



Downtime for a person is a time when the person can relax, i.e., it is a leisure time in-between one's daily routine. For people like us living in urban areas, our times of leisure may be spent or reading, watching movies, visiting friends, going for walks, exercising, or simply meeting friends and chatting. But very little is known about how an average rural resident spend their downtime, or whether they have sufficient downtime for personal pursuits. About 68% of India's population lives in rural areas, which is about 900 million people. The Transform Rural India Foundation in partnership with Sambodhi Research and Communications, conducted a pan-India rural downtime survey to answer some of these questions.

How does rural India spend their downtime?

The survey primarily focused on leisure time and activities done during this time by rural Indians. The aim of the survey was to understand activities that the rural population engages in for leisure and to identify their interests. The participants of the survey can be broadly divided into four demographic sets viz. the young adolescent (unmarried, 14-19 years), the young adults (married, 20-35 years, and with one child aged less than 15 years), the middle-aged (married, 36-55 years) and the Elderly (60 + years). Each age group has been further categorized based on gender (male and female). Total sample coverage is 2655 persons, spread across 20 representative states. The male sample was 148 while the female sample was 1164.

When questioned about leisure time during the day, the respondents admitted to spending sporadic moments at different times of the day doing leisure activities. The table below illustrates the findings.

Mean leisure time at different times of the day (in minutes)

	Before 9 AM		9 AM - 12 Noon		12 Noon - 4 PM		4 PM - 8 PM		8 PM- 10 PM		After 10 PM	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Young adolescents	43	35	38	40	54	54	69	61	48	45	36	33
Young adults	34	30	37	39	53	62	57	55	46	42	39	34
Middle-aged	39	35	37	44	57	62	63	57	51	43	38	32
Elderly	48	48	62	72	79	84	76	78	48	46	40	34

What is done during leisure time?

The influence of the smartphone era

Affordable mobile internet has been one of the primary reasons why the smartphone usage has proliferated both in rural and urban India. Just like the urban counterparts, the rural citizens spend significant amount of their time using mobile phones. This could be because the smartphone caters to specific need of all generations. While the elderly might use it to listen to devotional songs or watch a television serial which they missed on TV, the young adolescents use it to play mobile games. Regardless of the varied scope of its usage, spending time using the mobile phone has been a common leisure activity across age groups.

Watching television

Until few years ago, cable TV was an important part of almost everyone's life in India. Watching cricket or eagerly waiting for a favorite show on TV was a common feature. Ever since the launch of OTT platforms, a large section of urban India has moved to the concept of binge-watching shows. Further, the ease of access to these platforms on multiple devices has reduced the popularity of traditional television viewing. However, the idiot box is still an important part of the lives of rural Indians. The idea of watching a show or a movie with family and friends on television is still a popular choice of leisure for most rural Indians across all age groups.



Chatting with family and friends

“All animals communicate. What's special about gossip is that it's not about the here and now. You don't gossip about lions. You don't gossip about clouds. You only gossip about other people. And once you do, you can keep track of many more people - this is the basis for forming larger communities.”

- Yuval Noah Harari (in his book *Homo Sapiens*)

One of the most common activities of leisure was found to be chatting with friends, family and neighbors in a small gathering. All age groups loved to sit down with their close ones and talk. In spite of avenues of leisure such as smartphones and television all age groups are responded saying that chatting with friends, family or neighbors is a sought-out activity of leisure. Perhaps, gossip is an important feature in these conversations and clearly rural Indians seem to be liking it. People in rural areas place great importance on socializing and building community relationships.

Religious activity

Faith is an important thing for most rural Indians specially in the lives of the senior citizens. Both men and women of the elderly age-group spend their leisure time in religious activities. This was one of the top 3 responses of the elderly. These religious activities can be prayer at home or a religious place in the village like mosque, temple, church etc. In fact, many of the senior citizens used mobile phones to listen to devotional songs or watch videos related to religion.



Top 3 Leisure activities across age groups and gender

	Male			Female		
Young adolescents	Use mobile phone (play mobile games/ watch movies/ listen to songs on phone)	Watch tv	Chat with family/ friends/ neighbours	Watch tv	Chat with family/ friends/ neighbours	Use mobile phone (play mobile games/ watch movies/ listen to songs on phone)
Young adults	Chat with family/ friends/ neighbours	Use mobile phone (play mobile games/ watch movies/ listen to songs on phone)	Watch tv	Chat with family/ friends/ neighbours	Watch tv	Use mobile phone (play mobile games/ watch movies/ listen to songs on phone)
Middle-aged	Chat with family/ friends/ neighbours	Use mobile phone (play mobile games/ watch movies/ listen to songs on phone)	Watch tv	Chat with family/ friends/ neighbours	Watch tv	Use mobile phone (play mobile games/ watch movies/ listen to songs on phone)
Elderly	Chat with family/ friends/ neighbours	Use mobile phone (play mobile games/ watch movies/ listen to songs on phone)	Prayer/ religious activity (prayer at home go to temple/ mosque /church etc.)	Chat with family/ friends/ neighbours	Watch tv	Prayer/ religious activity (prayer at home go to temple/ mosque /church etc.)

What rural India wants to do during their downtime?

Rural Indians have many aspirations to utilize their leisure time for pursuing many interests and hobbies. These activities vary across age-groups; the younger generation of boys and girls want to pursue interests like learning to drive motor vehicles such as trucks, cars or motorcycles and the elderly men want to have a good time by drinking alcohol during their leisure time.

Acquiring a skill

India is on a path of economic development and the future generations have to be skilled. Most respondents of the survey across age-groups and gender wanted to engage in a skill or a trade such as tailoring, designing clothes, plumbing, carpentry, etc. Acquiring a skill during their leisure time was one of the top 3 activities that respondents wanted to do across almost all age groups. Learning a new skill related to a trade is not something that most of us want to do during our leisure time. However, rural Indians think of acquiring a skill related to a trade as an activity that can be done during leisure time.

Top 3 leisure activities people wish to do across age-groups and gender

	Male			Female		
Young adolescents	Ride a cycle/bike/ scooter or drive a car/ truck /tractor	Playing outdoor, (cricket/ football/ kho-kho/ kabbadi or any organised sport)	Dance or learn to dance	Dance or learn to dance	Engage in learning a vocational trade (designing/ tailoring/ plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, etc.)	Ride a cycle/bike/ scooter or drive a car/truck/tractor
Young adults	Engage in learning a vocational trade (designing/ tailoring/ plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, etc.)	Playing outdoor, (cricket/ football/ kho-kho/ kabbadi or any organised sport)	Consume alcohol/ party with friends	Engage in learning a vocational trade (designing/ tailoring/ plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, etc.)	Dance or learn to dance	Ride a cycle/bike/ scooter or drive a car/truck/tractor

	Male			Female		
Middle-aged	Engage in learning a vocational trade (designing/ tailoring/ plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, etc.)	Prayer at home/ participate in religious gathering/ sing or listen to devotional songs at gatherings	Ride a cycle/bike/ scooter or drive a car/truck/tractor	Engage in learning a vocational trade (designing/ tailoring/ plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, etc.)	Prayer at home/ participate in religious gathering/ sing or listen to devotional songs at gatherings	Ride a cycle/bike/ scooter or drive a car/truck/tractor
Elderly	Prayer at home/ participate in religious gathering/ sing or listen to devotional songs at gatherings	Consume alcohol/ party with friends	Learn or play music or musical instrument (including singing)	Prayer at home/ participate in religious gathering/ sing or listen to devotional songs at gatherings	Engage in learning a skill/ trade (designing clothes/ tailoring/ plumbing, electrical work, woodwork, etc.)	Use mobile phone (play mobile games/ watch movies/listen to songs on phone)

Reasons why they can't pursue their interests

Most young adolescents and young adults wished to learn dancing while many male young adults wanted to consume alcohol and have a good time. Similarly, the elderly wished to learn music and almost all age-groups wanted to acquire a new skill. But all these activities are aspirations and not a reality. In order to identify the reasons why rural Indians are unable to pursue their interests, the respondents of the survey were asked about the reasons. It can be concluded that many girls and women could not pursue their interests owing to restrictions from family. However, one of the major reasons why people could not pursue interests is affordability. Perhaps, learning a new skill or learning music or even drinking alcohol involves spending money which clearly seems to be a factor demotivating rural Indians to pursue their interests.

Male	Female	
20%	33%	It will not be looked upon favourably by the elders in the household/husband
15%	21%	I will not be given permission to engage in this activity
27%	30%	There is no scope/facility available locally to pursue this activity
20%	14%	I will not get others/friends to join in such an activity and this cannot be done alone
40%	36%	This costs money, which I cannot afford

Leisure activities can improve the physical and mental health of individuals and have the significance of regulating the body and mind, alleviating the stress of life, and providing a pleasant experience. In this context, it is important to take note of the fact that many men can't pursue downtime activities of choice simply because they are either too expensive, or opportunities not available locally. On the other hand, women in rural India face discrimination from household elders who do not look kindly upon girls in the family taking up hobbies and interests which might require them to spend time outside of home.



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