

Does Sport Improve Self-Perception of Health?

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Abstract

Aim

The purpose of this paper is to determine whether participation in specific sport and leisure activities leads to an increased self-perception of good health, whilst controlling for wider lifestyle characteristics.

Theoretical Background

Health is now seen as a primary outcome of, and hence justification for, public investment in mass sports participation. In the UK this is evidenced by the recent shift in responsibilities for promoting mass sports participation to the Department for Health. Policy recommendations, however, need to focus upon activities that actually affect health.

Whilst the link between sport and health has been well-documented in the medical literature (Bassey, 2000) and increasingly such literature investigates self-assessed health (Piko et al, 1997, Andrijasevic et al, 2005, Lamb et al, 1990, Thorlindsson et al, 1990) or explores the impact of lifestyle on health (Ericsson, 1997), none of the literature audits the contribution of specific activities but concentrates upon sport and leisure generally.

This paper undertakes the task of assessing the contributions of specific activities to self-perceived health by drawing upon the seminal health economics work of Grossman (2002). Grossman employs a household production model of ultimate commodities to show that health is produced endogenously.

As such, consumers choose their level of health by investing in education, good diet, and sporting lifestyles which may be seen as derived demands.

Methodology / Research Design and Data Analysis

This paper investigates these theoretical predictions using the UK General Household Survey of 2002.

As well as socio-economic and demographic data, this survey provides data on participation in 40 different activities which are categorised as sport or leisure. Of particular interest to this study is the self-assessed health variable, which is an ordinal measure of the individual respondent's self-perceived health status.

The investigation has two stages: Following Ericsson (1997) and Downward and Riordan (2007), Cluster Analysis is used to identify particular lifestyles of people with different patterns of sport and leisure participation. The second part of the analysis uses the self-assessed health variable in an ordered logistic regression upon lifestyle factors and specific sport and leisure activities.

By variable deletion tests the impact of the sport and leisure activities upon self-reported health are determined.

Results/ Discussion and Implications

The results indicate a clear positive relationship between participation in sports activities but not leisure activities to self-perceived health. The research highlights the need to focus upon promoting these activities as part of a shift towards active leisure lifestyles. In particular the research reaffirms the need to target opportunities for the older, less well off and female strata of society.

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