

FACTORS INFLUENCING FUTURE MARATHON RUNNING PARTICIPATION

Abstract ID: EASM-2015-97/R1 - (607)

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Date submitted: 2015-03-19

Date accepted: 2015-04-28

Type: Scientific

Keywords: Marathon, involvement, socializing, motivation

Category: 11: Sport Participation

Synopsis:

Abstract:

Marathon running is a recreation activity which has experienced an exceptional development over the last decade, as an increasing number of individuals consider it an appropriate alternative for recreation based physical activity (Ridinger et al., 2012). The significant increase of marathon running popularity has led researchers to examine more intensely individuals' motives for sport participation. The aim of this research was to ascertain the perceived significance level of factors associated with commitment to semi-marathon running. More specifically, the purpose was to examine the relationships among recreation involvement, socializing opportunities, and perception about physical and mental health, as well as to investigate a potential effect of gender on motivation for individuals who had taken part in a semi-marathon.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A lot of research has investigated motives of marathoners (Funk et al., 2011), but inadequate consideration has been assigned to the notion of recreation involvement with running. Involvement refers to the importance of a recreation activity as part of an individual's overall perception about life and can affect individuals' future participation and behavior (Ridinger et al., 2012). Marathon running offers a divergent assemblage of mental and physical benefits to individuals, such as reducing stress and anxiety, promoting well-being, avoiding health problems and thus it could motivate individuals to participate in such a recreation activity (Funk et al., 2011). One remarkable factor which also differentiates the probability to participate in marathon is gender. Research has shown that participation motives differ between the two genders, with men having more ego oriented motives than women (Kilpatrick et al., 2005). Socializing is an important aspect people scrutinize when choosing to take part

in recreation activities. People's initial intention when searching for a recreation activity is to find opportunities to interact with new people. This kind of relationship among individuals with similar interests can occur through active participation in marathons (Hill & Green, 2012).

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

A quantitative method was used for the purpose of this study and questionnaires were collected from semi-professional athletes during a mountain running event (a semi-marathon of 22400m) in Southern Greece. The questionnaires were distributed, at the end of the race, to each participant by a team of 3 researchers and were completed in the presence of the surveyors. A total of 268 questionnaires were successfully completed and analyzed by means of the SPSS.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

From the 268 participants of the present study, 84% of them were male and 16% female. Approximately half of them had received a formal higher education and 20% held a master's degree. Almost the majority of the sample was employed (90%) earning up to 2000€ per month (88%). Supplementary, the mean age of the whole sample was 40 years old.

The difference between male and female participants is overwhelming and in accordance to the respective literature, which supports that women face more extensively than men intrapersonal constraints, such as diffidence and scarcity of skills that avert them from taking part in running events (Alexandris & Carrol, 1997). Due to the unavailability of national statistics pertinent to the profile of Greek runners, it was not attainable to classify the extent to which this sample can be regarded as representative. Nevertheless, gender was not found to be significantly linked with the intention to participate in marathon events again (69% admitted they were determined to participate in the forthcoming marathon). As mental health and recreational involvement are concerned there was a significant differentiation between male and female participants. More specifically, women appreciate the positive effect of running on their mental health more than men do ($p < 0.01$). Moreover, they also value more their recreational involvement with running than men do ($p < 0.1$).

Socializing, recreational involvement with running, physical and mental health, were all significantly correlated with the intention to participate in the marathon again, when examined separately.

When combined all in one model, only recreational involvement with running (RIR) and physical health (PH) showed a significant effect on intention to participate again (IP) ($R^2 = 0.216$, $p < 0.000$). The respective equation was:

$$IP = 2.674 + 0.433 * RIR + 0.226 * PH$$

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