

Understanding leisure boredom and risk behaviour during free time in adolescence

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There has been very little research investigating leisure boredom and risk behaviour among adolescents in South Africa. This paper presents a qualitative study of adolescents' perceptions of leisure boredom and risk behaviour. Participants documented their experiences during free time through the use of photographs. This was followed by focus group discussions with the participants. Participants perceived that they were bored in their free time mainly because they had nothing to do. The low socio-economic environment in which they lived contributed to occupational deprivation and imbalance in their free time, maintaining or 'trapping' the adolescents within the situation and contributing to feelings of boredom. The result was that they spent large periods of time hanging out on street corners or in backyards, which provided some form of diversion because it allowed them to socialise, but inevitably this pursuit led to boredom. The young people perceived boredom as being part of life, although it was 'dangerous' because it very often led to risky behaviour (or negative leisure pursuits). In conclusion, the study showed that leisure is an occupational concern for adolescents living in socially impoverished environments, due to the occupational deprivation and imbalance occurring within their free time, which results in feelings of boredom. This study focuses attention on leisure boredom as a factor contributing to risk behaviour in adolescents. Expanding knowledge in this area is useful for individuals and organizations concerned with adolescent health, education and development.