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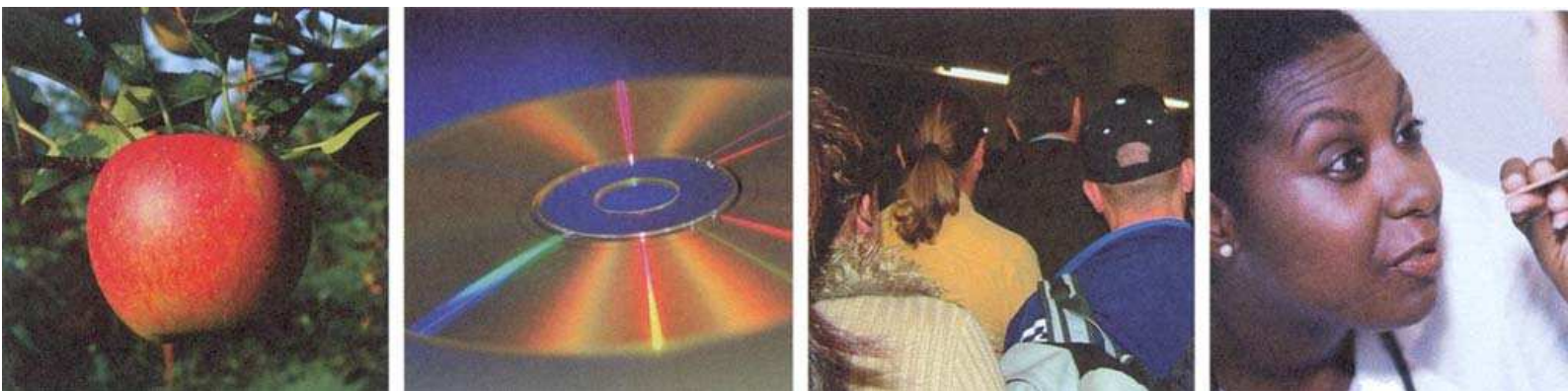
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Am I Bovered?

A participative action research study to develop, implement and evaluate physical activity interventions with girls

Phases Two & Three Report EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Centre for Health Services Studies

CHSS is one of three research units of the University of Kent's School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research. CHSS is an applied research unit where research is informed by and ultimately influences practice.

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1 Introduction

The 'Am I Bovered?' project was a two-year study aiming to develop, implement and evaluate sustainable exercise-based interventions with girls aged 11-15 years in order to improve their engagement in regular physical activity. The study took place in three phases that corresponded with the project's main aims. This summary provides an account of Phases Two and Three.

2 Aims

The aims of the first phase of the study were to:

- Explore factors that motivate and create barriers to 11-12 and 14-15 year old girls engaging in regular physical activity (Phase One has been completed - http://www.kent.ac.uk/CHSS/docs/Am_I_Bovered_Phase_One.pdf).

The aims of the second and third phases were to:

- Develop and implement activities chosen by inactive 11-12 and 14-15 year old girls with the support of a multi-agency team (Phase Two).
- Evaluate the impact of the project, examining factors associated with young girls' engagement in physical exercise (Phase Three).
- Make recommendations for policy and practice.

The Multi-agency team (MAT)

A multi-agency team was brought together to form a collaborative partnership of key stakeholders and professionals across Kent who had experience of working with young people in physical activity. In Phase Two the specific role of the MAT focused upon the development, planning and funding of the activities, as well as helping with devising a four-week taster session programme and an eight-week full programme of activities.

3 Methods and Sample

Phase Two involved recruiting pupils to a four-week programme of taster sessions giving participants the opportunity to try a range of activities including indoor-climbing, street-dance, ten-pin bowling, aqua-aerobics and trampolining. This was followed by an eight-week programme of activities chosen by the taster session participants. The preferred activities were indoor-climbing, trampolining and aqua-aerobics.

Phase Three involved evaluating the impact of the project. This was conducted through

- a questionnaire administered before and after the interventions that sought to detect any attitudinal changes about exercise;
- three focus groups with the participating girls to ascertain qualitative perceptions of the impact of taking part;
- one parental focus group to investigate perceptions of their daughters' involvement;
- telephone interviews with girls who had 'dropped out' of the programme to explore reasons for withdrawal.

Sites

Phases Two and Three involved the same two secondary schools that form part of the School Sports Partnership. The schools are situated in Margate and Westgate and draw their pupils from a diverse demographic population.

Sample and Recruitment

A total of 67 girls from Year 7 (11 to 12 years of age) and Year 10 (14 to 15 years of age) were initially recruited with the assistance of teaching staff. Thirty-one girls completed the eight-week programme, 25 of whom completed a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire. With respect to the focus groups, 11 girls took part in four focus groups and seven parents in one group. Attrition interviews were conducted with five girls.

Management of the Project

An important feature of the project was the overall organisation and co-ordination of the physical activity programmes. This involved conducting a full risk assessment including an

examination of the activity sites, an assessment of transportation routes and a criminal background and qualification check of all the instructors.

4 Key Findings

Pre- and post-intervention questionnaire

- The girls reported a positive change that taking part in physical activity was *easy* and they felt more *confident* to participate in regular exercise after the intervention.
- The influence of friends impacted on the frequency the girls exercised; the Year 7 girls showed a more positive view that their friends exercised regularly, whereas the majority of Year 10 girls disagreed with this view.
- The intervention seemed to affect the frequency of parental exercise reported by the girls.
- The majority of girls in School One reported that their parents exercised on a regular basis, but there were far fewer girls who reported this view in School Two following the intervention.
- Most girls reported a much more positive change in opinion after the intervention that their parents would encourage them to exercise on a regular basis, with more School Two girls reporting a stronger view than the girls in School One.

Qualitative Findings: Girls' and Parents' Perceptions of Being Involved in 'Am I Bovered?'

- 'Am I Bovered?' was described as sociable and fun, which fitted with the girls' expectations of what sport should be. The desire for fun outweighed other considerations in girls' motivations to exercise.

- Most of the participants liked the girls-only dimension of the project because it reduced their self-consciousness and lessened their fear of embarrassment. It also allowed them to see sport as something that girls could do well, rather than being in second-place to boys. They felt that it helped to counter the male bias surrounding school sport.
- Those who were more ambivalent about sports and exercise seemed to be re-introduced to the idea that sport and exercise could be fun and something they could do by engaging with sport in a different context, being offered a wider and novel choice of activities, and being offered non-competitive activities rather than conventional sports.
- Weight and body issues are significant to girls' confidence and willingness to engage, but they are resistant to drawing attention to this.
- The organisational factors which facilitated participation were three-fold: one, that the activities and transport were provided free of charge; two, girls were proactively recruited into the project and three, the intensive organisation 'on the ground', which was found to be reassuring to both girls and parents.
- An important feature of the project was that it bridged the gap between school and external activities, making the girls more confident about trying something new. Engaging in activities with friends but away from the school environment was viewed positively as it reduced the risk of ridicule or judgement.
- The main differences between the two schools lay in the range of activities ordinarily available to the girls and in the effect of the girls' attitudes and identities on the way they engaged with the project.

Attrition and Reasons for Withdrawing

- The personal circumstances of the girls affected their attendance: these included illness, over-stretched time commitments or 'forgetting' about the programme
- Older girls tend to have more control over how to spend their time, which may have impacted upon their decision to participate regularly on the programme.
- There were mixed views about whether undertaking the activities with girls from another school deterred them from participating.
- Most girls said that the programme had increased their levels of physical activity and they felt the programme was fun and enjoyable.

5 Strengths and Weaknesses

- The multi-agency team was vital to the success of the programme through their ability to offer advice and support with organisational and funding issues in the arrangement and resourcing of the sporting activities and providing important operational advice.
- Recruitment and retention of the girls was a challenge. It was difficult to establish direct contact with the girls, which impacted upon recruitment and retention levels. The impact of attrition in the initial stages affected the overall size of the sample and the amount of data that was collected.
- The programme involved establishing ground-level relationships with the girls and the parents; this was a labour intensive process requiring a substantial manpower input but was vital to success.

- The researchers were responsive to the girls' lack of identification with the term 'inactive', used in the initial recruitment process, changing the terms to 'sporty' or 'not sporty'.

6 Recommendations

- Gender issues must be championed when developing sports activities and programmes, especially for younger girls. It must be recognised that sport tailored for girls improves participation, increases confidence to achieve and to develop new sports-related skills, and decreases embarrassment and perceptions of negative body image.
- Participation and sustainability in sport are improved when activities are designed to appeal to girls' sociability and desire to spend time with their peers. Ideally activities should be enjoyable and fun, and be conducted in peer or friendship groups. Organising activities outside of the school adds to the sociability and enjoyment.
- The way in which activities and participants are managed and supervised has a significant impact on levels of enthusiasm and sustainability. Activities must be well-planned and co-ordinated with all professionals, trainers and organisers in advance, and clear information must be provided for participants and parents. Transport to and from activities is an additionally vital component. Costs should be kept to a minimum.
- Sport that is conducted in mixed gender groups should develop strategies to counter a potential male gender bias and create ways of increasing equal opportunities for girls to participate. Diversity and choice of activity are important factors in sustaining interest. Teachers and trainers should make efforts to engage girls by taking into account increased shyness and embarrassment felt by girls, as well as being aware of the impact of negative comments from boys.

- Involving girls in decisions about activities is important, in order to ensure relevance and commitment, however this works best within their own peer groups rather than working together with professionals.
- Practical issues surrounding participation in sport should be considered. This includes adequate and private changing facilities and sportswear that girls feel comfortable wearing.
- The role of a multi-agency team in the successful implementation and funding of activities cannot be overstated, therefore their continued involvement in programme development is vital. There is a need to develop a sports facilitator role within this team which should include the promotion, management and co-ordination of activities for girls within schools and communities.