Reviewer’s report

Title: Long-term members' use of fitness centers: a qualitative study

Version: 0 Date: 25 Feb 2018

Reviewer: Rochelle Eime

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BMC Sports Science, Medicine and Rehabilitation

Long-term members' use of fitness centers: a qualitative study

General Comments

This study is quite novel and aims to understand the reasons why long-term users of fitness centers are physically active through these centres. The authors state that the rationale is that if people are committed and maintaining their physical activity for at least 2 years then we could learn about these people specifically. However the authors do not articulate how this information of 'maintainers' of physical activity through fitness centers could more broadly be applied within the physical activity context.

Overall this is a well written paper.

I feel that the authors could expand in two main areas. Firstly, the introduction is very short, and the manuscript would benefit from further discussion of the previous literature. Secondly, I think that the authors could be broader in their recommendations, in the context of getting more people active through fitness centers. How could the findings of this study be used?

Specific Comments

Abstract

- What is the rationale for definition of a long term member of 2 years?
- What is the theoretical framework underpinning this investigation?
- If word limits permit I suggest adding where and when this study was conducted into the Abstract.
- I think the conclusion could be improved. Of course long-term users are going to think that the facilities are good and fulfilling their needs. I encourage the authors to think more broadly about recommendations. What learnings can be gained from this study to try and
engage more people within fitness centres and/or get those new people to maintain their involvement?

Introduction

- The Introduction is too short.

L49 The authors state a few of the barriers to participation in physical activity. These include, accessibility, weather and social support. There are many more barriers to participation and this should be acknowledged.

L54 It is stated that there has been an increase in participation. Please show evidence of this, for example an increase from % to %.

L54-55 Is there any more research about use of facilities including age and/or gender breakdowns or frequency of use. The Introduction could benefit from a deeper discussion of the literature in this area.

L57 What is meant by 'ordinary' members of fitness centers?

L58-66 This section would benefit from greater discussion of the findings within these studies. Specifically what are the findings that are different between settings (fitness centers compared to sports clubs)?

Methods

L103 Please provide more information regarding the development of the questions. What theoretical perspectives/frameworks were used? Also provide more information regarding the literature that guided the discussions.

Results

L221 What is meant by 'studying other participants'?

It would have been useful to have some information on the cost of membership and/or classes etc? Are fitness centers conducive to wider population use or are they too expensive for some/many?

Discussion

In genera the discussion highlights one main finding per paragraph, and then discusses how this result is reflected in other literature. I think the authors could go deeper and try to construct
various themes together. For example I took a couple of key things from the results, which are not discussed in a connected manner.

- People who were active at fitness centers still had barriers of time and energy, however the commitment of classes and money assisted to overcome these barriers and remain committed.

- Social interactions was a benefit of participation and this was also linked to classes and coffee shops

- There are differences of motivations to participate for those who are individual focused compared to those more group/class and socially focused.

What are the key learnings from this study that can help inform strategies to either maintain participation for those early adopters to fitness centers, or secondly get people active through fitness centers?

L262 Less concerned that what/who?

L262-265 The authors point out that people in fitness centers were more focused on appearance than those playing sports. Could this be related to fitness centers being an individual activity (mainly) and sports clubs a team environment?

L267 I don't really think it is the fitness centers that need to be aware of people focusing on physical appearance? How would this help? Perhaps individuals who are focusing on appearance are more inclined to go to fitness centers however those who want competition, and/or team and social environment play sports.

Conclusion

It states that this study highlights how to get fitness center users 'more regularly physically active'? I'm not sure that I really agree with this as a conclusion. The study didn't investigate frequency of physical activity.

Of course the long-term users would find the centers accessible and welcoming environments, that is why they are committed. The conclusion would be stronger if it highlighted clearer recommendations based upon these findings. What can be recommended to increase and maintain participation in physical activity through fitness centers?

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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