



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: KATIE MOONEY

BEEFCAKE! A new study by a U of A economist shows the link between socioeconomic factors for participation in sports.

Study explores relationship between income and exercise

TOM WAGNER
News Staff

A new study by Brad Humphreys, a U of A economics professor, suggests we should be looking at physical activity and the promotion of exercise in a whole new way.

The study surveyed over 275 000 individuals across the United States and examined the effect of factors such as ethnicity, income level, gender, age, and climate on participation levels and time spent on physical activity. Humphreys found substantial differences in levels of physical activity between groups, as well as in the types of activities they participated in.

For example, 57 per cent of respondents participated in walking as a form of physical activity, making it by far the most popular form of exercise. In comparison, only 15 per cent of those surveyed participated in group sports such as hockey or basketball. According to Humphreys, this is a direct result of cost.

"[Walking] takes very little equipment. All you've got to have is a pair of walking shoes and workout clothes if you're going to be outside," Humphreys explained. "Compare that to, say, the equipment you have to

have to participate in hockey."

Humphreys added that gender also heavily influenced participation levels in physical activity.

"Females were less likely to participate in physical activity than males, for example, which is probably because females spend a lot more time in child-rearing and childcare and home production like cooking and cleaning," he explained.

The elderly were less likely to engage in physical activity or exercise for long periods of time. Humphreys explained that this is a result of the increasing physical restraints that age puts on the body.

Although Humphreys was not surprised by most of his findings, there was one unexpected pattern.

"Even though minorities, like African Americans and Hispanics, are less likely to participate in physical activity, given that they decide to participate, they spend more time than anybody else," he said.

The study notes that on average, African-Americans spend two hours more per week in group sports than Caucasians, while Hispanics spend an hour and a half more.

Given these differences, the study reached a number of conclusions about government promotion of

exercise and physical activity. The first is that because parks and recreation spending only increases participation in group sports—activities that only 15 per cent of the population participates in—parks and recreation spending isn't a very effective policy to promote physical activity.

Humphreys also suggested that government policy must take into account the reasons behind varying levels of participation and tailor programs to people's needs if they're serious about getting people active. For example, he suggests setting up daycare programs so that women have the free time to exercise.

Although the study was conducted in the United States, Humphreys still sees the conclusions reached as relevant for Canada, except for one key difference: climate.

"We know when these people were surveyed during the calendar year, and people who were surveyed in months during winter were less likely to participate in physical activity, just because of climatic factors. And because winter is longer in Canada—and colder—we might expect the effects of climate on physical activity, and temperature, to be more important here in Canada."

NEWS BRIEF

NINTH ANNUAL SCIENCE SUNDAY ATTRACTS FUTURE SCIENTISTS

Using the motto 'Look! Touch! Create! Discover!', University of Alberta Museums attracted aspiring scientists from the ages of 5-12 for the ninth annual Science Sunday on 2 March.

"The idea behind Science Sunday is to introduce children to the wonders of natural sciences in a fun environment," said Jennifer Pascoe, the communications and marketing coordinator for the U of A Museums. "There are activities in all the sciences: entomology, geology, paleontology, mineralogy, petrology. It's a fun afternoon of activities and they learn a lot."

Accompanied by their parents, children were seen crowding around each station set up in the Earth Sciences Building, exploring 20 different activities. A stimulated archaeological dig was especially popular, with the limited number of seats filling up quickly. Here, the young scientists were given the opportunity to explore the processes involved with fossil excavation through hands-on experiences. Even though children may have faced disappointment at not being able to



LAUREN STIEGLITZ

SCIENCE ROCKS! This little girl put the "gee" in geology last Sunday afternoon.

participate in the dig, they had plenty of other stimulating activities to enjoy.

"There is 'Dino Detective'; 'Make a Fossil,' where they actually learned how fossils are made; 'Investigating Insects,' where they are looking at insects and from the entomological museum under a microscope," Pascoe said, listing some of the major attractions.

Besides giving children the opportunity to explore natural sciences, Science Sunday had another goal. Pascoe explained that the event was also designed to teach kids about the various

career possibilities in various fields. This goal appears to have been achieved, as children seemed to have soaked up these messages.

"I learned that you can be whoever you want to be, and you can do whatever too. It doesn't matter who you are if you believe in yourself," nine-year-old Cierra observed.

Due to the high success of Science Sunday, the U of A Museums have announced that they will be holding a Science Saturday in November as part of the Festival of Ideas.

—Caroline Lee, News Staff



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