

ATTITUDE OF UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TOWARDS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND FITNESS EXERCISE IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

Benjamin O. Omolayo¹, Dominic B. Olawa², Olajumoke C. Omole³

¹ Department of Psychology, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, ² Department of Psychology, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, ³ Department of Psychology, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, NIGERIA.

¹droluomolayo@gmail.com, droluomolayo@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The study examined the attitude of university undergraduate students towards physical activity and fitness exercise. 180 students comprising of 98 male and 82 female participated in the study. Two research instruments were used to collect data from the participants namely Attitude Towards Physical Activity (ATPA) and Exercise Benefit-Barrier Scale (EBBS). Data were analyzed using independent t-test and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Testing three hypotheses, results showed that undergraduates who benefitted from fitness exercise will have positive attitude towards physical activity than those who do not benefit from it. It was also found that adolescent-aged students demonstrate favourable attitude towards physical activity like that of adult-aged students. Findings also revealed that there is no significant interaction effect of age and gender on physical activity. It was recommended that undergraduate students, irrespective of their age, gender, socio-economic status, environment and level, should participate in physical activities and fitness exercises in order for them to be healthy and live a healthy life.

Keywords: Attitude, Physical activity, Fitness exercise, Gender, Age, Undergraduates, Adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Health is wealth, and everybody desires good healthy living. It is essential for everybody to attain a reasonable level of health, and one of the ways through which this could be achieved is regular physical activity. Sports and Exercise Psychologists continue to explore the factors which motivate persons to exercise at all levels which results in increased physical and psychological health. Exercise has been reported as a sure route to physical fitness and a significant contributor of good health status (O'Brien, 2005; Adeogun & Dansu 2006). According to Biddle, Fox and Boutcher (2000), exercise has more to contribute to human happiness, posture, mood, decreased anxiety, depression, and elevated level of self-esteem. Similarly, Fox (1999) maintains that exercise really has the potential to be used in the prevention of some diseases and to increase the positive enjoyment of life that is embedded into good healthy living.

Regular exercise has been linked to longevity and individual who remain physically active or physically fit during middle older ages live longer than their sedentary counterparts (Karmisholt & Gotzche, 2005), and also recommended for secondary prevention of several diseases (Okuneye, 2002). In their research, Benzer, Adams and Whistler (1999) showed that active lifestyle is a vital tool to psychological, mental, social, intellectual and spiritual wellness. All these are pointers to the importance of physical activity on human health. Physical activity is any body movement carried out by the skeletal muscles refers to energy.

On the other hand, exercise is a planned, structured, repetitive movement of the body designed specifically to improve or maintain physical fitness (Bulugbe & Oloyede, 2007).

Attitude serves as the motivating factors to learn and improve the use of skills and knowledge which has been learned (Tsang & Chan, 1993). Attitudes can predict behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1983), increasing attention has gradually been given to the roles that attitudes play in the cognition behaviour pathway. Therefore, the development of a good attitude toward taking part in physical activity and fitness exercise are one of the most important steps to stay healthy in life.

According to Okuneye (2002), physical activity behaviour of people has been tremendously altered due to modernization or development in the society. Despite the overwhelming evidence of the positive effect of fitness exercise, well mentioned individuals still drop out of exercise programmes at an alarming rate of 40% to 60% (Dishman, 1986). O'Brein (2005) reported that some adults are afraid that fitness exercise would be too strenuous, or that physical activity could be harmful to them. Similarly Center for Disease Control, CDC (1999) reported that more than 60% of adults do not exercise regularly and 25% of them were not active at all. This type of survey gives credence to the attitude of people toward physical activity and fitness exercise.

Sedentary behaviour has been identified as one of the leading preventable causes of death and an inverse linear relationship exist between volume of physical activity behaviour and all cause mortality. Moreover, participation in regular physical activity decreases the risk of cardiovascular diseases, type II diabetes mellitus, obesity, reduces blood glucose levels and improve overall health and well being. Despite the numerous benefits of physical activity and the recent attention to specific guidelines, only few adults and adolescents engage in regular leisure time physical activity and fitness exercise. Lack of exercise and generally poor physical fitness is thought to be the main key reasons for the surge of diseases like heart failure, type II diabetes because inactivity and obesity promote insulin resistance and other factors that trigger other diseases. It is extremely important for a person to develop an exercise program that promotes physical fitness, in order to stay healthy and be physically active.

Given the many benefits of physical activity and the low prevalence rates, it is imperative that intervention be designed that effectively promote the adoption and maintenance of active lifestyle in large number of people. Certain complications associated with some illnesses will also dictate what type of exercise program an individual can partake. Activities like weightlifting, jogging or high impact aerobics can possibly pose a risk for people with diabetes retinopathy due to the risk for further blood vessel damage and possible retinal detachment. It is imperative to design or have a physical fitness program that will fit the specific needs of every individual.

The importance of facilities and equipments in exercise cannot be underestimated. Adeogun and Dansu (2006) reported that marketers of goods were willing to participate in exercise regularly, but the time consuming nature of their business as well as lack of sports and fitness facilities around the markets were major hindrances to their non-involvement in physical activities & exercise. They noted that facilities are important for the performance of physical activity & fitness exercise, and that a functional facility will attract the interest of people in physical activity.

According to Bouchard & Shepherd (1994), there are factors that influence physical activity, fitness and health. These include lifestyle factors (such as smoking, diet, alcohol consumption and sleeping patterns), personal attributes (such as age, gender, socio-economic status,

personality, motivation and attribute), physical environment (such as temperature, humidity, air quality, altitude, and climatic changes) and social environment (such as social, cultural, political and economic conditions that affect physical activity, fitness exercise and health).

The general physical activity recommended to enhance good health suggests 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week (Patterson & Facuette, 1990; Sallis, Condon, Goggin, Roby, Kolody & Alcaraz, 1993). This can be interpreted as a minimal dose of physical activity to guarantee most of the health benefits. Physical activity and exercise is more cost-effective than either psychopharmacology or psychotherapeutic interventions, it has minimal adverse effect and it can also be sustained by the individual because it has no specified end point (Faulkner, 2006). The physiological benefits of physical activity & fitness exercise are important as exercise enhances energy, strength, endurance, bone mass and ability to participate with peers in sports (Onifade, 1985).

Tsang & Chan (1993) in their study found that attitude held by girls influenced their success in physical exercise. They found that both male and female students exhibited a favourable attitude toward physical activity. However, male students had a higher attitude score in all age groups except at the age 17 where both genders scored the same. Their study revealed that gender was significantly related to attitudes toward physical activity. Assessing the attitude toward physical activity of 58 boys and 56 girls, Schutz & Smoll (1980) found that the attitude toward physical activity was generally positive for both sexes. However, the girls showed more favourable attitude toward the aesthetic sub-domain than the boys. Also, the same result was found for those that engage in fitness exercise. Emotionally disturbed children were found to have more negative attitude toward physical activity and fitness exercise than the normal children. Moreover, there was significant difference between boys and girls. Girls scores significantly higher in the aesthetic sub-domain but boys scored significantly higher in the vertigo sub-domain (Telema & Lasko, 1997). Studying the attitude of fourth and fifth grade students towards physical activity and fitness exercise, Patterson and Faucette (1990) found that there was a significant difference between genders on the two sub-domains. Boys had significantly higher scores on the vertigo sub-domain while girls had significantly higher scores on the aesthetic sub-domain. They concluded that boys and girls might differ in their expressed attitude toward certain aspects of physical activity and fitness exercise. Comparing upper elementary school children's attitude toward physical activity and exercise using the third through sixth grades students, Folsom-Meek (1992) found that girls displayed significantly more positive attitude than boys in social, health and fitness, and aesthetic sub-domain, whereas boys showed more positive attitudes in the vertigo sub-domain. Such findings showed that upper elementary school children's attitude toward physical activity and fitness exercise were best described by interaction of gender and specific attitude sub-domains.

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. Undergraduates who benefit from fitness exercise will have positive attitude towards physical activity exercise than undergraduates who have no benefit in it.
2. There will be significant difference in the attitude towards physical activity between adolescent-aged and adult-aged students.
3. There will be a significant interaction effect of gender and age on physical activity.

RESEARCH METHODS

Design

This study is an ex-post factor design. Independent variables are attitude, age and gender while physical activity is the dependent variable. Physical activity is measured in terms of low and high, and attitude is also measured in terms of low and high attitude.

Participants

Employing randomization sampling technique, a total of 180 undergraduate students drawn from Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti in Nigeria participated in the study. They comprised of 98 male & 82 female undergraduates selected from eight faculties in the institution.

Instruments

Two questionnaires were used in the collection of data for the research. They are:

1. The Attitude Towards Physical Activity (ATPA) which measure the attitude towards physical activity. The scale was developed by Kenyon (1968). The reliability ranges from 0.72 to 0.89 (Kenyon 1968). The instrument is a five-point Likert scale which participants indicates the relative strength of agreement or disagreement on each item using the following scoring system 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Undecided, 4- Agree, and 5- Strongly Agree.
2. The Exercise Benefit Barrier Scale (EBBS) developed by Noble, Walker, Render and Karen (1985). The test-retest reliability of the instrument was .89 and its Cronbach's alpha was .86. The instrument has responses in Likert format with responses ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Procedure

Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the participants having assured them of confidentiality in the treatment of their responses.

Statistical Analysis

The independent t-test and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) are the statistical analysis that was used to analyse the data collected from the participants.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1. Independent t-test table showing the difference in the attitude towards physical activity between those who benefit from exercise and those who experience exercise barrier.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>t-cal</i>	<i>P</i>
Exercise Benefitted	79	39.91	5.36	.60	178	4.67	<.05
Exercise Barrier	101	36.52	4.37	.43			

t = 4.67, p<.05

Table 1 shows that undergraduate students that benefitted from fitness exercise has positive attitude towards physical activity than those that has no benefit in the fitness exercise. Therefore, the first hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2. Independent t-test table showing the effect of age on attitude towards physical activity.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>t-cal</i>	<i>p</i>
Adolescent-aged students	104	37.40	4.80	.47	178	-1.88	>.05
Adult-aged students	76	38.84	5.41	.62			

t = -1.88, p>.05

Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference in the attitude towards physical activity of adolescent-aged students and their adult-aged counterparts. Based on this finding, hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Table 3. Descriptive Table.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>
Adolescent-aged	104	37.40	4.80
Adult-aged	76	38.84	5.41
Female	83	37.02	4.72
Male	87	38.86	5.29
Total	180	38.01	5.01

Table 4. 2x2 ANOVA table showing the interaction effect of age and gender on physical activity.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>P</i>
Age	180	54.833	2.19	.141	178	>.05
Gender	180	148.220	5.92	.016		<.05
Age & Gender	180	39.518	1.58	.210		>.05

From Table 4 above, results showed that there is no significant interaction effect of age and gender on physical activity. Therefore, the third hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the attitude of university undergraduate students toward physical activity and fitness exercise. Findings revealed that students who have benefitted from fitness exercise tend to have positive attitude towards physical activity than those that have not benefitted. The plausible explanation of this result is that students' attitude toward the learning experience and skills encompasses many elements, including enjoyment, motivation and perception of skills.

The likelihood of students putting their skills and strengths into use is influenced by their attitude for or against such physical activities. If the students develop positive attitude towards the activity, they will engage the possibility of participating in such activity. However, inability to participate might be as a result of different barrier they encountered and with such barrier, they develop low or negative attitude towards the activity.

Moreover, the explanation for this finding may be that participating in many exercise and physical activities can lead to feelings of autonomy and competence which produces joy,

excitement, thrills and other satisfying emotions. In that respect, it is easy to see that physical activities may be inherently intrinsically and extrinsically motivating. On the other hand, some people don't participate in physical activity and fitness if there is no material inducement while some participate in fitness exercises because they are being coerced to do it. Many people don't participate in physical activity because to them attempting physical exercises leaves them with feelings of incompetency and humiliation, anxious and pressured. This finding supports the previous findings of O'Brien (2005), Adeogun and Dansu (2006), Armstrong and Biddle (1991), Karmisholt & Gotzche (2005) and Okuneye (2002).

Furthermore, the results of this study revealed that there is no significant difference between adolescent-aged and adult-aged students in their attitude towards physical activity. The previous finding of Bouchard and Shepherd (1994) supports the result of this study. The possible explanation of this is that participation in physical activity at the adolescence stage is associated with a high attitude of physical activity in later life. This suggests that physical activities that can not be performed at the adolescence stage are carrying over to adulthood. Examples of this could be seeing in sports or games like soccer, skiing and athletics where a strong carry-over value from adolescent to adulthood is present. Adolescent participating in relatively intensive endurance physical activity (such as soccer, skiing, orienteering & athletics) is associated with a high level of total activity and participation in endurance physical activity in adulthood.

One reason for the high carry-over effect into adulthood may be the ease with which these physical activities can be performed on one's own time. In the present study, the participants in those adolescent-fitness activities which carried-over to the adult years were commonly characterized by high positive attitude which is a reflection of well developed and wide range of skills. Some social determinants of participation in different physical activity in adolescent depend on the socio-economic status of the family and the environment.

In rural areas, outdoor activities are more popular whereas in urban areas, the demand for special facilities and organized guidance (such as riding, running and other facilities) is on the increase. However, those in urban environment have more opportunities to participate in various organized activities and to utilize sport facilities than those in rural communities.

The findings of this study showed that there is no significant interaction effect of age and gender on physical activity. The results indicated that boys and girls report no statistical significant difference in terms of their intensity of involvement and duration in physical activity. It also pointed to the fact that being a male or female, or being an adolescent-aged or adult-aged does not mean they can not be involve in physical activity. This finding contradicts previous studies of Schutz & Smoll (1980), Telema and Lasko (1997) and Patterson and Faucette (1990), but the finding of Tsang and Chan (1993) supports the results of this study.

The explanation of this finding is that there is always a gradual change in behaviour of an individual and such change comes in stages. Human being does not just have a positive or negative change towards physical activity, it depends on where the individual grew up, people that he/she interacted with, and also people he/she could trust in his/her growing up days.

The pros and cons that can make the changes and making gender and age not necessarily relevant in the participation of physical activity might be an experimental processes of change towards a healthy life, which an individual can do in order to be physically and mentally fit.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

This study showed that undergraduate students who benefit from fitness activity have positive attitude towards physical activity than undergraduate students who does not benefit from fitness exercise. This explain the fact that needs are innate, but can be developed in a social context. Some people develop stronger needs than others, some will benefit in a program than others which created individual differences.

The results also indicated that adolescent-aged students demonstrate favourable attitude toward physical activity like that of the adult-aged students because there was a carry-over effect from adolescent to adulthood which help to generate positive impact on attitude towards physical activity.

Moreover, the findings of this study showed that there was no significant interaction effect of age and gender on physical activity. Hence, it can be concluded that age and gender are not important factors in the attitude toward physical activity.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that students irrespective of their age, gender, socio-economic status, environment and level should participate in physical activity and fitness exercise in order for them to be healthy, to stay healthy, to live a healthy life and for their days to be long on earth.

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