

Public health in action: my health and the socio-ecological model

[Health & Medicine](#), [Healthy Lifestyle](#)



In 2015, I vowed to engage in an hour of weekly exercise, and so I partake in 30 minutes of jogging every Tuesday and Friday. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adults aged 18 to 64 should do at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity such as brisk-walking or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity such as jogging. As of 2018, I turned 21 and yet I lead a rather sedentary lifestyle.

Individual Factors

The first layer of the socio-ecological (SE) model encompasses the individual lifestyle factors, which relates to my attitude and the approach I take towards how I live my life. Most recently in 2018, I begin to deviate from my routine physical activity because of a lack of time and according to a study conducted by WHO, one in three Singaporeans do not have sufficient exercise due to a “lack of time”. I am very occupied with schoolwork since I entered the university and a failure to manage my time wisely had led me to occasionally disregard my weekly exercise routine. Entering the digital age, majority of my schoolwork and study materials are online. Furthermore, project works are completed via online platforms such as Google Docs, since my classmates are also busy with their own workload. As such, I have an excessive exposure to the computer screen while being in a sitting position for a prolonged period, on an almost daily basis. According to a survey done by AIA, “7 in 10 in Singapore find it hard to break the habit of spending a lot of time in front of screens” resulting in consequences such as an insufficient amount of exercise per week. It is appalling that ages 18 to 29 has the highest prevalence for a high level of sedentary behavior when we should be

the most active. As such, a lack of time has led me to subconsciously adopt a passive attitude and behavior towards exercising. Concurrently, I have embraced a more sedentary lifestyle which essentially impedes my commitment towards having more exercise and building a healthier lifestyle.

Social Influences

The second layer of the SE model comprises of the social and community influences, which relates to the interaction between me and my family and friends. Being introverted, I only have a small group of friends. Furthermore, upon entering the university, I lost touch with many secondary school and polytechnic friends because of a lack of time to join in those frequent catch-up sessions. In contrast with my friends who are more outgoing and sporting, I go out less often as compared, be it in terms of shopping or going to the gym. According to a survey conducted, "limited social networks" is a determinant towards having insufficient physical activity. As such, the size of my social network does relate to the amount of physical activity I conduct per day i. e. the number of step counts per day. Having such little social engagement further exacerbates my current sedentary lifestyle of constantly being at the computer desk. Thus, the inadequate act of socializing with my friends does have a negative influence to how much physical activity I undertake, be it moderate or vigorous activity. Despite my lacklustre commitment towards exercising and the inclination for a more sedentary lifestyle, there are some external factors below which have positively influenced me to adopt a more physically active lifestyle instead.

Physical Environment

The third layer of the SE model includes structural factors which relates to the living and working conditions of the everyday environment that I live in. In Singapore, we have the Health Promotion Board (HPB) to promote and foster active living amongst Singaporeans. HPB collaborate with National Parks Board (NParks) to organize a weekly event called “Sundays @ The Park” where people get together to participate in vigorous activities such as Zumba and kickboxing. Initially, I signed up with the intention of propelling myself to conduct exercise regularly because I occasionally disregard the need for exercising due to my time constraints. However, upon joining this weekly event, I set aside and dedicate an hour every Sunday morning to learn and take part in the physical activity I have chosen. Furthermore, the event is held over 70 locations island wide and I could conveniently head to Hougang Avenue 5 Park, which is just a 5 minutes walking distance from where I live. As such, I would not have any excuses to evade this weekly activity since it is of close proximity and of which, also provides for a good dosage of exercise weekly.

Aside from the vigorous physical activity I partake, I engage in moderate physical activity during the day within the school compound as well. In the National University of Singapore (NUS), there are very few elevators available, but staircases are aplenty. The school’s infrastructure essentially enforces me to habitually climb up and down the floors to the next class and not conveniently take the lifts. This is vital since I sit for hours during seminars and it is detrimental to my health, as excessive sitting can lead to

premature mortality. However, the rapid development of the public transport system in Singapore has conveniently allowed me to travel from one end to the other without much needed walking, due to the easy accessibility and availability of escalators and elevators. I never take the stairs unless the escalators and elevators break down. As such, I applaud NUS for constructing an infrastructure that comprises of mainly staircases to encourage me to step up and exercise. But despite the unintended consequence of a first-class transport system on regular commuters like me, the 2017 emergence of bike-sharing has brought about a great opportunity for me to utilize the latter form of active transport instead. Although I still take the public transport for longer distance travelling, I would rent a bike for those shorter distance travelling. Therefore, the bike-sharing system does promote physical activity and would ultimately improve my overall health. With such promptings from the everyday environment that I live in, it has encouraged me to participate in more physical activity, instilling in me the habituality of conducting exercise. Apart from the physical environment that either impedes or promotes me to live a more active lifestyle, below are large-scale factors beyond that that relates to Singapore as a whole, which also impacts the attitude I have towards exercising.

Macro-level Environment

The outermost layer of the SE model represents the macroeconomic, cultural and environmental conditions which affect the whole of society. Climate change is real and Singapore is no exception. According to a study conducted, “ people who live in warmer countries were found to be less

active". Although I strive to dedicate more time towards engaging in physical activities, be it the weekly event by HPB or the choice I make to take the stairs or to ride a bicycle, but the sweltering heat and high humidity in Singapore does still take a toll on me whenever I exercise. Not only do I tend to sweat more, it sometimes gets harder to breathe when I do vigorous exercises in the late mornings or afternoons due to the humid air. Hence, I tend to work out on a shorter duration or would procrastinate to another day when the weather is cooler. Thankfully, I still dedicate an hour to "Sundays @ the Park" because it takes place at 8.30 a. m. in the morning and there is a lot of fresh air then. However in the afternoon, the temperature rises and it gets much warmer. As such, I would feel lethargic and be more inclined to stay home or head to an air-conditioned mall such as the heartland malls, situated in the neighborhood areas for residents' convenience. In essence, moving from a third world to first, the urbanization of Singapore has greatly improved Singaporeans' lives, such as the public transport system, and I am very appreciative that I was born into one of the most urbanized countries in the world. As of 2017, the government seeks to achieve green urbanism, which would improve the environment that I live, breathe and exercise in. Currently, 80 percent of the houses in Singapore are of close proximity to the parks. The Minister for National Development even seeks to increase the number of parks to 90 percent by 2030.

Overall, the implementation of green urbanism would greatly improve my physical and mental health as I would be more motivated to exercise with the greater accessibility of parks and the greener spaces around me.