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A Study to Identify and Evaluate
the Drop in Participation of
Sixteen to Twenty Year Olds
in Physical Activity

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of Sports and Athletics Administration

Lynn University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science

by

Alison Claire Davies

March, 2002

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A further thanks must also go to the young men and women in the town of Llanelli, Wales, United Kingdom who took the time to discuss with me their replies thus making this project possible.

Finally I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my parents for their unconditional love and encouragement throughout my studies both in Wales and the USA.

The interpretation of the data and the opinions suggested are those of the author alone.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The place of research

This thesis is based on research undertaken in an area outside the USA and may therefore be unfamiliar to the audience. I will therefore give a brief overview of the town and Country in which this thesis is based.

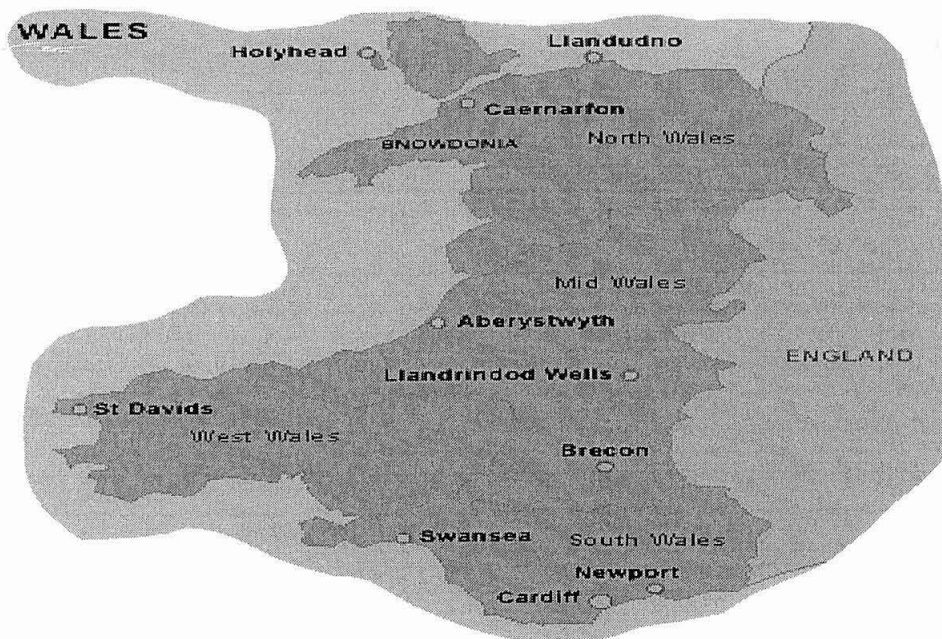
Wales is one of the four countries that make up the United Kingdom, namely Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.



The Geography of Wales

Wales is one of the last undiscovered corners of Europe. Situated on the western shores of Britain it occupies an area of 20,764 square kilometres with a maximum length of 140 miles and 100 miles at its widest. It is home to 3 million people. It is one of the oldest countries in the world with evidence of human habitation going back almost 200,000 years. Despite coming under English rule for centuries, the Welsh culture and language still survive and its people are fiercely proud of their heritage. In a 1997 referendum, the people of Wales voted to be governed by a Welsh Assembly based in Cardiff, the capital of Wales rather than from the House of Commons in London.

The **town of Llanelli** with a population of some 35,000 people is situated 15 miles west of the city of Swansea in South Wales (See map below). Llanelli is a coastal town where the Welsh language is still widely spoken. It has a long association with the tinplate, steel, and coal mining industries, and is the home of the world-famous Llanelli Rugby Club.



The leisure facilities in Llanelli consist of one sports centre within close proximity to the town centre and is open to the public at a minimal charge. The facilities within the sports centre consist of a 4 court sports hall, gymnasium, 50metre pool, 3 squash courts, outside playing fields and tennis courts. In addition, Llanelli also has numerous member clubs including tennis, bowls, gymnastics, soccer and rugby clubs.

The need to exercise

Establishing an active lifestyle at a young age has shown to be important in promoting lifelong participation in physical activity, with early experiences influencing subsequent activity behaviour.

The benefits to health from exercise have been widely reported and accepted. There is already good evidence and emerging evidence, that exercise in later life promotes gains in health, even for the elderly .

The landmark 1996 Surgeon General's report, Physical Activity and Health identified substantial health benefits of regular participation in physical activity. When physical inactivity is combined with poor diet, the impact on health is devastating. Tobacco use is the only behaviour that kills more people. The Surgeon General's report highlighted that in adults regular participation in physical activity reduced the risks of dying prematurely from heart diseases, developing diabetes, high blood pressure, or colon cancer. In childhood and adolescence, regular participation in physical activity helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints. It helps control weight, build lean muscle and reduce fat. Physical activity prevents or delays the development of high blood pressure and helps reduce blood pressure in some adolescents with hypertension. Physical activity also reduces feelings of depression and anxiety. Through its effects on mental health, physical activity may help increase students' capacity for learning.

Participation in physical activity and sports can promote social well-being as well as physical and mental health, among young people. Research has shown that students who participate in scholastic sports are less likely to be smokers or use drugs and are more likely to stay in school and have good conduct and high academic achievement. Sports and physical activity programs can introduce young people to skills such as teamwork, self-discipline, sportsmanship, leadership, and socialization. Lack of recreational activity, on the other hand, may contribute to making young people

more vulnerable to gangs, drugs and violence.

One of the major benefits of physical activity is that it helps people improve their physical fitness. Five basic components of fitness are important for good health: cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility and body composition (percentage body fat).

“Fitness is a state of well-being that allows people to perform daily activities with vigor, participate in a variety of physical activities, and reduce the risks for health problems”.

Physical Activity and Health 1996

The consequences of the sedentary lifestyles lived by so many of our young people are grave. In the long run, physical inactivity threatens to reverse the decades-long progress we have made in reducing death and suffering from cardiovascular diseases. In addition to the toll taken by human suffering, surges in the prevalence of chronic diseases could lead to crippling increases in our national health care expenditure.

Physical activity is crucial to our health, happiness and well being.

“The potential for physical activity behaviors that are learned in childhood to carry through to adulthood and positively affect health, coupled with the age-related declines in physical activity from childhood to adolescents, makes for a critical need for understanding the predictors, antecedents, and determinants of such behaviors. Ideally, given a set of such determinants, adolescents could be identified as candidates or targets for intervention.”

Kohl

This leads me on to my research....

CHAPTER TWO

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

Statement of the Problem

This research proposes to identify the extent to which 16-20 year old people in the Llanelli District do not participate in physical activity and their reasons for dropping out of any activities. It is hoped that the research will provide a factual background for the introduction of programs to overcome the problem. In 1987, Corben stated that:

"There is now little doubt that regular physical activity of the appropriate frequency, intensity and duration produces significant health benefits. Most important is the achievement of those specific fitness components which help reduce the risk of hyperkinetic conditions, including heart disease, back pain, diabetes, osteoporosis and obesity" (Seidentop 1994).

The National Centre for Chronic Prevention and Health Promotion discusses how physical activity is linked to enhanced life and to reduce risk for all causes of mortality and the development of many chronic diseases in adults. However, many adults are either sedentary or less physically active than recommended. Children and adolescents are more physically active than adults but this participation declines during adolescence, but school and community programmes have the potential to help children and adolescents establish lifelong, healthy physical activity patterns.

The Subproblems

1. The first subproblem is to try and determine the reasons for their non-participation.
2. The second subproblem is to present the findings in a manner which will motivate sports authorities into taking action to increase participation.
3. The third subproblem will be to analyse the data so as to evaluate the responses for the research group.

The Delimitations

- A. The study will not attempt to assess the fitness of the researched group.
- B. The study will not evaluate the scope of physical education in schools to prepare students for later activity.
- C. The study will not attempt to set out ideal standards which should be achieved.
- D. The study will be limited to 16 – 20 year old males and females living or working within the local authority district of Llanelli.

Assumptions

1. The first assumption is that by participating in physical activities the general health of this age group will improve.
2. The second assumption is that if this age group becomes committed to physical activity they will continue with it into their adulthood.
3. The third assumes that students, after leaving the discipline of school, have the freedom to choose alternative activities to fill their leisure time.
4. The fourth assumption is that physical activity prevents or reduces many illnesses in later life and thereby will reduce the cost of health care.
5. The fifth assumption is that the study group is representative of 16 – 20 year olds within the same economic and social background.

Significance of the study

It is accepted that an increase in physical activity will help reduce many illnesses related to the heart and lungs. However, there appears to be a worrying concern that once young people leave school there is a marked drop in their participation in any form of physical activity. Many organizations are aware of the problem but do not appear to have come up with practical proposals which will encourage young people to continue with physical activity. The significance of the study will be to ask this age group why they do not participate and use this information in future studies to identify what can be done to address the reasons given and encourage their continued participation after leaving school. It will also be significant to find out if the locality of Llanelli has the same common problems as other towns.

Hypothesis

1. The first hypothesis is that 16 - 20 year olds have many commercial pressures on them to do things other than participate in physical activity.
2. The second hypothesis is that the members of the study group do not see the benefits of physical activity on their health in future years.
3. The third hypothesis is that themed programs of physical activity will encourage and motivate young people to participate.
4. The fourth hypothesis is that 16 - 20 year olds do not participate in community physical activities for various reasons.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LIERATURE

The issue of physical activity has been a subject for discussion for the past 50 years, but it is only more recently that the health of the nation has been shown to be affected by limited physical activity. Therefore, one finds that the major studies by health organizations and their findings are published in relevant journals.

Some of these studies have looked at the health of young people, the effects of future health of young people not doing any physical activity, the financial costs on the health services caused by obesity, how new technology in equipment can help improve health, the influence of physical education in high schools and the development of physical activity among children and adolescents.

The major findings of these studies are that young people are opting out of physical activity and the effects this is having on their immediate health, their health in future years, and the cost to society especially health costs of young people becoming less active in physical activity.

There is no doubt that the published studies are continuing to encourage an under-debate on this subject and that people in general are becoming more aware of the problem. However, it would appear that to a large extent the studies are read by people who are either actively involved in organizing physical activity, i.e., schools, sports development organizations, leisure clubs, or by people who regularly exercise. In other words, they are preaching to the converted. There would appear to be a problem in the community with 16 to 20 year olds and also the studies appear to be weak on practical solutions. For this reason, I believe further work is needed to understand the full extent of the problem and what needs to be done to encourage the 16 to 20 year olds to take a more active part in physical activity. Also, what factual information has been gathered has been centered around very large geographical areas often national surveys with the result that the findings are not representative of highly specific areas. A further reason for my wish to examine this subject is to understand the nature of the problem as it affects my own local area, an area which has one of the highest number of heart-related diseases in the world.

One disadvantage of research is that by the time the findings are published, they can be as much as three to four years out of date. If nothing else, my studies will give a more recent view of the problem, and because it will be locally based, the findings can be published much sooner.

The nature of my studies will obviously benefit from previous work, but I would hope to improve on them by tackling the attitudes of the 16- to 20-year olds and find out exactly why they do or do not participate in physical activity.

The problem of ill health often caused through the lack of physical activity has been highlighted by the recent discussion on the spiraling costs of health care. In the USA, insurance costs are rising so rapidly that increasing numbers are unable to cover themselves against illness, thereby placing even greater burden on the public sector. In the UK, there is a similar problem and decisions being made appear to give greater priority to deal with health problems (e.g., heart and lung transplants) than to switching resources to prevent the arising problems. The glamor is in the operating theater rather than the gym.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Conduct of the study

All data for the study was randomly selected and devised by the researcher. A thirty item questionnaire was developed to give the respondents as wide a choice as possible to determine their reasons for dropping out of physical activity. The questionnaire was also designed to give a clear picture of the percentage of those asked who carried on with their activities and those who did not. Because the 16 to 20 year olds studied were widely spread geographically (unlike children in a school) great care was taken to ensure that the sample was representative of the age group. To cover the area of Llanelli I defined five areas where I would ask the questions:

- (1) The school
- (2) The town center
- (3) The local park
- (4) A record store
- (5) An ice cream parlor.

The Sample

The sample was a representative cross-section of the 16 – 20 year olds in the defined geographical area, and while the group might have been representative of similar age groups in other areas in Wales with similar economic and social problems, the survey was specific to one area and must be viewed as such.

A total of 217 subjects were approached, however only 114 were interviewed in depth because of the following reasons:

- *were not from the area*
- *not within the age group*
- *did not want to be interviewed*
- *had left school over one year and had not done any physical exercise since..*

The interviews were conducted over a three week period in which each day of the week was covered.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Sample Returns

The 114 young people in the age group 16 – 20 were surveyed and the response of these young people is the basis of the following results. The split between sexes is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Male and Female Respondents

Males	51	45%
Females	63	55%
Total	114	100%

How Many Young People Dropped Out Within Twelve Months?

The returns indicated that a total of 61 young people (54%) had given up sport or a leisure activity within the previous twelve months. Of the 53 who were still active in sport, approximately 40 (76%) were very active while the remaining 13 (24%) were less committed.

The results also showed that the female dropout was greater than the male dropout.

Table 2: Dropouts and Adheres by Sex

	Dropouts	Adheres
Males	23 (45%)	28 (55%)
Females	38 (60%)	25 (40%)

What Were the Motives for Dropout?

The motives from the questionnaire were ranked in ascending order according to the percentage of respondents who found each motive to be "Important" or "Extremely Important" in the dropout process.

The top ranked motive was **took up too much time**, with 43% of the respondents reporting it as 'Important' or 'Extremely Important' (Appendix 2). This was followed by two other motives reflecting conflicts of interest: **interfered with schoolwork** and **had other things to do**. Other motives of, **cost**, **did not like the pressure**, **not as good as I wanted to be** and **training was boring** claimed 4th, 5th and 6th equal motives respectively, while **I did not like my coach**, **too serious**, **not able to be with friends** and **got a job that conflicted** were ranked 8th equal.

Are There Differences in Motives Offered for Dropout by Sex?

Further analyses of Appendix 2 shows there were significant differences in four motives given by males compared with females.

Had Other Things to Do

48% of males **had other things to do** as an extremely important reason for them dropping out, but only 18% of females gave this as a motive. Males were keen to identify that computers, video games and socializing were the motives behind their reasoning.

A quarter (26%) of males rated **not able to be with friends** as 'Important or Extremely Important' motive for dropping out of sport or leisure activities. This compared with only 18% of females.

Sport is another activity, which refers to participation in other sports also

demonstrated significant differences in responses between sexes. Yet a simpler explanation may be that females reported 'other things' under specific motives – for example, 45% of females rated highly **interfered with school work/studies** compared with 26% of males.

Wanted To Take Part in Another Activity

Wanted to take part in another activity was identified as a motive by 16% of dropouts, with significant differences between responses for males (30%) compared with females (8%). There may be a number of underlying causes for this difference.

First, males may be generally dissatisfied with their sport compared to females, either from a training or competitive standpoint. This is borne out by the high ratings males accorded to such motives as **training was boring, I did not like my coach,** and **did not receive enough rewards**. These indicated motives are associated with withdrawing from one sport, possibly in favor of pursuing another sport which the dropouts find more rewarding. This contrasts with females who appear to have shifted their interests to other activities such as studying.

Not Enough Fun

Fun is a changing, nebulous concept caused by different things for different people, but the relevance of fun to maintaining sports links should not be underestimated.

Not enough fun was an 'important or extremely important' motive for 16% of dropouts, 24% of males and 8% of females.

Again, having fun may relate to the quality of training, competitive experiences or social interaction with peers and coaches. Boys may expect a greater or perhaps a different return for their investment of time and effort. It may also suggest that, in general, girls within the sample were having fun compared with boys, but other motivational issues caused them to quit.

No Facilities Near Me

No facilities near me was the fourth motive in which a significant difference by sex was found. Ten per cent of dropouts considered it an important or extremely important motive, but this reflected 22% of males but only 3% of females. Analysing the location of respondents and relative distances from their nearest facility was beyond the scope of the study, yet the comments of many confirms the location to some people as being very important and could, perhaps, be the subject of another study.

Other Motives for Dropout

Although the differences so far mentioned were the only ones to be statistically significant, a number of other motives were identified and make them worthy of consideration.

Cost too much

Cost too much was ranked fourth overall, identified by 26% of dropouts. Cost was referred to as both travelling expense and membership and weekly charges. From further questioning it appears that classes for individuals have higher costs than team sport charges. As women are more likely to compete in individual sports this would explain the higher percentage results for women on this question. Also, as the research took place in Llanelli it must be noted that Llanelli is an area of high deprivation with high unemployment.

Training was Boring

Training was boring was given by 23% as an important or extremely important reason for giving up sport. This reason reinforces the importance of making sport fun.

Additional Motives

In addition to other results, **took up too much time** was a motive which many respondents used regularly which links with the high ranking studies.

Analysis of the responses to the question 'Choose the single most important reason for your decision to give up participation in sport or leisure', indicated that across the total sample there was no conclusive reason offered for dropout. However, there were two reasons with close links which received relatively high support; **cost** and **facilities**.

A further interesting result was the high number of dropouts who were considering or attending a higher education college and might explain the high support given to the motive mentioned above **interfered with school work**. This motive was particularly highly cited by females who ranked it as their number 1 motive for giving up sport.

It is interesting to compare the results from the motive **interfered with school work** with studies carried out in America (Burton & Martens 1986; Klint & Weiss 1986) which did not rate schoolwork/studies highly in the dropout process. However, the American educational culture is different from that in Wales in so far as young people have an additional reason for pursuing sport. The American academic system can reward young people who excel in sport by providing free or subsidized collegiate university education, as well as providing top quality facilities and coaching. The Welsh system does not. Instead it seems to place demands on time and effort which are at conflict with sports and training requirements. During this survey it was not possible to pursue this high incidence further, but it could be the subject of further study.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSIONS

Conclusion

It is apparent that there is high dropout of young people from leisure/sports activity soon after they leave school, and from other studies it would appear that the young people of Llanelli are no different from other areas of the U.K.

The findings show that young people are giving up sports and leisure activities for a number of reasons, mainly associated with **conflicts of interest** and **having other things to do**. Despite conflict of interest motives claiming the top three ranked places, it would be wrong to assume that these reasons dominate dropout motives in this study. The next five ranked motives can all be classified as having a significant influence on the reasons for young people dropping out. One interesting aspect of the study was the difference that the education motive **Interfered with schoolwork/studies** played compared to its influence in American studies.

Education played a considerable role in the dropout process of young Llanelli people and is given as a major factor by many of these people.

Pressure, too serious, and boring were given as motives by the young people of Llanelli, but again were not as highly rated as other studies. Similarly, parents were not among the main reasons for dropping out overall, although a notable minority did claim that adults had a negative influence on their participation.

However, one significant element **Time** - was identified as a major cause for concern. This reason may be due to the fact that having finished with the strict rules of school, the young people had not yet been able to adapt to their new found freedom. Nevertheless, it is a matter of concern that this figure should rank so highly in this study.

In addition to the various motives given for not participating in any form of physical activity, a major concern is the actual number dropping out. Of the 114 young people interviewed over 61 had dropped out of physical activity during the previous twelve months; i.e. a dropout rate of over 50%

Recommendations

- 1. Places of employment are encouraged to provide a service to staff where they can train in nearby sports facilities either during lunch time or after working hours.**
- 2. Better transportation and opening times to sporting venues particularly during the evenings.**
- 3. Discount prices to under 18's, unemployed, low income and students.**
- 4. Provide quality coaching.**
- 5. Review opportunities for casual sports classes with rewards and social evenings.**
- 6. Sports centers need to have more recruitment /open nights giving youngsters the opportunity to experience classes, meet members, and generally feel welcome.**
- 7. Improved communication between schools, clubs and community sports centers.**

Future Research

There are a number of areas where future work would be valuable:

Follow up studies should take place to identify:

- **What occupations are employees restricted from participating in physical activity during lunch breaks and for what reasons are they restricted?;**
- **How can schools and clubs make sport more enjoyable for young people?;**
- **The range of physical activities that are on offer in the schools and community.**
- **The cost of playing sport**

A large-scale, multi-sport, inter-disciplinary study should be undertaken to identify participation motives over time among young people. Dropout motives would be identified for those who withdrew. Variables should include age, sex, type of activity, length of time carrying out this activity, educational ambitions, facilities and location of these, and social variables such as family income and support.

CHAPTER SEVEN

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QUALIFICATIONS OF RESEARCHER

To conclude, I present the qualifications of the researcher to show my competence and academic qualifications to perform this research work.

Academic:

- 14-16 years: obtained 8 G.C.S.E.'s
- 16-18 years: obtained 2 'A levels' in physical education and human biology.
- 18-22 years: obtained B.Ed. degree (honors) specializing in physical education at the University of Wales, Camarthen.
- Two years teaching elementary physical education.
- Commencement of studies at Lynn University, Boca Raton for Master of Science Degree in Sports & Athletics Administration
- 4 months voluntary work (towards M.Sc) with Sports Council for Wales working with elite athletes.
- 2 years as Community Development Officer for English Rugby Union in London
- Presently working for Sports Council for Wales who's aims are to increase the number of people participating in sport in Wales and to improve the performance of elite athletes. Much of this work is achieved by allocating lottery funding towards sports facilities and athletes.

Published Work:

- A Rugby Coaching Manual for the Teaching of Rugby and Ball Skills to Elementary-Aged Children (published in 1997 by Llanelli Town Rugby Club).

APPENDIX I:

Definitions:

Exercise

Exercise is a subset of physical activity that is planned, structured and repetitive and is done to improve or maintain physical fitness

Obesity

Obesity can be defined as an excess of body fat considered to be undesirable

Physical activity

Any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure

Physical Fitness

Physical fitness is a set of attributes that are either health or skill related. Health related fitness includes cardio-respiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility and body composition. Skill-related fitness includes balance, agility, power, reaction time, speed, and co-ordination

**APPENDIX II:
Motives for Dropout by Sex**

Table of results indicating percentages of dropouts, overall and by sex, who gave motives as 'Important' or 'Extremely Important' reasons for giving up physical activities. They are ranked in order of overall importance.

Rank	Motive	Total %	Male %	Female %
1	Took up too much time	43	43	42
2	Interfered with schoolwork/studies	38	26	45
3	Had other things to do	30	48	18
4	Cost too much money	10	9	11
5	Did not like being committed to regular classes	25	17	29
6	Not as good as I wanted to be	23	17	26
7	Training was boring	23	26	21
8	I did like the coaches/staff	21	30	16
9	Not able to be with friends	21	26	18
10	Got a job that conflicted	21	22	21
11	It became too serious	21	17	24
12	I did not improve	20	17	21
13	Was not able to get access to equipment or facilities	16	26	11
14	Wanted to take another activity	16	30	8
15	Could not attend regularly	16	26	11
16	Not enough fun	16	24	4
17	No encouragement from coaches	15	11	22
18	Did not like competitiveness	15	17	13
19	Did not learn new skills	11	17	8
20	Not enough challenge	11	17	8
21	Was expected to improve	11	4	16
22	Not exciting enough	11	9	13
23	No facilities near me	10	22	3
24	I was injured	26	13	34
25	Parents expected too much	8	9	8
26	Parents or friends did not want me to continue	8	0	13
27	Did not win enough	7	9	5
28	Training was too hard	7	4	8
29	Always lost	3	9	0
30	Did not like being in a large group	3	0	5