

# Periodic Research

## Societal Health Concern: Exploring Perceptions on Physical Activity among College Students

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#### Abstract

The trend towards a sedentary lifestyle is recognized as a major contributor towards many of the health and social issues. There is a growing focus on health related issues in the media and an increasing government spending on health campaigns. Regular physical activity remains an important behavior for promoting health, postponing or preventing hypo kinetic disorders. Despite the abundance of information that demonstrates the role of physical activity in health and quality of life, this information alone has not been sufficient to promote active lifestyles among the majority of the population. College Students perception of physical education influences their intention to participate in physical activities and understanding of its learning outcomes. The purpose of this study is to identify and investigate whether there are gender based differences regarding the perceptions on physical activity among college students. The focus was on three main categories namely: general knowledge, physical education and scientific basis of physical activities. Each category contained questions which serve to evaluate their perceptions about physical activities. The questionnaire was adapted from a journal article on a study done by Mowatt, DePauw and Hulac (1988). Further, it was adopted by Omar-Fauzeeet. al. (2009) in their study on college students in Malaysia. This study investigated the perceptions of 147 students (79 males; 68 females) aged between 19 and 25 about physical activities. The hypothesis was tested using t-test and inferences made. Findings of the study suggests female college students at Tumkur district show more positive attitudes towards the physical education and scientific foundation dimensions compared to males.

**Keywords:** Physical Education, Physical Activity, Perceptions, College Students.

#### Introduction

The trend towards a sedentary lifestyle is recognized as a major contributor towards many of the health and social issues. There is a growing focus on health related issues in the media and an increasing government spending on health campaigns. The initiative to improve public health on the part of government has undoubtedly contributed to the increased public awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyle (Fen & Hong, 2009). Regular physical activity and fitness contribute to overall health and fitness (Ooyub and Omar 2002). It is widely known that regular exercise is associated with a significant decline in the risk of cardiovascular complications, high blood pressure, obesity and weight management, and mortality rates. Regular exercise also helps in the reduction of symptom of depression and anxiety (Blair 1993). Despite the facts that these positive physical and psychological benefits of exercise are well documented and well publicized, levels of physical inactivity are increasing worldwide (Bond and Batey 2005). Due to the various health and social problems associated with sedentary lifestyle, research into investigating determinants affecting exercise behavior is warrant.

Regular physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle that has considerable physical and mental health benefits. Higher physical activity has been associated with a lower risk of all-cause mortality, lower risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, cancer, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, obesity, osteoporosis and depression (Abu-Omar & Rutten, 2008; Juracic, 2008). Participation in physical activity also appears to have a positive impact on affective development by reducing levels of depression and anxiety, improving mood, and enhancing abilities to

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perform daily tasks (US Dept of Health and Human Services). Whether people engage in an active lifestyle is a complex behavioral process that is influenced by various factors, including personal, social, and environmental factors (Pan et al., 2009). A healthy lifestyle in adulthood is believed to be rooted in habits acquired at early ages, mainly during adolescence (Lee & Loke, 2005; Li, Treuth, & Wang, 2009). Physical activity decreases significantly between adolescence and adulthood, and this may be explained by the fact that physical activity practice becomes a voluntary activity when individuals leave high school and join higher studies.

Despite the abundance of information that demonstrates the role of physical activity in health and quality of life, this information alone has not been sufficient to promote active lifestyles among the majority of the population. In general, people do not exercise just because scientific evidence indicates that they should. In order to provide motivation for individuals to change their sedentary behaviors, it is necessary to understand the determinants of such behaviors. Developing effective population interventions requires strategies and behavioral techniques that have proven effective on an experimental and clinical basis. It has also been demonstrated that different groups (e.g., women, the elderly, children, teen-agers and young adults, blue-collar workers, and handicapped people) require specific intervention approaches.

Most investigations related to perceptions on physical activities were carried on in western countries where socio-economic conditions vary from India. Due to the limited number and relatively narrow scope of past studies done about attitudes towards physical activity in the Indian context, this study aims to identify and investigate whether there are gender based differences regarding the perceptions on physical activity among college students.

#### Review of Literature

Ample studies were take place in order to analyze the involvement of college student in physical education with greater passion in college sports intention to maintain both mental and physical health. Omar-Fanzee et al(2009) conducted a study on college students in Malaysia and confined that male students were more interested than female students because to maintain health and they were more intelligent and had general knowledge and scientific foundation. Physical activeness leads to generate general knowledge as well as helps to reduce stress. National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2003) reported that women are much interested as men in the recent days because of equal opportunity in the field of physical activity which helps to balance their daily life as well as working. Vaz and Bharati (2004) confined that physical activity was closely related with gender followed usually male were actively participate in physical activity themselves because of physical strength. And age criteria also determined in physical activity.

Singh Sunitha and Gopalkrishna Gururaj (2014) studied that Health behaviors & problems among young people in India: Cause for concern &

# Periodic Research

call for actionsample size varying from 500 to 1000 with the prevalence of under nutrition in 10 to 24 yr. ranging from 56.4 to 68.5 percent. A school based study showed that 38.8 per cent of boys and 36.9 per cent of girls were stunted while a community based study showed that 51.7 per cent adolescents were stunted. Elisabeth Pain (2018) conducted a study on Graduate students need more mental health support, new study highlights 2279 responses, mostly from Ph.D. candidates based in 234 institutions across 26 countries, 40% of whom are in the biological and physical sciences and engineering—unveil “strikingly high rates of anxiety and depression” among the graduate population, the authors write in the *Nature Biotechnology* paper. Based on clinically validated questionnaires, 41% of respondents showed moderate to severe anxiety and 39% moderate to severe depression, both of which are more than six times the prevalence found in studies of the general population. The researchers also found significant variation by gender. About one-third of male respondents reported experiencing each condition, compared with approximately 40% of female participants and more than half of the 42 transgender and gender-nonconforming respondents.

#### Objectives of the Study

1. To know the involvement of different stream students in physical activity
2. To understand the difference in perceptions towards physical activity between male and female students

#### Methodology

##### The Design of Study

Descriptive research method was observed for the present investigation by using the survey research design to determine the perception or attitude of college students about physical activity.

#### Subjects

The subjects for the study were 147 under graduate college students of Tumkur district studying in the academic year 2017-18. The sample included 79 male and 68 female students from science, commerce and arts streams.

#### Research Instrument

The instrument used was a questionnaire containing 20 items in a 5-point Likert scale. It was a translated version of the original questionnaire by Mowatt, DePauw and Hulac (1988). The instrument was further adopted by Omar-Fauzee et al. (2009) in their study on college students in Malaysia. The translation from English to regional language Kannada was carried out by an English professor and the content validity was verified by the investigator. A pilot study was carried out and the test-retest results reported .72 alpha values.

The focus of the instrument was on three main categories namely: general knowledge on physical activities, physical education and scientific basis of physical activities.

#### Procedure

The questionnaire was administered in a classroom setup where the students assembled with necessary accessories. The objective of the test was made clear at the outset and honest responses were

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sought. Any doubts that eventually crept in the minds of respondents were made clear by the researcher. The duly filled in questionnaires were collected back after providing ample time.

**Statistical Techniques**

To analyze the data, the researchers used the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) for Windows. The mean and standard deviations were obtained and t-test was employed to test significant differences in means of variables. The significance level set at 0.05.

**Analysis of data and results**

Table 1 depicts subject characteristics of 147 respondents selected for the present investigation hailing from Tumkur District.

**Table 1**

**Information on characteristics of Subjects**

		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	79	53.74
	Female	68	46.26
<b>Stream</b>	Science	47	31.97
	Commerce	48	32.65
	Arts	52	45.37
<b>Religion</b>	Hindu	116	78.91
	Muslim	19	12.93
	Christian	12	8.16
<b>Year of Study</b>	I	82	55.78
	II	65	44.22
<b>Involvement</b>	Athlete	17	11.56
	Non-athlete	130	88.44

From the above table it is evident that the majority of the respondents were Hindu, followed by Muslim and Christian. In terms of year of study,

# Periodic Research

almost equal representation was given to first years second year students. In terms of athletic involvement, majority were non-athletes with 88.44% compared to 11.56% athletes.

Table 2 provides information on differences in perceptions towards physical activity between male and female students.

**Table 2**

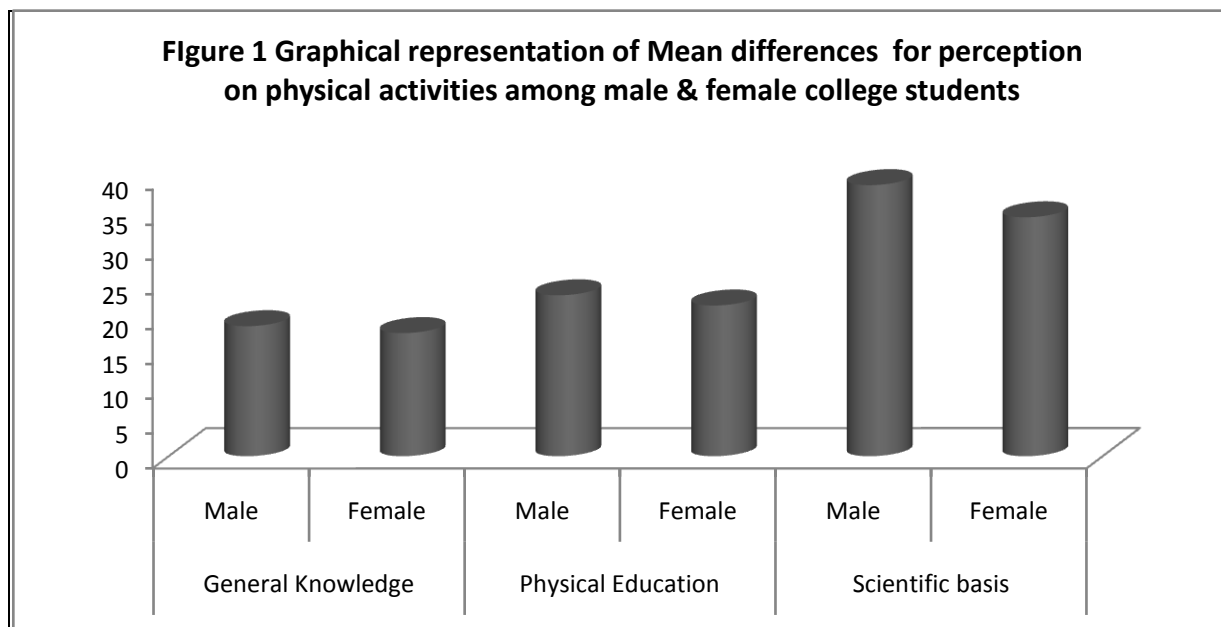
**Summary on t-test for assessing perceptions on physical activities among college students in Tumkur district**

Aspects	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
<b>General Knowledge</b>	Female	79	18.66	3.02	1.780	.077
	Male	68	17.67	3.73		
<b>Physical Education</b>	Female	79	23.09	3.51	2.372	.019*
	Male	68	21.63	3.93		
<b>Scientific Foundations</b>	Female	79	38.90	4.25	4.722	.000*
	Male	68	34.29	7.36		

\* Significant at p<0.05

The t-test results exhibit that females possess a more positive interest towards physical activity compared to males. This is evident by the significant difference between females (M=23.09±3.51) and males (M=21.63±3.93) in the physical education aspect t=2.372, p<0.05. For the scientific foundation dimension, t= 4.722, p < 0.05 also indicates a significant difference between the two genders. However, for the general knowledge dimension, t= 1.780, p > 0.05 shows that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students in this cross sectional study. The above results are graphically depicted in figure 1.

**Figure 1 Graphical representation of Mean differences for perception on physical activities among male & female college students**



**Discussion**

The findings of the study suggest that female college students at Tumkur district, show more positive attitudes towards the physical education and scientific foundation dimensions compared to males. The physical education dimension portrays a sentiment or attitude towards the way physical

education is taught in the curriculum while the scientific foundation dimension represents a sentiment in assessing the scientific benefits of exercises. This shows that the perceptions of females towards both dimensions differ from that of males.

The result of this study contradicts with that of Omar-Fauzeeet. al. (2009) suggesting that male

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students show more positive attitude towards general knowledge and scientific foundation dimensions compared to females in Malaysia. A study done by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2003) reported that women are much more likely than men to reason that being physically fit reduces stress and allows better time management in their jobs. Vaz and Bharati (2004) clearly demonstrated age and gender-related differences in the perception of physical activities.

Positive attitude of female students towards physical education is encouraging in the present scenario. It reflects their better understanding of physical education as compared to male counterparts. Results of the study conducted by Krouscas (1999) indicated that positive attitudes towards physical education decline between grades six and eight. This trend was more apparent for females than for males.

Better perception of female students towards scientific foundation was another positive aspect revealed by this study. This suggests that the female students value the scientific benefits of exercise and hence molding their beliefs towards healthy lifestyle is not a difficult task. Hence providing ample opportunities is an important factor towards creating healthy society. This argument is supported by Romaguera et al. (2011) who concluded that those who practiced physical activity consumed more fruits and were less likely to be smokers compared to non-physically active students. Also, physically inactive men spent more time in front of the computer and physically inactive women spent more time in front of the TV and were more likely to be frequent alcohol consumers.

The general knowledge dimension shows how one views physical activities as it is understood and perceived. Both male and female students were found to have neutral perceptions with regards to this dimension. This shows that the perceptions of male and female students are similar and at the same level. They agree that general knowledge on physical activities should be taught as a compulsory subject and offered at all levels of education. This finding is supported by the report of a study by Mowatt, DePaw and Hulac (1988) which stated that college students showed a neutral attitude about the understanding of Physical Education but they still believe that it is important to hold Physical Education classes.

#### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations are made with the hope that a similar study can be carried out on other groups of students at various institutes of higher education.

The data in the present study cannot be generalized to all populations. However, it is important to develop a clearer understanding of how people perceive physical activity if it is aimed to promote effective changes in health behavior of the society.

Further studies should be carried out on bigger samples by including students at training colleges, universities and secondary schools, workers and members of fitness clubs as well as the general public. The sample size can probably be increased as well.

# Periodic Research

The instrument used in this study has limited scope for enquiry. It should be comprehensive and necessarily include questions regarding lifestyle, dietary habits, parents' characteristics, and physical activity habits of the subjects under investigation.

Administrators of educational institutions and physical education directors need to be conscious of the factors that influence usage for the purpose of encouraging student recruitment and retention in physical activities. Higher levels of usage will increase physical activity and influence health and wellness in the college population.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the findings of this study serve as useful information with regard to curriculum framework in physical education. The knowledge should also provide basis for promoting active lifestyle and transform the present society into a healthier one.

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