

## Physical activity ... or inactivity of male Canadian ice hockey fans: A sport participation initiative

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Participation in sport has been linked to a number of benefits including improvements in both physiological and psychological health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Despite these benefits, the national sport participation rate of Canadians aged 15 years and older has been declining since 1992 (Canadian Heritage, 2013). In 2010, 26% of Canadians aged 15 years and older participated in sport, a decrease of 17% over the previous 18 years (Canadian Heritage, 2013). Moreover, lack of physical activity among Canadians is at an all-time high with the average adult depicting sedentary behaviour for over nine hours per day (Statistics Canada, 2013). These inactive lifestyles can have negative health implications, particularly for males who tend to suffer from poorer general health when compared to females (Statistics Canada, 2014). Specifically, males who are sports fans tend to weigh more, eat higher fat foods, and have worse general health habits than their non-sports fan counterparts (Health.com, 2008). Previous research has shown that other significant gender differences exist, such as motivation for engaging in sport whereby males are motivated by challenge, competition, social recognition, and strength and endurance (Kilpatrick, Hebert, & Bartholomew, 2005). Recent research has shown that weight-loss programs that are based in a sporting context, where participants had a strong sense of affiliation, resulted in lower dropout rates and higher rates of satisfaction among participants than traditional weight-loss programs (Stewart, Fraser, Robertson, Avenell, Archibald, Douglas, Hoddinott, Van Teijlingen, & Boyers, 2014). Through the use of self-determination theory (SDT) researchers can gain insights into what energizes people's behaviour and moves them into action using human perceptions, cognitions, emotions, and needs as predictors of regulatory, behavioral, developmental, and experiential outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2015).

In Canada, ice hockey remains a key component of the Canadian culture, with two-thirds of the adult population following the sport, and one-quarter indicating that they love hockey and consider themselves to be "huge fans" (The Environics Institute, 2012). While many Canadians may enjoy following their national winter sport, only 4.4% of Canadians 15 years and older actually participate (CBC, 2013). Given the gender-specific motivational traits and the negative health implications due to inactivity particularly for males, the purpose of this study was to develop and implement an exercise program specifically for inactive males.

Hockey Fans in Training (Hockey FIT) was created as a gender-sensitized weight-loss and healthy living program designed specifically for male ice hockey fans and delivered through their local Major Junior hockey organizations. Fans from two organizations (N = 80) volunteered to participate in 12 weekly physical activity, healthy eating, and health promotion

sessions led by trained instructors and hosted in local hockey club facilities. Objective health measurements (i.e., participant's weight-loss, waist circumference, body mass index, blood pressure, diet, and health-related quality of life) and physical activity levels of fans (i.e., step counts over 7 days and self-reported International Physical Activity Questionnaire) were measured at baseline, with follow-up assessments at 12-weeks and 12-months to evaluate program effectiveness. Additionally, the psychological benefits (i.e., self-esteem, positive/negative affect, self-reported quality of life) from participation in the program were examined. Finally, focus groups and interviews were conducted with the participants to further explore their motivation for joining the program and their satisfaction following its completion. SDT was used as the theoretical framework for the analysis.

Preliminary results suggest that through leveraging the participant's emotions (i.e., their love for hockey and the use of competition), Hockey FIT was successful in increasing the participant's physical activity levels and improving adherence to the changes following completion of the program. Qualitative data revealed that participant satisfaction was high because the program was delivered in a hockey environment and in a lighthearted manner, and was designed for 'men like me'. The results also supported the gender-specific motivation findings of Kilpatrick, Hebert, and Bartholomew (2005).

Although many Canadian males enjoy following ice hockey, in general, they are quite sedentary and physically inactive. This present study found that exercise, which incorporates gender-specific motivational attributes and is based in a hockey context, is successful in increasing sport participation rates of Canadian male hockey fans. By partnering with established sport organizations, this program can help combat a rise in sedentary rates and obesity levels within their local community and fan base. Future research could investigate whether the passion shared by fans of other sports is equally effective with similar satisfaction rates as the current study. Finally, the results from this study offer a promising opportunity for sport organizations to transform a passive spectator into an active sports participant.

### References

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