

A Comparison of Camper Psychological Well-being in Taiwan

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The literature on psychological well-being has progressed rapidly in the past few decades. The recent studies have taken huge steps in understanding the factors influencing psychological well-being. However, few studies of this line have focused on the context of campers. Camping is one of the most popular outdoor recreation activities in western countries; however it has not been the case in Taiwan. Understanding the factors such as visitor psychological well-being can help recreation managers tailor the services to meet the needs for their diverse clientele. The purpose of this study was to explore the differences of psychological well-being among campers who were from different living circles, travel distances, regions and cultural groups in Taiwan.

Psychological well-being served as the dependent variable in this study. Psychological well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives and these evaluations may be in the form of cognition or in the form of affect. The cognitive part is an information based appraisal of one's life; that is, when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about one's satisfaction with life as a whole. The affective part is a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings such as frequency with which people experience pleasant/unpleasant moods in reaction to their lives. There were four independent variables in this study including living circle, travel distance, region and cultural group. Based on previous cross-cultural research, I hypothesize that campers from different living circles, travel distances, regions and cultural groups have different psychological well-being.

In 2013 and 2014, campers to the Wuling National Forest Recreation Area and Xitou Nature Education Area in Taiwan were surveyed. I intended to include two settings, one considerably remote and the other closer to urban area, to better represent diverse recreation locations. The researchers stayed at the Wuling and Xitou campgrounds and asked if the campers encountered were willing to take a 15-minute survey. Overall, 797 campers were approached and 771 campers responded to the surveys, resulting in a 97% response rate and 701 valid surveys.

In the questionnaire, there were 23 items to measure psychological well-being. Exploratory factor analyses were used to reduce the data and find possible factors from the psychological well-being items. Eventually, 5 factors were identified for the psychological well-being measures. The validity and reliability analysis showed the factors derived possessed acceptable measurement criteria. I asked hikers' residential zip code and, accordingly, calculated hikers' living circles, travel distances, and regions. For testing the psychological well-being differences, the results showed that 3 out of 5, 2 out of 5 and 1 out of 5 psychological well-being factors differed with living circles, regions and travel distance, respectively. The cultural group was not significantly different from camper psychological well-being.

The findings have implications for recreation management. Managers may tailor their services to meet the diverse backgrounds of their campers. For instance, this study found that campers who lived closer and travelled shorter distance to the campground had higher levels of psychological well-being. Campers from the northern region of Taiwan however perceived lower levels of psychological well-being. This is especially true for the warm relationship and new experience aspects of psychological well-being. Accordingly, I suggest that managers may provide more campgrounds closer to campers' residential areas, and provide a setting with welcome, kind, friendly, decent, dedicated, modern, fresh and unique service atmosphere so as to promote the psychological well-being of their clientele. Discussion and suggestions for future research of this line are also provided.

Keywords: psychological well-being, living circle, travel distance, region, cultural group, camper