



## Recreational Exercise Motives of Adolescents and Young Adults

by

Emine Caglar<sup>1</sup>, Yusuf Canlan<sup>1</sup>, Murat Demir<sup>1</sup>

*This study examined the motives for taking part in recreational exercise/sporting activities based on a sample of Turkish young people. Secondly, gender and age group differences with motivational dimensions were investigated. A total of 298 members of 6 Youth Centers voluntarily participated in this study. The Recreational Exercise Motivation Measure (REMM) was administered to all participants. Two x two MANOVA revealed significant main effect for gender ( $p < 0.03$ ) and age group ( $p < 0.01$ ). Univariate follow-up tests revealed that the significant main effect for gender was attributable to health subscale, and age group differences were correlated with health, body/appearance, social/enjoyment, and skill development subscales ( $p < 0.01$ ). It can be concluded that health motives were more important for females than males, and motives relating to health, appearance, and social/enjoyment were more important for young adults.*

**Key words:** Recreational exercise motives, gender, adolescents

### Introduction

Participation in leisure activities may influence psychological and physical well-being. Regular exercise during leisure time provides multiple health benefits that prevent or treat many causes of morbidity or mortality, such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and osteoporosis (Plonczynski, 2000). In addition, exercise or regular physical activity plays an important role in the management of psychological stress (Heyward, 1991) and psychological well-being (Weinberg & Gould, 2007), with less substance abuse and positive feelings toward school (Saunders et al., 1997). Psychologists have found positive effects of exercise on mental health. For example, physical activity participation has been shown to reduce depression and anxiety and improve psychological well-being (Iso-Ahola & St.Clair, 2000). As is evidenced by the literature, benefits from physical activity can be psychological, physical (such as improved appearance), social, and

health related, whereas common barriers include lack of time, competing demands, fatigue, disinterest, cost, and low skill (Burton, Turrell, & Oldenburg, 2003).

Despite the extensive evidence for physical, social and psychological benefits of regular physical activity and years of individually focused interventions, exercise and total physical activity levels continues to decline in industrialized countries (Phongsavan, McLean, & Bauman, 2007). This apparent motivation problem makes explaining and predicting components of exercise adherence especially important. It is interesting to note that psychological factors, such as self-motivation, may be the best predictor of exercise behavior (Ebben & Brudzynski, 2008). Thus, it is important to understand what motivate people to be physically active. Understanding the motives for exercise and sport participation has become a prominent issue for sport practitioners and researchers in the last decade, because it is considered an important sport-commitment determinant (Iso-Ahola &

<sup>1</sup> - Kırıkkale University, School of Physical Education and Sport

St.Clair, 2000). Leisure research has examined various factors which influence participation in leisure, sport, and fitness activities. Research has focused on why people participate in marathons, fitness activities, college athletics, and individual sports. Various motives have emerged-enjoyment and social interaction, competition, health and fitness, sense of achievement and personal satisfaction (Laverie, 1998).

Since health-risk behaviors, such as being physically inactive, are generally established during adolescence and young adulthood, early intervention (e.g., during the transition from adolescence to adulthood) may be useful for preventing chronic diseases (McCracken, Jiles & Blanck, 2007). For this reason it is important to have young people participating in recreational exercise/sporting activities. Therefore, this study aimed to explore what motivates young people to participate in recreational exercise/sporting activities. The understanding of motivated behaviour of adolescence and young adults is important to encourage their persistence in sport and physical activity participation, which is advantageous to the development of their physical and psychological well-being (Biddle, Fox & Boutcher, 2000). In this way, knowing their participation motives can allow their leaders to evaluate and re-examine their methods and to use appropriate motivational strategies. Weinberg and Gould (2007) suggest that this research area has engaged the interest of investigators, because the accumulation of knowledge through these efforts will enable youth sport leaders and coaches to design sports program and athletic experiences for participants that will fulfill the people's needs and contribute positively to their personal development (cited in Ryckman & Hamel, 1993).

Majority of the studies examining the motives for recreational exercise programs have been primarily focused on economically well-developed countries. However, it is not known why people participate in recreational exercise/sporting activities in economically developing countries, such as the younger population in Turkey. Haase, Steptoe, Sallis and Wardle (2004) reported that the classification of countries, in terms of economic development, showed significant associations with the prevalence of physical inactivity among students, regardless of age, gender, and health beliefs. They stated that there was broad association between economic development stage of countries and leisure-time physical activity, coupled with specific cultural and geopolitical determinants. They found that levels of lei-

sure physical activity in young adults were generally higher in more economically developed countries.

There is no research to study participation motives of the young people involved in recreational exercise/sporting activities in Turkey. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the motives for taking part in recreational exercise/sporting activities based on a sample of Turkish young people. Secondly, we investigated gender and age group differences within motivational dimensions. In this way, the present study extends previous research of recreational exercise motivation in developed countries to developing countries by focusing specifically on gender and age differences in recreational exercise motivation of Turkish adolescents and young adults.

## Method

### Participants

A hundred and forty two females ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.01$ ,  $SD = 2.75$  years) and 156 males ( $M_{\text{age}} = 19.71$ ,  $SD = 2.68$  years), totaling 298 ( $M_{\text{age}} = 19.86$ ;  $SD = 2.72$  years) adolescents and young adults, voluntarily participated in this study. Participants were randomly selected from the members of six Youth Centers in the capital city of Turkey. They were attending sporting activities at these centers, such as soccer, basketball, volleyball, table-tennis, and swimming. These sporting activities were regarded as recreational exercises by the researchers.

### Measures

Recreational Exercise Motivation Measure (REMM):

The Recreational Exercise Motivation Measure is a 73-item self-report measure of motives for participation in recreational exercise (Rogers & Morris, 2003) and consists of the following eight subscales: (a) mastery, (b) physical condition, (c) affiliation, (d) psychological condition, (e) appearance, (f) others' expectations (g) enjoyment and (h) competition/ego.

Participants were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability and validity evidences of this scale for Turkish subjects were obtained in recent studies carried out by Gürbüz, Aşçı, and Çelebi (2006). Principle Component Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation for testing factor structure of the Turkish version of REMM, supported 5 factor structures for exercise participants.

Recreational exercise motives	Female (n = 142)		Male (n = 156)		Total (n = 298)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Health	3.98	0.58	3.84	0.64	3.91	0.61
Competition/ego	3.06	0.89	3.13	0.82	3.10	0.85
Appearance	3.58	0.74	3.70	0.79	3.64	0.77
Social/enjoyment	3.86	0.65	3.84	0.62	3.85	0.63
Skill development	3.82	0.69	3.84	0.66	3.83	0.67

The Turkish version of REMM consists of five subscales, namely, health, competition/ego, appearance, social and enjoyment, and skill development. The internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha) values ranged from 0.84 (Skill development subscale) to 0.93 (health). Similarly, the alpha coefficients for the present sample were acceptable, ranging from 0.75 (Skill development subscale) to 0.90 (Health subscale).

#### Procedure:

The REMM was administered to participants in the classroom setting. They were informed that participation was voluntary and responses would be confidential.

#### Results

It was found that the top three motives for recreational exercise/sporting activities were (a) health, (b) social/enjoyment, and (c) skill development. The participants were classified into three age groups: 15-17, 18-20, and 21-24 years of age. Compared responses to REMM using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with age group and gender as the independent variables, and the five subscales of REMM as the dependent variables, were employed. MANOVA revealed significant main effects for gender (Pillai's Trace = 0.60;  $F(5, 292) = 3.73$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.06$ ;  $p < 0.004$ ) and age group (Pillai's Trace = 0.16;  $F(5, 292) = 5.35$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.08$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). No significant overall main effect for gender x group interaction was obtained. Univariate follow-up tests revealed that the significant main effect for gender was attributable to health subscale of REMM, in which males scored lower than females (Table 1).

In addition, univariate follow-up analysis indicated age group differences in health, body/appearance, social/enjoyment, and skill development subscales ( $p < 0.01$ ). The participants in 21-24

Recreational exercise motives	Age groups					
	15-17 years (n = 79)		18-20 years (n = 90)		21-24 years (n = 129)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Health	3.67	0.64	3.87	0.66	4.08	0.51
Competition/ego	2.98	0.77	3.08	0.82	3.18	0.92
Appearance	3.36	0.82	3.63	0.77	3.82	0.69
Social/enjoyment	3.51	0.72	3.85	0.67	4.05	0.44
Skill development	3.64	0.72	3.91	0.68	3.89	0.62

years of age group had higher scores in all subscales, except skill development, compared to other groups (Table 2).

#### Discussion

This study primarily intended to examine the motives for taking part in recreational exercise/sporting activities based on a sample of Turkish young people. Secondly, the study was aimed to investigate gender and age group differences within motivational dimensions.

The obtained mean scores indicated that health motive was the most important participation motive for the total sample, while competition motive was the least important participation motive. These findings were in line with the findings of Güngör-müş, Yenel, Gürbüz and Karaküçük (2007), which reported the highest scores in the health subscale of the REMM for Turkish adults. Additional support about motivations and barriers to exercise among college students was presented by Ebben and Brudzynski (2008), which reported that general health and maintaining fitness were the two most common themes. Similarly, Zunft et al. (1999) found that in their study of over 15,000 people from 15 countries in the European Union, the most frequently given reason for physical activity participation was to maintain good health. Biddle and Mutrie (2008) reported a study in their book involving over 4000 people, 16-74 years old, from 30 regions of England, that the most important motivational factors for physical activity were 'to feel in good shape physically', 'to improve or maintain health', and 'to feel a sense of achievement'. These findings can be explained by using benefits of physical activity. Recent researches emphasize the health benefits of moderate increases in daily activities and the devel-

opment of active lifestyles (Pahkala et al., 2007; Sjolie & Thuen, 2002). The benefits of regular exercise include improved cardiopulmonary function, lower blood pressure, increased bone mineral content, increased muscle strength and joint flexibility, improved mental health and psychological well-being, and a heightened level of energy (Biddle & Mutrie, 2008; Huang, Lee & Chang, 2007; Plonczynski, 2000). Additionally, Huang, Lee, and Chang (2007) reported that there are significant relationships between exercise participation behavior and quality of life, inclusive of physical health improvement, psychological health improvement, and sexual satisfaction. Thus, the opportunity to improve one's health and functional performance may motivate individuals to engage in recreational exercise/sport participation behavior.

Analysis revealed that social/enjoyment was the second common motive to recreational exercise/sport participation for the total sample. Similarly, Koivula (1999) reported that physical health and fun and enjoyment were rated as the most important reasons for sport participation, regardless of gender. Weinberg and Gould (2007) and Willis and Campbell (1992) stated that many people start exercise programs to improve their health and lose weight, but few people continue these programs unless they find the experience enjoyable. There is empirical evidence to show that the motive of enjoyment correlates with regular exercise. In their study about individual, social, and environmental predictors of physical activity, Titze, Stronegger and Owen (2005) reported that women who enjoyed running were more than eight times as likely to adopt regular leisure time running than were those who reported to have no enjoyment from running when they had low family support. In the cross-sectional study, Marti (cited by Titze et al., 2005) assessed motives for running among participants of a Swiss 16 km fun run. The highest rated motives for maintaining a running routine were 'enjoyment', 'feel better afterwards', and 'being out in nature'. As Dishman, Sallis, and Orenstein (1985) stated, knowledge of and belief in the health benefits of physical activity may motivate initial involvement, but feelings of enjoyment and well-being seem to be stronger motives for continued participation in corporate programs. In terms of socialization, one of the reasons often cited for exercising or joining an exercise program is the chance to socialize and be with others. Exercising offers the potential to meet

people, and almost 90 % of exercise program participants prefer to exercise with a partner or group rather than alone (Berger, Pargman and Weinberg, 2002). Participating in recreational exercise/sport gives people a sense of personal commitment to continue the activity and to derive social support (Carron, Hausenblas and Estabrooks, 1999). For these reasons, it is not surprising that the second most common motive in the present study was social/enjoyment.

Gender difference was obtained on only health motive for recreational exercise/sport in the present study. This difference was due to the fact that males had lower scores on the health subscale than females. Females rated health as a more important motive for participating in recreational exercise/sporting activities than males. Yet, health was still the most important motive for both genders. Contrarily, in the study of Kilpatrick, Hebert and Bartholomew (2005), it was found that college women had greater concerns regarding their body weight than do men. Men were more highly motivated by performance and ego-related factors, such as challenge, strength and endurance, competition, and social recognition when compared with women. Similarly, Koivula (1999) reported that men rated competition as a more important motive for sport participation than the women, whereas women rated appearance as more important than the men did. The differences in the motives between previous studies and the present study could be attributed to the differences in sample and instruments used for assessing the motivation. Additionally, the participants in the present study participated in these sport activities for only recreational purposes, without any intentions to join any competition. Therefore, the findings about gender differences might be dissimilar from other studies.

According to the results, age group differences in health, body/appearance, social/enjoyment, and skill development subscales were established. The participants in 21-24 years age group had higher scores in all subscales, except skill development, compared with other groups. It was seen that with increasing age of the participants, the importance of participation motives increased (Table 2). When the motivating factors for participation in recreational exercise/sporting activities were examined with regard to age, "health" was regarded as being one of the most important variables. It can be explained that young adults in the present study were aware of the bene-

fits of physical activity much more than adolescents. Thus, having high awareness of such health benefits may motivate them to engage in recreational exercise/sport participation behavior. Biddle and Mutrie (2008) reported that for children and youth, common motives were fun, skill development, affiliation, fitness, success and challenge; whereas for adults, motives change across stages of the lifecycle. Younger adults are motivated more by challenge, skill development and fitness, whereas older adults are more interested in participation for reasons of health, relaxation and enjoyment.

The present study has some limitations that should be taken into account. First, the ability to generalize the current findings is limited by the fact that only individuals who participate in recreational exercise/sporting activities in the Youth Centers were sampled. Thus, it is not known to what extent our findings represent other respondents. Second, the findings may be relevant only for male and female adolescents and young adults in urban settings, which limit the generalizability of the results to counterparts living in other parts of the country or in rural areas.

As a result, it can be concluded that health motive was more important for females than males, and motives relating to health, appearance, and social/enjoyment were more important for young adults than for adolescents. The results of this study provide baseline data for researchers and practitioners to enhance persistence of young people in sport and physical activity participation. Sports marketers and managers need to be aware of and address these multifaceted motives in their program offerings and promotions. For example, if we know which factors enhance people's readiness to adopt regular physical activity, intervention strategies could be designed to strengthen these factors and subsequently to increase the proportion of regularly physical active people. As Kimiecik (2002) stated, telling people about all benefits of sport and exercise, without helping them change their mindset toward the exercise, is like putting children on a bike for the first time with no training wheels. Exercise/recreation professionals can additionally capitalize on the power of social influence to improve exercise adherence.

## References

- Berger B.G., Pargman D., and Weinberg R.S. *Foundations of Exercise Psychology*. Fitness Information Technology, Morgantown, WV, 2002.
- Biddle S.J.H., Fox K.R., & Boutcher S.H. *Physical activity and psychological well-being*. Routledge, London, 2000.
- Biddle S.J.H. & Mutrie N. (2008). *Psychology of Physical Activity. Determinants, well-being and interventions*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Routledge, London, 2008
- Burton N.W., Turrell G. & Oldenburg, B. Participation in recreational physical activity: Why do socioeconomic groups differ? *Health Educ Behav*, 2003. 30: 225-244.
- Carron A.V., Hausenblas H.A., & Estabrooks P.A. Social influence and exercise involvement. In S. Bull (Ed.). *Adherence Issues in Sport & Exercise*. (pp 1-17). John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, UK, 1999.
- Dishman R.K, Sallis J.F., & Orenstein D.R. The determinants of physical activity and exercise. *Public Health Rep*, 1985. 100: 158-171.
- Ebben W. & Brudzynski L. Motivations and barriers to exercise among college students. *Journal of Exercise Physiology online*, 2008. 11 (5): 1-10.
- Güngörmüş HA, Yenel F., Gürbüz B., & Karaküçük S. Examination of recreational exercise participation motives of health-fitness clubs members' with regard to demographic variables, 4th International Mediterranean Sport Sciences Congress, 09-11 November, Antalya, Turkey, 2007.
- Gürbüz B., Aşçı F.H., Çelebi M. The reliability and validity of the Turkish version of the Recreational Exercise Motivation Measure. *Proceedings of 9<sup>th</sup> International Sport Sciences Congress*, 3-5 November, Muğla, Turkey, 2006.

- Haase A., Steptoe A., Sallis J.F., & Wardle J. Leisure-time physical activity in university students from 23 countries: associations with health beliefs, risk awareness, and national economic development. *Prev Med*, 2004. 39: 182-190.
- Heyward V.H. *Advanced fitness assessment and exercise prescription*. Second Edition. Human Kinetics, Champaign, Illinois, 1991.
- Huang C., Lee L., & Chang M. The influences of personality and motivation on exercise participation and quality of life. *Soc Behav Personal*, 2007. 35: 1189-1210.
- Iso-Ahola S.E. & St.Clair B. Toward a theory of exercise motivation. *Quest*, 2000. 52: 131-147.
- Kilpatrick M., Hebert E., & Bartholomew J. College students' motivation for physical activity: differentiating men's and women's motives for sport participation and exercise. *J Am Coll Health*, 2005. 54: 87-94.
- Kimiecik J. *The Intrinsic Exerciser: Discovering the joy of exercise*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 2002.
- Koivula N. Sport participation: Differences in motivation and actual participation due to gender typing. *J Sport Behav*, 1999. 22: 360-380.
- Laverie D.A. Motivations for ongoing participation in a fitness activity. *Leisure Sci*, 1998. 20 (4): 277-302.
- McCracken M., Jiles R., & Blanck H.M. Health behaviors of the young adult U.S. population: behavioral risk factor surveillance system, 2003. *Prev Chronic Disease*, 2007. Vol 2 (2): 1-15. [serial online].
- Pahkala K, Heinonen O.J, Lagström H, Hakala P., Sillanmaki L., & Simell O. Leisure-time physical activity of 13-year old adolescents. *Scand J Med Sci Spor*. 2007. 17: 324-330.
- Phongsavan, P., McLean G., & Bauman A. Gender differences in influences of perceived environmental and psychosocial correlates on recommended level of physical activity among New Zealanders. *Psychol Sport Exerc*, 2007. 8: 939-950.
- Plonczynski D.J. Measurement of motivation for exercise. *Health Educ Res*, 2000. 15: 695-705.
- Rogers H. & Morris T. An overview of the development and validation of the Recreational Exercise Motivation Measure (REMM), XI<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Sport Psychology Proceedings Book, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2003.
- Ryckman R.M. & Hamel J. Perceived physical ability differences in the sport participation motives of young athletes. *Int J Sport Psychol*, 1993. 24: 270-283.
- Sjolie AN, Thuen F. School journeys and leisure activities in rural and urban adolescents in Norway. *Health Promot Int*, 2002. 17(1): 21-30.
- Titze S., Stronegger W., & Owen N. Prospective study of individual, social, and environmental predictors of physical activity: women's leisure running. *Psychol Sport Exerc*, 2005. 6: 363-376.
- Weinberg R.S., & Gould D. *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. Fourth Edition. Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL, 2007.
- Willis J.D. & Campbell L.F. *Exercise Psychology*. Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL, 1992.
- Zunft H-J.F., Friebe D., Seppelt B., Widhalm K., de Winter A-M., Vaz de Almeida MD., Kearney JM., & Gibney M. Perceived benefits and barriers to physical activity in a nationally representative sample in the European Union. *Public Health Nutrition*, 1999. 2 (1a): 153-160.

**Notes:** This study was accepted as an oral presentation in the 12<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Sport Psychology, which will be held in 17-21 June 2009, Marrakech.

*Corresponding author*

**Emine Çağlar**

Kırıkkale University,

School of Physical Education and Sport,

Yahşihan, 71450Kırıkkale/TURKEY

Phone: + 90 (318) 357 42 42 / 2481

Fax: + 90 (318) 357 38 63

E-mail: eminecaglar@kku.edu.tr, edolucaglar@yahoo.com