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Effects of physical–based serious and casual leisure activities on prisoners in Türkiye: a grounded theory study

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ABSTRACT

Leisure activities are particularly employed as a significant intervention tool in the rehabilitation of prisoners within correctional institutions. Primary purpose of this study is to provide a theoretical framework that explains the effects of physical – based leisure activities for prisoners and the secondary purpose is to contribute to the understanding of how the effects derived from leisure activities differ according to the type of activity (serious and casual). Research design is based on a qualitative research method: the grounded theory approach. Participants consist of 19 prisoners (mean age = 33.3), selected through criterion sampling, a purposive sampling technique. The effects of leisure activities organised by the prison administration are classified into three main categories: basic, psychological, and growth effects. These effects vary depending on the type of participation. While casual leisure activities provide basic and psychological effects, serious leisure activities are found to offer more comprehensive effects, including growth effects. The findings propose a new effects model that underscores the critical role of physical – based leisure activities in enhancing the prison environment and supporting prisoner rehabilitation, thereby drawing attention to the extensive advantages of leisure involvement.

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Grounded theory; serious leisure; prisoner; effects; health

Introduction

Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) data show that the number of prisoners in Türkiye has increased systematically since 2011 (TurkStat, 2021), while Human Rights Association (IHD) Central Prisons Committee reports that the number of prisoners in Türkiye increased dramatically in 2018 and 2019, reaching the most crowded period in the country's history (IHD, 2020). In 2020, according to penal statistics published by the Council of Europe, Türkiye ranked first among European countries in terms of the number of detainees and convicts (Aebi & Tiago, 2021). As wards have become more crowded, health services in Türkiye have become inadequate in terms of quality and capacity (IHD, 2020).

Several studies assessing the physical and psychological conditions of prisoners have stated that they have a higher prevalence of psychological and physical disorders than the

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general population (Russell et al., 2022). Depending on their living conditions and experiences, prisoners have physical and mental health problems before entering prison (Segal et al., 2018), but very few of them have reported their diagnosis and treatment (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). Pre-incarceration health risks are psychological, due to limitation of contact with the outside world, social exclusion, special architecture of prison facilities (Morris & Worrall, 2014), deprivation of heterosexual contact, sexual assault by other prisoners (Nkambule et al., 2023), access to health care, nutrition, limited physical activity (PA) (MacLean et al., 2022), smoking in prison (Plugge & Leclerc, 2021), infectious diseases etc. are effect on prisoners' psychological and physical health. Prisoners with poor mental and physical health are more likely to abuse others than healthy individuals (Semenza & Grosholz, 2019). In addition, it has been reported that prisoners with poor mental and physical health find it difficult to reintegrate into social life after release, that neglect of health problems during incarceration leads to increased social exclusion after leaving prison (Pękala-Wojciechowska et al., 2021), and that there are strong relations between mental health and incarceration (Pat et al., 2021).

The problems experienced by prisoners are not limited to physical and psychological health problems. In Türkiye, as in many countries around the world, prisoners have low levels of education (TurkStat, 2021); they are mostly at the economic poverty line (Demez et al., 2017); and it is stated that the individual who was poor before entering prison will return to his/her poor social environment after release (Maschi & Leibowitz, 2017). In addition, it is reported that prisoners do not have the vital skills to cope with issues such as managing human relations and meeting the need for housing (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

Considering the economic, security-related, health, aesthetic, and other benefits of leisure activities (LA) for individuals (Sirgy et al., 2017), such activities are regarded as critically important for mitigating the adverse conditions outlined above (McMay & Cotronea, 2015). However, despite a widespread belief among prison administrators, academics, and other sector professionals that LA contribute to the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals, the empirical evidence supporting this assumption remains limited (Gallant et al., 2015). Previous studies in the literature have primarily examined the effects of Physical-based Leisure Activities (P-BLA) intervention programs (e.g. Fight with Insight, parkrun, and boxing) on prisoners (Campana et al., 2023; Gallant et al., 2015; Martinez-Merino et al., 2019; Meek & Lewis, 2014; O'Toole et al., 2018; Pedlar et al., 2008), as well as their effects on prison staff (Moscoso-Sánchez et al., 2017). In addition, research has also focused on the impacts of alternative P-BLA, such as Prison Gardening and Horticulture Programs (Fisk & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2024), along with vocational education programs, on prisoners.

These studies demonstrate that P-BLA interventions reduce psychological problems among prisoners, such as depression, anxiety, and aggression, while simultaneously strengthening coping mechanisms by enhancing social skills, fitness levels, and sleep quality. Regular PA programs have been shown to be effective in reducing cardiovascular risk factors and improving overall well-being (Gallant et al., 2015; O'Toole et al., 2018). Similarly, PA has been reported to decrease aggressive behaviours and to enhance self-esteem and locus of control, thereby supporting prisoners' adaptation within the prison environment as well as their reintegration into society following release (Tomescu et al., 2024). As is evident, the majority of existing studies tend to focus on the specific

outcomes of sport or P-BLA intervention programs. However, research adopting a holistic and comparative perspective on the effects of diverse P-BLA– such as sports, workshops, and courses – offered within the prison context remains notably limited.

Employing a grounded theory approach, the present study aims to address this theoretical gap by comparatively examining a broad spectrum of P-BLA, including sports, workshops, and courses, and by developing an original theoretical framework that explicates their effects on prisoners. In this research, Stebbins' Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP) is used to classify P-BLA, while the effects of these activities on prisoners are analysed through motivation-oriented approaches, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Alderfer's Existence – Relatedness – Growth (ERG) theory. Furthermore, Sirgy's Leisure Well-Being Model (LW-BM) serves as a key conceptual framework for interpreting the implications of these activities for individual well-being and quality of life. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based insights for prison administrators, policymakers, and practitioners in the planning, diversification, and development of rehabilitation-oriented P-BLA, while also offering a valuable theoretical perspective for researchers working in this field.

Theorical framework

Serious and casual leisure

In the leisure studies literature, Robert A. Stebbins' SLP (1977, 1980, 1982, 1992) provides an important theoretical framework for understanding individuals' modes of participation in LA. Stebbins divides LA into two categories: serious and casual.

Stebbins (1982, 1997, 2007, 2008) defines serious leisure activities (SLA) as 'the systematic and long-term pursuit of amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activities that are substantial, interesting, and fulfilling, and that require special knowledge, skills, and experience, during which participants develop a "leisure career".' He identifies six distinctive characteristics that separate serious from casual leisure activities (CLA): (1) perseverance in the activity, (2) development of a leisure career, (3) significant personal effort, (4) durable and tangible benefits, (5) creation of and involvement in a social world, and (6) strong identification with the activity (Shen & Yarnal, 2010; Stebbins, 1982, 2007). Perhaps the most salient feature of SLA is the participants' effort to progress and achieve a sense of career development within their chosen activities. Participants in SLA are generally categorised into three groups: amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers. Amateurs are individuals engaged in the arts, sciences, or sports who may interact with professionals and follow a systematic process of development (Stebbins, 1982). Hobbyists are individuals who pursue an activity with deep commitment but without the intention of becoming professionals, engaging voluntarily (Stebbins, 1980, 1982). Volunteers, in contrast, are individuals who contribute to society with a motivation to produce social benefit rather than financial gain (Stebbins, 2013).

CLA, as the counterpart of serious leisure, is defined as 'an immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived activity, requiring little or no special training to enjoy' (Stebbins, 1997, 2007). Such activities are hedonically oriented, demand only superficial involvement and low responsibility, and are often engaged in spontaneously. Stebbins (1997) classifies CLA into eight categories: (1) play, (2) relaxation, (3) active entertainment, (4) passive entertainment, (5) sociable conversation, (6) sensory stimulation, (7)

casual volunteering, and (8) pleasurable aerobic activity. It is essential to emphasize that a particular LA may represent serious leisure for one individual while constituting casual leisure for another. Within the SLP framework (Stebbins, 1982, 1997, 2007), the classification of P-BLA enables a systematic examination of the experiences and outcomes of prisoners, which vary depending on the nature of the activities in which they participate. Moreover, grounding the conceptualization of the effects of P-BLA on prisoners in Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs, Alderfer's (1972) Existence – Relatedness – Growth (ERG) theory, and LW-BMdeveloped by Sirgy et al. (2017) provides a more holistic and theoretically grounded understanding of the role of P-BLA in the prison context, as well as of prisoners' social, psychological, and personal development.

One of the most influential models in theories of human motivation, Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs proposes a five-stage progression ranging from physiological needs to self-actualisation. Although Maslow's model has been widely applied across various contexts, including education and health, Mannell and Kleiber (1997) emphasise that individuals seek not only survival but also meaning, growth, and connectedness through specific activities. In this regard, Maslow's theory has been frequently referenced by leisure scholars and is regarded as an important framework for understanding which needs individuals pursue, when they pursue them, and through which activities.

Alderfer's (1972) ERG theory reconceptualises Maslow's hierarchy into three dynamic categories of needs – existence, relatedness, and growth – allowing for more flexible and context-sensitive interpretations by suggesting that needs may be pursued simultaneously or regressively rather than in a strict linear sequence. The ERG theory has been employed as a theoretical framework to examine individuals' needs and motivations across diverse domains, ranging from education to consumer behaviour (Logeswaran & Muniandy, 2019; Yang, 2011).

In prison environments, where basic physiological and safety needs are largely externally regulated, P-BLA become one of the primary contexts through which individuals can pursue relatedness and growth needs. At this point, the LW-BM developed by Sirgy et al. (2017) provides a structured framework for understanding how P-BLA contribute to well-being by fulfilling various need domains and conceptually aligns with the models proposed by Maslow (1970) and Alderfer (1972). In this context, the study theoretically grounds the effects of P-BLA (serious and casual) within classical needs-based psychological approaches, while simultaneously integrating contemporary leisure well-being frameworks, thereby contributing greater theoretical depth to the leisure literature.

Method

Research design

In this study, the grounded theory principles were followed. Grounded theory studies are generally used in cases where a new theory is put forward, an existing theory is tested in another context, or the issues that are thought to be missing in the theory are studied, and it aims to provide clarity, flexibility and certainty to the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). In this study, we preferred the Glaserian approach based on realistic positivist philosophy.

Participants

The participants were selected in two stages from inmates at the Antalya L-Type correctional facility. First, using the criterion sampling technique, which is one of the purposive sampling methods, inmates identified by the prison administration as participants in LA – either as serious or casual leisure participants – were selected. Considering that an individual may participate in more than one activity, inmates were asked to conduct a self-assessment by indicating the specific activities they engaged in as either serious or casual leisure. For this purpose, they were requested to respond to the following statements by inserting the activity name: participation in the . . . . . activity; (1) requires considerable effort to develop knowledge, skills, and abilities; (2) necessitates coping with and overcoming challenges, obstacles, or certain problems; (3) enables gradual progress and observable development within the activity. Participants who answered 'yes' to all items were classified as SLA participants, while those who responded 'no' to any of the items were considered CLA participants. Prisoners participated in workshops and courses as SLA, while participating in sports activities as CLA. Further details regarding the selection of prisoners are presented in Figure 1.

Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 42 years, with a mean age of 33.3. Further details regarding participant characteristics are presented in Table 1.

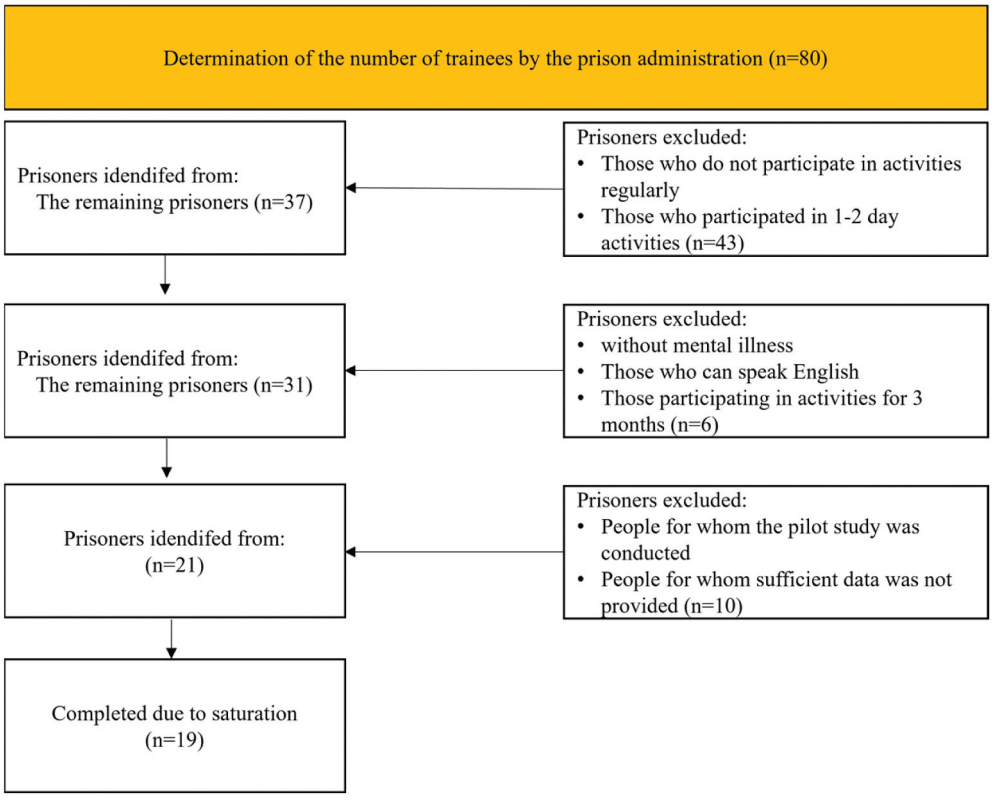


Figure 1. The process of identifying participants.

Table 1. Information about the participants.

Participants	Age	Education Level	Marital Status	Time Spent in prison (Month)	Number of Imprisonment	Activities
M1	39	MSS	Married	300	8	CW
M2	42	MSS	Married	13	1	TW
M3	27	HS	Married	9	11	CC +SA
M4	36	L	Married	17	1	CW + SA
M5	36	NL	Single	84	1	TW
M6	39	HS	Single	120	8	TW + SA
M7	36	MSS	Single	132	2	CC+ SA
M8	20	MSS	Single	41	1	TW + SA
M9	42	G	Single	31	2	MMW
W1	29	HS	Married	81	1	HC+ SA
W2	33	L	Married	36	10	SW + SA
W3	20	MSS	Single	4	3	SW
W4	33	HS	Married	53	1	SW
W5	27	NL	Single	102	1	LMW
W6	38	MSS	Single	90	25	LMW
W7	37	L	Married	86	2	WC
W8	39	NL	Single	37	1	LMW
W9	28	HS	Married	8	5	SW + SA
W10	33	MSS	Married	72	4	SW + SA

Note: Middle Secondary School (MSS); High School (HS); Literate (L); Non- Literate (NL); Graduate (G); Carpentry workshop; (CW); Tile workshop (TW); Magnet making workshop (MMW); Sewing workshop (SW); Lock making workshop (LMW); Craft Course (CC); Hairdressing Course (HC); Wood Course (WC); Sport activities (SA).

Data collection and analysis

An introductory information form and a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher based on the relevant literature were used to carry out the interviews more systematically (Merriam, 2013). For this purpose, three experts were selected to decide the suitability of the semi-structured questions, and a pilot study was implemented to test the understandability of the interview form by the participants. After the pilot study, the interview form was finalised. The study initially started with 5 questions. Some of the initial interview questions were as follows:

(1) How do you spend your time in prison, and what do you do?
(2) What does the concept of 'leisure' in prison mean to you? From where?
(3) Can you describe in detail the activities you have attended so far and their effect on you?

In order to obtain more detailed information about what the participants said during the interviews, the question pool was expanded with probe questions, and this process continued until theoretical saturation was reached (McCann & Clark, 2003). The purpose of these probe questions is not to steer participants towards positive evaluations, but rather, in line with the principles of the grounded theory approach, to encourage them to elaborate more fully on the meanings and experiences they have already expressed. Some probe questions were as follows:

(1) What do you think about the benefits of the activities you do in your leisure?
(2) What is the most useful activity you do in your leisure? From where?

In this study, prisoners were observed in activity settings (workshops, sports fields) for the purpose of data collection; their activities, time use, and interactions were examined. In addition, secondary data sources such as prisoners' diaries, awards, and diplomas were analysed (Merriam, 2013). Observations, documents, and memo notes supported the interview process and contributed to the development of the theory.

The data analysis was carried out in accordance with the Glaser approach through the stages of open coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). During open coding, statements were coded using the constant comparison technique, and new codes were generated when necessary. The codes were grouped under subcategories, and throughout the selective coding process, categories were renamed and combined. As a result, 20 subcategories, 7 main themes (selective codes), and 3 core categories were identified.

In the theoretical coding phase, the researchers examined the relationships between the core categories to understand how the core categories fitted together and to move the narratives in a theoretical direction.

Rigour in qualitative study

For the rigour of the study (credibility, transferability, dependability, dependability), the researcher stayed in the context for a long time, obtained participant confirmation and participant approval, and went for data triangulation. In addition, the data analysis was conducted by two independent researchers, and external control was on demand (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

Leisure in prison and the meaning of leisure

In this section, before going on to the relationships between the core categories and main themes, it is thought that it is important to reconceptualise the concept of leisure specific to this context due to the uniqueness of the prison context. Thus, what prisoners do in their leisure and the meaning of leisure for them are examined.

M8 sees the tile workshop he attended as 'a task' and describes his leisure as the time outside of this task:

> I understand it as resting, doing sports, playing ball. If I have a special task to do myself, do it or. Since I work in the workshop here, I honestly can't say that I have much leisure. I have some leisure during lunch breaks between work and in the ward after work.

W6 defines leisure as the time when she does the responsibilities of prison life, workshops and activities she enjoys:

> What do I do in my leisure? Since I am the ward manager, I deal with tasks such as keeping track of other prisoners, checking the cleanliness, keeping the surroundings tidy, and I read

> books when I have leisure. I also participate in courses, workshops and other events that the prison administration has prepared for us.

Although the meaning of leisure in the literature varies depending on the individual's personal characteristics, social context, cultural factors, and lifestyle, the meaning of leisure for prisoners was affected by the physical and psychological context of being a prisoner and the conditions of imprisonment. For example, M1 defined the meaning of leisure as follows: 'leisure is the time when I question myself and am alone with myself and what I do'. M6, on the other hand, defined leisure as 'useless time': 'when leisure is mentioned, it does not mean anything to me. Because all your time is leisure here. That's why I perceive leisure as the time where I sit around doing nothing and not providing any benefit to anyone'.

> This situation had a similar meaning for female prisoners: 'leisure in prison? Leisure means prison anyway. Because you are in emptiness and in a place and time where you have nothing to do'. (W,10)

W8, on the other hand, associated leisure with boredom:

> Leisure is like a bored period for me. I mean, I want to have a job all the time, I don't want to have leisure. Because having leisure means dying from boredom. Because time here only passes when you have something to do. When there is no work here, everything seems to stop. For this reason, I want there to be no weekends, and I want the courses and workshops to not end.

For prisoners, leisure is often expressed as a process in which individuals are left alone with their own thoughts and feelings, confront their past, and struggle with feelings such as loneliness, emptiness, and helplessness.

Findings on the core category and main theme

In this section, the effects associated with LA (both serious and casual) identified as the core category, are examined comparatively according to the type of activity in Figure 2.

The effects associated with sports activities as a form of CLA

Basic effects

The category of basic effects refers to effects associated with the fulfilment of fundamental needs that enable prisoners to manage daily life within the prison environment. Basic effects consist of three main themes: physical health, escape effects, and economic effects. CLA provide effects that meet only the basic needs related to physical health and escape. The physical health theme encompasses prisoners' perceptions of the protective and enhancing effects of LA on their physical well-being. Considering the physical conditions of the prison (e.g. the small size and overcrowding of wards), physical inactivity is a significant issue for most prisoners, and this negatively affects their health.

> I love both watching and playing football. For me, football is a source of enjoyment. It feels as if we were meeting friends and playing at an outdoor pitch. First of all, it contributes as a PA. It keeps us moving. We consume so many calories every day . . . If we did not exercise at all, we would definitely become obese. (M6, SA)

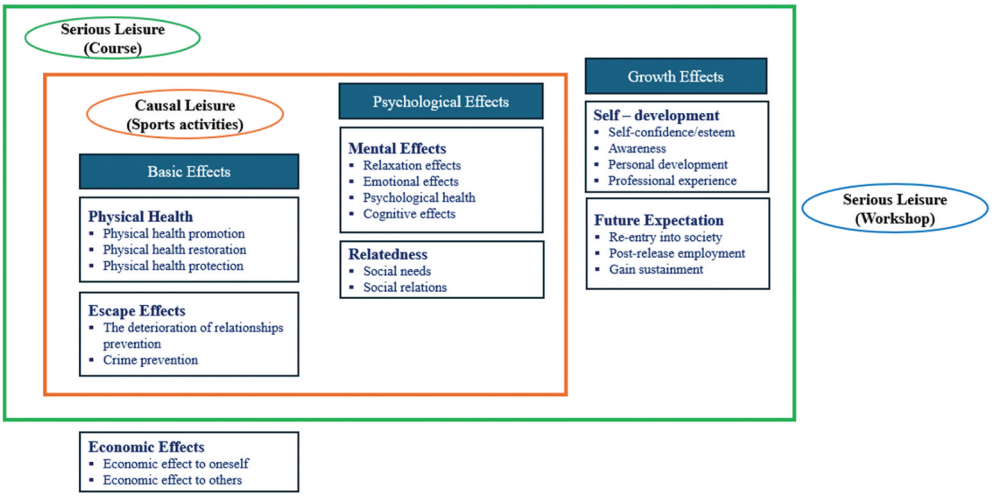


Figure 2. The effects of serious and causal LA.

> I was diagnosed with a heart rhythm disorder, and the doctor prescribed me heart medication to take regularly. Later, he told me that I must continue using the medication and also exercise regularly. I started doing sports every day as soon as I woke up, and over time I stopped taking the heart medication. Now I don't take it anymore, and I feel much better than before. (M3, SA)

The escape effect's theme refers to the contributions of LA that enable prisoners to distance themselves from conflicts with themselves and with other inmates, thereby preventing criminal behaviour and helping maintain social relationships. These effects were described in the context of temporary disengagement from ward-related routines and interactions. Participation in SA was reported to provide prisoners with opportunities to spend time outside the ward, which participants associated with a reduction in the frequency of conflicts and changes in the nature of social interactions during and after these activities.

According to prisoners, participation in SA helps them get away from the ward and creates a safer environment for them.

> How healthy can a person be when confined to a narrow space, always with the same people and the same conversations? After a while, due to monotony, even a bed, a spot on the floor, or a pen can become valuable for a person. Numerous conflicts and fights begin among people. For this reason, sports activities are incredibly important. You leave the ward and release your energy, distancing yourself from all the problems happening inside. (M7, SA)

Psychological effects

The category of psychological effects refers to effects associated with prisoners' psychological experiences in relation to LA within the prison context. Psychological effects consist of two main themes: mental effects and relatedness. The mental effect's theme encompasses prisoners' descriptions of how participation in LA was associated with changes in their emotional states and thought patterns. Participants reported that LA helped prisoners regulate their emotions,

distance themselves from negative thought patterns, reduce the stress of daily life, achieve psychological relaxation, and cope with long-term psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and addiction, thereby supporting their overall psychological well-being.

> Prison is such a place that people can reach the point of killing each other over a piece of paper. Particularly among prisoners who have been incarcerated for more than five years, serious psychological disorders such as anger, panic attacks, and depression are observed. For this reason, sports protect me from these psychological problems. (M3, SA)

According to M3, SA also help reduce anxiety levels and free individuals from negative thought patterns: 'SA allow me to get rid of these worries, even if only for a short time. They help you immerse yourself in what you are doing and distance yourself from such thoughts'.

Through SA, prisoners distance themselves from the stress of daily life, experience emotional enjoyment, and cognitively focus on the present moment.

> When playing volleyball, you truly forget you are here; for a moment, you step out of the prison mode and focus entirely on the competition. It's fun, you know—you release all your stress. (W2, SA)

M3 also compared sports, as a CLA, with SLA, (such as courses and workshops), emphasizing that SA is more enjoyable: 'sports may not contribute to a person in an educational sense like courses do, but they are very entertaining, I mean we really enjoy them'. (M3, SA)

The relatedness effect's theme reflects prisoners' perceptions of changes in their relationships with themselves and with their social environment in connection with LA. These effects were described in relation to experiences of social interaction and connection, including feelings associated with group belonging, love, respect recognition, appreciation and interpersonal engagement. Participation in sports as a form of CLA was reported to be associated with changes in communication patterns with family members, fellow inmates, and prison staff.

> Thanks to football, you improve your dialogue with your teammates. As you know, football has a very important place in our culture. Therefore, most people who are interested in football have plenty of common things to talk about. What I mean is that these activities help strengthen communication. (M6, SA)

M3 also highlighted the role of sports in socialisation and its importance in the prison context: 'It's a great activity because it contributes to socialisation. Socialisation is one of the best things that can happen to a person within these four walls'.

Effects associated with courses and workshops as a form of SLA

The effects associated with sport activities (SA) as a form of CLA have been explained above. The themes conceptually discussed earlier, which also overlap with SLA, will not be reiterated in this section.

Basic effects

The physical health theme identified within the basic effects category was determined as a common effect observed in both SLA and CLA. Prisoners maintain and improve their physical health not only through SA but also by participating in courses and workshops.

W2, who attends a sewing workshop, expressed this as follows: 'thanks to these activities, at the very least, we start the day more energetic. Since we are active throughout the day, we feel physically better'.

Prisoners who attend courses voiced similar views, noting the contributions of courses to physical health and, indirectly, to sleep: 'I would say that attending courses alleviates the physical fatigue caused by sitting all the time, and feeling physically better also contributes to one's sleep pattern'. (M7, CC)

Escape-related effects also emerged as a shared theme across both CLA and SLA. According to M1, the carpentry workshop helps to avoid conflicts with other inmates in the ward, thereby preventing the deterioration of relationships:

> After roll call, I go to work and return to the ward after the evening roll call. This way, I stay away from those people. Spending the day in the workshop is a great opportunity to prevent relationships from breaking down. (M1, CW)

When considering individuals who previously earned their living through illegal means (gambling, theft, betting), the escape theme highlights that SLA plays a more prominent role than CLA in crime prevention and ensuring safety within the wards.

> I wish everyone worked under the supervision of officers. If they did, they wouldn't steal other people's belongings in the ward because they would be earning money. (M5, TW)

According to prisoners, the most important way to prevent conflicts in the ward and to ensure their rehabilitation into society is through SLA:

> If you want to reintegrate a man into society in prison, you absolutely need to make him work. Otherwise, someone who stays in the ward all the time will either start a fight or kill someone. (M2, TW)

The economic effect's theme refers to effects associated with income generating activities and financial exchanges described by prisoners in relation to LA. These effects were discussed in connection with prisoners' access to monetary resources used for personal expenses (e.g. razors, shampoo, cleaning products), as well as financial interactions involving prison staff and relevant institutions or organisations. The economic effect's theme is expressed only by prisoners who participate in workshops (such as carpentry, ceramics, lock-making, or sewing) as a form of SLA.

Prisoners frequently state that they have no one outside to send them money and that their only source of income is the workshops as SLA:

> I have no income. With the money I earn from the workshops, at least I can buy personal necessities such as shampoo and cleaning supplies. (W5, LMW)

They also emphasise that they provide economic benefits not only for themselves but also for prison staff, management, and subcontracted services. As M5, who attends the TW

workshop, explains: 'our state benefits, we benefit, and so does the employer. In other words, everyone earns money from these workshops'.

Psychological effects

One of the themes within the category of psychological effects, mental effects, also emerged as a shared theme across both SLA and CLA. Participation in SLA was reported to be associated with experiences related to emotional regulation and changes in perceived mental states.

> On one hand, you blame yourself, and on the other, you accept the situation you are in. We experience constant emotional fluctuations. I have been here for four years. Sometimes I laugh, sometimes I cry. But since I started participating in recreational activities, I can say that my mood has been more balanced. (W10, SW)

W1, who attends the hairdressing course, stated that the courses make her feel better emotionally and cognitively:

> Participating in courses and seminars has changed my perspective on life. Before I started the courses, I was introverted, which caused me to focus only on the negative aspects of life. Now, I am more hopeful. Despite being here, I am aware that there are positive aspects of life and innovations that keep you connected to life even in the most hopeless situations. (W1, HC)

SLA also helps prisoners focus on the task at hand, enabling them to distance themselves from thoughts that make them unhappy:

> Normally, I am constantly thinking about my children. These activities are very enjoyable. Besides being enjoyable, they help me focus on myself and distance myself from thoughts about my children. (M3, CC)

Many prisoners reported that, thanks to SLA, they have largely discontinued the use of psychological medications and support. W8, who participated in LMW, stated that SLA helped her overcome several problems:

> I used to go to the hospital every three days; my body and teeth would lock up at the slightest problem in the ward. It would immediately trigger a panic attack. Since the course, I haven't had a panic attack for approximately five months. I also stopped using sleep medication.

Moreover, participation in SLA, which requires long hours of work and focus, helps prisoners distance themselves from psychological addictions:

> I was a smoker. Even while walking, my lungs burned, and I got tired quickly. Could a person rest after two steps? But now, I move longer distances, and my smoking has decreased. Of course, there's another aspect: while working in the workshop, you don't even think about smoking because you are focused on the task. Inevitably, you stay away from it. (W6, LMW)

The relatedness effects are among the themes where SLA resembles CLA. According to M9, SLA contributes to the development of social relationships:

> My dialogues and relationships with people have improved. Even my family noticed this. I used to get upset over everything. I didn't talk to anyone, but now I have a circle of friends. Conversations flow now; we joke, laugh, and have fun. (M9, MMW)

Through SLA, prisoners can become part of a group, develop a sense of belonging, and feel recognised, loved, and respected by prison staff, family, and other inmates. The fulfilment of social needs is more frequently emphasised in SLA: 'for example, when we attend conferences or courses, the encouragement and recognition from prison administration and staff are among the factors that constantly increase our motivation. Being liked, encouraged, and respected by them is very valuable'. (W7, WC)

Growth effects

The growth effects category represents effects associated with prisoners' descriptions of changes related to personal capacities, self-perception, and future-oriented considerations in connection with LA. Growth effects consist of two main themes: self-development and future expectations.

Self-development refers to the experiences that prisoners associate with participation in SLA. This theme encompasses changes in self-awareness, including shifts in their perspectives on life, as well as changes in self-confidence and self-esteem linked to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Moreover, it includes prisoners' experiences of obtaining certificates, diplomas, or other forms of official recognition through the educational programs they attended. Considering that many prisoners did not have a profession prior to incarceration, gaining vocational experience is particularly significant for them. Considering that many prisoners had no prior profession before incarceration, acquiring professional experience is particularly significant for them:

> Most people don't know how to earn money or work. These people need to learn what it means to earn money through work. The activities we participate in contribute to gaining a profession and gaining experience in working life. (M9, MMW)

SLA also provides prisoners with important opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills:

> Since I started this workshop, my sewing speed has increased, and I have become quite skilled. (W4, SW)

Prisoners also note that the knowledge they acquire through SLA changes their perspectives on life: 'attending courses and seminars, reading books to expand my vocabulary, learning new information – these all contribute to my personal accumulation. They enhance general knowledge. Every piece of information I acquire changes my perspective on life'. (W1, HC)

Additionally, prisoners who engage in self-development tend to have higher self-confidence and self-esteem compared to others, highlighting a key distinction of SLA from CLA: 'a person who works, puts in effort, and earns money has a different mindset because they develop confidence in earning through work, and their self-belief and self-esteem grow'. (W6, LMW)

The Future expectations is a theme that reflects prisoners' perceptions of the effect of SLA on their post-release lives. Through SLA, prisoners acquire knowledge, skills, social competencies, and professional experience. They believe these gains are critical not only

for life in prison but also for post-release social adaptation, employment, entrepreneurship, and economic integration.

Prisoners emphasise that social skills acquired in prison are particularly important for post-release social integration:

> Through these activities, people learn social relationships and etiquette. They change; they develop . . . This is very important for gaining respect, finding a job, and managing relationships in life outside. (M2, TW)

They also believe that the knowledge and skills obtained through SLA will help them find employment after release:

> At least through the carpentry workshop, I am acquiring a profession. Moreover, I really love carpentry. For me, it's like a golden bracelet, and I believe it will help me find a job when I get out. (M1, CW)

> Courses are actually better. Why? Because they give you a diploma when you finish the course. When you are released, this is very important for starting a business, becoming qualified in a job, and building your own life. These activities contribute greatly in terms of education and preparing a person for life outside. (M3, CC)

Many prisoners report that SLA gradually becomes their hobby, and continuing these gains after release is important for using their leisure time productively and maintaining habits, they consider beneficial: 'most likely, when I leave here, I will continue doing what I learned and make beautiful things for my mother. I have gained many enjoyable hobbies for the future'. (W7, CC)

Findings on the relationships between selective codes

In this section, the relationships between the core categories will be addressed. As shown in Figure 3, there are reciprocal relationships among the core categories.

Some findings regarding theoretical coding (relationships between core categories through memos and direct quotations) are given in Figure 4, and the findings are expanded.

The relationships among the core categories are illustrated in Figure 3 through direct quotations. The findings also indicate that the three identified core categories – basic, psychological, and developmental effects – do not follow a hierarchical structure similar to that proposed in Maslow's theory of needs. Participation in LA enables individuals to experience effects that satisfy multiple needs simultaneously, and these effects interact in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Discussion

This study presents a preliminary theoretical model that outlines the potential effects that may be associated with prisoners' participation in SLA and CLA within the scope of leisure time in the context of the TW-BM. In this section, prisoners' perceptions of leisure will be discussed before addressing the main findings of the research.

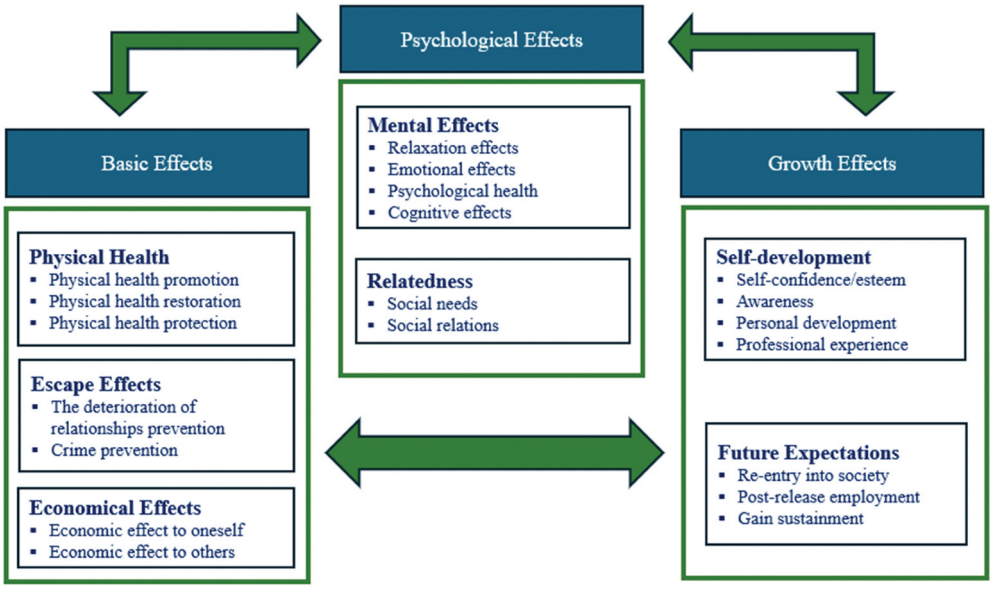


Figure 3. Relationships between core categories.

Core Category	Relationships	Core Category	Direct quotes
Basic effects are associated with psychological effects.			'Apart from that actively playing volleyball and football is beneficial for my body. It prevents us from decaying here, makes me more vigorous, and if my body is healthy, my mind becomes clearer'. (M3, SA)
Basic effects are associated with psychological effects.			'There's also hairdressing; I learned things like eyebrow shaping, dyeing, and mustache removal. Through these, I meet my personal needs. I do wax, for example, I dye my hair. I've also been able to help women this way, meeting the personal needs of my friends in the ward. This both helps them feel better about themselves and positively affects their psychological state'.(W4,HC)
Basic effects are associated with growth effects.			'Without my health, I can't find a job. Imagine having a herniated disc, or shall we say, calcification issues. I'm of no use even to myself, let alone being able to find work. If I can't find a job and fail to adapt to society, I'll end up having to commit crimes again and come back here'. (W9,SW)
Psychological effects are associated with basic effects.			'Oh, let me also mention that when you're not working, you just eat, drink, and lie around, and because you've psychologically collapsed, you end up taking medication, constantly wanting to eat, and constantly wanting to sleep. When that happens, you gain an incredible amount of weight. I once saw 78 kilos at one point, but now I've dropped back down to 58 kilos again'. (W4,SW)
Psychological effects are associated with growth effects.			'Through recreational activities, I have the opportunity to discuss many topics with my friends. Not only with my friends but also with my course instructor... And I can say that the communication I establish with them contributes to my personal development'. (M7,CC)
Growth effects are associated with basic effects.			'During courses and workshop studies, you discuss and become aware of so many things with instructors, staff, or the friends you work alongside... For instance, I learned about the harm and damage that types of drugs cause to our bodies. Due to the environment we're in, we live collectively. I learned what we need to do to protect ourselves from infectious diseases. You know, I also learned that nutrition is important while exercising, and I lost more weight, for example'. (W9,SW)
Growth effects are associated with psychological effects.			'The dream of being able to earn money from this profession I've acquired here and support my children with that money once outside makes me very happy'. (W10,SW)

Figure 4. Relationships between core categories and direct quotes.

Prisoners' perceptions of leisure are shaped by the constraints created by the prison context and their individual life experiences. For most prisoners, leisure gains meaning within the context of time-space and the feeling of being stuck and limited.

In this context, prisoners' perceptions of leisure reveal that it generally has a negative meaning and is seen as a part of their efforts to both re-interpret themselves and adapt to prison conditions. Studies in the literature indicate that 'time' can gain new meanings in prison, that 'time' generally passes more slowly in the context of imprisonment, that

prisoners experience deep loneliness despite being in a collective environment, and that it has a negative meaning for them (Fox & Crocker, 2024).

Due to the fact that the responsibilities of individuals in prison differ from those outside prison (for example, basic needs such as shelter, food, etc. are met by the state), on the other hand, due to the limitation of freedom by higher authorities, the definition of leisure in prison appears in a different context than the general definition accepted in the literature. For example, taking a count, one of the prison's compulsory tasks, requires inmates to be in a specific place at a specific time and is subject to supervision.

However, LA in prison are carried out with the freedom of choice determined by the higher authorities. In this context, we defined the concept of leisure for prison as 'the time left over by individuals for their responsibilities towards the prison (food, counting, etc.) and themselves (personal care and biological needs, etc.) in a place where freedom is constantly monitored by higher authorities'.

The impacts of P-BLA on inmates are shaped by unique factors such as the type of activity, the individual's physical and psychological background, social relationships, educational attainment, and the duration of imprisonment, rendering these effects fundamentally context specific.

This study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the effects of LA on prisoners by synthesising insights derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Alderfer's ERG theory, and Sirgy, Uysal, and Kruger's LW-BM approaches. This integrated perspective demonstrates that P-BLA may play an important role not only in meeting basic lower-level needs (physiological, escape, economic, etc.) but also in addressing higher-level psychological (relatedness, mental, etc.) and growth needs (self-development, future expectations, etc.).

The research findings indicate that the effects of P-BLA on prisoners can be grouped into three core categories. These are divided into three categories: basic, psychological, and growth. Physical health represents the basic needs prisoners must meet to survive and corresponds to Maslow's physiological needs. Escape reflects the pursuit of safety and peace by distancing oneself from the negative conditions of the prison. This aligns with Maslow's safety needs and, together with physical health, corresponds to Alderfer's existence needs, which encompass both physiological and safety needs. Sirgy et al. (2017) LW-BM emphasises escape theme as a basic need, highlighting that avoiding harmful stimuli and remaining free from stress and tension is essential. LW-BM, referencing Maslow's hierarchy of needs, suggests that a leisure activity fulfilling an individual's security needs substantially reduces the likelihood of a painful experience and satisfies a core need by providing a sense of safety and security.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the economic effects of P-BLA contribute to prisoners' ability to meet fundamental needs, such as health and hygiene, and enhance their sense of security within the prison through the material gains obtained. This aligns with Maslow's physiological and safety needs as well as Alderfer's existence needs. In addition, for prisoners, economic effects are consistent with the LW-BM, as they directly contribute to well-being by fulfilling essential life requirements (Sirgy et al., 2017).

Psychological effects constitutes the second core category. One of the two primary themes in this category, relatedness, corresponds to the love, esteem, and belonging levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. When compared to Alderfer's ERG theory, the relatedness theme of the psychological effect category directly aligns with Alderfer's relatedness

dimension. According to Alderfer, relatedness encompasses relationship needs that involve security, belonging, and esteem, as well as the need for attachment. Attachment needs refer to the desire to give love to others or receive attention and care from others. Sirgy et al. (2017) define relatedness as encompassing social interactions that satisfy social needs. Many leisure activities serve to fulfil individuals' needs for social approval, belonging, attachment, social status, social recognition, cooperation, competition, and altruism. However, Sirgy et al. (2017) categorise relatedness under growth needs.

The second theme of this category, mental effects, focuses on prisoners' emotional, cognitive, and psychological well-being. In Maslow's and Alderfer's models, psychological needs are largely considered within the dimensions of relatedness and growth, and gains directed towards the individual's inner world – such as mental relaxation, emotional recovery, and psychological health – do not emerge as a distinct sub-dimension. In the context of incarceration, however, psychological processes are of central importance and cannot be reduced solely to social relationships. Relief, happiness, satisfaction, and a sense of freedom derived from LA, along with the reduction of negative states such as depression, anxiety, anger, and addiction, directly influence quality of life. Therefore, mental effects need to be considered independently from both social relationships and personal development.

Finally, growth effects constitute the last core category in the theoretical framework. This category is divided into two sub-themes: personal development and future expectations. The personal development theme is linked to Maslow's self-actualisation level, as it relates to factors that influence an individual's ability to fully realise their potential, such as problem-solving, creativity, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. In Alderfer's ERG theory, it aligns with the growth dimension, which encompasses the fulfilment of needs related to self-confidence and self-actualisation. The growth stage in ERG expresses needs for self-confidence, pursuit, knowledge-seeking, achievement, feeling useful and competent, and productive engagement, whereas self-actualisation refers to an individual's need to achieve their goals, develop their personality, and realise their potential. According to Sirgy et al. (2017), leisure well-being derived from mastery of one's needs is linked to the development theme, which aligns with our research findings.

The second sub-theme, future expectations, is related to prisoners' needs not only to maintain their current personal development but also to continue it after release and to structure their lives at a higher level. Reintegration into society, evaluation of employment opportunities, and preservation of acquired gains signify the continuity of individual growth. In this context, future expectations are not merely a matter of hope or desire but are regarded as an indicator of growth that aims to ensure the sustainability of personal development over time.

Another finding of the study concerns the comparison of the effects of P-BLA according to the type of participation (serious vs. casual). Most LA conducted with prisoners do not differentiate activities by type, which limits comparisons with previous findings in certain aspects and makes it difficult to determine the effects associated with each type of activity. In this context, the research findings are evaluated within Stebbins' SLP (Stebbins, 1982, 2007).

The results indicate that both casual and serious activities fulfil prisoners' basic needs. Physical health and escape theme (e.g. preventing the deterioration of relationships) are common outcomes of both activity types. According to the prisoners, regardless of whether the activities take the form of sports, courses, or workshops, they increase inmates' levels of PA, allow them to leave their cell environment, reduce

tension, and prevent conflicts within the ward. This alleviates stress caused by continuous confinement with the same individuals and reduces the risk of disputes and physical confrontations within the ward. Therefore, although there are differences in motivation and participation structure between different types of leisure, changes in physical space and social environment diversity emerge as shared effects of both activity types.

Furthermore, the sub-theme of crime prevention is more closely associated with SLA (e.g. workshops). Such activities may guide prisoners towards long-term, structured engagements because they embody Stebbins (1982) features of 'perseverance', 'personal effort', and 'career acquisition'. As a result, these activities may reduce the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviour's such as gambling. In addition, the direct (e.g. wages, sales) and indirect (e.g. vocational skills) economic income provided by workshops may offer indications that the motivation to seek illegal sources of income could be lowered. Both types of activities may help prisoners distance themselves from stress, negative emotions, and thoughts, thereby potentially enhancing their psychological well-being. However, while CLA (e.g. sports) primarily emphasise enjoyment and immediate satisfaction, SLA highlight progress, mastery, and long-term meaning (Stebbins, 2007). Therefore, although both participation types offer hedonic effects, CLA are more closely linked with 'pleasure' and 'fun', whereas SLA are associated with 'reward' and 'fulfilment'.

The findings also indicate that SLA is more effective in helping prisoners move away from addictions. This may be due to the long-term, focused, and planned nature of SLA, which allows leisure time to be more structured and provides individuals with alternative social identities (Stebbins, 1982). Prisoners participating in SLA can identify as 'carpenters', 'musicians', or 'athletes', developing new identities that partially replace addiction-related identities.

Both types of activities appear to have the potential to contribute to the development of social relationships. However, it can be suggested that SLA may play a more effective role than CLA in meeting the needs for belonging and respect. The main reason for this may be that, unlike CLA's short-term and low-intensity interactions, SLA requires continuity and intensity, allowing for the development of deeper relationships and a stronger sense of belonging (Stebbins, 1997, 2007). Furthermore, the achievements and gains obtained through SLA (e.g. awards, certificates) may enhance the respect and recognition prisoners receive from their peers, families, and institutional staff. This social recognition plays a critical role in satisfying the need for respect, a function also highlighted in other studies emphasising SLA's role in social acceptance (Kotze, 2006).

Finally, the findings demonstrate that effects related to growth needs particularly emerge through SLA. Due to their planned and goal-oriented structure, SLA provide prisoners with tangible outputs such as technical skills, knowledge, and certificates, fostering both external validation and internal competence. Long-term progress and mastery experiences support personal development, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Moreover, SLA cultivate social skills such as discipline, communication, and teamwork, helping prisoners reconstruct themselves and prepare for reintegration into society. The sub-theme of future expectations is a prominent theme in SLA. Certificates and vocational skills strengthen beliefs in post-release employment or entrepreneurship, instilling an identity as a 'productive, learning individual'. This identity is thought to have the potential to facilitate successful

reintegration by enabling prisoners to feel confident in assuming roles in post-release life. These results align with Maruna's (2001) reintegration approach, which emphasises identity transformation. According to Maruna (2001), successful reintegration requires not only behavioural change (desisting from crime) but also identity transformation.

In summary, the findings indicate that both CLA and SLA have significant effects on improving the prison environment and supporting prisoners' rehabilitation and reintegration processes. It is evident that LA impact not only prisoners' quality of life but also society by potentially reducing the risk of recidivism.

Conclusion

In this study, prison leisure was conceptualised as a unique and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by prisoners' restricted temporal – spatial conditions, institutional constraints, and individual life histories. This study categorises the effects of P-BLA into three main categories: basic, psychological, and growth-related effects. Moreover, by employing a multi-theoretical framework that incorporates Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Alderfer's ERG theory, and Sirgy's LW-BM, the study enables a holistic discussion of need theories within the context of leisure. The main findings can be summarised as follows:

First, this study reveals that P-BLA in prison may function as a mechanism that addresses basic needs, particularly by supporting physical health, providing an escape from negative environmental stimuli, and offering opportunities for economic gain. Given the specific conditions observed in the Turkish context – such as overcrowded correctional facilities, limited mobility, and hygiene-related issues – these functions become critically important. In this regard, the present study shows that sports, courses, and workshop-based activities provide more than mere physical engagement for prisoners; they also serve as strategic tools that help minimise tensions and conflicts within living units and contribute to the economic resources necessary for daily survival.

Second, the findings indicate that both SLA and CLA provide significant psychological effects to prisoners. This component encompasses multiple dimensions, including a sense of belonging, social connectedness, emotional regulation, psychological relief, and cognitive well-being. In contrast to classical need theories – such as those of Maslow, Alderfer, and Sirgy – where psychological needs are typically discussed alongside social or growth-oriented needs, this study identifies psychological functioning as an independent and central core category uniquely shaped by the incarceration context. The primary reason for this is that psychological needs emerge as the most salient factor influencing prisoners' daily experiences.

Third, the study highlights growth-oriented effects involving personal development and future-oriented aspirations. These effects are particularly evident in SLA; workshops and vocational training facilitate long-term skill acquisition, support identity transformation, and provide a critical foundation for post-release reintegration. While growth-related needs in classical theories are generally associated with individuals' intrinsic tendencies towards self-actualisation, the present study demonstrates that, in addition to these traditional interpretations, the growth dimension acquires a reconstructive and socially adaptive function specific to the prison context. Accordingly, the findings suggest that growth-oriented effects operate not only as a means of realising individual potential but also as

a transformative process that supports the construction of a socially accepted identity in post-incarceration life.

Finally, while CLA are primarily characterised by short-term effects such as immediate pleasure, enjoyment, and physical improvement, SLA generate deeper and longer-term effects, including economic gains, fulfilment of social needs, personal development, and expectations related to post-release life. In this respect, SLA extend the scope of the effects provided by CLA.

Theoretical and practical contributions

This study makes a unique contribution to the literature by demonstrating the applicability of Stebbins' SLP model in the prison context to explain the effects of P-BLA. Additionally, by employing a multi-theoretical framework encompassing Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Alderfer's ERG theory, and Sirgy's LW-BM, the study allows for a holistic discussion of need theories in the context of leisure. The findings indicate that the effects of P-BLA are not limited to the individual level but also encompass social and institutional dimensions, highlighting the multi-layered nature of P-BLA's effects.

From a practical perspective, the study provides guidance for prison administrators and policymakers in developing programs that support rehabilitation processes. The comparative examination of SLA and CLA contributes to the design of programs that are more strategically tailored to the target population, demonstrating that, in addition to sports, vocational training, artistic activities, and workshops can play a functional role in a multidimensional and comprehensive rehabilitation approach.

Limitations and future research

The researcher collected the data through observations, document analysis, and qualitative interviews conducted with prisoners in L-Type correctional institutions. Although the perspectives of prisoners are valuable, social desirability bias may arise, potentially influencing the findings. To minimise possible bias, gathering additional data from other stakeholders – such as institutional psychologists, instructors, and other correctional staff – could strengthen cross-comparisons and contribute to refining the conceptualisation. Conducting this study in the Turkish context provides substantial local depth; however, comparisons with international literature could more clearly reveal the strengths, limitations, and unique contributions of practices in Türkiye.

Future studies may also investigate the reasons why certain activities receive high participation while others attract limited interest, thereby contributing to the redesign of prison programs in line with actual needs. Since the present study focused exclusively on activities involving PA, it is recommended that future research examine other types of LA, such as religious programs, educational activities, and socio-cultural events (e.g. theatre performances, concerts, conferences, film screenings, knowledge competitions, debates, chess). Finally, future research could also focus on institutional constraints, implementation challenges, and cultural adaptation requirements encountered during the delivery of leisure programs in Turkish correctional facilities.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Ethics statement

Ethics Committee Report was obtained from Akdeniz University of Medicine Clinical Research Ethics Committee (no.KAEK-20).

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