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# Leisure aspirations of people with visual impairment in the Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the contestation of the existence of leisure freedom, particularly among marginalized populations such as people with disabilities, there have been limited studies to ascertain their leisure aspirations. The negative socio-cultural connotations of disability in Ghana further constricts disabled peoples' leisure freedom and therefore warrants research into their leisure aspirations. Employing data obtained from 330 people with visual impairment, via a questionnaire, the study established that the respondents exercised limited freedom in the choice of their leisure activities. Activities desired but out of their reach included jogging, playing board games (ludo, oware and drafts) playing football, reading, visiting recreational areas, and visiting friends and relatives. Reasons for their inability to indulge in desired activities encompassed bodily dysfunction, financial constraints, lack of social support and inaccessible physical environment. The probability of facing any of these constraints was based on the respondents' age, marital status, formal educational status and monthly income.

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## Introduction

Leisure performs an essential function in fostering the inclusion of People with Disabilities (PwDs). The importance of leisure in the lives of PwDs is underscored by both its biological and psychosocial efficacies. The enunciated benefits of leisure to the lives of PwDs include its ability to improve their cognitive and social skills, stress management, development of motor and language skills, and boosting of self-confidence (Darcy and Taylor 2009; Darcy, Cameron, and Pegg 2010). Leisure is therefore central to the lives of PwDs, particularly due to the discrimination and marginalization they encounter in their daily lives. Nevertheless, the benefits of leisure cannot accrue if an individual is unable to participate in a 'freely' chosen activity. The idea of leisure connoting freedom both in time and choice of activity antedate modern conceptions of leisure. Leisure freedom has been a key concept in leisure studies but has recently been questioned in relation to its existence beyond theoretical conceptions (Shaw 1985; Lee and Dattilo 1994; Stebbins 2005; Walsh-Allen 2010; Carr 2017). The rigidity of social structure, within which human beings are both creators and creatures, has been cited as the contending reason that diminishes the practical utility of leisure freedom (Devine 2004; Buttimer and Tierney 2005). In the view of Carr (2017),

there is no behaviour that is immune from external influence and leisure freedom is at best perceived and not absolute. While arguing that freedom does exist in leisure, Carr (2017) acknowledged that such freedom can only be exercised by people in search of enlightenment (self-discovery). However, for those in search of 'freedom from' (escapism), they are shackled by societal power structures in the exercise of such freedom (Carr 2017, 138). Thus, the individual is implicitly coerced into making choices among alternatives that are pre-determined by society mostly based on consumerist ideologies (Carr 2017), a phenomenon that is particularly pervasive among the less powerful and marginalized such as PwDs (Shaw 1985; Pieris and Craik 2004; Craik and Pieris 2006).

Rigid social structures have impacted on the life experiences (including leisure experiences) of PwDs in general and specifically people with visual impairment. The leisure experiences of PwDs, including people with visual impairments, in Africa are characterized by irregularities and restrictions to home-based, passive activities (Adam, Boakye, and Kumi-Kyereme 2017). Additionally, traditional African and Ghanaian conceptions of leisure (especially active leisure) as being frivolous and a preserve for the elite (Yankholmes and Lin 2012) shape the leisure experiences of people with visual impairment. Less privileged population segments, such as people with visual impairment, are expected to be concerned with the necessities of life, which does not include leisure (Adam, Boakye, and Kumi-Kyereme 2017). Despite these specific situational factors in Africa and Ghana that uniquely define the leisure experiences of people with visual impairment, there has been little research into this phenomenon. Further, in the context of African and Ghanaian societies, PwDs in general and particularly those with visual impairment are subject of social exclusion, a situation that has limited their leisure freedom. In these societies, people with visual impairment are expected to rely on non-disabled people for almost every life endeavour, including leisure. Accordingly, the leisure freedom of people with visual impairment is subdued since they must rely on non-disabled people in constructing their leisure (Adam, Boakye, and Kumi-Kyereme 2017). Nonetheless, very little research attention has been dedicated to understanding the leisure freedom of people with visual impairment. Accordingly, there is a paucity of research on the leisure aspirations of persons with visual impairment, particularly in the context of African societies where leisure is perceived as a preserve of the rich and people of high social class (Yankholmes and Lin 2012). In this vein, this study seeks to explore the leisure aspirations of people with visual impairment and examine the reasons for their inability to undertake such desired leisure activities.

This study provides valuable information on the leisure needs of people with visual impairment to individuals and agencies concerned with their welfare. Insights into the leisure needs of people with visual impairment may inform the design of leisure spaces to provide the variety they desire. Further, understanding of the reasons for the inability of PwDs to undertake desired leisure activities may be valuable in constraint targeting. Knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the curtailment of leisure freedom will serve as the basis for designing and introducing socio-cultural and economic interventions that will enhance the ability of people with visual impairment to participate in leisure and ultimately reap its benefits. Regarding literature, this study's contribution lies in its ability to bridge the current literature gap about the leisure aspirations of people with visual impairment and therefore extends the frontiers of knowledge on leisure freedom beyond its theoretical conceptions. Aside from the fact that this segment of society is

understudied relative to leisure, the subject of leisure aspirations in connection with leisure freedom has barely featured in the research endeavours of leisure scholars (e.g. Aitchison 2009; Darcy and Taylor 2009; Evans, Bellon, and Matthews 2017). This study makes a germane contribution by demonstrating how leisure freedom is exercised and the extent to which leisure freedom exists among people with visual impairment. The debate about leisure freedom in the literature is therefore crystallised and projected through this study.

### **Theoretical context: leisure and leisure freedom**

Leisure has been variously defined, with the most important concepts in leisure definitions being 'free time' and 'freely chosen'. The idea of 'freedom' has been sacrosanct in much of the definitions and descriptions of contemporary leisure. Any description of leisure must, as a matter of necessity include the idea of leisure freedom. Leisure freedom by itself connotes the individual's ability to freely decide on the course of his or her leisure lifestyle, including the choice of leisure space and activity as well as the timing of the occurrence. However, the existence of leisure freedom has been questioned in recent publications (Juniu and Henderson 2001; Stebbins 2005; Arneil 2009; Carr 2017). For instance, Juniu and Henderson (2001) contend that the idea of leisure freedom cannot be empirically supported since leisure spaces and activities are socially constructed and shaped by social inequalities. In the estimation of Stebbins (2000, 2005), publications on experiential definitions of leisure do not contain references to 'choice' and when used, it is often used to imply perceived/relative rather than absolute choice, an idea exemplified by Carr (2017, 141). Leisure spaces and activities are constructed by social structures and thus the individual participant lacks significant choice. In the view of Stebbins (2005), words such as 'choice' and 'freely chosen' have outlived their usefulness in describing the experiential nature of leisure and as a consequence advocates that future definitions and research on leisure should incorporate the following modifications: (1) admit that leisure stems from socialization, leaning heavily on what people learn from friends and family; (2) magnify the question of who has what rights to what kind of leisure while taking into account the influence of social power dynamics such as gender, disability, tradition, ethnicity, social class and inequality; (3) focus on the question of aptitude while taking into account age, disability and mental capacity; (4) expand on the question of known alternatives and the role of leisure education on leisure lifestyle; and (5) expand on the question of accessibility of alternatives along the lines of temporal, spatial and socio-economic constraints.

While debate on leisure freedom has recently garnered interest, the idea predates' current concerns, as identified by structuralists (e.g. Cuff and Payne 1984; Clarke and Critcher 1985; McKay 1990, 1991; Rojek 2000); who have earlier affirmed their believe that marginalized individuals are at the mercy of the powerful in society since leisure is defined by people with structural power. Based on the tenets of the structuration theory, individuals do not have the luxury of deciding on their actions because they are implicitly constrained by the socially constructed meaning of 'normality'. These socially constructed meanings of events/objects serve as the frame within which all social actors are confined. Social norms and values provide the basis of social actions in all endeavours, including leisure. The structure which provides the context within which

the individual lives does not only become a benchmark for what is acceptable as leisure but also becomes a constraint for the individual in terms of exercising his or her 'absolute' freedom in leisure. Meanwhile, the social benchmarks are defined by social inequalities such that the rich and powerful construct the boundaries of what is an acceptable societal value or otherwise. Thus, in the analyses of structuralists, ownership of economic resources empowers the few wealthy ones whose leisure lifestyles are imposed on entire societies as being the benchmark (Rojek 2000). Within the structuralists approach to leisure, alternatives are only available in as much as they meet the standards as defined by the powerful social class. The marginalized, including PwDs, therefore have their actual leisure desires sacrificed (McKay 1991; Rojek 2000). However, the knowledge on social actions is limited and thus the apparent lack of choice is not apparent to the individual actor. Consequently, this idea of limited leisure freedom is usually unconceived by both the individual actor and most leisure researchers as societal orientation conceals such reality from them (Stebbins 2005).

However implicit the non-existence of leisure freedom may be to researchers, there are other indicators that point to some inherent admission of the absence of leisure freedom. For instance, over the last five decades, it has become clearer that leisure constraints serve as inhibiting factors on leisure freedom. There is ever-growing literature that describes the constraints that leisure participants encounter (Adam 2014; Adam, Boakye, and Kumi-Kyereme 2017). These constraints often result in the use of negotiation strategies that may entail abandoning some of the participants' leisure desires. Undoubtedly, constraints limit the freedom that the individual can exert in his or her leisure space. Additionally, socio-cultural orientations serve to provide conducive terrain for the limitation of leisure freedom. Social and cultural norms, particularly in the context of Africa and Ghana, shape the development of leisure spaces. Ultimately, preferences towards certain leisure spaces and activities are accepted as appropriate while others are frowned upon (Adam 2014). Meanwhile, socio-cultural definitions of leisure reflect societal power structures in terms of inequalities pertaining to certain exclusionary identities such as gender and disability (Stebbins 2005). In most African and Ghanaian societies preferences for leisure spaces and activities are defined by social class (Adam 2014).

Finally, the idea of boredom in leisure suggests limited leisure freedom (Stebbins 2005). Thus, if leisure freedom is not curtailed, an individual will have so many leisure activities at his/her disposal that one will never feel bored in leisure. Boredom is based on the premise that one has nothing interesting to do and thus has little or no option to choose from. If options abound, then leisure boredom will not triumph. The freedom to exercise leisure in whatever way one desires in whatever activity one chooses is restricted and hence the fixation of an individual on an activity or set of activities to the extent that he/she can become fed-up. Ultimately, the existence of boredom in leisure implicitly underscores the non-existence of absolute leisure freedom.

## **Disability and visual impairment in Ghana**

Many perceptions of visual impairment antedate and have driven disability discourse. Evidence from the Bible links lack of sight to lack of moral insight and subsequently regards blindness as an affliction (Jessup, Bundy, and Cornell 2013). History has always portrayed people who are visually impaired at the extremes of ability as either being helpless,

needing protection, or hopeless and unable to achieve independent living. Bolt (2004, 53) suggests that the terms blindness and the blind have become a 'psychosocial burden' that perpetuates prejudice and that the 'blind' are perceived as a homogeneous group, sharing the same traits. Australian vernacular uses the term 'blind Freddy', to denote people who are unintelligent and unable to understand what is happening around them (Steer and Gale 2006). Many societies and cultures dehumanize people with visual impairment. Dictionary definitions of blindness pertain to ignorance and concealment, implying that if one cannot see then he or she cannot 'know' (Jessup, Bundy, and Cornell 2013).

In Ghana, 40.1% of PwDs have visual impairment, the highest of all the categories of impairment (GSS 2014). The leading causes of visual impairment in Ghana include cataract, glaucoma, trachoma, refractive errors, diabetes, and sickle cell retinopathy (Ghana Eye Foundation 2013). Disability has negative connotations in Ghana. PwDs are often identified by their functional impairments based on moral conceptions (Adam, Boakye, and Kumi-Kyereme 2017). While the living conditions of people with visual impairment are similar to that of the general PwD population, in some instances they experience unique challenges. There is a dual view pertaining to societal perceptions of disability and visual impairment. The first and predominant view relates PwDs and people with visual impairment, especially those whose conditions are congenital, to people whose parents or family members have wronged a deity and thus the impairment is conceived as a punishment visited on the family (Agbenyega 2003; Kassah 2008). In some cases, it is believed that even when dead relatives offend a god or deity, it can cause a living relative to either acquire impairment or give birth to a child with impairment. Consequently, non-disabled people fear that any association with a PwD or person with visual impairment may incur similar punishment (Avoke 2002; Kuyini, Alhassan, and Mahama 2011). The other socio-cultural construction of disability (including visual impairment) perceives PwDs as subjects of charity. Those who subscribe to this view perceive disability as an aberration in God's creation and thus represent an opportunity for non-disabled people to do 'good' and serve God (Agbenyega 2003). It is believed that the path to achieving salvation lies in being sympathetic to PwDs (Kuyini, Alhassan, and Mahama 2011). In this regard, PwDs and people with visual impairment are conceived as a socio-economic burden.

Information, communication, and assistive devices that can offer PwDs new possibilities to achieve independent living and participation in social activities like leisure are virtually non-existent and in cases where they exist, they are not accessible to PwDs (GFD 2008). People who are deaf or have hearing impairment hardly get access to public information as both national and private information and communication service providers cut them out (except for Ghana Television's major news bulletin). The National Media Commission (NMC) does not oblige television stations to provide sign language inset in their programmes (Naami, Hayashi, and Liese 2012). Newspapers, books, and educational materials are not presented in formats that are accessible to people with visual impairment.

Economically, PwDs have faced and continue to face exclusion. Many PwDs live in extreme poverty with a high degree of unemployment and under-employment while they continue to face discrimination in the job market (Naami, Hayashi, and Liese 2012). Meanwhile, it is widely believed that people with visual impairment are economically inactive since they lack eyesight (UNDP 2007). The situation is worse for women with disabilities as they experience multiple disadvantages on account of gender and disability

(Kassah, Kassah, and Agbota, 2012). Therefore, some PwDs resort to begging as a livelihood strategy. It is not uncommon to find PwDs begging on the streets, especially in urban areas. Similarly, people with visual impairment have very limited access to education as the educational curriculum and facilities do not make provision for the mass education of people with visual impairment. Teachers in special education who can teach people with visual impairment are limited while educational infrastructure and facilities are lacking beyond those provided for non-disabled people (UNDP 2007). In this regard, people with visual impairment have limited access to information since they cannot read and write like their non-disabled counterparts.

To improve the quality of life of PwDs in Ghana, the Persons with Disability Law (Act 715) was passed in 2006 to give legal backing to the rights of PwDs in the country. The law covers a wide range of issues related to the well-being of PwDs, including access to medical care, education, transportation, and employment. Among the rights of PwDs guaranteed under the law are access to all public places, services and social activities. Under the law, public places and services such as pubs, entertainment facilities, attraction sites and places of public gathering are to be made accessible to PwDs. Ramps and lifts are to be provided while sign language and special services are to be made accessible to PwDs. Despite these provisions, very little improvement has been achieved in the lives of PwDs, partly due to poor implementation of the law (GSS 2014). Pursuant to Article 41 of the law, a National Council for Persons with Disability (NCPD) was established in 2009 to propose policies, programmes and strategies for ensuring achievement of full participation of PwDs in social life. Through parliament, the NCPD enacted a law that requires District Assemblies (local political administrative authorities) to give 2% of the quarterly funding (District Assembly Common Fund [DACF]) they receive from the Central Government to PwDs. However, this support is characterized by inadequacy and persistent delays. Further, some of the local authorities apply these funds to sectors of the local economy they consider relevant to the neglect of PwDs. Owing to a lack of reliable data on PwDs, the District Assemblies rely on disability-based associations such as the Ghana Society for the Physical Challenged (GSPC), the Ghana Association of the Blind (GAB), and the Ghana National Association of Deaf (GNAD) among others in disbursing the monies. These associations receive these quarterly funds and disburse them to their members. Another form of state support is the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP). Unlike the first kind of state support, this state support (in the form of monthly stipends) is not specifically targeted at PwDs but owing to the extreme poverty situation of PwDs in the country, some of them benefit from the programme.

## **Study method**

### ***Study setting***

The study setting is the Kumasi Metropolis in Ghana. The Kumasi Metropolis is the second largest city in Ghana after the national capital (Accra). The Metropolis has the highest proportion of people with visual impairment among all major cities in Ghana and hence was deemed ideal for this study. The Metropolis has 42,060 people with impairment with 17,984 of them being people with visual impairment (GSS 2014). Other forms of impairment in the Metropolis include physical, emotional, speech, hearing, intellectual and

multiple impairments. Regarding leisure facilities and opportunities, the Metropolis is endowed with numerous attractions and open spaces (e.g. Komfo Anokye Sword site, the Zoological Garden, the Ghana Armed Forces Museum, Manhyia Palace, Prempeh II museum, Ghana National Cultural Centre, Children's Park and Rotary Park) among others.

### ***Research instrument***

A questionnaire was used in gathering the data for this study. The questionnaire was designed in English. The design of the questionnaire in English was necessitated by the fact that English is the official language in Ghana. Even though it would have been appropriate to design the questionnaire in braille, the high illiteracy rate among people with visual impairment in Ghana (GSS 2014) made it an unviable option. However, the questionnaire was administered by the research assistants in the Asante Twi language (indigenous language of the Metropolis). The research assistants read and interpreted the questions to the respondents in the Asante Twi language and their responses were recorded. To ensure both face and content validity of the measurement items of the questionnaire, the questionnaire administration was preceded by a forward and backward translation of its content between English and the Asante Twi language by two Asante Twi language lecturers at the Department of Ghanaian Languages of the University of Cape Coast. Also, the researcher, together with the two field assistants, was trained by the Asante Twi language lecturers in the proper translation of the content of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was structured into three sections. The first section inquired about the leisure activities undertaken by the respondents. Under this section, the respondents were asked to list the activities they frequently undertook on weekly basis. They were further asked to indicate the frequency of participation in terms of the number of times each activity is undertaken as well as the time spent on the activity. The second section centred on the leisure aspirations of the respondents. Here, the respondents were required to list the various activities they desired but are unable to undertake. In addition, they were required to indicate the reasons for their inability to undertake such activities. The last section measured the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, including sex, age, marital status, level of formal education attainment, household size and monthly income.

### ***Data collection***

Data for the study were collected from a sample of 330 people with visual impairment using a questionnaire from August to September, 2014. The respondents were reached through a stratified sampling approach. Under this method, the list of all registered members of the GAB in the Metropolis was used. The GAB is the umbrella association of all people with visual impairment in the country. It registers people with visual impairment and ensures their well-being through acts like advocacy, contribution to national dialogue, and socialization events. The GAB is not state funded and as such funds its activities from donations by philanthropic individuals and organizations and also from fees paid by its members. It has a national representation with regional and district branches across the country. The list provided by the GAB contained the names and contact details of its members in the Metropolis and hence served as the sampling frame. The list was



disaggregated based on sex as a stratification variable. This was important because leisure as a social phenomenon has a gender dimension, as has been widely acknowledged in the literature (eg. Arab-Moghaddam, Henderson, and Sheikholeslami 2007; Adam 2014). Next, the sampling interval for each of the stratum was computed by dividing the total population by the desired sample. Coincidentally, the sampling interval for the two strata is 18. Consequently, the first element from each of the stratum was randomly selected after which the sampling interval was applied to select every 18th member on the list. In line with the tenets of probability sampling philosophy, a substitution list was drawn from the population based on the same sampling interval.

In reaching the selected individuals, the bi-monthly meetings of the GAB were used as contact periods. The association meets on the first and third Saturdays of every month. These meetings are scheduled to deliberate on the well-being of the association's members and decide on future actions. During the first visit, the executives of the GAB introduced the research team to the association's members and the team explained the rationale of the study to the members. Afterward, the selected individuals were contacted by phone during which their consent was sought. Individuals who agreed to be part of the study were asked to report three hours before the commencement of the next meeting so that the questionnaires could be administered to them. Selected individuals who were absent from the meetings were contacted by phone to seek their consent for the questionnaires to be administered to them in their homes. Those who agreed were visited at home and the questionnaires were administered accordingly. Those who agreed to be part but were later unavailable within the data collection period were replaced with individuals on the substitution list.

As part of the data collection and management routine, the anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed by ensuring that no identifier information (such as house address, names and telephone numbers) were linked to the data. Confidentiality is key to the study and it was observed by making sure that the data is only available to the researcher and as such it is stored on an external hard drive with a password. Further, the two master's students who helped in the data collection exercise were duly recruited and paid. In specific terms, the availability of this opportunity was advertised. However, suitability was restricted to post-graduate students with a background in leisure, tourism or disability studies. Four master's students were shortlisted and taken through training and mock examination after which the best two were selected.

### ***Data analyses***

The data were processed with the Statistical Package for Service Solution (SPSS) version 19. Discriminant Analysis (DA) was used to classify the respondents along the four reasons they cited as being responsible for their inability to undertake desired leisure activities. The reasons for their inability to engage in the desired leisure activities served as the dependent variable while their socio-demographic variables were used as the independent (predictor) variables. The appropriateness of the DA on the data was confirmed by the fact that the assumptions of homogeneity of variance-covariance-matrices (Box's M was not significant at  $P < 0.05$ ) and multi-collinearity were checked and not violated. Also, there were enough cases in each of the discriminant categories.

## Profile of the respondents

Table 1 indicates that the sample was dominated by males (60.5%). Leisure in Ghana has gendered dynamics rooted in the socio-cultural set-up of Ghanaian societies. Some leisure activities are conceived as the preserve of males (Adam 2014). Due to women's defined traditional role as 'home keepers', their leisure activities are mostly home based and passive in nature (Adam 2014). Nonetheless, males did not differ from their female counterparts in terms of activities patronized in this study. A review of the activities undertaken by the respondents revealed that they are largely passive and home based which are traditionally undertaken by both sexes. As shown in Table 1, the sample was skewed towards those aged 50 years and above (55.4%) and thus indicative of the aged demography of the population of people with visual impairment in the Metropolis and Ghana in general (GSS 2014). Ageing is associated with changing leisure patterns. The meaning and benefits of leisure are re-interpreted in later life (Agahi, Ahocic, and Porker 2006). While some aged people withdraw from some activities, others maintain and increase their level of participation in other activities (Agahi, Ahocic, and Porker 2006). Nonetheless, aged people are generally inclined to passive leisure activities (Dupuis and Alzheimer 2008). For people with visual impairment, the limiting environmental conditions as well as the exclusion they experience act conjointly with their dependency on non-disabled people to curtail their leisure engagement. Regarding marriage, most of the respondents

**Table 1.** Profile of respondents ( $N = 330$ ).

Socio-demographics	<i>N</i>	Percent
Sex		
Male	200	60.5
Female	130	39.5
Age (years)		
20–29	25	7.7
30–39	53	15.9
40–49	69	21.0
50–59	100	30.3
60–69	83	25.1
Marital status		
Never married	107	32.3
Married	86	26.2
Ever married	137	41.5
Formal educational attainment		
No formal education	105	31.8
Basic education	117	35.4
Secondary education	39	11.8
Tertiary education	69	21.0
Employment status		
Employed	141	42.6
Unemployed	189	57.4
Monthly income (GH¢)*		
≤100	168	50.8
101–200	47	14.4
201–300	32	9.7
301–400	42	12.8
401+	41	12.3
Household size		
1–5	210	63.6
6–10	68	20.5
10–15	52	15.9

\*1GH¢ = 0.26 US dollars.

were either separated or divorced (ever married = 41.5%). Those who attained basic education dominated the sample (35.4%) followed by those without any formal education (31.8%). The sample is suggestive of low levels of formal education among the respondents and thus reflects the national pattern of formal education among PwDs. Most of the respondents were unemployed (57.4%) and earned an average monthly income of 100 Ghana Cedis or less, mostly through remittances from family and friends as well as benevolent individuals/organizations.

## Results of the study

### *Leisure activities*

Seven different activities were found to be popular among the respondents (Table 2). The activities include chatting, listening to music, watching television, listening to other radio programmes aside music, sleeping, meditation and reading. Chatting was the most widely patronized leisure activity (23.8%). This was followed by listening to music (17.9%), watching television (15.5%), listening to radio (14.0%), sleeping (11.7%), meditation (9.7%) and reading (7.6%). However, in terms of time spent on participation, listening to music (3.6 h) watching television (3.8 h) and sleeping (3.7 h) were the most popular (Table 2).

### *Leisure aspirations*

Among the sampled respondents, 6.4% indicated they did not have any leisure aspirations aside from their current leisure engagements. However, the remaining respondents (93.6%) indicated that they have a wish-list of activities they could not undertake (Table 3). These activities include jogging, playing board games (such as ludo, oware [local board game] and drafts), playing football, reading, visiting recreational/open

**Table 2.** Leisure pursuits of the disabled.

Leisure activity	N	Percent	Rank	Average time used (hours)
Chatting	321	23.8	1	2.0
Listening to music	241	17.9	2	3.6
Watching television	207	15.5	3	3.8
Listening to radio	189	14.0	4	2.8
Sleeping	157	11.7	5	3.7
Meditation	129	9.7	6	2.5
Reading	102	7.6	7	2.4
Overall	1346 <sup>a</sup>	100.0		

<sup>a</sup>Multiple choice applied.

**Table 3.** Leisure aspirations (N = 309).

Activity	N	Percent	Rank
Jogging	301	24.0	1
Board games (Ludo, oware, draft)	291	23.2	2
Recreational areas	253	20.2	3
Taking walk/Visiting Friend and Relatives (VFR)	201	16.0	4
Playing football	123	9.8	5
Reading	85	6.8	6
Overall	1254 <sup>a</sup>	100	

<sup>a</sup>Multiple choice applied.

spaces, and taking walks. Table 3 shows the wish-list of leisure activities among the people with visual impairment.

### **Reasons for inability to undertake desired activities**

Four main reasons were cited by the people with visual impairment as being responsible for their inability to undertake desired leisure activities. These include their impairment, financial constraints, lack of social support and unfriendly physical environment (Table 4).

To establish the relative importance of the various reasons cited by the respondents in relation to their background variables, DA was conducted. In conducting the DA, only respondents who have a wish-list of leisure activities were considered. Thus, the 6.4% of the respondents who indicated they did not have leisure aspirations aside from their current leisure engagements were not included in the DA. Consequently, a sample of 309 people with visual impairment was used in the DA with reasons for inability to undertake the desired leisure activities as the dependent variable and socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age, marital status, educational status, religion, monthly income earnings) as the predictor variables. The respondents differed significantly based on the reasons for their inability to undertake desired leisure activities on three predictor variables (age, educational status and monthly income) as revealed by the univariate ANOVAs. In the DA, a significant discriminant function emerged ( $\chi^2 = 33.24$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p = 0.016$ ). The discriminant function and correlations between the predictor variables and the dependent variables are shown in Table 5.

The results suggest that formal educational status, age and monthly income were the strongest predictors of reasons for inability to engage in desired leisure activities. As formal educational status was negatively correlated with the discriminant function value, it implies that people with visual impairment who have attained higher educational status were less likely to cite their impairment as a reason for their inability to undertake a desired leisure activity. Additionally, the results showed that age is positively correlated

**Table 4.** Reasons for inability to undertake desired activity ( $N = 309$ ).

Reason	<i>N</i>	Percent
Impairment	299	29.6
Financial constraints	287	28.4
Lack of social support	233	23.0
Unfriendly physical environment	192	19.0
Total	1011 <sup>a</sup>	100.0

<sup>a</sup>Multiple choice applied.

**Table 5.** Discriminant function coefficients and structure matrix ( $N = 309$ ).

Socio-demographics	Canonical discriminant function coefficients			Structure matrix		
	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3
Sex	0.424	0.112	0.030	0.277 <sup>a</sup>	0.102	-0.068
Age	0.204	-0.109	-0.436	0.146	-0.026	0.816 <sup>a</sup>
Marital status	0.118	0.620	-0.446	0.086	0.490 <sup>a</sup>	-0.360
Education status	0.516	0.844	-0.254	-0.784 <sup>a</sup>	0.189	-0.065
Religion	-0.086	0.614	0.786	0.046	0.408	0.351
Monthly income	0.557	-0.957	0.164	-0.793 <sup>a</sup>	-0.284	0.186

<sup>a</sup>Largest absolute correlation between each variable and any discriminant function.

with the discriminant function implying that older people with visual impairment showed increased likelihood of citing lack of social support as a reason for their inability to undertake their desired activity. With regards to monthly income, the discriminant function indicates that higher monthly income earners were less likely to cite their visual impairment as a reason for not being able to participate in a desired leisure activity.

## Discussion

As a social activity, leisure is socially constructed along the axis of societal power structures. For this reason, the existence of absolute leisure freedom has been contested (Stebbins 2005; Aitchison 2009). Despite the contestation regarding the existence of leisure freedom, particularly among people of lower social classes such as people with visual impairment, little empirical discourse has been focused on the subject. Much of the scholarly works on leisure freedom has been theoretical rather than empirical. In this regard, this study contributes to the debate on the subject by assessing the leisure aspirations of people with visual impairment as a lens to unearthing the freedom with which they exercise their leisure. In that regard, this study demonstrates that people with visual impairment lacked significant leisure freedom and thus are not able to extend their choice beyond the activities that are pre-determined by societal power structures. Their inability to fulfil some leisure aspirations indicates limitation in leisure freedom. Multiple reasons could account for the existence of limited leisure freedom among the respondents. First, the idea that they have to rely on non-disabled family members and friends could have ramifications for their leisure freedom. Thus, when general life freedom is curtailed as in the case of people with visual impairment (Kassah 2008), it invariably affects their ability to exercise absolute freedom in making their own choices in leisure and are therefore coerced into undertaking leisure activities approved by their family and friends. Second, the age structure of the respondents could have a tangential impact on their leisure freedom. Generally, the social welfare system for the aged in Ghana is poor and a lot of the aged are made to rely on their family members for remittances and care. This situation is worse for people with visual impairment who are denied the opportunity to construct meaningful socio-economic lives and therefore live in poverty. In this regard, they are made to heavily depend on family members who provide them with physical, emotional and economic assistance. Such dependency significantly limits their leisure freedom.

Another important finding pertains to the emergence of functional impairment as an obstacle to leisure freedom. This finding is inconsistent with the tenets of the social model of disability which currently shapes disability discourse and programmes around the world. Functional impairment is a product of the medical perspective of disability which tends to describe PwDs by their bodily dysfunction and portray them as people in need of curing (Darcy and Taylor 2009). This view is considered unconstructive to achieving inclusion of PwDs and discarded for the more inclusive notion of the social model that de-emphasizes the functional impairment and emphasizes the role of social structures in disabling individuals with impairment. The citing of functional impairment (visual impairment) as a constraint to undertaking desired leisure activities partly suggests that the conception of disability is contextual. In the case of Ghana, the socio-cultural context as against that of the western societies significantly differs and could offer an

explanation for this finding. In developed western societies, much of the disability movements are based on strong legal implementation regimes with societal perceptions of disability largely grounded on the social model of disability. On the contrary, in most Ghanaian societies, disability and PwDs are dehumanized and excluded from social life. People with visual impairment are socialized to internalize the negative construction of visual impairment that is collectively held by society. Eventually, this negatively constructed social meaning of visual impairment coupled with the associated negative social attitude towards people with visual impairment leads them to believe that their impairment is an obstacle to achieving inclusion. The negative socio-cultural portrayal of PwDs as being morally decadent (Kassah 2008) and disability as being infectious (Avoke 2002) results in exclusion of PwDs.

Personality traits define individual values and relations with the wider society. Proportionally, individual characteristics that define one's relation with the wider society have implications for leisure freedom and thus ability or inability to fulfil one's leisure wishes. As demonstrated in this study, the individual personality variables with statistically significant influence on leisure freedom include formal educational status, age and monthly income. In relation to age, older people with visual impairment are likely to experience increasing limitation in their leisure freedom due to the absence of adequate social support systems in the form of state financial support, accommodation and other safety nets. On the contrary, relatively younger people with visual impairment are comparatively active and able to successfully negotiate some of the negative socio-cultural stereotypes to enable them experience 'enhanced leisure freedom'. Indeed, younger people with visual impairment are noted to use their leisure spaces as a tool for resistance to negative socio-cultural stereotypes (Adam, Boakye, and Kumi-Kyereme 2017).

Formal education enhances one's networks and social status and in addition, enlightens an individual of opportunities. These associated benefits of formal education help to broaden the leisure freedom of educated people with visual impairment relative to their uneducated counterparts. In relation to this study, formal education tends to enlighten the individual with visual impairment to rely on his or her abilities and less on the impairment. Additionally, formal education increases the confidence of the individual to resist some of the negative socio-cultural inclinations of disability that makes it unlikely for educated people to cite their impairment as an impediment to leisure freedom. Alternatively, less educated people or those without formal education suffer multiple discriminations due to their impairment. As such, they lack significant power of agency (in the form of exposure and confidence) to deal with the negative socio-cultural stereotypes associated with disability. Conversely, they are socialized to internalize the negative socio-cultural connotations of disability, which leads to a sense of helplessness. In addition to enhancing the social status of people with visual impairment, high income levels enable them to engage the services of caregivers (albeit their relatives/acquaintances). With the possibility of being paid by people with visual impairment, some relatives and neighbours allow their children to care for people with visual impairment; an act that may enhance their leisure freedom as compared to their counterparts who cannot pay for such services. Subsequently, relatively high income earning people with visual impairment are less likely to cite lack of social support as a reason for their inability to undertake desired leisure activities.

## Conclusion

This study sought to examine the leisure aspirations of people with visual impairment as well as establish the reasons for their inability to exercise their leisure freedom. Using a random sample of 330 people with visual impairment in the Kumasi Metropolis of Ghana, a number of conclusions are made. First, leisure freedom in the context of people with visual impairment is limited. The composition of leisure (what can and cannot be done as leisure) among people with visual impairment is limited to what is available; which is largely determined by societal power structures. Further, the study concludes that contrary to the contemporary conception of disability based on the tenets of the social model of disability, some of the people with visual impairment view their impairment as a disabling factor and hence a barrier to exercising leisure freedom. The idea that people with impairment are disabled by societal barriers and not their impairment is not shared by some of the respondents involved in this study. Perhaps this view is a product of social orientation. Based on the negative socio-cultural construction of disability (including visual impairment), there is a negative social attitude towards people with visual impairment. As social members, people with visual impairment are socialized to believe that their impairment is an obstacle to achieving inclusion. Consequently, people with visual impairment internalize these negative societal views on visual impairment and hence the belief that their impairment is a reason for their inability to exercise leisure freedom. Accordingly, there is the need to acknowledge and understand how socialization and other social agents help to shape the conceptions of disability and the attitudes of both PwDs and non-disabled people towards disability.

Further, the study concludes that the reasons why people with visual impairment cannot achieve their leisure aspirations are varied, yet reflect their struggles within the broader spectrum of life. By extension, these daily difficulties transcend into their leisure spaces and thus limit their quest to fulfil their leisure desires. Reasons such as a lack of social support, financial constraints, and inaccessible physical environment reflect the challenges they encounter in all spheres of life. Inherently, these reasons also reflect the level of neglect and marginalization faced by PwDs and specifically people with visual impairment. Resources are committed to the provision of facilities and services geared at improving the welfare of non-disabled people without consideration for people with visual impairment.

Additionally, certain socio-demographic characteristics define the social status of people with visual impairment and invariably determine the possibility of them fulfilling their leisure aspirations. In relation to the respondents, age substantially increases their dependence on relatives. This dependency derails the power of agency that could have been exercised by people with visual impairment in fulfilling their leisure freedom. Meanwhile, formal education is positively related to the respondents' conceptions of disability. Thus, people with visual impairment who have no formal education are more likely to conceive their impairment from a medical perspective and therefore perceive their impairment as an impediment to exercising leisure freedom. In this regard, formal education is a significant factor in shaping the conception of people with visual impairment. Moreover, the income level of people with visual impairment influences their perceptions of social support and may serve as an inhibitor to or enhancer of leisure freedom.

Finally, this paper makes an important contribution to the literature on the leisure experiences of PwDs and specifically people with visual impairment. Interests in understanding the experiences of people with visual impairment, particularly in developing countries such as Ghana has failed to garner support among leisure researchers. In this vein, there is a paucity of information and understanding of the nuances between socio-cultural contexts of visual impairment and leisure involvements of people with visual impairment. This paper has demonstrated that the leisure engagement of people with visual impairment is underpinned by their socio-cultural, economic and environmental contexts, which varies widely between the developed and developing countries such as Ghana. Such situational factors tend to place a constraining frame on the ability of people with visual impairment to exercise their leisure freedom.

### **Implications of the study**

First, the finding that people with visual impairment have leisure aspirations indicate that they are not able to fulfil their leisure dreams and thus their leisure freedom is sub-consciously limited. The practical implications relate to the fact that leisure programmes should not only concentrate on activities that are currently patronized but rather on the desires or aspirations as well. The inability to undertake the desired leisure activities has resulted in the patronage of the activities currently undertaken. In reality, therefore, if the desired activities are made available, they will be preferred to those currently undertaken. By focusing on the desired activities, participation can be enhanced while satisfaction may be guaranteed. In this regard, the GAB as well as Ministry of Gender and Social Protection and other city authorities must strive to create disable friendly leisure spaces fitted with activities that are desired by people with visual impairment. Alternatively, existing public spaces can be reconfigured to become disable friendly and provided with a range of activities desired as reflected in this study. Such an initiative will improve on the leisure participation of people with visual impairment.

The findings on the reasons for the inability of the people with visual impairment to fulfil their leisure dreams implies that when their general conditions of life are improved, they will be able to engage in their desired activities. Reasons such as lack of social support, financial constraints and inaccessible physical environment pervades all spheres of their lives. Ultimately, there is the need for individuals and organizations interested in the welfare of people with visual impairment (including the GAB) to heighten their advocacy and programmes that are geared toward the improvement of their socio-economic conditions. As demonstrated in this study, leisure among marginalized group of people is inextricably linked to their ability to achieve socio-economic emancipation. Further, the socio-demographic characteristics of people with visual impairment can be used as segmentation variables to discuss their leisure aspirations and design specific leisure programmes aimed at enhancing participation. Particularly, formal education and for that matter leisure education should be enhanced among people with visual impairment. As demonstrated in this study, high formal education achievers do not perceive their impairment as a constraint. In terms of literature, this finding implies that future leisure research on PwDs should explore the intricacies of leisure freedom through more personalized qualitative methodologies. Further studies aimed at unearthing the role of socialization in disabling and limiting the leisure freedom of people with



visual impairment will be a valuable addition to the literature since this study suggests that the respondents are socialized to internalize the feeling of helplessness and hence the view that their impairment is a constraint to leisure freedom.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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