

MOTIVATION TO EXERCISE AND PERCEIVED BARRIERS - MEN AND WOMEN'S EXERCISE HABITS

Karin A. Josefsson,

Centre for Sport and Health Research, Halmstad University, Sweden

Introduction

Regular exercise habits are hard for many people both regarding establishment and adherence, which in many cases is caused by lack of motivation. Since the human body needs a certain amount of physical activity to function properly it is important to help people to motivate themselves in order to promote physical and mental health in society (Lindwall & Faskunger, 2003). The interest in motivation related research is, according to Roberts (2001) huge and holds as much as one third of all psychological research. A comparatively small part of this research treats perceived barriers to exercise and how individuals overcome these obstacles to adhere to their exercise habits over time. Such knowledge could be useful to challenge the drop-out rates by helping those who recently have initiated new exercise habits to maintain them, e.g. by providing useful strategies to overcome these barriers. These strategies could consist of predetermined coping strategies and alternatives to use when facing obstacles towards planned activities. The theoretical framework used was Achievement Goal Theory (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Elliot, 1983; Maer & Nicholls, 1980; Nicholls, 1981; 1984; 1989 ref. ur Roberts, 2001), Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles et. al 1983, 1984 ref. in Eccles & Whigfield, 2002), Relapse Prevention Theory (Brownell, Marlatt, Lichtenstein & Wilson, 1986), Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977 ref. in Bandura, 2001) and Social Exchange Theory (Thibaut och Kelley, 1959).

Objective

The purpose was to study individuals' exercise motives and experiences, which factors that cause breaks in an exercise programme, perceived barriers to exercising, which strategies those who maintain their exercise habits use to overcome these barriers and whether exercise goal setting is used.

Method

After a pilot study to test the instrument a quantitative questionnaire was constructed and distributed at different training establishments and working sites. The questionnaire contained 99 items of which eight were background variables; gender, age, exercise history, exercise activities, exercise frequency and exercise in childhood. The items were categorized in Reasons to drop out; Motivation; Exercise experience and Identity, Perceived barriers to exercise; Strategies to overcome barriers; and Goal setting. Each of these categories also had an open alternative. The questions were answered on a five graded Likert scale.

Results

The most frequent motive to exercise was to enhance physical condition and the most frequent experience was that exercise was a tool to stay in shape. The most common cause for the breaking of an exercise programme was injury and the most common barrier against exercise was stress/lack of time. To overcome barriers the most common strategy was thoughts of the feelings afterwards and the commonest goal setting strategy were easy goals which can be reached through low effort. Middle Aged and Elder Adults ranked psychological well-being higher than Young Adults and Experienced exercisers ranked psychological well-being higher than Beginners. Women tended to prioritize intrinsic values regarding exercise whilst men had a propensity to view exercise as achievement and goal oriented.

Discussion/Conclusion

There are clear parallels between the present study, previous research and the theoretical framework at hand. The study also provides support to the application value of the theories on the exercise area and support previous results. The results indicate that in prospective interventions which aim to help people overcome exercise barriers, background variables such as age, gender, exercise experience and exercise frequency should be considered. It is also a plausible assumption that adherence to exercise habits could be enhanced by interventions which aim to enhance the exercise related self-efficacy since this over time could be expected to raise individuals positive emotions towards exercise.

References

- Bandura, A. (2001). Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective. *Annual Reviews Psychology*, 52, 1-26.
Brownell, K. D., Marlatt, G. A., Lichtenstein, E., & Wilson, G. T. (1986). Understanding and preventing relapse. *American Psychologist*, 41, 765-782.

- Eccles, J. S., & Whigfield, A. (2002). Motivational Beliefs, Values and Goals. *Annual Reviews Psychology*, 53, 109-132.
- Lindwall, M., & Faskunger, J. (2003). Bortom nyårslöften och skrämselfgifter: Fysisk aktivitet, motion och mental hälsa ur ett motivationsperspektiv. In P. Hassmén (Ed.), *Svensk Idrottspsykologisk Förenings Årsbok 2003* (pp. 69-85). Örebro: Reprö, Örebro Universitet.
- Roberts, G. C. (2001). Understanding the Dynamics of Motivation in Physical Activity: The Influence of Achievement Goals on Motivational Processes. In G. C. Roberts, (Ed.). *Advances in Motivation in Sport and Exercise* (s.1-50). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Thibaut, J. W., and Kelley, H. H. (1959). *The Social Psychology of Groups*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.