

Leisure Lifestyle and Health in an Aging Village
-Kitanakagusuku (北中城村) in Okinawa-

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In the U.S and United Kingdom, both the Social Gradient Theory of Life Expectancy (SGTLE) and Fundamental Social Cause Theory (FSCT) are used to study health. Although both theories are related to socioeconomic status (SES), validity of both theories and role of leisure has not determined by previous studies in cross-cultural settings. In addition, relationships between cultural consonance, leisure and health have been studied by anthropologists; however, leisure activities were not comprehensively measured in their studies. Therefore, this study is to

explore relationships between leisure and health and examine validity of SGTLE, FSCT, and cultural consonance in a cross-cultural setting in Okinawa, Japan.

Okinawa is an isolated island located in the most southwestern prefecture of Japan. The region has been a world leader in life expectancy and positive health profiles for decades. The positive health profiles have resulted in a low risk for major age-related, chronic diseases (Willcox, Willcox, He, Wang and Suzuki, 2008). By 2000, according to Japan Ministry of Health and Welfare life, Okinawa had even surpassed Japan, Sweden and United State (U.S.) to lead the world in life expectancy with an average age of 81.2. While genetics, caloric restriction and healthy cognitive aging are considered to be contributors to the health of elderly Okinawan's health (The Okinawa Centenarian Study, 2008), particular physical activity interventions related to these changes have not been identified. On the other hand, Cockerham and Yamori (2001) addressed that unique leisure lifestyles (e.g., family gatherings including feasting and ceremonies honoring ancestors) are more important than sense of social hierarchy for longevity in Okinawa although they did not conduct empirical research on leisure lifestyle. On the other hand, Cockerham and Yamori (2001) also admitted that their data limitations constrained their full assessment on relationships between leisure and health in Okinawa, Japan.

A total of 250 questionnaires are collected at the end of a two-week data collection period. Average age of the samples is 71.10 year old with 53.6 percent male participants. The finding of this study did not support SGTLE and FSCT. Furthermore, this study is also an expansion of cultural consonance theory that the members of the communities who are culturally consensus (cultural consonance) in their leisure lifestyle are healthier in terms of physical and mental health.