

Forschungsgesuch Piffaretti

Poursuite et abandon de la pratique du fitness en Suisse

Summary

The first section of the investigation (chapter 4) allowed to evaluate the profile of the fitness new clients, according to a number of factors that the literature has recognised as important to predict either continuation or discontinuation of a fitness programme. Results indicated that close to a half of our sample has a number of positive preconditions: more than half of them have already integrated fitness or exercise activities in their habits, allowing themselves to be in what Prochaska & Markus (1994) labelled as an "action" or even "maintenance" phase. They also feel comfortable and like their involvement in exercise (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), which increases the intention to pursue exercising. Moreover, this part of the sample feels they are in average to good shape, which allows them to maximise perceived physical competence, namely a good predictor for exercise motivation. The other half of the sample, however, presents a profile that might be labelled as "at risk". In fact, their feature is: lack of exercise habit for a long time, perception of a mild attraction towards exercise, and not feeling well about their own body image.

Three factors were also closely looked at: gender, age and BMI level. As far as gender is concerned, women are under-represented in the group of individuals who have been physically active before subscribing to the fitness club, whereas they outnumber men in the "inactive" group. They also are comparatively less numerous than men in the group of people who perceive themselves as being either in good or very good physical shape. Moreover, they tend to value more goals that are linked to their own appearance (improving appearance, losing weight, which confirms other studies, cf. McAuley et al., 1994) - that is an immediate outcome which is difficult to reach and that exposes them more easily to disappointment and loss of motivation (Nicholls, 1989). Comparatively, men value goals that are more controllable, because they are connected to process rather than outcome. For all these reasons, women might be more at risk than men as far as exercise dropout is concerned.

Age was identified as another variable that might influence exercise participation. At subscription time, adolescents have a more positive perception of their physical shape. Middle-aged participants have high goal attainment self-efficacy, while perceiving a higher resistance from their family and experiencing less job satisfaction.

The BMI variable, too, seems to be associated with some other features. In our sample, individuals with high BMI level tended to show a more negative attitude towards exercise, more negative perception of their physical shape. Additionally, they tended to perceive family members as less supportive of their fitness involvement than individuals with lower BMI values.

The second section of our investigation (chapter 5) aimed to give a clear picture of the continuation / dropout rates within a mainstream fitness club and to specify the clients' reasons for their continued involvement or their dropout. Concerning the first goal, results showed that dropout rates 3 months after subscription are rather limited in number (10.3%) and mainly concern women. Three months later, the rate of dropouts increases to reach 25.56% of the initial population (21.2% of men drop out, while dropout rate in women rises to 30.7%). These figures are inferior than expected (some studies clearly mention a 50% dropout rate), although women's dropout, once again, is clearly higher than men's. Following Gould's dropout model (see 3.4., figure I, component I), data revealed that most of the dropouts are specific, since 71 % of the dropouts continue some kind of involvement in exercising. Reasons that are most commonly mentioned for dropping out are psychological ("desire to do something else" and "personal problems" above all) or demographic ("lack of time" and "excessive costs"). The categorisation of reasons for drop out into higher order groups make it possible to assess component 2 of Gould's dropout model (individually controlled vs. externally-controlled dropouts), which indicates a roughly 50-50 between the two types of discontinuation. Conversely, results suggested that people who decide to continue are driven primarily by a positive impression to be in better physical shape, an impression to take good care of their health and, more simply, because they love physical activity. Among factors influencing clients' cost-benefit analysis of their participation to a fitness programme (component 3 of Gould's model), higher frequency of participation and contact with the fitness personnel seem to have played a positive role.

Finally, concerning the second section of our investigation, it is interesting to compare the expected obstacles to the continuation of a fitness programme (assessed at subscription time) and the actual reasons for continuing or dropping out of the programme. The first section of the investigation had pinpointed the expected negative influence especially of "lack of time", "financial problems", and "daily hassles". In the second section of the investigation "lack of time" and "excessive costs" are actually among the most frequently cited motives for discontinuation. This suggests that clients have a high capacity to foresee the obstacles to their involvement, an intelligence that might favour the creation of dropout prevention strategies in fitness clubs.

The **third** section of the investigation (chapter 6) consisted in disclosing - with quantitative and a qualitative approach - the factors that allow to characterise a client who is more at risk of fitness exercise dropout. This part of the study was decisive in the perspective of discussing possible interventions aiming to change exercise behaviour and maximise people's adherence to a long-term fitness programme.

In general, the quantitative analysis confirmed some important theoretically-based assumptions. Clients with a long personal habit in exercising (Prochaska & Mari with self-determined motives to do physical activities (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and with a positive attitude towards sports in general (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) have greater chances to pursue their exercise programme within the fitness club. Data revealed that clients are more vulnerable when they present themselves with an "unhealthy" profile: they are smokers (and as such, as indicated in the first section of the investigation, have a tendency to have more negative attitude towards exercise and lower goal-attainment self-efficacy), they strive to release tension from daily hassles or other personal issues through exercise, they tend to have a more negative self-perception about their physical shape, they have a less active, (before and during their involvement in the fitness programme), and they tend to feel they are not being adequately supported by fitness personnel and by family members. Those data seem to corroborate the validity of the ecological model (Sallies & Owen, 1997).

Finally, the qualitative analysis opened an interesting perspective on the personal experiences showing that dropouts are not necessarily accompanied with negative feelings, but are either induced by external circumstances or voluntarily assumed by the clients. When that is the case ("seasonal dropout", "forced dropout"), dropouts turn out to be temporary and soon transform themselves into exercise continuation (either within the fitness club or outside). On the hand, some kinds of dropout ("health-related") can reveal the clients' unfulfilled attempt to solve a personal difficulty (social loneliness, negative" self-image) and their need to be comforted and listened to. When members of the fitness personnel do not detect this kind of hidden need, the client will find any good way to discontinue because his/her real expectations are not met.

In addition, the qualitative analysis stressed the presence of passive continuation: i.e. when a client continues only for external reasons, because he/she does not feel at ease within the fitness environment. The interviews suggested that is sometimes the case when the clients perceive that the economic interest is being put at the core of the fitness approach, while the client's well-being neglected.