



## **BARRIERS RESPONSIBLE FOR PHYSICAL INACTIVITY AMONG MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA**

**Offodile, Humphrey (MA,Msc) and Ujuagu Nonye Ann( Phd)**

Department of Human Kinetics and Sports Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

### **Key words-**

Physical activity, Barriers to Physical activity, Physical inactivity

### **Abstract**

A semi-structured personal interview survey was conducted among 6 physically inactive male and female middle-aged adults (30-50 years) across 3 district zones of Anambra state, Nigeria to identify barriers responsible for their physical inactivity. Non verbatim thematic analysis of the interview was conducted through a coding and assumptive analysis from the responses of the interview. A questionnaire and audio recorder were used for the purposes of probing and recording respectively for the study. From a theoretical perspective, three (3) major barriers to regular physical activity were located by the study-social, personal and environmental barriers and the findings of the study revealed that social barriers such as lack of motivation by family and friends as well as environmental barriers such as non availability of sidewalks and green areas were not considered by the respondents of the study as barriers responsible for their physical inactivity. However, 'lack of time to engage in regular physical activity,' was a theme that was mainly reported by respondents of the study as being responsible for their physical inactivity. Thus, making personal barrier responsible for physical inactivity among middle-aged Adults in Anambra State, Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Physical activity is any bodily movement activities produced by skeletal muscles that require energy expenditure (Caspersen, Powell & Christenson 1985). On the other hand, regular Physical activity provides the basis for overall health and fitness of the body thereby reducing

chronic diseases (Hupin, Roche & Gremeaux et. al. 2015). According to the World Health Organization, WHO (2010), among other things, it is recommended for adults to engage in regular moderate physical activity at least for 150 minutes a week for healthy living and anything short of this requirement is regarded

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as physical inactivity. According to Kyu, Bachman & Alexander (2016), in 2015 alone physical inactivity contributed to 21% of breast cancer, 25% of colon cancer, 27% of diabetes and 30% of ischemic heart disease across the world. In Nigeria, the prevalence of physically inactive persons was 52% with prevalence in women higher at 55.8% compared to men at 49.3% and thereby contributing to a major fraction of diseases in the country (Adeloye, Ije-elegbede & Auta, 2021). Thus, the consequences of physical inactivity is associated with higher frequency of chronic non –communicable diseases ( Yaneth, Yisel Jose, Estella, Damaria & Rafeal 2017) and according to WHO (2018), it is recognized as a fourth risk factor for global mortality.

Regular physical activity is dependent on social, personal and environmental factors within the individual (Beighle & Marrow, 2014). It also implies that these factors are central to the behavioral choices of people to engage in physical activity and therefore the presence or absence of one or a combination of these factors are likely to affect the level of physical activity in them.

Buckworth and Dishman ( 2002) posited that the presence of social influence have strong correlations with physical activity and helps to increase the level of physical activity in people. Furthermore, social support and social networks and the characteristics of the social-environment such as companionship, encouragement, assist from friends and family

are relevant indices to the level of physical activity in persons (Mac Neil, Kreuter & Subramanian 2006). Similarly, Biddle and Mutrie (2008) argued that motivation is central to the understanding of behavioral choices and decision making in engaging and sustaining physical activity . According to Bauman, Reis, Sallis,Wells, loos & Martin (2012), Sociological barriers to physical activity is a construct of intra and inter personal levels and is recognized as a major predictor of physical activity. The interaction between inter and intra barriers of physical activity is also explained by the social-cognitive theory which identifies that social facilitators enable healthy behaviors. Other dimensions of social construct that influences physical activity include social cohesion, social capital neighborhood socio economic status (Mac Neil et.al 2006).

Environment in which we live has great influence on physical activity level. These environmental factors may include accessibility of working paths, cycling tracks, traffic and availability of public transportation, weather, crime and pollution. According to Smith, Hocking, Woodward, Witten, Macmillian, Field and Mackie (2017), environmental factors determine the level of physical activity in a person and Schurz, Wurm, Zeigalman and Wolf (2012) suggested that planning towards physical activity is moderated by environmental factors. The role of green spaces or recreational parks in promoting physical activity was analyzed by Wolch, Byrine and Newell (2014)



which revealed that urban green spaces, such as parks, forests, streams and community gardens promoted physical activity, psychological well being and public health. According to Smith et. al (2017), there was higher level of physical activity and use of environment when there was pedestrian accessibility and a great number of parks and playing ground. Similarly, those who lived within a distance of a park were most likely to visit the park for physical activity (Cohen, Mackenzie, Sehgal, Williamson and Golineli 2007) and thereby making environmental factors a strong determinant for physical activity.

The presence of social and environmental factors may not be adequate for engaging in regular physical activity due to personal barriers, Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2022). Thus, Overcoming personal barriers can promote regular physical activity in people and personal barriers such as “lack of time” have been theorized as part of the reason people are inactive or people do not have adequate level of physical activity ( Beighle and Marrow, 2014). According to Jackson, Morrow and Dishman(2012) , people’s unwillingness to replace current activities for physical activity signals that it isn’t a priority. Thus, ‘lack of time’ was reported by many people due to poor behavioral skills such as time management or a rationalization of lack of motivation to be active (Biddle and Mutrie, 2008). Similarly, psychosocial issues such as intention, self-efficacy and health beliefs present personal

barriers to physical activity among people. Personal barriers to physical activity cut across age and gender, for instance, Justine, Azzizan, Hassaan, Salleh and Manef (2013) revealed that most common personal barriers of middle-aged people were ‘ too tired’, ‘ already active enough’, ‘do not know how to do it’ and ‘ too lazy’. Additionally, social support for physical activity and lack of time may present more influence on women than men and there are different impacts of perceived benefits among men, women, old and young people, ( Bourdeaudhuij & Sallis 2002) Furthermore, CDC (2016) reported that fear of injury and feeling of self-consciousness or shame when being physically active forms basis for personal barriers.

All across the globe there are existing factors that contribute to physical inactivity. In Nigeria for instance, the barriers to being physically active are meditated on a couple of contextual factors. According to Adeleye, Ige-Elegbede and Auta (2022) it may include high density population, poor road designs and unsafe terrain as well as other social and economic factors. Thus, based on prevailing barriers to regular physical activity, the study identified barriers responsible for physical inactivity among middle-aged adults in Anambra state, Nigeria.

## Method

A semi- structured personal interview was conducted among 6 adults including 3 males and 3 females of between 30-50years, both employed and non-employed status and who



did not participate in regular moderate physical activity of 150 minutes a week as recommended by the World Health Organization. Purposive sampling was used to derive the sample of the study and the interviews were conducted across 3 districts of Anambra state in south east, Nigeria. Precisely, Anambra north, Anambra south and Anambra central districts. Each district was represented by a male and female interviewee.

A questionnaire and audio recorder were used to administer the questions and for data collection respectively and transcribed non-verbatim for clarity. A thematic analysis and coding of data collected was carried out in the study to deduce assumptions based on the elements of theories related to social, personal and environmental barriers to regular physical activity.

#### **Inclusion criteria**

Inclusion criteria of the study included, employed and non-employed middle-aged male and female adults of ages 30-50years who were non-physically active according to the specifications by World Health Organization.

#### **Excerpts from Interview**

Interviewer: Do your friends or relations participate in regular physical activity?

Interviewee: Some of them do.....

Interviewee: Yes a lot of them.....

Interviewee: Not all but some of them like to exercise.....

Interviewee: A lot of them do...

Interviewee: Not so many of them...

Interviewee: Not all of them...

Interviewer: What are your reasons for not participating in physical activity with peers who are regular?

Interviewee: I'm not usually around at the times they like to exercise and sometimes I'm not disposed....

Interviewee: Sometimes when they are exercising, I'm at work.....

Interviewee: They don't live around me.....

Interviewee: I don't usually meet up even though I try sometimes...

Interviewee: I'm not usually interested and besides I do not have so much time...

Interviewee: I'm usually tired to join them.....

Interviewer: Do you think that your peers can serve as motivation for participating in regular physical activity?

Interviewee: Maybe! but it depends on if I'm ready because I have so many things I'm doing at the moment.....

Interviewee: Yes I think so, especially if they tell me in time....

Interviewee: They have invited me several times but I'm not usually free...

Interviewee: Yes, but it depends on if I'm less busy...

Interviewee: As long as I have enough time, why not...

Interviewee: Yes I will be motivated but it should be a suitable time so that I can be regular like them...



Interviewer: What are the personal issues you encounter against participating in regular physical activity ?

Interviewee: I can't say really but I think because I'm usually busy all the time.....

Interviewee: I would like to participate in regular physical activity but I'm not usually free unless at the weekends.....

Interviewee: I don't think I can do it regularly because I usually go to my shop early.....

Interviewee: It's not easy because one has to survive due to economic hardship....

Interviewee: It is something I would like to do regularly but I'm not usually disposed.....

Interviewee: I usually work from morning till evening and by the time I come back I'm usually tired...

Interviewer: Do you think that gender limits you from participating in regular physical activity?

Interviewee: I'm usually tired all the time because of domestic issues I handle around the house....

Interviewee: The only thing I will say is being the mother of the home, I usually don't have time because I'm trying to provide for my family....

Interviewee: Not really only that I don't have time.....

Interviewee: I'm not really strong to do it all the time because of taking care of kids and things like that....

Interviewee: Gender is not really a problem.....

Interviewee: I don't have any gender issue is just that I don't have enough time...

Interviewer: Do you think that your environment is a hindrance to participating in regular physical activity?

Interviewee: Not really.....

Interviewee: No

Interviewee: Maybe.....

Interviewee: I don't think so....

Interviewee: No.....

Interviewee: I will say not really.....

Interviewer: Are there available places around you like parks, fields or foot paths for you to engage in regular physical activity?

Interviewee: Not really.....

Interviewee: There is a field across the road that people normally use to do their jogging...

Interviewee: There is a field somewhere far away....

Interviewee: There is no place around, the field nearby is normally used for church program....

Interviewee: We don't have open field around here.....

Interviewee: There is a school nearby but they don't allow people use it.....

Interviewer: Do you think that having access to places like fields, parks or foot paths will make you participate in regular physical activity?

Interviewee: Yes I will feel motivated...

Interviewee: It still depend on if I'm free.....

Interviewee: If I have the time, why not....

Interviewee: Maybe if I have the time.....

Interviewee: It still depends on time because times are hard...

Interviewee: I'm not sure, maybe I will exercise during the weekends....





Interview Extracts	Codes
<p>Maybe but it depends on if I'm ready because I have so many things I'm doing at the moment.....</p> <p>Yes, especially if they tell me on time.....</p> <p>Yes, but it depends on if I'm less busy....</p> <p>As long as I have time, why not?...</p> <p>Yes I will be motivated but it should be a suitable time...</p> <p>As long as I have enough time...</p> <p>I would like to exercise regularly but I'm not usually free unless the weekends...</p> <p>I don't think I can do it regularly because I usually go to my shop early..</p> <p>I would like to do it regularly but I'm not usually disposed.....</p> <p>I usually work from morning till night everyday and by the time I come back I'm usually tired....</p> <p>Not at all just time for me....</p> <p>Gender is not really a problem....</p> <p>Not really.....</p> <p>The only thing I will say is being the mother of my home I usually don't have time because I'm trying to provide for my family....</p> <p>It still depends on if I'm free...</p> <p>If I have time why not?..</p> <p>It still depends on time basically times are hard...</p> <p>I'm not sure maybe I will exercise during the weekends...</p> <p>I'm not sure maybe....</p>	<p>Acknowledgement of motivation as important tool to performing regular physical activity but still dependent on time available.</p> <p>Desire to perform physical activity regularly but due to time constraints irrespective of gender</p> <p>Environment not a major determinant to regular physical activity but time constraints</p>



Codes	Deductive Themes
Acknowledgement of motivation as an important tool for performing regular physical activity but still dependent on time available	Personal barrier within social intervention.
intention to perform physical activity regularly but due to time constraints irrespective of gender	Personal barrier
Environment not a major barrier to performing regular physical activity but time constraints	Personal barrier within Environmental interventions

## Findings

**Personal barrier within social intervention-** The respondents of the study reported that motivation from peers was an important factor towards achieving regular physical activity. This was found to be consistent with Mc Neil et. al.,(2006),where they argued that social support and networks were relevant to regular physical activity. According to Biddle and Mutrie (2008), motivation plays a central role in person's decision in participating in physical activity. However, the remarks by the respondents of the study revealed that 'time' was a barrier towards achieving regular physical activity. For instance, when they were asked about why they did not participate in regular physical activity along with their peers, a respondent mentioned that- *I'm not usually around at the times the exercise*

*and most times I'm not disposed... while another mentioned that- Sometimes when they are exercising, I'm at work...and while the other mentioned that-I'm not usually interested and besides I do not have much time because I'm always busy... On the other hand, when the respondents were asked about whether they thought that friends or relations could serve as motivation towards achieving regular physical activity, a respondent mentioned that – Yes, I will be motivated but it should be a suitable time so that I can be regular like them.. Another respondent mentioned that -Yes, but it depends on if I'm less busy...and also another respondent mentioned that- I can't say really but I think because I'm usually busy all the time. Therefore, further assumptions by the study was that 'time' factor was a barrier towards achieving regular physical activity*



regardless of any form of social intervention from friends and family.

**Personal Barriers-** The respondents of the study revealed that 'lack of time' factor was a major barrier towards achieving regular physical activity. The study found that even though there was a personal desire among the respondents of the study to participate in regular physical activity, 'time' was a hindering factor towards achieving it. For instance, when the study asked about personal issues that may be a hindrance to regular physical activity, one respondent mentioned that- *I would like to participate in regular physical activity but I'm not usually free unless at the weekends....*, Another respondent mentioned that- *it is something I would like to do regularly but I'm not usually disposed....* Furthermore, the study found that gender was not a personal hindrance to regular physical activity. However,, some of the female respondents revealed that lack of energy and being sandwiched to domestic affairs kept them away from participating in regular physical activity. For instance, one female respondent mentioned that- *Most of the times I'm tired ( to participate in regular physical activity) because of domestic issues I handle....* Another female respondent mentioned that- *The only thing I will say is that being the mother of the home , I usually don't have time because I'm trying to provide for my family and likewise the other female respondent mentioned that-It's only that I'm really not strong to do it all the time because of taking*

*care of the kids and things like that....* According to King, Castro, Wilcox, Eyler, Sallis & Brownson(2000), personal barriers often reported by women include lack of time, care giving duties and lack of energy. Heesch and Masce( 2008) went further to state that women reported devoting much time to their responsibilities such as housekeeping, motherhood and marriage which often interfaced with their plans for being physically active.

**Personal barriers within Environmental Interventions-** The study found that environmental structures where not readily available for regular physical activity in Anambra state, Nigeria. However this did not affect the level of physical activity as revealed by the respondents of the study who went on further to explain that 'time' factor was more of a hindrance towards achieving regular physical activity. For instance, when the study asked the respondents whether they thought that the availability of environmental factors would promote regular physical activity in them, one respondent mentioned that- *it will depend on if I'm free...Another respondent mentioned that-if I have time, why not?..* and while another respondent also mentioned that- *it still depends on time because times are hard....* Thus revealing that lack of environmental interventions were not primarily responsible for their inability in achieving regular physical activity.





## Conclusion

In conclusion, the study focused on 3 broad barriers to regular physical activity- Social, Personal and environmental barriers and from the remarks by the respondents of the study; 'lack of time in engaging regular physical activity' was a dominant theme towards achieving regular physical activity across these 3 broad barriers determined by the study. Therefore, information gathered from the respondents of the study revealed that social barriers such as lack of motivational support by family and friends as well as environmental barriers such as non- availability of sidewalks and green areas were not responsible for physical inactivity. Also, personal barriers such as fear and low esteem were not considered by the respondents as barriers rather they expressed that above other things, 'time' was a major barrier preventing them from participating in regular physical activity. This also implies that respondents of the study did not utilize their time in participating in regular physical activity hence the reason for their physical inactivity. Thus, 'lack of time to engage in regular physical activity' being a form of personal barrier was responsible for physical inactivity among middle-aged adults in Anambra state, Nigeria.

## Limitations of the study

The problem of interview study has been that opinions are affected by emotions and may not reveal the real issues and more also the study needs to be more expansive in terms of

population and also the barriers discussed in the study will need to be dissected further for better analysis in future research.

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