

Factors Influencing Exercise Participation Frequency Among UWRF Students

Gary Larson, Jordon Larson, Stephanie Quast

Todd Wilkinson PhD (Faculty Mentor)

University Of Wisconsin River Falls

Introduction

The Purpose of this study was to determine the reported reasons University of Wisconsin River Falls (UWRF) students give for choosing whether or not to participate in physical activity, and if there is a relationship between their amount of leisure time, number of credits enrolled in, number of hours per week of employment and reported reasons for choosing to participate or not participate in physical activity. This research is important because, although college students may give several reasons for or against exercise, the fact still remains that the lack of regular exercise causes major health problems among Americans. The results of this study may be used to develop intervention programs that encourage physical activity in the future.

Previous research performed on college students has been done to examine the motivational attitudes toward physical activity participation (Yoh, 2009), acquire information on motives and barriers to exercise (Brudzynski & Ebben, 2008), and current evidence on topics of: obesity, physical activity, dietary behaviors and intervention programs (Ferrara, 2009). The methods used to obtain information in these studies have been Likert scale surveys (Yoh, 2009), secondary data (Ferrara, 2009), and surveys consisting of open ended and fixed questions (Brudzynski & Ebben, 2008).

The results of these studies found that college students exercise to increase and maintain physical and mental health, develop a healthy lifestyle (Yoh, 2009), maintain fitness, appearance, weight management, and stress reduction (Brudzynski & Ebben, 2008). These studies have also found that there is an increase in body weight during the college years and that these increases are due to lifestyle changes leading to significant decrease in physical activity, alcohol consumption, and increased stress associated with academics (Ferrara, 2009). These changes in lifestyle along with other barriers lack of time, laziness and other priorities

(Brudzynski & Ebben, 2008), can be contributing factors to reduced fitness levels in college students. When asked many college students would like to increase their exercise frequency and that having more time, fewer demands in other areas of life and more motivation would lead to more exercise (Brudzynski & Ebben, 2008). Other studies found that few college students exercise to make new friends, or develop leadership, sportsmanship, and self – realization. These studies also found that college students are not interested in understanding mechanical principles of movement, and the effects of exercise on the human body (Yoh, 2009).

These studies concluded that college students do understand that exercise has benefits in regard to physical and mental health, reduction of stress, and to improve appearance (Brudzynski & Ebben, 2008), (Yoh, 2009). However, these studies found that college students consider a lack of time to exercise participation and that intervention programs need to be developed to increase the frequency that college students exercise (Brudzynski & Ebben, 2008), (Ferrara, 2009).

These studies are significant because our study on physical activity frequency showed about 62% of college students on the UWRF campus did participate in the recommended amount of physical activity but as these previous studies demonstrate, more students need to exercise more frequently and at a higher intensity. Our findings demonstrated that non-exercisers, exercisers, males, and females agreed recreational physical activity is a desired reason to participate in physical activity. Our study also agreed with the previous research that college students realize the health benefits of physical activity and exercise. Our study agreed with the previous research in that there is a need for intervention programs (encouraging frequent intense physical activity) that can be incorporated into a busy college student's life with little time to exercise.

Our Hypothesis in our study is that there is a correlation between exercise participation frequency and the number of credits enrolled and number of hours per week of employment. We also predict that those students with smaller credit loads and numbers of hours per week of employment have a higher exercise participation frequency.

Method

Prior to conducting this study, approval was granted following successfully completing Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) application to perform an anonymous multiple choice and fill in the blank survey of the UWRF general student population at the UWRF University Center. Students were randomly asked to complete a survey measuring: credits enrolled in, number of hours per week working for an employer, number of days per week participating in exercise, number of minutes per exercise session, level of exercise intensity, and reasons for or against exercise participation. Participants of this study were 98 randomly selected students enrolled at UWRF. Of the 98 participants, 62.3% (n = 61) were females and 37.7% (n = 37) were males. In terms of class levels, 19 (19.3%) freshmen, 25 (25.5%) sophomores, 28 (28.6%) juniors, and 26 (26.5%) were seniors.

Results

Using a correlation coefficient, the results showed that there was no correlation between exercise participation frequency and number hours obligated to employment per week, or credit load. The top 5 reasons given (Figure 1) for exercise participation were: improve or maintain physical health (69%), improve or maintain personal appearance (65%), feel good physically (61%), recreation (52%), and feeling of accomplishment (49%). The top 5 reasons given for not participating in exercise (Figure 1) were, not enough time (70%), lack of motivation (67%), not enough energy (27%), lack of enjoyment (17%), and exercise creates physical pain or discomfort

(13%). The MEAN for all respondents for exercise sessions per week was (M=3). The number of minutes per exercise session had a MEAN of (M=49). In terms of exercise frequency 62.2% of the respondents exercise 3 or more times (M=4) per week for at least 30 minutes (M=58). Mean credits taken for both Exercisers and Non Exercisers (M=15). Total hours per week employment obligation for Exercisers (M=11) and Non Exercisers (M=12).

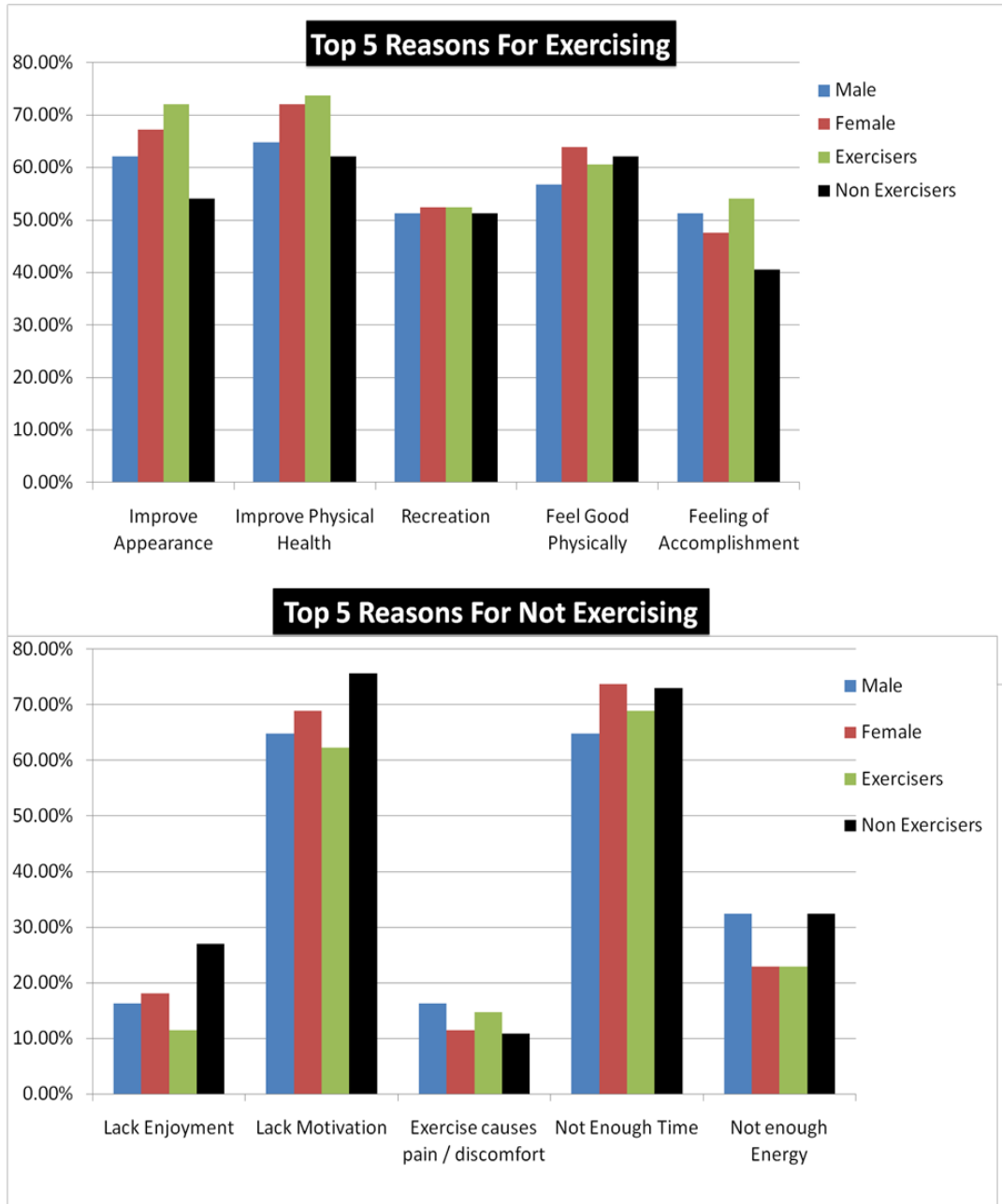


Figure 1

Discussion

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends the following for exercise: moderately intense cardiovascular exercise 30 minutes a day, five days a week or vigorously intense cardiovascular exercise 20 minutes a day, 3 days a week and eight to 10 strength-training exercises, eight to 12 repetitions of each exercise twice a week. This study found that 62.2% of UWRF students surveyed met at least one aspect of these guidelines. Although our study found a higher exercise frequency in UWRF students it is important to note that our study agreed with the findings of the previous research cited, both exercisers and non exercisers recognized the health benefits of exercise, both groups sighted lack of motivation and lack of time as barriers to exercise. Further research needs to be performed in this area in order to develop intervention programs that encourage exercise and development of a healthy lifestyle. In order to enhance interpretation of future data it his recommended that a Likert scale survey be used to determine the strength of reasons given for or against exercise. The development of intervention programs should involve activities that are entertaining because males, females, exercisers and non exercisers had very similar data citing recreation as a reason for exercising in our research. This suggests that exercise intervention programs should keep participants engaged in entertaining activities. Entertaining activities could be described as nature hikes, cycling, canoeing, etc. Although these do not fall into the category of traditional exercise, they all increase heart and respiration rate and involve the use of large muscle groups. This could be accomplished through providing students with on campus bike paths, well lit walking paths, nutrition information, and the availability of an individualized exercise prescription for any and every student on campus.

References

- Brudzynski, L., & Ebben, W. (2008). The Motivations and Barriers to Exercise among College Students. *Journal of Exercise Physiology, 11*(5), 1-12.
- Ferrara, C. (2009). The College Experience: Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Implication for Intervention and Future Research. *Journal of Exercise Physiology, 12*(1), 1-14.
- Yoh, T. (2009). Motivational attitudes toward participating in physical activity among international students attending colleges in the United States. *College Student Journal, 43*(3), 932-936.