

The impact of exercise on happiness - essay



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The impact of exercise on happiness has long been interest to researchers and many researches had identified that exercise as a cause of joy.

Happiness is consisted of three components which are positive excitement, life satisfaction and the absence of negative state like depression and stress.

Exercise refers to planned, structured, and repetitive movement to improve or maintain one or more components of physical fitness (Knöchel et al., 2012). Other than physical benefits such as reduced risk for cardiovascular disease and diabetes, exercise has also psychological benefits which including greater levels of positive mood and happiness, lower levels of depression and anxiety (Reed & Ones, 2006).

People who exercise are happier and more sociable than people do not participate in exercise. Meta-analyses and comprehensive reviews have clearly showed that exercise minimize self-reported anxiety and depression. Reed and Ones' (2006) meta-analytic review of 158 studies concluded that exercise can helps to increase positive mood. For instant, participants who took part in a ten weeks exercise program for mood-enhancing purpose, they experienced significantly increased self-esteem after complete the program. Moreover, experiments done on American and Italian teenagers showed that they are at the happiest state when they get involved in sports and games (Huang & Humphreys, 2012).

According to the findings, regular exercise results in life satisfaction, increases happiness and improves general health in students (Gatab & Pirhayti, 2012). There are students who practice regular exercise such as jogging to maintain health. On the other hand, Forrest and McHale (2010) as cited in Huang & Humphreys (2012) found that women who engaged in

physical activity reported higher well-being than women with similar characteristics who did not engage in physical activity.

Problem Statement and Significance of Study

Many students claimed that they do not have time to exercise as homework and assignments have taken up all their time. They would rather spend their time surfing internet, playing online games or hanging out with friends when they are free. Some students who are obese do not practice regular exercise and they have lower level of happiness. Exercise and food choices are areas for improvement. Furthermore, group exercises will increase happiness in students (Gatab & Pirhayti, 2012). For example, males are more likely to be involved in group exercise such as playing basketball, badminton and football. In sports and group activities, people will learn to help others, cooperation in teamwork and thus can build stronger friendship and self-confidence that lead to happiness.

Planned Activity Procedure

An exercise program was scheduled and planned for the participants (6 group members of the assignment: 2 males and 4 females) during the initial 2-4 weeks of the trimester at their university. All participants were aged 21-22. The instruction regarding the exercise and completion of Authentic Happiness Inventory Questionnaire was being posted in the ' Facebook' group page prior to the starting of exercise program. Before and after the whole exercise program, participants are required to complete the Authentic Happiness Inventory Questionnaire to assess their pre- and post-activity level of happiness. Participants were being told to jog lightly for a period of 30 minutes at moderate pace and intensity. Jogging sessions took place in <https://assignbuster.com/the-impact-of-exercise-on-happiness-essay/>

Westlake Garden which located near to participants' house area while the questionnaire and self reflection were being done individually by participants seated at home or any indoor area. There were at least 3 jogging programs being conducted in group each week. All exercise program were took place in early evening (around 5. 30 PM), with the condition when the weather was fine.

Rationale for the Activity Chosen

Part of the rationale that jogging or walking was chosen was because it is safe and effective in promoting health. At the same time, it was expected to be enjoyable or at least tolerable for everyone across a wide range of fitness level and body weights (LePage and Crowther, 2010). Walking was being emphasized as a significant example of appropriate lifestyle activity for it is readily accessible and easily regulated exercise. This rationale is supported by the assumption that lower intensity of activity tends to be adopted and maintained for longer period of time (Ekkekakis, Backhouse, Gray and Lind, 2008). In short, moderate intensity is more likely to be practice for long period than high-intensity activities.

Theoretical Approaches

There are many interesting theories which are related about happiness and also to explain how people can gain happiness and increase their happiness level. Theories related to happiness will be like flow, hedonic, eudaimonic and learned helplessness. Theories chosen to be discussed on how exercise related to happiness are theory of flow and hedonic theory of happiness.

Theory of Flow

We are interested in Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow because the experience of being in flow is fairly common for people, and they are also easy to be recognized this condition. According to Csikszentmihalyi (as cited in Compton, 2005), flow denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement. Human always gain happiness or enjoyment when they put attention towards the content of the activity. For instance, when a person who is exercise lover, they will always tend to enjoy and found happiness during their exercise moment, they may pay attention towards what they are doing, and do not conscious their surroundings. Therefore, flow theory can explain how the athletes increase their happiness during exercise.

Flow is the experience that allows people to enjoy life, feel happier and function better. Firstly, the characteristic of action and awareness are merged is explaining on how people feel "inside" the activity (Compton, 2005). Next, flow is complete concentration on the task at hand, which complete concentration and centering of attention on the activity of the moment and the concentration appears effortless. Distractions are excluded from the consciousness, people will not focus on the distractions anymore but put attention at the task (McGuinness, 2006). Thirdly, when people is in flow, they will be lack of worry about losing control, which means they have a sense of control, they feels they are in complete control of their action. In additional, flow is a loss of self-consciousness, which ego part of human is quieted, and we do not have to think before we act, we are not trapped in an internal conflict between various options (Compton, 2005). Others than that,

being in flow, time is no longer seems to pass in ordinary way, which means time seem to pass more quickly than usual. Next, flow is refer to the experience is done for its own sake rather than a means to another goal. Flow also accompanies a challenging activity that requires skill which personal challenge of an activity may pushes individual's skill level, and requisite concentrate is produced that can induce the flow experience (Compton, 2005).

Hedonic Theory of Happiness

The other theory which can explain well about happiness is hedonic. According to Norrish and Vella-brodrick (2008), this theory explains that in order to be happy, we must maximize our pleasure while on the same time minimize experience that is painful. Thus, happiness will only occur if pleasure experience and sensory gratification are more than the painful experience. If painful experience is more than pleasure experience, then happiness is unlikely to occur.

Hedonism also call hedonic well-being includes the idea that pleasure is the basic motivating force behind most of the human behaviors but also recognize that certain pleasures require positive social interactions with other people (Compton, 2005). It comprises of an affective component such as high positive affection and low negative affection, and also the cognitive component which the satisfaction with life (Happiness and Positive Psychology, 2010).

Rationale of Theories Chosen

As compared to eudaimonic theory, hedonic theory is more suitable for us to access happiness in this assignment because it can be retrieved easily by asking person current emotional state and also it can be experienced easily in different situations. In eudaimonic, people may not experience fully and when they do not achieve certain category. During sport time, participants may experience happiness when they are involved in social interaction with others, playing with others, they increase their positive mood (maximizing pleasant) and forget their sad moment, they are more satisfied towards their current situation, which is no stress and relax (minimizing unpleasant). Therefore, people are more enjoy during in sport moment, because they are more involved in activity and presence of positive mood. Last but not least, there are a lot of different theories to talk about happiness, however being in flow and hedonic is easy to access and understand in general.

Literature Review

Exercise Intensity

Different intensity of exercise can also bring different impacts on mood and exercise motivation. People tend not to continue with exercise when it is high-intensity activities as compared to moderate-intensity physical activities (Ekkekakis, Backhouse, Gray and Lind, 2008). Optimal benefits of exercise happen in moderate level, but not low or high intensity exercise (Reed & Ones, 2006). This is further supported by Farahani, Saiah, Heidary, Nabilu, and Eskandaripour (2011), saying that regular exercise results in higher life-satisfaction, relaxation, self-esteem, joy than highly intense exercise. It was found that positive effects exist only for exercise duration up to 35 minutes

and last for at least 30 minutes after exercise before returning to baseline (Reed & Ones, 2006). Walking was being recommended as a prime example of appropriate moderate intensity activity. Many choose walking as their physical activity because it is readily accessible and easily regulated exercise (Anderson and Brice, 2011). It is not good to exercise or involves in sport activities overly. Study showed individuals exercising at high levels exhibit greater eating pathology than individuals who exercise moderate levels (LePage & Crowther, 2010).

Affective Effects of Physical Exercise

Since 1981, a lot of literature reviewed that exercise decreases negative psychological states like self-reported anxiety and depression. It is proven that exercise can reduce tension, anxiety and anger effectively (Yeung, 1996 as cited in Stubbe, Moor, Boomsma & Geus, 2007). This is a consistent finding because it is congruent with the finding of Huang and Humphreys (2012) that exercise enhances mental well-being through improved mood and it can be considered as an effective treatment for clinical depression and anxiety. Wininger (2007) as cited in Anderson and Brice (2011) called these reductions in negative mood states as 'sense of relief' effect. This is because sport activities can produce anti-depression effects started from the moment we start exercise and it will stay for some time after finishing the exercise (Kiyani, Mohammadi & Sattarzadeh, 2011). This result from the study of Birkeland, Torsheim and Wold (2009) also showed that there are weak but significant negative relationships between leisure-time activity and depressed mood. Alfermann and Stoll (2010) as cited in Stanley & Cumming (2010) found that exercise was positively correlated with stress-management

and control-orientation. Besides from improved well-being, it was also found that exercise can lead to greater ability to cope with stress (Holley et al., 2010 as cited in Knochel et al., 2012). Results from the study of Raedeke, Focht & Scales (2009) showed that exercise was associated with positively activated affective states. One of the reasons athletes participate in sport is because they can gain fun, enjoyment, challenge and excitement from the activity (Farahani, Saiah, Heidary, Nabilu and Eskandaripour, 2011).

Behavioral Effects of Physical Exercise

Physical exercise and quality of sleep. The American Sleep Disorders Association had considered physical exercise as a modality of non-pharmacological treatment for sleep disorder (Santos, Tufik, & Mello, 2007). Some researches had shown the positive effect about physical exercise and improve the quality of sleep. Physical activity not only associated with better sleep in the general population. Physical activity may also improve the sleep quality among those with sleeping disorders (Loprinzi & Cardinal, 2011). And in Brand et al. (2009) research had shown that the adolescent athletes reported better sleep patterns as well as psychological functioning when compared to sedentary control. Any fatiguing activity during daytime that in turn results in a greater metabolic requirement for compensatory night-time sleep also can improve the quality of sleep (Youngstedt, O'Connor & Dishman as cited in Fairbrother, 2011). Moreover, daytime exercise is a leading factor associated with the best quality night-time sleep (Youngstedt & Kline, 2006 as cited in Fairbrother, 2011).

Happiness and quality of sleep. Insufficient sleep is one of the unhealthy behaviors that can influence the happiness level of individual. The people

who was insufficient sleep has shown that easily feeling tired, low energy and unable to concentrate on the task and those behavior has directly linked to lower levels of happiness (Chuah, et al., 2010). Insufficient sleep also can lower the levels of happiness by indirectly way. For example, the people who lack of sleep will decrease the productivity at workplace or school; increase the chance to get injuries (Choi, et al., 2006) negative effect toward interpersonal interactions with others (Totterfell et al, 1994 as cited in Hansen, 2012). In conclusion, time of sleep and quality of sleep has negative correlation with level of happiness. By improve the quality of sleep will improve the level of happiness.

Cognitive Effects of Physical Exercise

Physical exercise and self esteem. Exercise is a proven way to increase self-esteem (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000). Research has indentified that physical activity behavior have a strong correlated to self esteem in both children (Strauss, Rodzilsky, Burack, & Colin, 2001), adolescents (Erkut & Tracy, 2002) and adults (McAuley et al, 2000 as cited in Haugen, Säfvenbom, & Ommundsen, 2011) Experiences in the physical activity context are proposed to influence perceptions of self-efficacy. Change in self-efficacy can lead to higher level change in four sub domain perceptions of the physical self (sports competence, physical condition, body attractiveness and physical strength), which may then generalize to improvement in an overall sense of physical self-worth. Change in physical self-worth may then generalize to global self-esteem. And perception of self also play an important role in overall feeling of self esteem (Sonstroem et al, 1994 as cited in White, Kendrick, & Yardley, 2009). Moreover, physical activity can improve self-

image, self-confidence; relieve stress tension and premenstrual tension, increased alertness, increased energy, increased ability to cope with stress and moods (Greist & Jefferson, 1992 as cited in Greenberg & Oglesby, 1996)

Biological Effects of Physical Exercise

One of the ways to gain happiness is by releasing some neurotransmitter that can make people feel happy. The neurotransmitter that can improve the level of happiness is serotonin, endorphin and dopamine (Breuning, 2011).

Numerous biological and chemical hypotheses have been proposed to explain the effects of exercise on positive psychological health. One theory implies that exercise increases serotonin levels and that the release of endogenous opioids from the pituitary gland acts as a mood enhancer and antidepressant. Endorphin is the neurotransmitter that as the body's natural painkiller and start releasing the individual after begins the exercise.

Endorphin improves the level of happiness by four key effects on the body: they can relieve pain, reduce stress and anxiety, enhance the immune system and postpone the aging process. If we continuous exercise for more than 30 minutes then release of these hormones (Rokade, 2011).

Serotonin is a monoamine neurotransmitter thought to be involved in mood modulation and inhibition of emotional systems (Panksepp, 1982 as cited in Williams, et al., 2006) Serotonin improves happiness level by change the negative mood. Lower platelet serotonin was associated with lower mood (Peirson& Heuchert, 2000 as cited in Young, 2007) whereas better mood was associated with higher blood serotonin levels in human body (William et al , 2006). There are two mechanisms by which physical activity increases brain serotonin. First, motor activity increases the rate and frequency at which

serotonin is “ fired” within the brain, resulting in an increase in both the release and synthesis of it. Secondly, regular exercise increases the level of tryptophan in the brain. Tryptophan is an amino acid used to manufacture the serotonin (Turcotte, 2011).

Physical Exercise Provide Opportunity for Socialization

Literature shows that those who participate in group sports are happier and more sociable (Kiyani, Mohammadi, and Sattarzadeh, 2011). At the same time, to be a social person is one of the ways to increase the level of happiness as human being is a social creature. This is shown in the study of Raedeke, Focht & Scales (2009) that people reported higher exercise enjoyment and greater intentions of joining similar exercise activities when they feel more engaged and revitalized. Sport exercises were being recognized as the easiest and powerful way for creation of positive social relationship with others because it is usually in group form (Talebzadeh and Samkan, 2011). Study support the significant relationship between exercise and level of happiness, it is reported that people who involved in sports and group activities will learn to help others, teamwork, gain friendship and thus have a happy life (Gatab and Pirhayti, 2012). There is congruent with the study of Farahani et al., (2011), stated that there are socialization processes when participate in sport activities because they are able to be with others and feel the sense of belonging to a group. Besides, exercise is also able to enhances communication, benchmarking, strength feedbacks, social and communication skills (Newman, 2011).

The level of authentic happiness was being analyzed in terms of scores and percentage as shown in Table 1. 0. After carrying out several exercises, obviously the level of authentic happiness among our group members had increased. In order to have a more accurate result, we took one test separately before starting any exercise activities and another test after exercising. The scale that Chin ling scored before exercising was 2. 92 and after exercising were 3. 29. Kok Heng scored 1. 80 before exercising and 2. 04 after exercising while Pooi Hean obtained 2. 67 before exercising and 3. 29 after exercising. The scaled that Kai Shen gained before exercising was 3. 13 and after exercising were 3. 63. For Jie Ying's scale before exercising were 3. 46 and after exercising were 3. 54. Before exercising, Su Inn scored 2. 13 and 3. 13 after exercising.

The results shown that the level of authentic happiness will be increase when exercise. The least increasing of the scale is 0. 08 while the most increasing of the scale is 1. 0. After exercising, the highest scale of the authentic happiness scale among our group members is 3. 63 out of 5. 00.

Qualitative Analysis of Activity

Personal reflection in the form of diary or journal was analyzed according to different themes. In this case, thematic analysis was used to examine how different aspect of exercise (biological, cognition, affection and behavioral) influence level of happiness.

Biological Influence on Happiness. Throughout the entire exercise activities, Chin Ling found that she became happier and cheerful. This can be explained that exercise can improve happiness by releasing some neurotransmitter

which included serotonin, endorphin and dopamine that can make people feel happy (Breuning, 2011). Moreover, sport activities can produce anti-depression effects started from the moment we start exercise and it will stay for some time after finishing the exercise (Kiyani, Mohammadi & Sattarzadeh, 2011).

Affective Influence on Happiness. Besides, Chin Ling's stress also released through exercise. In the meanwhile, Kok Heng also pointed out that feeling better after exercising as he had time to relax from the assignment and midterm. Moreover, Pooi Hean also found that exercise helped her to keep her mind calm and relax after facing computer for a long period. She also said that exercise is not tiring but helped to minimize her tiredness. Kai Shen declared that that is the moment he can totally free himself from stress and just focus on the conversation when we are jogging or walking together to the same direction. All these statement supported by researchers that exercise can leads to greater ability to cope with stress (Holley et al., 2010 as cited in Knochel et al., 2012).

Behavioral Influence on Happiness. Some researchers had shown the positive effect about physical exercise and improve the quality of sleep (Loprinzi & Cardinal, 2011). The level of happiness will be improved when the quality of sleep is improved. All these statements are congruent with the reflection of Pooi Hean who mentioned that exercise helped to reduce her insomnia problem and she will be more energetic the next day. Jie Ying also pointed out that she felt energetic as well after exercising and has more motivation to done with her assignment. She also had the experience of sleeping very well after exercising.

Cognitive Influence on Happiness. Other than that, Pooi Hean stated that she felt good after exercising because she can lost weight in a very healthy way. She also said that exercise is a great way to keep fit, maintain health and have a better body image. The more she satisfied with the body shape, the more she feels confident and happy. Furthermore, Kai Shen mentioned that he didn't know how much weight he had lost throughout exercise but he just knows that he feel more confident with his body image. Besides, he had more positive thought about his own health as compared to last time which he didn't do much physical activity. All these reflections are congruent with some researches that physical activity can improve self-image, self-confidence; increased alertness, increased energy, increased ability to cope with stress and moods (Greenberg & Oglesby, 1996).

Opportunity for Socialization. Kok Heng also stated that he felt happy as he really enjoyed the moment with friends. Also, the interaction with friends and get to know more about them let Jie Ying felt very joyful and enjoyed during exercise. Moreover, Kai Shen mentioned that after exercising, the first thing he gains is a better relationship among his friends. He enjoyed not only the satisfaction of the exercise itself, but more of the chit-chating part which allow them to talk about all kind of things. These reflections are congruent with literature shows that those who participate in group sports are happier and more sociable (Kiyani, Mohammadi, and Sattarzadeh, 2011). Sport exercises were being recognized as the easiest and powerful way for creation of positive social relationship with others because it is usually in group form (Talebzadeh and Samkan, 2011). This is true that most of our group member claimed that exercise can improve the relationship among

friends. Hedonic theory also stated that certain pleasures require positive social interactions with other people (Compton, 2005). Hedonic can be retrieve easily by asking person current emotional state

In Flow during Exercise. Other than that, Su Inn enjoyed the walking session with her friends. Surprisingly she found that the time passed very fast when they were walking to campus. They laughed and talked as well as enjoyed the nice view along the pathway when walking. This phenomenon is congruent with flow theory when being in flow, time is no longer seems to pass in ordinary way, which means time seem to pass more quickly than usual (Compton, 2005). She complete focused in what she is doing at that moment which make her feel like the time seem to pass more quickly than usual.