



Washington County Community Physical Activity Survey

Summary

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This project consisted of two phases: focus groups, and a self-administered survey. There were 19 total participants at the 3 focus groups, which ranged in size from 2 to 11 participants. Of the participants, 11 were female. They ranged in age from 27 to 75 years (average age was 51 years), and all were Caucasian. Five out of the eight towns in Washington County were represented at the focus groups. The focus groups lasted on average 49 minutes.

For the survey, there were 143 participants, of whom 63% were female, 97% were white, 83% were married, and the average age was 51 years. In comparison, the state of lowa is 94% white and 50.4% female. Approximately 56 % were classified as overweight or obese according to their BMI (> 25), which is lower than the state average of 63 %. To obtain the 143 survey participants, 775 phone calls were made to recruit participants. Through those calls, 202 individuals were reached. Of those 202 that were reached, 130 consented to complete the survey and 72 refused, giving a response rate of 64%. In addition to these totals, 13 other participants contacted the researchers to participate after either hearing about the study by word of mouth, seeing flyers posted around town, or reading a press release in a local newspaper or newsletter. Participants came from all eight towns in Washington County.

Important findings:

- A. Focus groups: Participants mentioned the importance of seeing others in their neighborhood being active, using pets as a reason to stay active, and using community trails for being active. Some participants mentioned that they had to use neighborhood streets for walking since the sidewalks were too narrow. Other barriers to being active included a lack of resources or facilities, and roads that made it difficult to bicycle due to loose gravel or mud or the lack of a shoulder. Participants also mentioned a desire to use school facilities for being active since these facilities were paid for with tax dollars.
- B. Survey:
- 116 participants (84%) reported having access to both indoor and outdoor places to exercise.
- Neighborhood streets or sidewalks, and using space or equipment at home were the most common reported places where participants often exercised
- Participants most frequently reported exercising in the evening between the hours of 5 and 9
 p.m., or in times that varied each day
- The characteristics that the participants liked the most about where they exercise were: location/convenience, free place to exercise, and the ability to exercise at home

- The features of the environment that were most prevalent in the participants' communities included: enjoyable scenery, street lights, hills, sidewalks, and farm equipment on the roads
- The average number of physical activity resources that participants reported being aware of in their county was 19, and the average number of resources that participants used was 3
- When asked what resources the participants would like to see in their community to improve diet and exercise behavior, the most common responses were:
 - Educational programs in the schools to encourage healthy eating and physical activity (n= 82)
 - Planning and building biking and walking trails (n= 71)
 - Sidewalks and safety planning to ensure children and adolescents can walk or bike to school (n= 69)
- The average number of barriers to being active reported was 7 barriers
- The most common barriers reported were:
 - o not having time (75% indicated this was a barrier)
 - being too tired (72%)
 - not having motivation to exercise (68%)
 - o not having the energy to exercise (63%)
 - o and bad weather (62%).
- The most common social and environmental barriers reported were having no one to exercise with (39%) and gravel/unpaved/muddy/dusty roads (35%)
- 83% reported that they felt safe or extremely safe while exercising; 94% felt safe from crime
- 61% exercised alone
- When asked whom participants exercised with (if anyone), the most frequently reported response was spouse/partner (24%), followed by friends and children (16% and 14%, respectively)
- Over half of the participants agreed that employers should provide time during the work day for employees to exercise
- Only about 27% of participants reported that their workplace provided support or incentives for employees to exercise
- Overall policy attitudes towards using government funds for building and maintaining physical
 activity facilities, zoning regulations that include walking and biking paths, and the use of
 community buildings for physical activity were all positive, with at least 60% of the participants
 reporting agreement for each variable.
- Walking in any form was the most common sport or exercise reported by participants, and the second most common was gardening, followed by any form of bicycling.
- 55% were categorized as highly active, 33% as moderately active, and 12% as low active.