



# Assessment of Recreation Areas in Terms of Risk Groups in the Society

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*In memory of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ridvan KÜÇÜKALİ, who left us too early and untimely...*

## Abstract

It is seen that the physical health of aged individuals, who constitute one of the very special and important groups in society, may have deteriorated, especially in the last moments of their lives. Individuals who have to leave the house less often may also be in a psychologically bad situation in parallel with this restriction. In this sense, the need for areas where especially older individuals can spend more quality time is quite high. In this context, the research aimed to evaluate recreation areas for older individuals, especially in a region such as Erzurum, where winter conditions are quite harsh. In the research conducted using the interview technique, one of the qualitative research methods, the data were collected with the general information form and interview form prepared by the researchers. The research was conducted between January 2023, and May 2023. As a result of the research, findings were found that older individuals generally go out for health reasons, they find the streets unsafe, and recreation areas are not suitable and need to be improved. According to the results obtained in the research, it can be recommended that recreation areas be developed for both summer and winter conditions and that necessary arrangements be made to enable older individuals to spend quality time in these areas.

**Keyword:** Aged individuals, recreation areas, physical health, psychological health, quality time

## Jel Classification Code

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## 1. Introduction

Aged individuals who are sensitive and unprotected in society may face many risks. The most important of these risks is that their health may deteriorate and their income will not be the same as before. Especially in developing countries such as Türkiye, it is characterized by aging,

adaptation to a decrease in income, and health problems. Particularly in this sense, elderly individuals, who are quite fragile, may also experience psychological problems as a result of experiencing many physical health problems, losing strength and not having the financial power to achieve what they want (Arpacı and Bakır, 2017; Özer and Tanrıverdi, 2023; Sağlam et. al., 2016; Şen and Meriç, 2020; Van Leonhout et al., 2016; Yıldız, Ömeroğlu and Terim, 2017).

Physiological health is defined as the individual's state of wellbeing. In terms of physiological health, with the effect of aging, the organism slows down and many problems may arise. Among the health problems faced by older individuals, cardiovascular problems, blood pressure problems, diabetes and bone and joint pain are the leading ones. As a result of the health problems expressed, the movements of the older individual become more restricted, they become unable to leave the house and may need the help of someone else (Ağar, 2020; Akdeniz, Kavukçu and Teksan, 2019; Küçük and Karadeniz, 2021; Lazarus, Lord and Harridge, 2019; Meade et al., 2020; Pollock et. al., 2015; Wullems et al., 2016). The fact that older individuals do not have the strength they once had may affect their psychological health.

Psychological health can be defined as the individual's feeling of wellbeing and ability to cope with events. At this point, the fact that older individuals do not have the power they once had and become dependent on others, increases their level anxiety even more. In this context, it can often be seen that older individuals become depressed and question the meaning of life (Ağar, 2020; Arpacı and Bakır, 2017; Chang et. al., 2019; Choi and Matz- Casto, 2018; Karakaş and Durmaz, 2017; Ong, Uchino and Wethington, 2016; Özdemir and Bilgili, 2014). In order for older individuals to cope with the problems mentioned, there is a need for recreation areas where they can spend their free time, rest and have fun.

Recreation areas can be expressed in the most general sense as areas where free time can be spent in the most productive way. Recreation areas are very important for individuals of all ages and walks of life. There is a need for spaces, especially where older individuals can be together with their peers and spend their free time in a quality way (Aydın and Tütüncü, 2021; Onose et. al., 2020). However, these areas must be usable in all seasons. The inability older individuals to go to these areas, especially in winter, may negatively affect their physiological and psychological health (Hasegawa, Suzuki and Yamauchi, 2019; Yılmaz, Olgun and Şavklı, 2016). Erzurum province is important in this sense. The long and harsh winters in Erzurum, province may cause older individuals not to benefit from these areas sufficiently studies have determined that

recreation areas are very important for older individuals (Artmann et. al., 2017; Aydın and Tütüncü, 2021; Azak and Belir, 2020; Chen and Yuan, 2020; Efe and Aydemir, 2015; Feng, Tang and Chuai, 2018; Güngör, 2019; Karataş and Uzun, 2022; Yılmaz, Olgun and Şavklı, 2016; Yuan and Wu, 2021). However there have been limited studies evaluating recreation areas, especially in areas where winter conditions are quite severe, such as Erzurum (Gao et. al., 2018; Leng and Han, 2022; Ogawa et. al., 2019; Wang et. al., 2020). For this reason, the study aimed to evaluate recreation areas for older individuals in Erzurum.

## **2. Method**

The model, study group, data collection tools, data collection method and data analysis sections of the research conducted to evaluate recreation areas for elderly individuals in Erzurum are given below.

### **2.1. Research Model**

In the research, phenomenological case design, one of the qualitative research method, was used in the phenomenological case design, it is aimed to examine in depth the opinions of individuals who experienced the event. Phenomenological case design preferred to determine the usage levels of recreational areas by older individuals.

### **2.2. Study Group**

In the study, individuals who live within the borders of Erzurum province, are sixty five years old and above, have at least one chronic disease, live at home and go to recreation areas constitute the population. Snowball sampling method was used in the research. People who were found to be suitable for the determined purposes were informed about the purpose of the research. The study was conducted with individuals who agreed to participate in the research voluntarily. The research was conducted with 100 people.

60% of the people participating in the research were men (n=60), and 40% were women (n=40). 40% of the individuals are aged 75 and over (n=40), 30% are between the ages of 70-74 (n=30), and 30% are between the ages of 60-69 (n=30). Aged individuals have asthma, neurology, and osteoporosis problems (50%, n=50). Their economic incomes are at most 26 thousand and 35 thousand TL (80%, n=80). 80% (n=80) do not have exercise or sport habits.

### **2.3. Data Collection Tools**

“General Information Form” and “Semi- Structured Interview Form” were used in the research.

### **2.3.1. General Information Form**

This is the form developed by researchers to determine the sociodemographic characteristics of older individuals. The form includes questions about the gender, age, chronic disease status, sports and exercise habits and economic income of older individuals.

### **2.3.2. Semi Structured Interview Form**

It was developed by researchers to determine how and to what extent elderly individuals outdoor recreation activities and their general physiological and psychological states. After the form was created, it was presented to the opinions of experts in the field (Geriatrician 3, Social worker 3, Psychologist 2, Occupational therapist 1) and the form was given its final shape according to the expert opinions. The reasons why fit older individuals frequently go out on the street in their daily activities, the preferred mode of transportation in urban transportation, the longest walking time preferred in the city center, the factors that encourage and threaten urban pedestrian transportation, the regions used in daily life according to their frequency and their reasons. There are questions to determine thoughts and suggestions for spaces that can be used.

### **2.3.3. Data Collection Method**

In order to collect data in the study, ethics committee permission was obtained from Erzurum Ataturk University Ethics Committee, dated 16.01.2023 and decision number 1. After obtaining ethics committee permission, the researcher went to the most frequently visited recreation areas in Erzurum. The elderly individuals here were interviewed and informed about the purpose of the research. Voluntary consent forms were filled in for individuals who would voluntarily participate in the research, and the questions were asked face to face by the researcher. The researcher asked the individuals who participated in the research whether there were different participants and whether they would participate in the research, and arranged a meeting place, with these people. Visits were made to the specified place, where the purpose of the research was explained to all individuals and questions were asked to those who wanted to participate by filling out a voluntary form.

### **2.4. Analysis of Data**

In the study, descriptive analyzes were conducted regarding sociodemographic characteristics. A content analysis form was created based on the answers given by the participants. The created content analysis form (Geriatrics 3, Occupational therapist 2, Measurement and evaluation 2) was

presented to expert opinion. Final edits were made to the answers form the experts. Categories and subcategories for the content analysis form are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Content Analysis Form

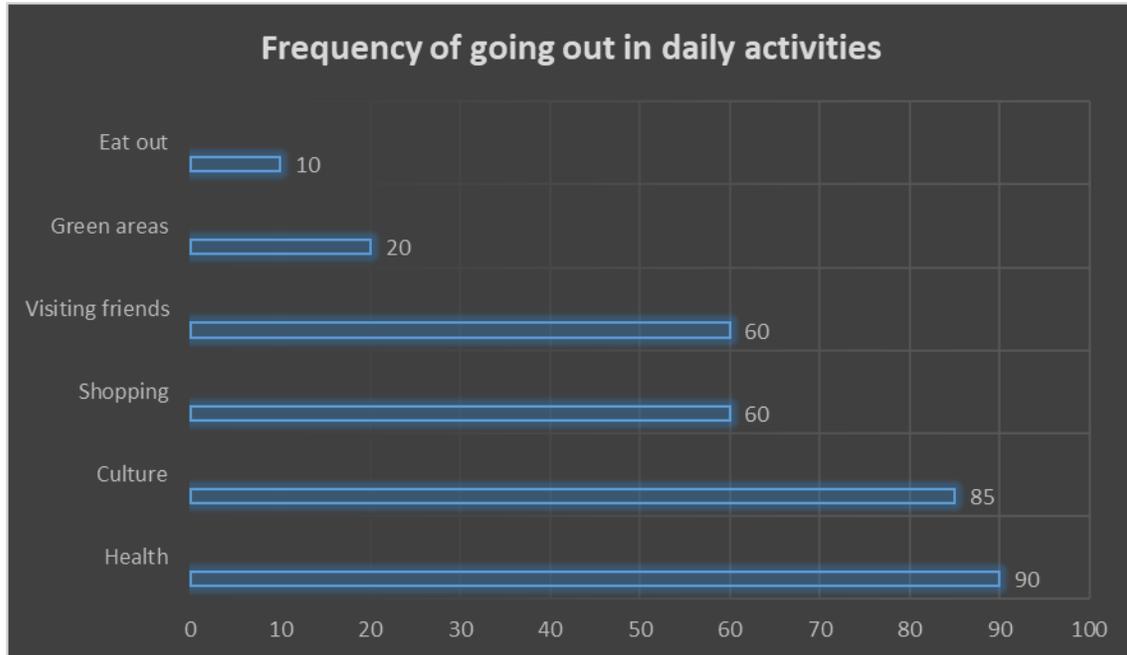
<b>Category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>
Reasons for going out in daily activities	Shopping, economic affairs
	Health
	Culture, art, religious activity
	Visiting friends and family
	Recreational activity
Preferences in urban transportation	Eating, drinking and having fun outside
	Public transport
	Transportation by walking
Walking time in the city center	Special vehicle
	0-15 min.
	16-30 min.
	31-45 min.
Opinions about urban pedestrian transportation	46 min and above
	Encouraging
Recreation areas used in daily life	Threatening
	Closed spaces
Suggestions	Open spaces
	Area usable in summer and winter
	Private space just for them
	Space for sports and cultural events
	Access to healthcare personnel
	Transportation service

The answers given by older individuals were coded by two independent researchers according to the content analysis form. Reliability between independent coders was found to be 100%. The answers given are presented in the form of sample sentences as E<sub>1</sub>, E<sub>2</sub>, E<sub>3</sub> ..... E<sub>99</sub>, E<sub>100</sub>.

### 3. Findings

The findings of the research conducted to evaluate recreation areas for older individuals in Erzurum are given below.

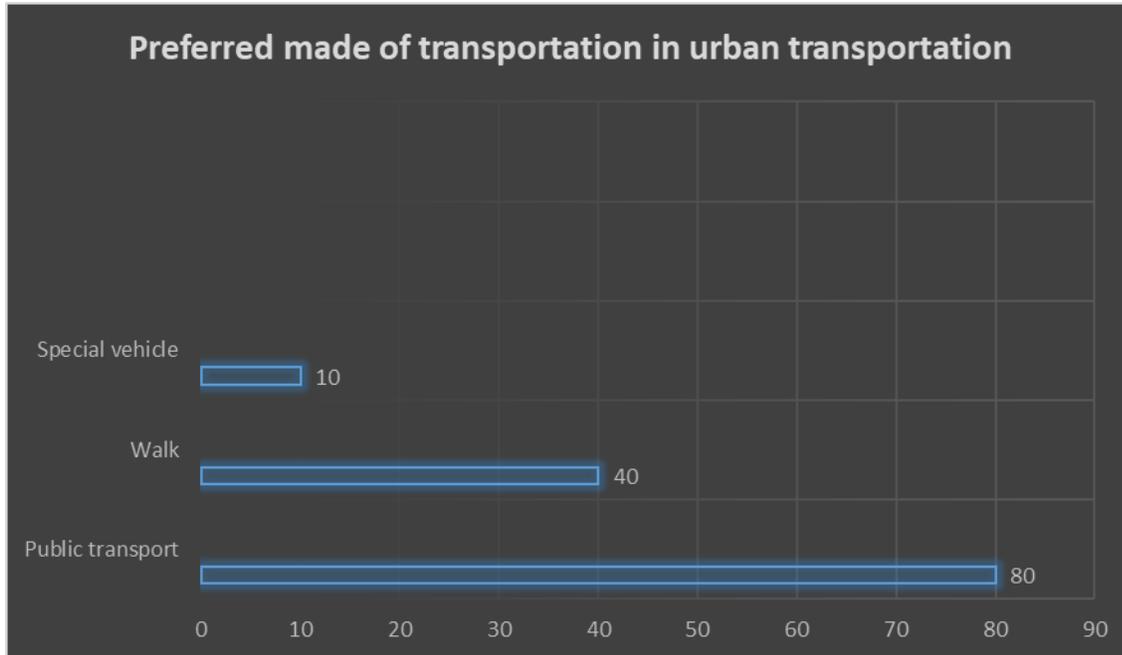
Participants were first asked for what purpose they went out in daily life. The distribution of the answers given by the participants is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Distribution of opinions on the reasons for going out in daily activities**

Figure 1 shows the distribution of participants' reasons for going out in daily activities. Participants stated that they mostly went out for health reasons (n=90), followed by cultural, artistic and religious activities (n=85), shopping and economic affairs (n=60), visiting friends and family (n=60), walking in green areas (n=20) and eating outside and entertainment activities (n=10). Participant E<sub>4</sub> said "I was going to with draw my salary. I was also shopping on the day I received my salary." While E<sub>28</sub> stated their thought as "I was going to get medication prescribed for my chronic disease" and E<sub>46</sub> said "We were visiting friends sometimes."

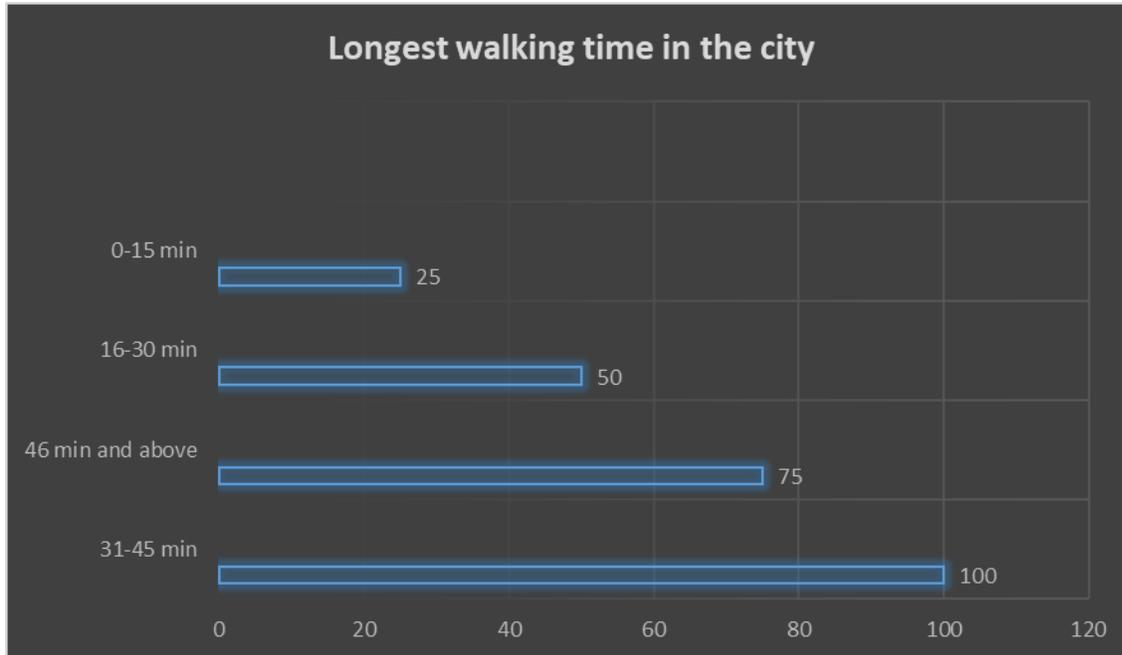
Secondly, the participants were asked what the preferred made of transportation was in urban transportation. The distribution of the answers given by the participants is presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Distribution of opinions on the preferred mode of transportation in urban transportation**

Figure 2 shows the distribution of preferred modes of transportation in urban transportation directed to the participants. While the participants stated that they mostly preferred public transportation (n=80), this rate was followed by walking (n=40), and private vehicle (n=10). Participant E<sub>46</sub> said *“I usually walked if the distance I wanted to travel was close, otherwise I preferred public transportation. However, it makes me very sad that young people behave disrespectfully toward us and do not give us a seat in public transportation.”* Then E<sub>60</sub> said *“We were driving in the boy’s car”* he replied.

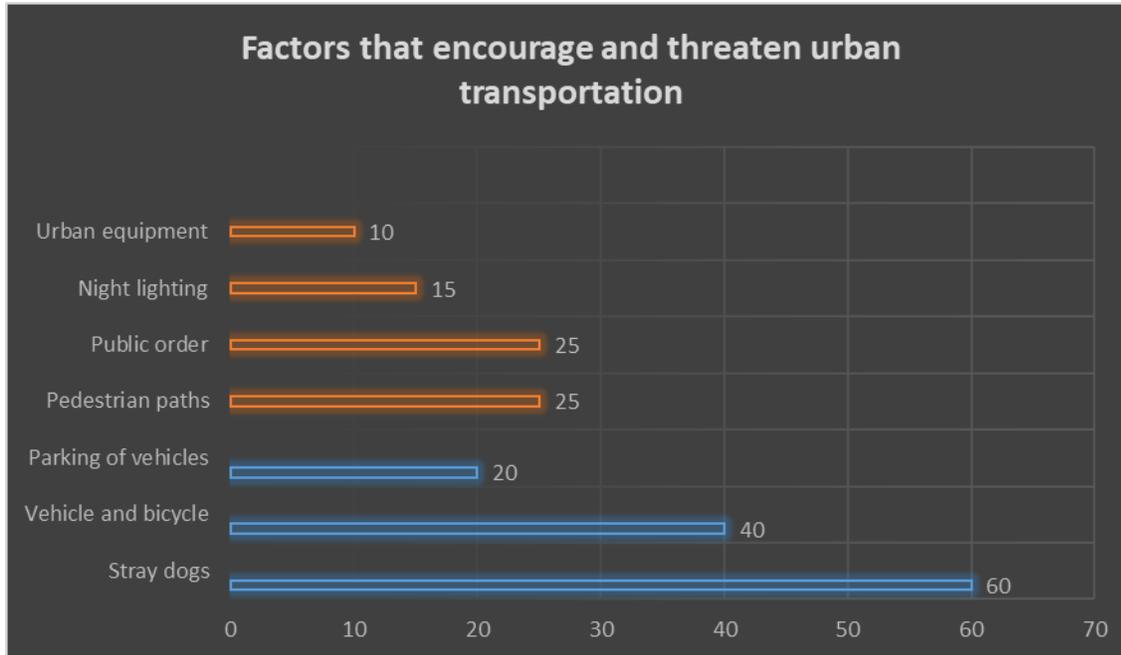
Participants were asked “What is your preferred longest walking time in the city center?” The distribution of the participants’ answers regarding the longest walking time is presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Distribution of opinions on the longest walking time in the city**

Figure 3 shows the distribution of participants' preferred walking time in the city center. It was determined that the participants' longest walking time was 31-45 minutes (n=100) at most, this rate were followed respectively, was 46 minutes and above (n=75), 16-30 minutes (n=50) and 0-15 minutes (n=25).

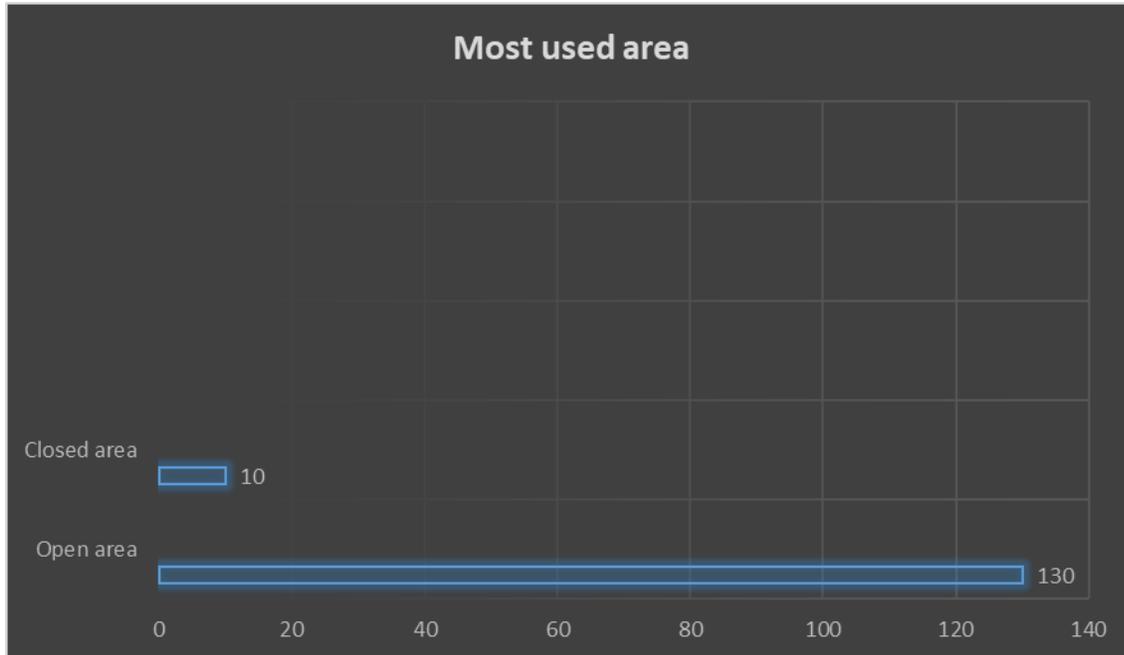
Fourthly the question "What do you think are the factors that encourage and threaten urban pedestrian transportation?" was asked to the participants. The distribution of the answers given by the participants is presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4. Distribution of opinions elements that encourage and threaten urban transportation**

Figure 4 shows the distribution of factors that encourage and threaten pedestrian transportation. While 60 of the participants stated the threatening elements, 40 stated the encouraging elements. It was determined that individuals over the age of 65 who responded threateningly said that they were most threatened by stray dogs (n=60), followed by vehicle and bicycle traffic (n=40) and the way the vehicles were parked (n=20). It was determined that the participants who gave the encouraging answer mostly answered the presence of pedestrian paths and paving material (n=25), and public order (n=25), followed by good night lighting (n=15) and urban equipment (n=10). Participant E<sub>9</sub> said *“The renewal of pedestrian paths by our municipality and their equipping with paving materials allows me to walk easily.”* While E<sub>34</sub> answered *“As a result of our security teams ensuring public order in the city and carrying out checks, I can go to wherever I want without fear.”* He answered. On the other hand, E<sub>16</sub> said *“Before the pandemic, stray dogs roaming the streets, especially after a certain time at night, made it difficult for me when I had to go out in case of emergency.”* E<sub>72</sub> *“Almost every house in the city seems to have 3-4 cars. Also, if these cars are not parked properly are on the pavement, they can hinder walking.”* They stated that walking life this is a threat.

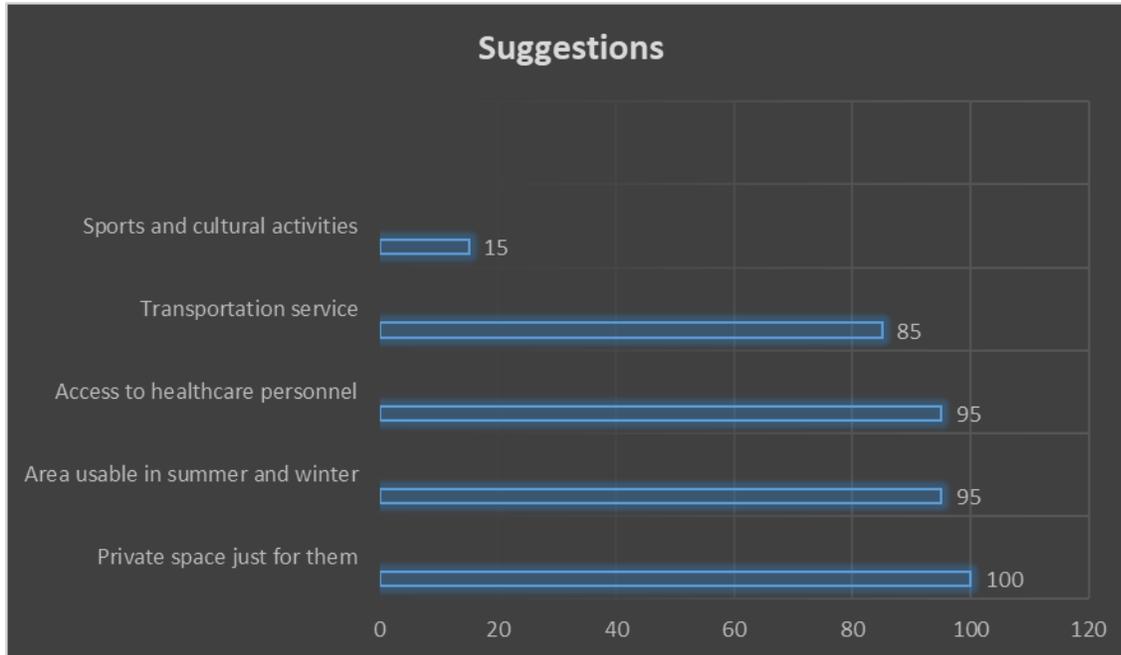
Participants were asked which areas they use most in daily life. The distribution of the answers given by the participants is presented in Figure 5.



**Figure 5. Distribution of opinions on the most used recreation areas**

Figure 5 shows the recreation areas most used by the participants. As can be seen in the figure, the participants stated that they mostly used open spaces (n=130) and closed areas (n=10) were used by people. Participants were asked in which seasons they use open spaces the most. Participants mostly evaluated accessibility in the summer months as good (n=50), followed by medium (n=30) and bad (n=20). In winter months, accessibility was evaluated as poor (n=60) at the highest rate, followed by good (n=20), and medium (n=20) answers.

Finally, the participants were asked for recreation areas. The distribution of the answers given is presented in Figure 6.



**Figure 6. Distribution of recommendations for recreation areas**

Figure 6 shows the distribution of the answers given to the suggestions of individuals over the age of 65 regarding open and closed spaces. The most common answers given were a private area just for them (n=100), an area that can be used in summer and winter (n=95), ease of access to healthcare personnel (n=95), provision of transportation service (n=85), and sports and cultural activities transportation (n=15) followed the suggestions. Participant E<sub>13</sub> said “*The areas should be arranged so that they can be used in both summer and winter. It would also be nice to have areas where only I and my guests can be.*” E<sub>29</sub> “*I would like it to be an area where different cultural and sports events can be held.*” E<sub>57</sub> “*Access to healthcare personnel should be easy when needed in areas*” and E<sub>88</sub> “*Access to such areas should be provided in the best possible way for our age group. Because we may not able to benefit from these services ourselves.*” They expressed their thoughts as follows.

#### **4. Discussion**

In the research conducted to evaluate recreation areas for older individuals in Erzurum, it was determined that they mostly went out for health reasons. It is known that people over the age of 65 generally have more health problems and chronic diseases or to go out due to their illnesses (Akgül,

2020). This confirms the research results studies show that older individuals generally go out for health reasons (Ekici, 2020; Gökçek et al., 2019; Ojembe and Ebe Kolu, 2018; Tsai et. al., 2019). As a result of the research, it was determined that public transportation was used the most in the city and the most people walked for 31- 45 minutes. The use of public transportation at the highest rate and 31-45 minute walk can be explained by connecting it to the life of a metropolitan city such as Erzurum. Living in metropolitan cities, brings with it the fast pace of life. For this reason, especially when the loss of strength of individuals with chronic diseases is taken into consideration, it can be considered as an expected situation that the frequently use public transportation and also walk for less than an hour the during the day (Fazla and Alkan Meşhur, 2023; Mirza Girgin, 2023). Studies have shown that older individuals use public transportation and do not prefer walking (Battara, Zucaro and Tremitera, 2018; Chang et. al., 2019; Mirza Girgin and Hülür, 2021; Mirza Girgin, 2023; Papa, Carpienteri and Guida, 2018; Srichuae, Nitivattananon and Perera, 2016; Wong et. al., 2018).

As a result of the research, older individuals stated that pedestrian traffic was the most threatening factor stray dogs were the most frequently mentioned threatening factors. In addition, vehicle and bicycle traffic and the way vehicles are parked also among the threats. Encouraging factors are stated as the presence of pedestrian paths and paving materials, public order, lighting and urban equipment. If you pay attention, all of what is expressed can be considered directly related to today's contemporary lifestyle. Nowadays, it is known that individuals adopt dogs to have a dog, but then leave them on the street because they believe that they cannot take care of these dogs (Kırışik and Öztürk, 2021). Again, the abundance of vehicles today may cause both the presence of vehicles in pedestrian traffic and the vehicles parking in places where there is no parking (Ağaoğlu and Başdemir, 2019). On the other hand, due to these negative situations experienced in cities more pedestrian roads are being developed, and the covering of these pedestrian roads is arranged accordingly (Yıldız, Kütahyalı and Çavdar, 2021). Necessary measures are being taken for public order, especially to ensure peace and security in the society (Payam, 2018). However, the good structuring of lighting and importance and structuring given to urban equipment can be stated as encouraging factors in cities (Köseoğlu and Demirci, 2018). It is thought that this situation is reflected in the research results. Studies have concluded that urban equipment, lighting and public order are very important among the factors that encourage pedestrian walking and safety of the city, pedestrian paths have become important and structuring has been carried out for this

purpose (Akbaş and Gülhan, 2023; Akkar, Ercan and Bilge, 2017; Ledraa, 2022; Mirghaemi, 2019; Öztürk and Kızıldoğan, 2017; Şayin and Dalkıran, 2020). In addition research results have been found that heavy vehicle traffic is important among the factors that threaten walking in urban life (Akbaş and Gülhan, 2023; Akkar, Ercan and Bilge, 2017; Gündoğdu and Dinçer, 2020; Lee and Park, 2018; Öztürk and Kızıldoğan, 2017).

Another finding obtained as a result of the research was that older individuals mostly use open areas in recreation areas and in the summer season. They evaluated the use of these areas as bad during the winter months. The research was carried out in Erzurum province. Erzurum province is among the cities where the winter season is quite intense and severe. In regions where winters are intense, the lack of capacity of open areas generally causes these areas to be unusable (Çetinkaya, 2014; Winter et al. 2019), and this is reflected in the results. Research has shown that older individuals have to stay at home more during the winter months and cannot use outdoor recreation areas (Costamagna, Lind and Stjernstör, 2019; Ghimire et. al., 2014; Rosenberg et. al. 2013; Vascencolos et. al., 2013).

The last findings of the research is the suggestions given by older individuals for recreation areas. These suggestions include a private area, an area that can be used in summer and winter, ease of access to healthcare personnel, provision of transportation service and access to sports and cultural activities. Today social changes have resulted in the erosion of some values. One of these values can be said to be the decrease in social respect towards older individuals. The most talked about behaviors by older individuals, especially young people, are the behaviors they describe as disrespectful towards them (Lee and Song, 2022; Ronzi et. al., 2018; Taşkesen, 2017; Umutlu and Epik, 2019). For this reason, it is thought that older individuals may also want a private space for themselves. In addition, as stated before, older individuals stated that they can use recreation areas mostly in summer (Çetinkaya, 2014; Winter et. al., 2019). At the same time, older individuals often need healthcare personnel due to their chronic diseases (Işık et. al., 2016; Srivarathan, Jensen and Kristiansen, 2019). These results bring about the desire to have recreation areas in both summer and winter seasons and to reach healthcare personnel as soon as possible. The recommendations to provide transportation services and have sports and cultural activities also coincide with the desire of older individuals to spend the last periods of their lives with quality (Carver et. al., 2018; Franco et. al., 2015; Ghenta et. al., 2022; Salvo et. al., 2018; Strabl et. al., 2016; Tekin, Parlar and Ercan, 2020).

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

As a result of the research conducted to evaluate the recreation areas for elderly individuals in Erzurum province, it was found that they went out mostly for health reasons, used public transportation the most, and spent 31-45 minutes at most. It was concluded that they stated that they walked, that there were many elements that threatened pedestrian paths in the city, that they used outdoor recreation areas in the summer season, and that they wanted special areas to be created for them. It is possible to make the following suggestions regarding the results obtained as a result of the research.

- The existence of well-organized public spaces and recreation areas for elderly individuals who tend to become increasingly socially isolated during the aging process will play an important role in integrating elderly people, especially those living alone in the city, into social life in society. For this reason, the functionality of these areas should be evaluated and necessary arrangements should be made.
- Elderly individuals should be provided with easy access to basic services (post office, bank etc.) cultural and social activities (painting, music, hobby courses, union membership, volunteering programs etc.).
- It is thought there is a need for new policies, strategies to be developed, regulations, activities and training for the elderly in the field of public and local administration in order to keep older adults healthy and active in the aging society.
- It is recommended to plan accessible, usable and safe open and closed recreation areas in cities, designed in accordance with the needs of the elderly, and to plan informative trainings for elderly individuals on healthy aging and activity by authorized institutions and organizations.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The author does not have any conflict of interest with any institution or person.

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