

Promoting social engagement and active lifestyles for the homeless

Contact details

Name author(s): Jeremy S. Jordan, Ph.D. (1) & Daniel C. Funk, Ph.D. (2)
 Institution(s) or organisation(s): Temple University (1); Griffith University (2)
 City and country: Philadelphia, PA, USA (1); Queensland, Australia (2)
 Email address for correspondence: jsjordan@temple.edu

Aim of paper and research questions

A majority of the world's population does not engage in sufficient physical activity to benefit their health (Sapkota, Bowles & Ham, 2006). Governments worldwide are investing in the promotion of healthy lifestyles and the efficacy of these programs may depend upon their ability to promote social engagement through recreational involvement. Strategies to promote active lifestyles need to be directed at special populations as engaging in regular physical activity helps prevent illnesses and promotes well-being. Back on My Feet (BOMF) is a community based organisation that promotes the self-sufficiency of the homeless population by engaging them in running as a means to develop self-efficacy.

Homelessness continues to be one of society's greatest public health challenges (Sermons & Henry, 2009). The community setting for this research project has experienced a 15% increase in homelessness since 2007 with this number expected to rise in the current economic climate. There is a lack of research on the effectiveness of physical activity intervention strategies targeted at underserved populations such as the homeless. Additionally, there is minimal information on the relationship between social engagement and sustained physical activity with underserved populations (Marcus et al., 2006). BOMF engages homeless individuals through three primary social and recreation components; a) monthly group meetings, b) group running sessions, and c) participation in organised running events. The purpose of this research is to examine the individual and collective role each component has on increasing and sustaining active lifestyles. Collectively, the three components are likely to build connections by promoting social engagement through running which will support and motivate members to move towards self-sufficiency.

The proposed research will utilise a longitudinal design to investigate the ability of BOMF to increase and sustain active lifestyle by facilitating social engagement and self-determination among members. The following research questions will guide this inquiry:

- Research Q1: What is the role of monthly group meetings on increasing and sustaining active lifestyles and self-determination?
- Research Q2: What is the role of group running sessions on increasing and sustaining active lifestyles and self-determination?
- Research Q3: What is the role of participation in mass participant organised running events active lifestyles and self-determination?

Literature review

The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) provides a sound framework to examine participation in physically active leisure to inform the practice of sport managers and public policymakers (Beaton & Funk, 2008). The PCM suggests involvement occurs through social and individual processes and explains how personal, psychological, and environmental

determinants increase the level of psychological connection with an activity. The PCM framework offers the ability to classify individuals into involvement stages to examine self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and social connections (Lee & Robbins, 1995) that exert a differential influence on self-esteem.

Research design and proposed data analysis

BOMF members from six homeless shelters will be invited to participate in the study. The current project will track individuals' progress in the program over a 12-month period. Survey data will be collected from participants via self-report questionnaires at monthly meetings.

The following quantitative measures will be used to collect data. The involvement facets of Pleasure, Centrality, and Sign will be used in the staging algorithm to place individuals into one of the four PCM stages (Beaton, Funk & Alexandris, 2009). Stage placement allows tracking of participants during the study to identify movement between stages and the evaluation of measures related to physical activity levels, social connectedness and self-esteem. Participants' level of physical activity will be categorised according to their level of perceived physical activity at the beginning of the study. Additional measures will be collected from BOMF data on activity levels for each previous month.

Discussion of progress

Data collection for this project began in February, 2009 and will continue through January 2010. Preliminary results suggest that participation in BOMF improves participant scores on measures of interest. See Table 1 for responses. Additional data collections will allow for more meaningful results that will be presented at the conference with emphasis on significant differences and movement through the stages of the PCM based on involvement in BOMF.

My self-esteem has improved	84%
I have become more productive in my daily life	88%
My self-confidence has increased	89%
I feel I can trust people more	66%
I am more excited about my future	90%
BOMF teaches me self-discipline	96%
Participating in BOMF provides my life with fun and enjoyment	95%
Social Connectedness from being part of BOMF	78%

Table 1: Outcomes from participation in BOMF (n=67).

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