

Deakin Research Online

This is the published version:

Allender, S., Cowburn, G. and Foster, C. 2005, Understanding participation in sport and physical activity amongst children and adults, in *EUPHA 2005 : Proceedings of the European Journal of Public Health Conference*, EUPHA, [Utrecht, The Netherlands].

Available from Deakin Research Online:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30025295>

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that permission has been obtained for items included in Deakin Research Online. If you believe that your rights have been infringed by this repository, please contact drosupport@deakin.edu.au

Copyright : 2005, EUPHA

• • •

Understanding participation in sport and physical activity amongst children and adults

Steven Allender

S Allender^{1}, G Cowburn², C Foster²*

¹Department of Public Health University of Oxford, UK

²British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group Department of Public Health University of Oxford, UK

*Contact details: steven.allender@dphpc.ox.ac.uk

• • •

Background

Current low and decreasing rates of physical activities represent an important public health challenge. Little is known about how children and adults start, stop or maintain sport and physical activity throughout their lives. This paper systematically examines published and unpublished qualitative research studies of UK children's and adult's reasons for participation and non-participation in sport.

Methods

The review covers the period from 1990 to 2004. Papers were sourced from peer reviews and grey literature and entered into review if they; aimed to explore the participants' experiences of sport and reasons for participation or non-participation in sport; collected information on participants who lived in the United Kingdom; and, presented data collected using qualitative methods. Each paper was reviewed independently by two qualitatively trained researchers.

Results

From more than 1200 papers identified in the initial search, 24 papers met all inclusion criteria. The majority of these reported research with young people based in community settings. Health benefits, weight management, social interaction and enjoyment were common reasons for participation in physical activity. Concerns about body shape were the main reasons for the participation of young girls. Older people identified the importance of physical activity in staving off the effects of ageing and providing a support network.

Conclusions

Challenges to identity such as having to show others an unfit body, lacking confidence and competence in core skills and, for women, appearing overly masculine were identified as barriers to participation. Participation was also hampered by difficulty in accessing, and the poor state of, facilities. A number of studies reported concerns with the cost of joining sporting clubs and fitness gyms. Across all groups, a greater emphasis on the enjoyment and social benefits of physical activity along with realistic role models would increase participation.