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The Benefits of Travel: Family and Relationships Review of Literature

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this review was to examine existent research on the benefits of travel applicable to working adults, couples, families and extended family members. While travel is often perceived as an outlet for relaxation, education and a chance to escape the mundane, recent research suggests travel has several deeper benefits for families, relationships, and the individual. Findings from the extensive review of literature revealed that tourism provides positive benefits for adults, children and couples. Time allotted for family bonding is decreasing, likely attributed to increased career demands and changing family structures. Several studies cited this, and showed travel as a means to improve communications within a relationship, reduce the possibility of divorce, strengthen lifelong family bonds and increase a sense of well-being in adults and children. Gaps in the existent research were noted, and potential suggestions for future research are addressed.

Keywords: *benefits of tourism, relationship benefits, family benefits, family travel*

INTRODUCTION

For generations, a highlight of childhood memories included the family vacation. However, amid an unstable economy, and increasing workloads, Americans are dedicating more time and energy to their careers, often leading to increases in stress and decreases in family time. A vacation deprivation study by Expedia (2011) ranked US workers 18th of the 20 countries surveyed in vacation days granted and used. The study revealed that Americans cite work constraints and financial concerns as reasons they don't use their allotted vacation days. Conversely, Accenture (2012) published survey results that revealed 42 percent of respondents sacrificed time with family due to their careers, while 58 percent said this has negatively impacted their family life. This trend highlights a need for resources beneficial to the enhancement of family bonding amid constraints. Those in the tourism field have recognized this need and have begun to increase their focus on how vacations can be viewed as a resource that can build relationships, and increase family bonds (Kozack and Duman, 2012; Crompton and Keown, 2009; West and Merriam, 2009; Shaw, Havitz, and Delemere, 2008).

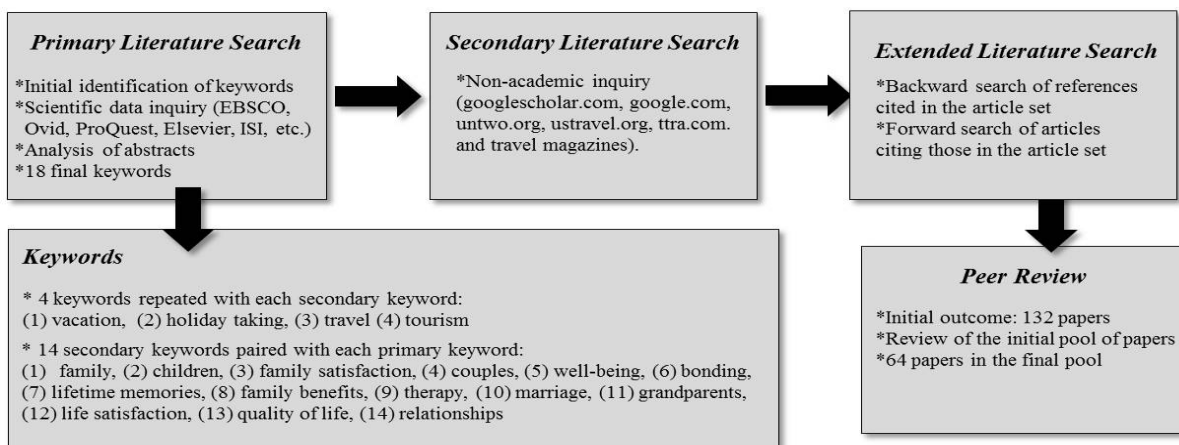
The purpose of this review was to examine existent research on the benefits of travel applicable to working adults, couples, families and extended family members and identify gaps

for future research. The review focused on three main hypotheses: H₁: Travel creates stronger family bonds/connections, lifetime memories, H₂: Travel maintains or improves the quality of family relationships, strengthens marriages, reduces the likelihood of divorce, and H₃: Travel increases individual and total family happiness, satisfaction with regard to family relationships. Finally, this study offers implications for future research on the potential benefits travel may provide to increase family cohesiveness, relationship satisfaction, and overall family satisfaction.

METHODS

Utilizing guidance from Webster and Watson (2002), a literature review was conducted to build a foundation for which to address the gaps in existent research, which may provide direction for the advancement of the study of tourism benefits. Primary literature was obtained by searching 42 online databases including the primary five, EBSCO, Ovid, ProQuest, Elsevier, and ISI. An expert panel was used to generate initial keywords to utilize. After multiple searches, four key terms appeared most relevant, and were then each paired with 20 secondary relevant terms. Keywords were further reduced to 14 secondary terms producing the most optimal results. The four key words repeated with each of the secondary words were holiday taking, travel, tourism and vacation. The 14 relevant secondary words were family, children, family satisfaction, couples, well-being, bonding, lifetime memories, family benefits, marriage, therapy, quality of life, relationships, grandparents, and life satisfaction. Thus, a search of each database listed previously included a search with the words travel and family, travel and children, travel and family satisfaction etc., followed by a search of holiday taking and family, holiday taking and children, holiday taking and family satisfaction, and so forth. The keywords were used in different combinations in different fields (title, abstract and topic).

Figure 1
Literature Review Process



A secondary literature search was carried out to obtain non-academic publications such as consumer trade articles, travel association publications and public and non-profit organization information not available or overlooked in the primary literature search. The following websites were searched: www.googlescholar.com, www.google.com, www.unwto.org, www.wto.org, www.ustravel.org, www.ttra.com, and various travel, leisure and family-focused magazines.

Finally, backward research were conducted to review material cited in the complied article set, and forward research completed to provide a review of material citing the research in the previously complied article set. The literature searches initially yielded 132 journal articles, papers and non-academic resources. After review of all articles by three graduate students, and a reliability of sources check by two Full Professors with expertise in this area, 64 resources were deemed relevant to this research and inclusive of useable empirical, theoretical and practical information. The majority of resources were recent; 37 published since 2006, 17 published between 2000-2005, 4 published in the 1990s, 4 in the 1980s and 2 in 1970s. In terms of geographical representation, the majority of articles reviewed came from US published journals and non-academic sources. Several others pertaining to Asian and European studies from international or foreign journals and non-academic sources were also included. All articles utilized were published in English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hypothesis One: Travel creates stronger family connection and lifetime memories

The research on the benefits of travel dates back to 1968, when Klausner first noted positive family and personal effects of prolonged vacations. Goodrich (1977) conducted research into the specific positive benefits of tourism and vacations with empirical studies of international travelers. More recently, works have revealed positive effects that recreation and leisure activities can have on family cohesion (Hornberger, Zabriskie, Freeman, 2010; Poff, 2010; Zabriskie, 2003; Zabriskie and McCormick, 2001; Holman and Jacquart, 1988; and Smith, Snyder and Monsama, 1988). As leisure activities are a major component of family vacations, and a leading reason for travel, research from the field of family studies and leisure could potentially be applicable to the benefits of travel for families.

Participation in leisure activities between parents and children has been found to enhance family relationships and perpetuate family cohesion between parent and child (Agate, et al., 2009; Zabriskie and McCormick, 2001). These shared activities by family members can create a unique experience that leads to an increase in bonding, connectedness and attachment. This can lead to children learning to share and get along better with others, and create loyalty within the family and build positive communications (Lehto, et.al., 2009; Shaw, 2008; Smith, 1997).

This research focused on family bonds built through vacation time, however, several studies have begun to research the opposite effect; when vacations create stress and tension. During a vacation, people spend considerably more time together than in their daily lives. Too much time together has the potential to lead to negative outcomes and lackluster memories of said vacation. To combat negative perceptions of family travel, research focusing on the differences between what children and parents seek most from a family vacation and how this affects vacation decision making is emerging, but suggests a need for further research on travel motives and how motives effect vacation satisfaction levels. (Kozak and Duman, 2012; Kozak, 2010; Lehto et al, and Agate et al, 2009; Blichfeldt, 2008; Gram, 2005).

Hypothesis Two: Travel maintains or improves the quality of relationships, strengthens marriages, reduces the likelihood of divorce

With many adults working longer hours and taking on multiple jobs, relationship dynamics are also changing, and ultimately the amount of time couples spend together is changing (Hellerstein and Morill, 2011; Bianchi, 2011; Amato, Booth, Johnson, and Rogers, 2009). Thus, resources which foster positive relationships, provide a break from routine obligations and daily stressors, help increase relationship and overall life satisfaction levels, and explain relationship dissatisfaction, are likely becoming increasingly more important. Research by Lounsbury and Hoopes (1986) was among the first to quantify the positive changes in work and domestic satisfaction following a leisure vacation. Several empirical studies since have revealed a positive relationship between leisure activities and marital satisfaction (Newman and Newman, 2008; Presser, 2000; Holman and Jacquart, 1988; Hill, 1988). Holman and Jacquart (1988, p. 76) found that “leisure with a great deal of communications is important to maintaining the wife’s marital satisfaction when she is faced with a large number of stressful events”. Hill (1988) concluded that increased amounts of shared leisure were correlated with a strong reduction in the probability of divorce or separation. Future research could focus on measuring vacation as a variable of leisure time to justify whether these results could be applied to the benefits of vacations for couples.

More recently, several studies have revealed couples traveling together were more connected and intimate with their partner, improved their relationship when they returned home, and improved their communication skills during a vacation (Survey Says 2012; Brown, 2010; Kuno 2010; Chikani, Reding, Gunderson and McCarty, 2005). These studies did not address the fade out effect of the “vacation high”, nor did they consider if varying lengths or types of vacation affected satisfaction levels for couples after vacation. Future research could investigate these variables and the possible impacts they contribute to relationship satisfaction.

Finally, practitioners in the field of travel have recently begun to examine the trend of couples traveling without their significant other on girlfriend’s getaways or “mancations,” as a means to potentially increase satisfaction with their leisure choices and relationship satisfaction (Bond, 2012, Cavallari, 2008). Academic research has yet to build on this research by examining the relationship satisfaction levels of adults who have taken vacations independent of their significant other and the motives for doing so to explore the possible contribution this behavior may have on relationships.

Hypothesis Three: Travel increases individual and total family happiness, and increases well-being and overall quality of life (QOL).

Numerous studies have found travel to be one way to provide a break from the routines of life, and can also lead to increases in quality of life satisfaction (Dolnicar, Yanamandram, and Cliff, 2012; de Bloom, Geurts, Taris, Sonnentag, de Weerth, and Kompier, 2010; Fritz and Sonnentag, 2006; Strauss-Blasche and Marktl, 2000; Crompton, 1979). Research has also cited travel as a contributing factor of reduced work and domestic stress as well as increasing family-life satisfaction and physical health (Sirgy, Kruger, Lee and Yu, 2011; Bupa, 2011; de Bloom et al, 2010; Gilbert and Abdullah, 2004; Strauss-Blasche et al, 2002; Neal, Sirgy and Uysal, 1999).

Adding to this research is the emerging trend of “Grandtravel,” or Generational travel, to include extended family traveling together or grandparents traveling with their grandchildren. The U.S. Travel Industry Association estimates at least 5 million US family vacations a year now span three generations, with grandparents often paying the bill (Hemlock, 2011). As baby boomers become one of the most marketable sectors for the travel industry, a gap exists for future research to investigate the extended health and well-being benefits travel for seniors can provide, while also addressing the travel constraints an aging population may face.

IMPLICATIONS

Of the 64 useable resources, 22 were obtained outside of academic research. The majority of those were focused on the benefits of travel for children (separated from the overall benefits to the family), and benefits for couples, in which the resources were obtained from travel magazines, destination publications, and publications from field representatives. Overall, while prevalent, academia is lacking areas of research to identify the benefits of travel particularly for adults and couples, thus suggesting a wide-open area for future research.

In researching the benefits of travel for families and adult couples, it became evident that empirical academic research focused on American travelers is further required to better understand the hypotheses that: 1) travel creates stronger family bonds, and 2) that travel could reduce the likelihood of divorce. The majority of academic articles used for this review studied those living and traveling outside the United States. Of the information pertaining to the likelihood that travel may reduce divorce and improve relationships, the majority of research has been focused on industry programs operating outside the US, which presently lack evidence to determine the program’s successes/failures. It is thus suggested that future studies be conducted to empirically examine the effects that travel has on family bonds and relationships, and in particular divorce rates. Research on these topics could provide the boost employers and employees need to increase the amount of vacation time granted and ease apprehension to use vacation days and more importantly, help families have better relationships.

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