

WHY DO FILIPINOS EXERCISE? EXPLORING MOTIVES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FILIPINO YOUTH

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Although exercise motivation is a well-established research area in sport and exercise psychology in the West, relatively little work on this topic is available in the Philippines. The purpose of this study was to explore possible motives for exercise behaviour according to Filipino youth using an open-ended methodology. One hundred twenty-nine Filipinos aged 15 to 21 years old responded to a questionnaire asking them to free-list reasons for exercise. 497 responses (M = 3.9 per respondent) were coded by two independent judges using themes derived from the Exercise Motivation Inventory subscales (EMI-2; Markland & Ingledew, 1997). Data on exercise frequency and types of activities engaged in were also collected. The three most frequently identified reasons for exercise were: weight management (“to lose weight”), strength and endurance (“para lumakas”, which means “to increase strength”), and appearance (“to have a sexy body”). Challenge and competition were the least frequently cited reasons for exercise, according to respondents. Results also indicated motives that were outside those identified in the EMI-2 subscales, including: as a requirement, to boost self-esteem, and social influence factors. Future directions for research on exercise in the Philippines, including the construction and validation of a scale for exercise motivation among Filipinos, will be discussed.

1 Introduction

Exercise motivation is an extensively studied research area in sport and exercise psychology in the West (Vallerand, 2007). However, little work on this topic is available in the Philippines. One exception is an unpublished study by Sanchez (2008) investigating the participation motivation for sport and for exercise of Filipino college students. Two hundred and ninety-one Filipino college students answered sport and exercise versions of the Exercise Motivation Inventory 2 (EMI-2; Markland & Ingledew, 1997; Kilpatrick et al., 2005) to differentiate the motives for participation in these two forms of physical activity. The top five motives for sport participation were enjoyment,

challenge, social recognition, affiliation, and competition. III-health avoidance was rated as the most important motive for exercise participation.

In another study (Polman et al., 2004), other factors were identified to predict physical activity and exercise behaviour in Filipino youth. Self motivation, a personality trait defined as the tendency to persist in habitual behaviour regardless of situational factors, was the best predictor for male college students, while body weight and BMI best predicted exercise behaviour for females. However, exact mechanisms through which body weight and BMI influence exercise behaviour were not explored. In addition, Filipino male students were found to participate more in physical education courses, regular exercise activities, extra-curricular activities, and organised physical activities, while females engaged in more general physical activities like household chores.

Further reasons for participating in sports and exercise are challenge and competition (Markland & Ingledew, 1997). In a study of adult Filipino marathoners, Martin & Gill (1995) observed comparable levels of competitiveness, goal orientation, and win orientation between Filipinos and their Taiwanese and American counterparts. This suggests that competitiveness can be a salient motivator for Filipinos, at least in sport settings.

The studies mentioned previously relied on standard inventories developed in Western settings with little or no cultural adaptation. While some of the motives may apply across cultures, reasons for sport and exercise participation are diverse and may often be culturally nuanced (Jermuravong, 2006; Moreno-Murcia et al., 2008).

This study aims to investigate possible motives for exercise behaviour according to Filipino youth using an open-ended free-listing methodology. In contrast to the use of imported structured inventories, this method allows for exploration of a wide range of reasons for exercise including more culturally grounded motives.

2 Methodology

A total of 242 Filipinos who exercised regularly in the last six months participated in this study. Ages ranged from 15 to 69 years old. For this analysis, we examined data from the youth subsample which consisted of 129 respondents (48 males, 76 females, 5 did not specify) with ages ranging from 15 to 21 years. Mean age was 19.0 years ($SD = 1.7$). Majority of the participants were students (91%).

The five most frequent activities for the male respondents were running, jogging, basketball, walking, and weight lifting. For female respondents, the most frequent activities were running, walking, jogging, dancing, and yoga. Majority of the respondents (69%) engaged in exercise activities two to three times a week in the last six months.

An open-ended free listing method similar to Ebben and Brudzynski (2008) was used in this study. Participants were asked to list all the possible reasons why they or people they know have exercised in the past. Responses were independently coded by the first two authors using themes corresponding to the 14 subscales of the EMI-2 (Markland &

Ingledeew, 1997), namely: stress management, revitalisation, enjoyment, challenge, social recognition, affiliation, competition, health pressures, ill-health avoidance, positive health, weight management, appearance, strength and endurance, and nimbleness.

Inter-coder agreement was 78%; disagreements were resolved by the third author. Responses which did not fit any of those themes were coded as “others” and analysed further.

3 Results

For the youth subsample, a total of 497 motives were collected. Respondents supplied an average of 3.9 reasons ($SD=1.7$). Three hundred seventy-eight (76%) were coded under EMI-2 themes. Based on EMI-2 coding scheme, weight management (e.g., “para pumayat” which means “to lose weight”) appeared to be the most frequently cited reason for exercise participation (18%). Strength and endurance (e.g., to develop strength), appearance (e.g., to have a sexy body), and positive health (e.g., “para maging healthy” which means “to become healthy”) were the next most frequently mentioned reasons for exercising. Competition was not mentioned by any of the respondents as a reason for exercising.

Table 1. Motives for exercise identified by Filipino youth, coded using EMI-2 subscales.

Theme	Frequency	Percentage	Examples
EMI-2 Themes			
Weight Management	89	18%	“to lose weight”
Strength & Endurance	57	11%	“para lumakas [to increase strength]”
Appearance	52	10%	“to have a sexy body”
Positive Health	45	9%	“para maging healthy [to become healthy]”
Enjoyment	29	6%	“because it’s fun”
Health Pressures	25	5%	“dahil sinabi ng doktor [because of doctor’s advice]”
Affiliation	18	4%	“barkada activity [peer group activity]”
Stress Management	11	/ 2%	“pampatanggal stress [to reduce stress]”
Revitalisation	8	2%	“to feel good”
Ill-Health Avoidance	6	1%	“para maiwasan ang pagkakaroon ng high blood pressure o iba pang sakit sa katawan [to avoid high blood pressure or other physical ailments]”
Nimbleness	6	1%	“para tumaas ang talon [to increase vertical jump]”
Social Recognition	5	1%	“para magpakitang gilás [to show off]”
Challenge	3	1%	“to improve skill”
Competition	0	0%	
Motives falling under General Fitness and Others			
General Fitness	29	6%	“para maging physically fit [to become physically fit]”
Others	114	23%	(see Table 2)
TOTAL	497	100%	

Table 1 summarises the frequency of responses under each EMI-2 theme, including sample responses. The EMI-2 subscales included two themes on fitness: nimbleness, and strength and endurance. However, a number of responses (6%) referred to non-specific, overall fitness as a reason for exercising (e.g., “para maging physically fit” which means “to become physically fit”) thus were coded separately. Combined, these three (nimbleness, strength and endurance, and overall fitness) accounted for 92 responses (19%). Although weight management initially appeared to have been the most salient motive for exercise participation, further analysis showed that fitness was an equally important reason according to Filipino youth.

Almost a quarter (23%) of the mentioned motives did not fall under any of the EMI-2 themes nor under general fitness. These motives were analysed by the three authors together and clustered under different sub-themes based on similarity in meaning. Some of the themes derived from this analysis were: requirement (e.g., physical education class), leisure, athletic goals (i.e., training for sport), lifestyle, and social influence (e.g., urged by friends or even family). Table 2 shows the top five additional motives for exercise participation. The percentage reported here is based on the overall number of responses.

Table 2. Top five additional motives for exercise.

Theme	Frequency	Percentage	Examples
Requirement	25	5%	“required sa PE class”
Leisure	15	3%	“pampalipas oras [to pass the time]”
Athletic goals	10	2%	“para gumaling sa sport [to improve in sport]”
Lifestyle	9	2%	“bahagi ng lifestyle [part of lifestyle]”
Social Influence	9	2%	“inaya ng kaibigan [invited by friend]”

4 Discussion

Overall, fitness and weight management were the top motives for exercising identified by Filipino youth. Most of the reasons cited could be accounted for by themes derived from the EMI-2 subscales. However, certain motives in the original scale were not particularly salient (i.e., social recognition and challenge) or were even absent (i.e., competition) in the data.

Results of the current study also point to reasons for exercising beyond those identified in the EMI-2. Exercising in fulfillment of a requirement, such as in physical education courses, was commonly cited. In addition, although social factors such as affiliation and social recognition are included in the inventory, Filipino respondents also identified reasons involving normative social influence such as “inaya ng kaibigan [invited by friend]” and “kasi forced by parents [because forced by parents]”. This suggests that there may be other important motives not directly measured by standard inventories, such as EMI-2.

Despite these differences in specific exercise motives, the overall predominance of extrinsic reasons is noteworthy. Extrinsic reasons, i.e., for overall fitness and weight management, appear to be the top motivation for exercise participation as identified by Filipino youth. As the research literature in the West indicates, people participate in exercise activities primarily for instrumental purposes (Kilpatrick et al., 2005). For example, exercising for fitness is consistent with the findings from Ebben and Brudzynski's (2008) survey which showed that the top three exercise motives for USA-based university students were general health, maintain fitness, and stress reduction.

While the questionnaire used in this study specifically asked why people exercise, some respondents referred to motives that were more sports-related. Further investigation is needed to differentiate participation motives in sports versus in exercise. As pointed out by others (Kilpatrick et al., 2005; Jermuravong, 2006; Sanchez, 2008), motivational dynamics for sport versus for exercise may differ.

As the EMI-2 accounted for most, but not all, possible reasons as to why Filipinos exercise, our next step is to construct and validate a culturally grounded measure of Filipino exercise motivation. This will provide a better understanding of exercise behaviors in the Philippine context towards the design of evidence-based interventions to promote more active lifestyles among Filipinos, especially the youth.

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