over the world. Although most people derive several beneficial experiences from these activities like exercise, stress relief, experiencing nature, loving life and having fun (KRAUS, 2001; COBLE *et al.*, 2003), differences can be derived between these related activities and among groups of people. Whereas, walking can last for two hours or less, hiking requires at least two hours to a whole day while backpacking involves overnight trips and can consist of two or more days. Given this as the case, their relationships can be articulated and presented where either travel, leisure and recreation are discussed.

Where there is a diverse and visibly active population, hiking can be one of the most popular outdoor activities during leisure time (HULL; STEWART 1995; CHHETRI, 2004) as it may bring both physical and emotional rewards to participants. As an activity, it is attractive to people with different walking backgrounds and who may not necessarily have to travel and stay overnight. Globally, hiking is reported to be the most popular outdoor activity and according to the Travel Industry Association of America as cited by Cordell *et al.*, (1996) about 98 million people or one-half of US adults have taken part in hiking within 5 years of study in the last decade.

In various literatures hiking is classified in the group of “soft” adventure (EWERT, 2000; BEEDIE; HUDSON, 2003) that does not necessarily require previous experience. Accordingly, Ewert (2000) had postulated four major characteristics of adventure experience including: (a) involvement with a natural environment, (b) containing elements of risk and danger, (c) uncertain outcome, and (d) influenced by the participant. However, since there are different grades in hiking activities from easy to expedition, and the variation of people’s perception and experience, what is classified as ‘soft’ by some may be perceived as ‘hard’ by others (BEARD *et al.*, 2003). Incidentally, there is an increasing trend of participation in outdoor activities especially hiking. While this is facilitated by increased free time, demographic, socio-economic and technological changes, the perception of and benefits derived from participation can differ from person to person, a theme similarly discussed by scholars like Cords *et al.*, (1993) and Beard *et al.*, (2003).

In Hong Kong, the number of people participating in hiking activities had been increasing over the years. In fact, the attitude of Hong Kong people toward hiking

activities has similarly changed (CHU, 1992). Whether or not factors as time, demographic, socio-economic and technology could be the driving force for the change in attitude in Hong Kong is yet to be established. However, with continuous improvement in living standards, the population is demanding higher quality leisure and increasingly participating in outdoor activities like hiking. In addition, during the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003, the awareness of the local population regarding hiking and outdoor activities has improved (MARAFIA; TUNG, 2004). At that time, out of the 200 people surveyed, over 90% participated in hiking activities. Although hiking adventures in Hong Kong are not new, studies on leisure were focused on youth and were district specific (NG, 1984; NG; MAN, 1988).

Such studies aimed at investigating participation patterns in recreational activities and constraints of not participating but rarely investigated the motives of participation. Therefore, the research on people's attitudes toward recreational activities is worth undertaking. Consequently, understanding people's needs and the provision of leisure activities can contribute to the quality of leisure as such activities tend to benefit participants in a number of ways. The importance of studying motives and attitudes toward hiking activities may have the potential to influence satisfaction through meeting individual's needs and their expectation of outcomes.

Accepting the fact that hiking is a popular activity and that the trend is growing particularly in Hong Kong, this study is designed with the following objectives: 1. to identify the characteristics of participants in terms of demographic and socioeconomic status; 2. to examine individual perception of the benefit of hiking activities. Specifically, the results of the investigation will help to answer the following questions: 1. What are

the desired benefits leading people to join hiking activities? 2. How do these desired benefits vary with demographic, socioeconomic situation and past experience of individuals? 3. Can people satisfy their needs through participation in these activities?

## **BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Although walking and hiking are now considered part of leisure and recreation, to many people, before the industrial revolution, only the upper class had access to leisure which included walking, strolling, pick nicking or camping within designated areas. Participation in such activities was a luxury to most people who needed to work for survival. At about the 1800s, there were movements in industrialized countries that demanded for the reduction of working hours and provision of longer holiday periods (CORDES; IBRAHIM, 1993; ARONSSON, 2000). As a result, changes were effected that caused lifestyle changes leading to more frequent short breaks leading to the growth in participation in leisure, recreation and outdoor activities in general.

### **The Trends of Motivation of Participating in Outdoor Activities**

As indicated earlier, there is an increasing trend of participation in outdoor activities. In addition to the increased free time, the trend is also supported by demographic, socioeconomic and technological changes (CORDES; IBRAHIM, 1993; BEARD *et al.*, 2003). Many people have identified participation in leisure as being influenced by demographic trends (FOOT, 2004). Indeed obvious changes in demographic trends such as population size, age and family structure are observed in many parts of the world including developed and developing countries.

Since many people now do not need to take care of children, this provides them with more opportunity for weekend trips and outdoor activities. On the other hand, single parent families are also becoming a common phenomenon in modern society. With the growing changes in economic activity, employment and work patterns, there are a rising number of self-employed people. These groups of people are free from fixed working time and can have more time to spend on leisure activities.

The desire for leisure and outdoor activities is also driven by the promotion of a healthy lifestyle (IWASAKI; SCHNEIDER, 2003). People have become more aware of their health and fitness under the influence of the media, government and other cultures (BULL *et al.*, 2003). They recognize that both mental and physical health could be improved through leisure activities thus making people spend more time on outdoor activities (BEARD *et al.*, 2003). Locally in Hong Kong, there is a growing number of commercial and non-commercial sectors that provide tours to the countryside. This channels people to take part in these activities and provides access to related information.

Furthermore, technological innovation facilitates the growth of tourism, travel and outdoor activities by providing convenient means of communication (BUHALIS, 2000). Substantial improvement in transport, like the spread of railways and the extension of transport networks all have a direct effect on leisure and outdoor recreation especially hiking. Recently, the transport system has taken numerous people to areas that previously were defined as remote. Various new materials and manufacturing methods have been developed, which make the products cheaper, lighter and stronger for use while participating in outdoor activities. Technological innovation also enhances safety and comfort during these activities (BEARD *et al.*, 2003).

## **Characteristics of Demand of the Present Travelers and Participants in Outdoor Adventures**

In most instances, the attitudes of people toward outdoor activities have changed. Poon (1993) identified that for those who travel generally are not homogeneous as their interests are diverse and sometimes specific. People travel or participate in outdoor activities not only to escape from everyday routine and a busy urban life, but also to achieve some form of fulfillment. For those who venture to the outdoors particularly for walking or hiking, some experience on the adventures, whether it is their own experience or those told by others, make them feel more confident and competent. It is usual that the more experience people have in one adventure, the more likely it is that they will have competence in it.

### **Perception of Benefits from Outdoor Activities**

As part of the motives for participation in outdoor activities, Pigram & Jenkin (1999) stated that recreation experience is goal oriented, with participation expected to yield some sort of satisfaction. This implies that the consideration of benefits associated with the activities is incorporated in their decision-making process. Such benefits therefore motivate people to participate in outdoor activities (CORDES *et al.*, 1993). Individual motives for seeking outdoor experiences can be divided into two categories of 'pull and push factors' (SHAW; WILLIAMS 1994). The pulling force originates from the attractiveness of nature and destination environment, while the push factors are associated with the reasons which motivate people to visit.

For hiking in particular, different types of natural resources would attract certain types of participants. For example, high peaks are appealing to mountaineers, rare animal species such as birds and butterflies and special geomorphology features are also attractive to some groups of people. On the other hand, the push factors are mostly those psychological needs of individuals (CORDES *et al.*, 1993). In other words, it depends on what individuals want to achieve in the experience. Escapism, understanding of nature, excitement, physical fitness, personal development, family togetherness, social contact, achievement and self actualization are some examples of the push factors. Indeed, such factors also generally dictate the trend in travel and participation in outdoor activities. Pearce (1988) distinguished the motives into a five-level travel career ladder. Starting from the bottom, the five motivation levels in the system are: (1) concern with biological needs (including relaxation), (2) safety and security needs (or level of stimulation), (3) relationship development and extension needs, (4) special interest and self development needs, and (5) fulfillment of deep involvement needs (formally defined as self actualization). The travel career ladder is presented graphically by Ryan (1998) which by analogy can reflect the levels of needs in outdoor recreation and hiking in particular (FIG.1).



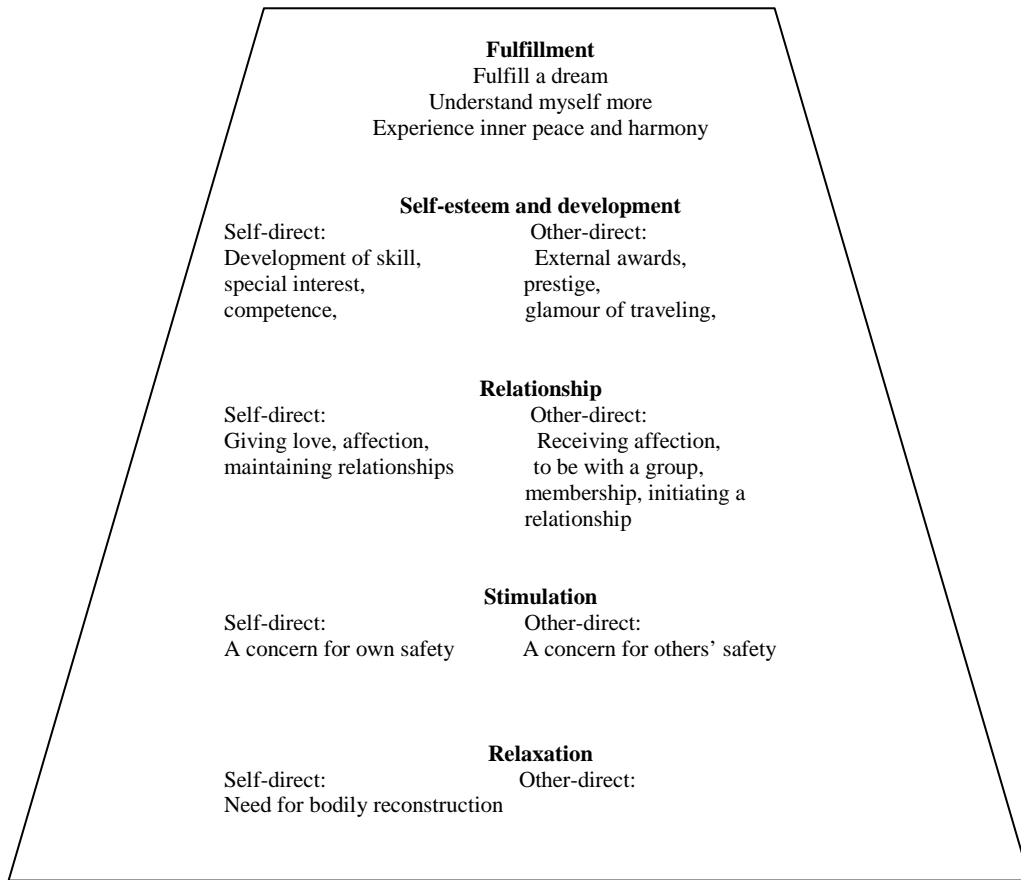


FIGURE 1 - The travel career ladder.

Source: RYAN, 1988.

People's attitudes vary according to their life phase and past experience, giving credence to demographic and socio-economic factors. However, it is not necessary that everyone's needs start at the bottom level. As people change with time, some may seek to satisfy higher level needs in pursuit of leisure and recreation.

### **Development of Hiking Activities in Hong Kong**

Generally as in other leisure and recreation activities, people who hike in organized groups belong to the voluntary sector in leisure provision. This voluntary

sector can sometimes provide better services than some types of formal leisure providers. Also, it provides a kind of leisure experience which is simply beyond the capabilities of both the public sector and the for profit private sector (ROBERTS, 2004). Where such groups are available, they tend to encourage participation in modern leisure recreation fields. Such hiking groups in Hong Kong were indeed the pioneers in promoting hiking activities to the population.

The history of Hong Kong hiking groups is not long dating back to about 70 years. Local literature about the development of hiking groups is piecemeal. In fact the most comprehensive literature related to this development are the articles written by Chu in 1978 and 1992 and the book 1932-1997 Milestone progress of Hong Kong excursion groups. The development of the hiking groups was closely related to that of the society leading up to the formative years of the creation of the country park system in Hong Kong. With the improvement of Hong Kong's economy, increase in transport infrastructure and availability of more holidays as well as recognition of the hiking groups, the 1970s was regarded as the most thriving stage in the history of the hiking groups and participation in outdoor activities. To sum up, the development of Hong Kong hiking groups is affected by the common trends in demographic, socio-economic and technological development. Hikers' behaviors and attitudes similarly are changing. Their interests are more diverse as they demand a higher quality of leisure.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to gain a better understanding of the attitudes of Hong Kong people toward hiking activities, a self-administered questionnaire was developed and a survey

was carried out. Respondents included all Hong Kong residents who have or do not have experience in hiking activities.

The questionnaire was designed to seek information on several issues including: 1. Individual hiking experience; 2. Individual perception of benefit of hiking activities; 3. Individual evaluation on benefit of hiking activities; 4. Obstacles preventing individuals from participating in such activities, and finally, 5. The characteristics of participants and non-participants of hiking activities is also sought. The research mainly focused on the opinion from hikers. The sample size was targeted at a minimum of 200.

To collect and collate responses, the questionnaire is divided into two sections. The purpose of section one is to collect hikers' opinion about the hiking activities. This section is sub-divided into three parts. Part one collects information about hikers' experience and habit in participating in hiking activities. Questions include the frequency of going for hiking, hiking companion and the types of trips in terms of both activities and the hiking grade (whether easy or difficult). Part two surveys hikers' expectation of the trips and benefits they gained from such activities. A 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) is applied to measure the strength of hikers' opinion on 14 potential benefits that may be gained from the activities. Part three helps to understand the obstacles preventing people from participating in hiking activities. Demographic information is collected on age, gender, marital status, occupation, education level and personal income in section two. This facilitates the understanding of the relationships of demographic characteristics and behavior of respondents.

### **Data Analysis**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for analyzing the data. The methods used for data analysis are selected in response to the research objectives. Recalling the objectives of this survey, objectives 1 and 3 can be achieved by generating frequency table of the related data, while objective 2 involves analyzing the relationships between participants' characteristics, hiking experience and desired benefits. These can be done by the one-way analysis of variance, paired-t test and cluster analysis. One-way analysis of variance deals with means of subgroups determined on the basis of one variable (VEAL, 2006). Paired-t test is used to compare the mean scores of expectation and evaluation on the psychological benefits. Cluster analysis helps to identify subgroups by dealing with many variables.

## **RESULTS**

### **Characteristics of Respondents**

Out of the 200 questionnaires distributed, a total of 146 completed responses were received between January and March 2005. The results are summarized in Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3. For the demographic characteristics, the respondents are predominantly male (70.5%) and they tend to be younger in age (between 21- 40 years old). Notably, from the results, over half of the samples (54.8%) are between the ages of 21-30 years old, followed by the age group of 31 - 40 years (22.6%). Among the respondents, seventy-three percent reported that they are single. Among those who are married, 36% of them have children under the age of 12.

Table 5. 1: Characteristics of respondents (n = 146)

Personal information	Participant	Overall
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	%	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	76.5	70.5
Female	23.5	26
<b>Age</b>		
20 or below	9.7	9.6
21-30	53.8	54.8
31-40	24.6	22.6
41-50	11.2	10.3
51 or above	0.7	0.7
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single/ not married	74.8	73.3
Married	25.2	22.6
<i>With children under 12 years old</i>		
Yes	36.4	36.4
No	63.6	63.6
<b>Education</b>		
Primary or below	1.5	1.4
Secondary	37.1	33.6
University or above	61.4	61.0
<b>Occupation</b>		
Student	20.3	24.0
Managerial/professional	28.6	26.0
Technical/operational	16.5	15.1
Sales/clerk	15	13.7
Blue-collar	1.5	1.4
Self-employed	1.5	1.4
Retired	0.8	0.4
Others	15.8	14.9
<b>Personal income (per month)</b>		
\$5000 or below	23.3	26.7
\$5001-\$10000	29.5	26.0
\$10001-\$30000	37.2	32.9
\$30001 or above	10.1	8.9

Further in the demographic factors, a majority (61%) of the respondents have achieved university education or above, 33.6% had attended secondary school and 1.4% reported that they have primary level education or below. Respondents are more likely to work in professional or managerial occupations (26%), 15.1% are in technical or operational occupation, 13.7% are sales persons or clerks. 24% are students and only a small number of respondents were blue-collar employees (1.4%), self-employed (1.4%)

and retired (0.4%). 26.7% of respondents had incomes below \$5001, 26% reported incomes between \$5001 and \$10000, while about 33% of the respondents reported monthly incomes of between \$10001 and \$30000 and 8.9% reported incomes above \$30000 as indicated in table 5.1.

Out of 146 respondents, 137 (93.8%) have taken part in hiking activities at various times (Table 5.2). Indeed, most respondents are quite active participants in hiking activities. A total of 38% of the respondents are likely to participate two to three times per month. While 20.4% participated at least once per week, 18.2% participate once per month and 11.7% participate once in three months and once in six or more months respectively. Friends seem to be the most preferred companions among the respondents when going out for hiking (87.6%). Forty-eight percent of the respondents like to join organized tours, while 28.5% usually go hiking alone and only 13.9% enjoy going with their family members.

Table 5.2: Hiking experiences of respondents

<i>Hiking experience</i>	<i>Valid %</i>
Yes	93.8
No	6.2
<i>Frequency</i>	
Once or above per week	20.4
2-3 times per month	38.0
Once per month	18.2
Once in 3 months	11.7
Once in 6 or more months	11.7
<i>Companion</i>	
Family member(s)	13.9
Friends	87.6
Colleague	11.7
Alone	28.5
Joining tour	48.2
Others	2.9
<i>Type-difficulty</i>	
Easy	14.0
Moderate	57.7
Strenuous	45.3

Challenging	41.6
<i>Type-activity</i>	
Hill walking for pleasure	58.1
Mountainous adventure	52.9
Stream trekking	31.6
Outlying island	12.5
Others	10.3

The respondents tend to take trips with a certain level of difficulty. Over half (57.7%) of the samples prefer moderate trips, 45.3% like joining strenuous trips, and 41.6% join more challenging trips. This probably relates to their hiking experience, since most of the respondents tend to go hiking quite frequently (58.4% go hiking at least two to three times per month) and people with more experience are likely to try more difficult trips. For the types of hiking destinations, hill walking for pleasure (58.1%) and mountainous adventure (52.9%) are the most popular activities indicated by the respondents. Stream trekking activities are relatively challenging, but only 31.6% of the sample enjoys such activities.

Table 5.3: Obstacles preventing people from joining hiking activities

<b>Obstacles-hiking activities</b>	<b>Non-participant (%)</b>	<b>Participant (%)</b>
No time	66.7	84.0
Not interested in the activities	55.6	6.4
No companion	66.7	46.8
Know little about the information	66.7	13.8
Health problems	11.1	21.3
Others	0	6.4

The obstacles preventing people from joining hiking activities differ among respondents. For participants, shortage of time (84%) is the predominant obstacle and 46.8% reported difficulty in finding a companion (Table 5.3). For non participants, although over half of the respondents (55.6%) are not interested in hiking activities, it is not the leading factor. Instead, shortage of time (66.7%), difficult in finding a companion

(66.7%), and little knowledge about the activities (66.7%) are the major obstacles preventing people from participating in hiking. These results reflect the fact that respondents can and do have more than one reason for participation in hiking activities. In addition, interests may be affected by their previous experiences, as some people loose interest in hiking activities because of their negative experiences in the past, while some are not interested based on their perception without any previous experience.

### **Expectation on Psychological Benefits**

The levels of expectation of psychological benefits on hiking activities reflect the aspects that people cannot achieve from other activities in their daily life. The most important outcomes they perceived (e.g. enjoying nature, peace and quietness) are representing what they actually lack or cannot benefit from when participating in other activities. From the survey results (Table 5.4), it shows that the natural environment is a vital element in outdoor recreation and hiking. Among the fourteen psychological benefits, enjoying nature and viewing scenic beauty are ranked as the most important expected outcomes, with a mean score of 4.51. Physical pressure (4.29), fitness (4.17) and learning about nature and culture (4.15) are some other important outcomes expected and indicated by the respondents. In contrast, increasing creativity (3.06), strengthening family ties (3.15), and developing leadership skills (3.25) are the least important outcomes that were expected by the participants. Consequently, satisfaction is mostly derived as in biological needs, self esteem and skills development, etc.

Table 5.4: Individual expectation and satisfaction of benefits

<b>Benefits/Outcomes</b>	<b>Expectation</b>	<b>Satisfaction</b>
<b>Biological needs</b>		
Enjoy nature / view the scenic beauty	4.51	4.39



Escape physical pressure (crowds, noise)	4.29	4.27
Keep/get physically fit	4.17	4.22
Escape personal and social pressure	3.83	4.00
<b>Stimulation</b>		
Experience excitement	3.46	3.57
<b>Relationship Development</b>		
Meet people with same interest / new people	3.80	3.86
Strengthen Family Ties	3.15	3.14
<b>Self-esteem and Development</b>		
Learn more about the nature and culture	4.15	4.11
Develop skills, abilities, endurance	3.98	4.11
Experience/discover new things or routes	3.89	3.89
Gain a sense of self-confidence	3.53	3.85
Develop leadership skill	3.25	3.32
<b>Fulfillment</b>		
Increase creativity	3.06	3.07
Development personal/spiritual values	3.52	3.55

Note: A 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) is applied to measure the strength of hikers opinion on 14 potential benefits that may be achieved from the activities.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Characteristics and Trends of Participants

Recalling the travel career ladder (PEARCE, 1988), the psychological benefits can be substituted into the five levels of: biological needs (enjoy nature, escape physical, personal and social pressure, and fitness), level of stimulation (experience excitement), relationship development (strengthen family ties and meeting people with same interest), self-esteem and development (gain a sense of self-confidence, develop skills, learn about

nature and culture, and discover new things), and fulfillment (being creative and develop personal values). These are indicated in Table 5.4.

Out of the five levels, the psychological outcomes belonging to the biological needs generally have higher mean scores than the others. These outcomes are the basic needs of people (KRAUS, 2001), especially for those who live in big cities like Hong Kong. Most people have little chance to have contact with nature in their daily routine. Therefore, the desire to escape from pressures and get closer to the natural environment is high (MARAFA, 2003). As the respondents tend to be younger, the desire for strengthening family ties is relatively lower. These trends can also be identified if the results of expectation are divided according to the age categories (Table 5.5). At the higher levels, there are different types of self-development needs and fulfillments. Some people just want to play and relax while some may seek to satisfy higher level needs. The needs between younger people and the older ones even between single and married couples show some differences. Respondents under 21 years old have a relatively higher demand for escaping from physical pressure, having excitement, meeting people with the same interest or making new friends, developing leadership skills, learning about nature and culture, discovering new things and increasing creativity. The youngsters are the group of people who are full of curiosity and they have higher intention to learn and discover new things. Additionally, they find it easier to make friends with others. Hence, leisure and recreation is believed to lead to improved social mobility (BULL, *et al.*, 2003) for the youth by opening up new horizons of awareness (KRAUS, 2001). In this study, the lowest score is family togetherness as most respondents choose to go hiking with friends. The youngsters mostly want to be with their friends therefore, family gathering is

probably not a major purpose of going hiking. In addition, they like something new and exciting and they are more willing to learn what they think is interesting.

Table 5.5.: Mean scores of satisfaction derived within different age groups

<b>Psychological Benefits</b>	<b>20 or below</b>	<b>21-30</b>	<b>31-40</b>	<b>41-50</b>	<b>51 or above*</b>
No. of cases	13	72	33	15	NA
Personal and social pressure	3.77	<u>3.96</u>	3.70	3.47	
Physical Pressure	<u>4.46</u>	4.40	4.30	3.67	
Fitness	3.92	<u>4.24</u>	4.16	3.67	
Family ties	2.85	3.09	<u>3.33</u>	3.20	
Meet people	<u>4.00</u>	3.81	3.88	3.53	
Excitement	3.62	<u>3.63</u>	3.34	2.93	
Self-confident	3.38	<u>3.57</u>	3.44	3.53	
Skills, abilities, endurance	4.08	<u>4.10</u>	3.78	3.80	
Leadership	<u>3.38</u>	3.30	3.12	3.00	
Enjoy nature	4.46	<u>4.54</u>	4.24	4.13	
Learn nature and culture	<u>4.15</u>	4.13	4.03	3.93	
Discover new things or routes	<u>3.92</u>	3.83	3.85	3.60	
Creativity	<u>3.15</u>	3.10	2.79	3.13	
Personal / spiritual	3.23	<u>3.69</u>	3.55	3.27	

\* There is only one case in the group of 51 years or above.

The underlined scores in each row represent the highest score on that benefit as indicated by the age group.

In the group of 21 - 30 years old, the respondents have comparatively higher demand on escaping personal and social pressure. They are also interested in fitness, excitement, self-confidence, developing skills, abilities and endurance, enjoying nature as well as developing personal and spiritual values. People in this age group have started to bear more responsibility such as the pressure from their jobs, too many commitments to work, and the burden of their family. They also have less chance to do exercise unlike in the schools so naturally, there are desires for bodily reconstruction. Moreover, some of

the people in this age group have just graduated from school and some might have been working for a few years. Therefore, personal development such as skills and self-confidence are still important to this group of people.

For those between 31 and 40 years, family plays an increasingly important role in their daily life. They tend to have relatively higher demands for strengthening family ties through outdoor and hiking activities. Respondents between 41 and 50 are less demanding. Their desires for most of the psychological outcomes are comparatively lower among the four age groups studied.

### **Perception and Satisfaction from Hiking Activities**

In most activities particularly travel and outdoor recreation, assessing satisfaction is an important task in identifying the extent of the quality of life sought by a given population. Where participation is organized for a group of people, the quality of the outcome is what continues to draw people to such organized activities. Looking at the means of expectation and satisfaction in table 4, the mean scores of expectation and satisfaction show no significant difference. Most of the psychological needs can be achieved through participating in hiking activities except for enjoying nature.

Having analyzed the data using SPSS for Windows, the mean scores of expectation and satisfaction are compared by using the paired-t test, and the result is shown in Table 5.6. The results do not show a very clear gap between individual's expectation and satisfaction. From the significant levels of the pairs ( $P < 0.05$ ), they show no significant difference between the expectation and satisfaction except for physical

pressure (-0.024), family ties (-0.017), enjoying nature (-0.118) and learning about nature and culture (-0.042) that showed negative mean differences.

Table 5.6.: Comparisons between expectation and satisfaction of the benefits by paired t-test

Perceived benefit	Paired Differences		T	DF	*Sig.
	Mean	SD			
Personal and social pressure	0.171	0.981	1.930	122	0.056
Physical Pressure	-0.024	0.704	-0.383	123	0.703
Fitness	0.058	0.675	0.943	120	0.347
Family ties	-0.017	0.516	-0.352	120	0.725
Meet people	0.056	0.613	1.021	24	0.309
Excitement	0.114	0.692	1.824	122	0.071
Self-confident	0.121	0.682	1.976	123	0.050
Skills, abilities, endurance	0.131	0.692	2.094	121	0.038
Leadership	0.074	0.621	1.317	120	0.190
Enjoy nature	-0.118	0.490	-2.618	118	0.010
Learn nature and culture	-0.042	0.585	-0.780	119	0.437
Discover new things or routes	0.000	0.757	0.000	122	1.000
Creativity	0.008	0.647	0.139	122	0.889
Personal / spiritual	0.033	0.677	0.533	122	0.595

\*Significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Although enjoying nature and escaping from physical pressure received the highest scores as far as evaluation and satisfaction is concerned, it is clear that individuals cannot satisfy these two needs through hiking activities. In fact, hiking brings people closer to the natural environment (KYLE *et al.*, 2003). However, whether people can enjoy nature and escape from pressures highly depend on the quality of the environment where they hike. These qualities include naturalness, solitude, landscape, vegetation status, degree of degradation and the types of environment or facilities that are offered. Also, some other factors like the levels of demand and the influence by other holiday

makers will also affect hikers' experience and consequently their satisfaction (HULL; STEWART, 1995, CHHETRI *et al.*, 2004).

The interests of people and their needs are diverse. Indeed, different types of hiking trails, surrounding vegetation and landscape along the trails would provide different levels of satisfaction for hikers. In addition, the meaning of 'enjoyment' highly varies among hikers. For example, to some people safety is important in enhancing enjoyment whereas some would enjoy a challenging and unexpected environment. Besides, environmental degradation due to human activities or natural processes will similarly have negative effect on enjoyment and satisfaction. For instance, resource impacts like soil erosion, loss of vegetation cover, damage of trees, and damage caused by hill fires are some reasons that could affect enjoyment (CHHETRI *et al.*, 2004). As more and more people are interested in outdoor recreation, the countryside is packed with people during the weekends, giving rise to the problem of crowding. Intensive human activities may generate problems like noise, littering and impact on natural resources. Many people go to the countryside for the purpose of getting away from the crowd and seeking a quiet and natural place to take a mental rest. However, it is common to find the countryside packed with people making it difficult sometimes to find a quiet place at some popular destinations. Although the relationship between hiker satisfaction and the natural environment is beyond the scope of this study, it is suggested that further studies can be done to examine this issue. Proper resource and visitor management would help to minimize the visitors' impact on the environment and eradicate conflicts between users, thus, enhancing visitors' enjoyment and satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the perceived benefits and expected satisfaction of hikers in Hong Kong. Although perceived benefits of hiking is place specific (HULL; STEWART, 1995; KYLE *et al.*, 2003), satisfaction and benefits derived can be comparable to sought benefits elsewhere.

This research is concerned with people's perception, behavior and attitude in deriving satisfaction from hiking activities. The validity and usefulness of the results highly relies on the information from respondents which depends on their own powers of recall and their honesty in responding. As leisure studies are dealing with human beings in an ever-changing social situation, any research finding will relate only to the subjects involved, at the time and place the research is carried out (VEAL 2006). Therefore, the research findings may not be appropriate to make comparisons with similar research done elsewhere.

However, human values and attitudes are changing spatially and temporally. They may be affected by global trends, local socioeconomic factors and personal experiences. To this end, continuous research is needed to examine such changes. Although this work has added to the numerous literatures describing and explaining the changing trends related to hiking and outdoor recreation, problems relating to human beings and their participation in such activities remain complex, especially as it relates to participation in leisure and recreation activities.

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