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An Analysis of Associations between Physical Activity and Satisfaction of Life in College Students

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AN ANALYSIS OF ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SATISFACTION OF LIFE IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate associations between factors of physical activity and satisfaction with life in a sample of college students. Two hundred and twenty-five male and female college students completed a 10-question survey on a voluntary basis. Questions touched on the frequency and type of exercise, satisfaction with life, mood, and other related factors. Most participants (p=.85) rated themselves satisfied or very satisfied with life (n=192). 81% of the participants who exercised 5 or more times a week and 87% of those who reported having exercised in the past week reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with life. 88% of participants reported having exercised in the past week, so satisfaction rates should be studied in more diverse groups to better determine associations.

Methods

Research approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Ouachita Baptist University.

An email was sent to all Ouachita students which included a link to an original questionnaire made on SurveyMonkey.com. This survey was open to responses for one week and was completed anonymously by students 18 years or older on a voluntary basis after informed consent was given.

225 responses were received and analyzed using Power Pivot on Microsoft Excel.

Background

With the increasing rates of suicide in college students, studies shown that physical activity might decrease thoughts of suicide and depression and increase mood.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2007) reported that **suicide was the third leading cause of death in American youth and young adults.**²

Less than 50% of college students exercise the recommended amount each week.¹

A relationship has been found between increased aerobic activity and reduced risks of hopelessness, depression, and suicidal behavior in both males and females.⁹

Negative emotions are significantly reduced post-exercise classes, especially in participants who report depressed moods.⁶

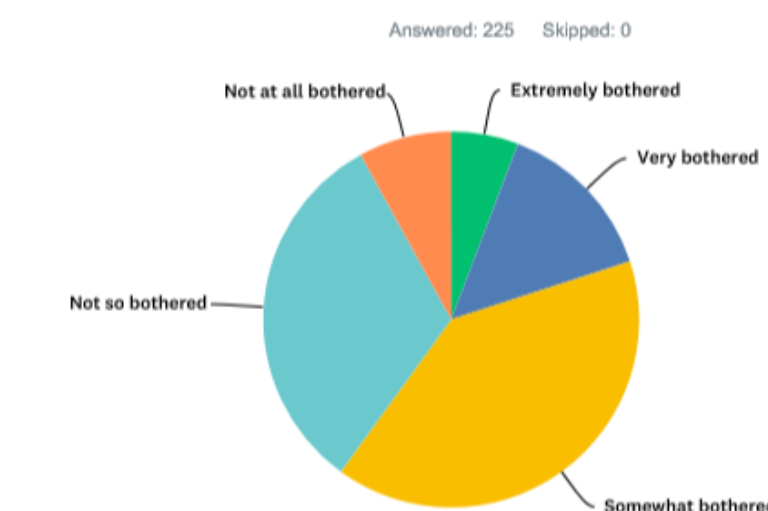
A 2012 study at Pennsylvania State University examined individuals with written exercise logs and found that exercise directly increased satisfaction with life.⁵

Associations between physical activity and overall satisfaction with life have not been studied through a survey method.

Results

60% of participants reported feeling bothered by emotional problems such as feeling anxious, depressed, irritable, or sad in the past week (n=135).

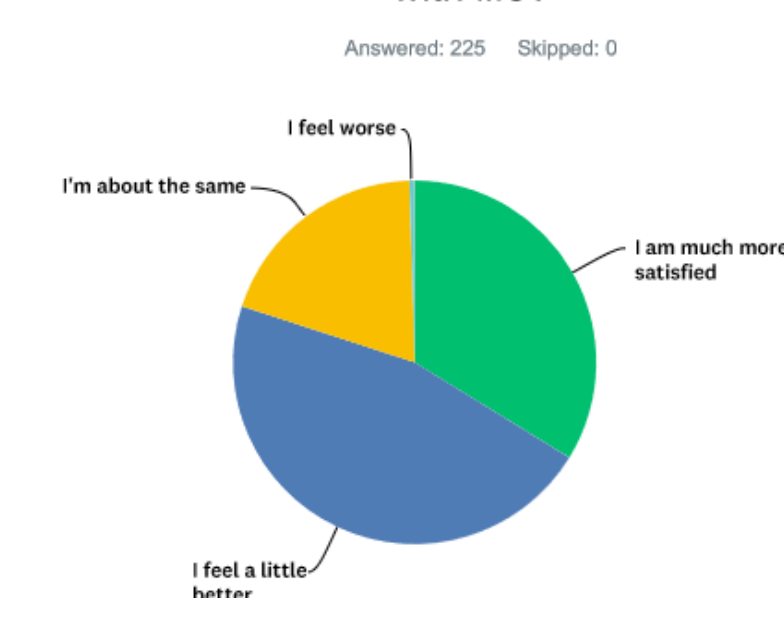
Q8 During the past week, how bothered did you feel by emotional problems such as feeling anxious, depressed, irritable, or sad?



66% of participants believed they get too little exercise (n=149).

80% reported that they feel exercise has improved their overall satisfaction with life (n=180).

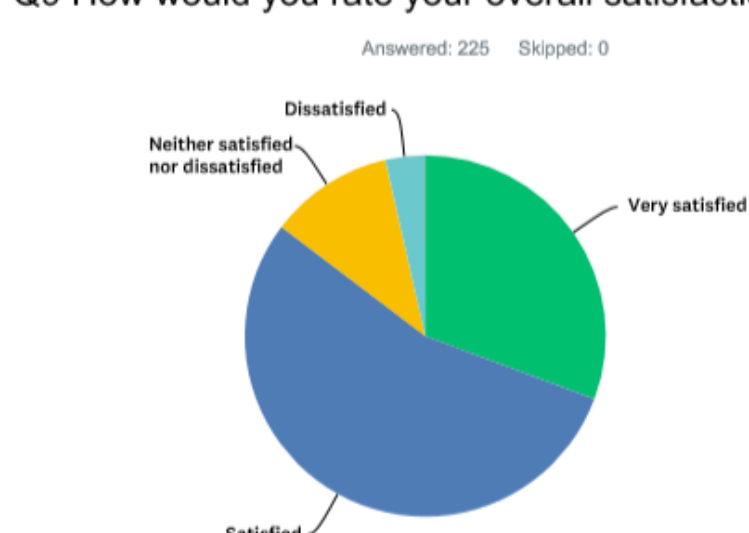
Q10 How do you feel exercise has contributed to your overall satisfaction with life?



Most participants (p=.85) rated themselves satisfied or very satisfied with life (n=192).

49% stated they were usually happy in the past 7 days

Q9 How would you rate your overall satisfaction with life?

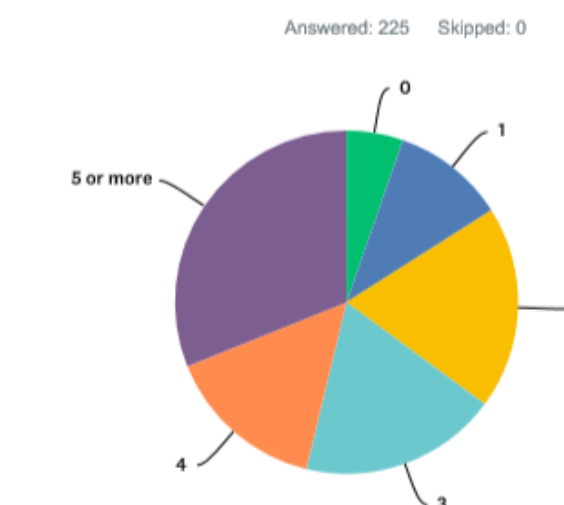


31% of participants reported exercising 5+ times per week (n=70).

Of the participants who exercised 5+ times a week, most reported that they were usually in a happy mood the past week (p=.66) and generally satisfied with life (p=.81).

Those who exercised 0 times a week (n=12) mostly reported that they were usually in a neutral mood the past week (p=.42) while they were also generally satisfied with life (p=.75).

Q2 About how many times in the average week do you engage in 30 minutes or more of physical activity?

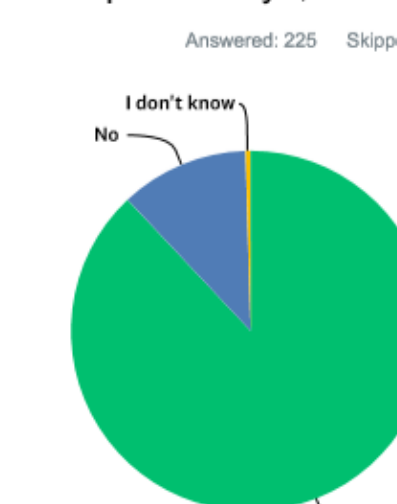


88% reported having exercised in the past seven days (n=198)

87% (n=172) of those who had exercised reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with life, while 52% (n=102) reported usually being happy in the past week and 37% (n=73) reported feeling neutral.

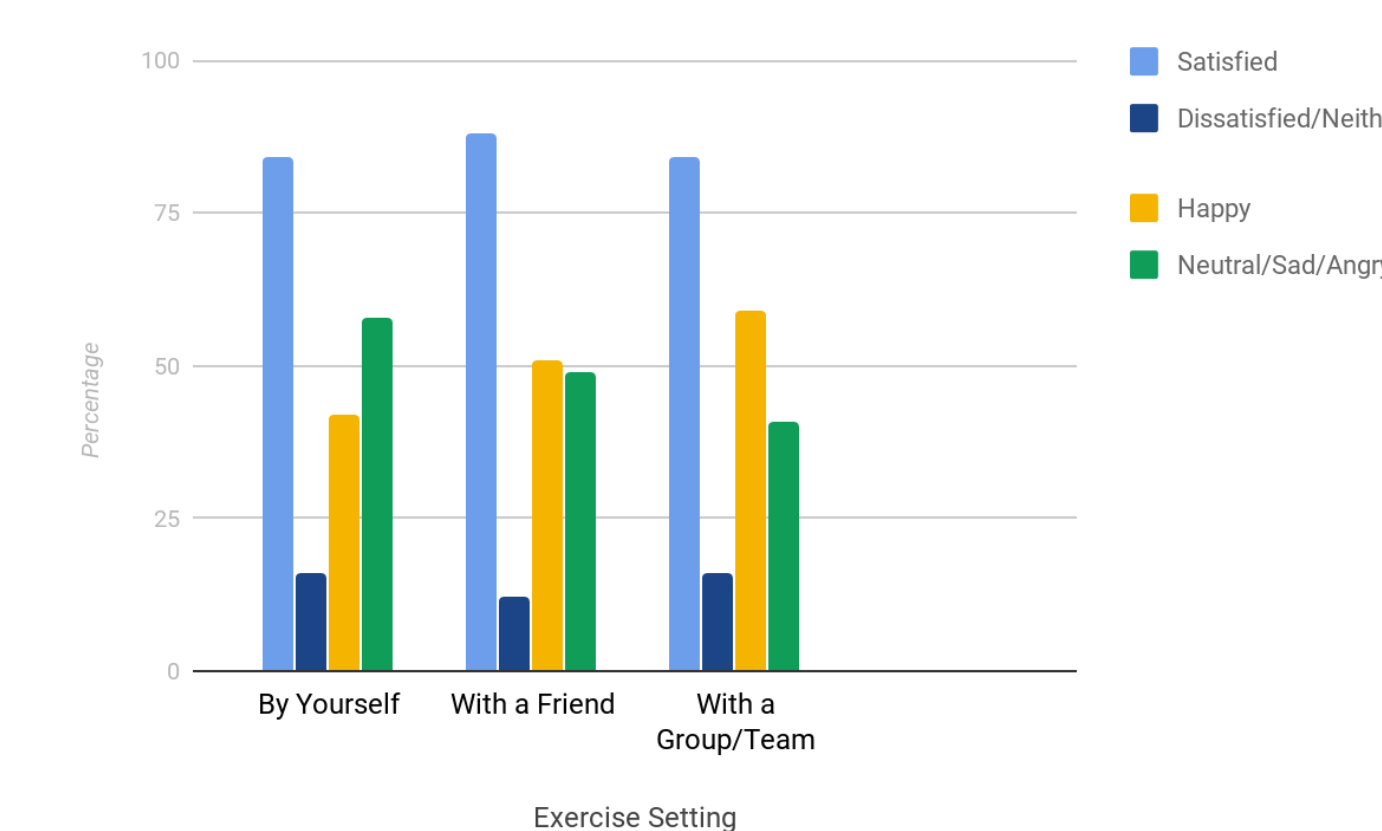
Of those who hadn't exercised, 74% (n=20) reported feeling satisfied or very satisfied with life of those who had not exercised in the past seven days (n=27), while 33% (n=9) felt happy and 56% (n=15) felt neutral.

Q6 In the past 7 days, have you exercised?



Those who responded that they generally exercise by themselves (n=95) mostly reported being satisfied with life (p=.84) and neutral (p=.58).

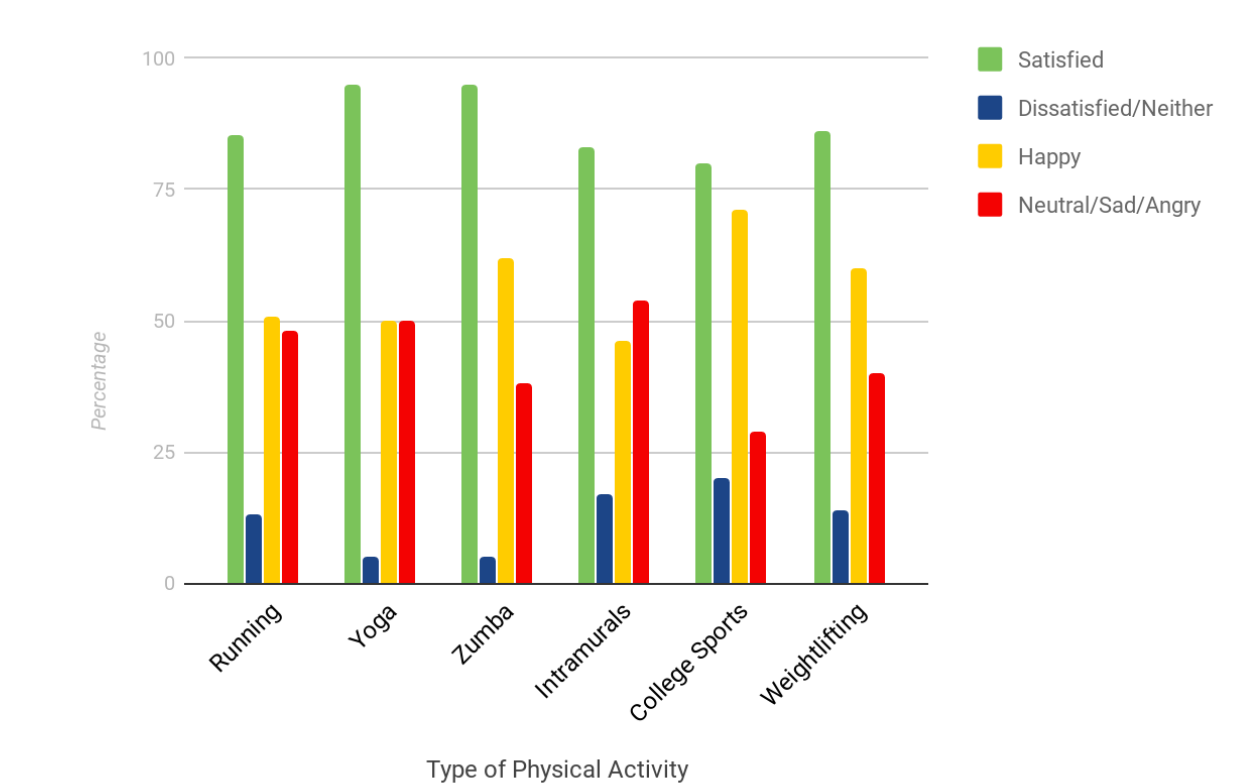
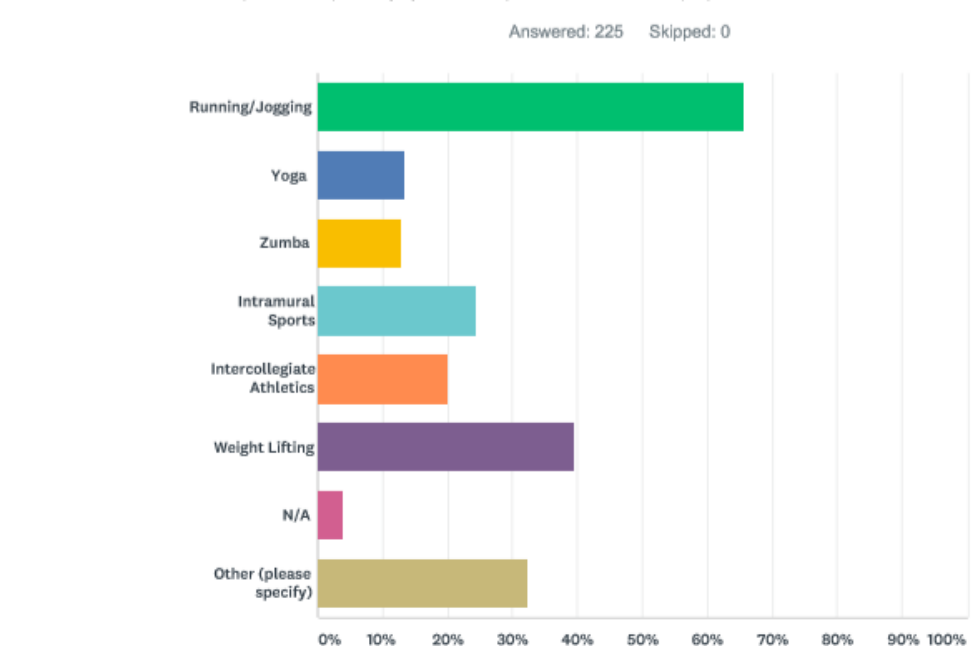
Participants who normally exercised with a friend (n=59) and those who normally exercised with a group or team (n=64) both reported mostly feeling satisfied (p=.88 and p=.84).



The most common type of exercise reported by participants was running or jogging (n=148), followed by weightlifting (n= 89).

86% of runners reported being satisfied (n=128), while 70% of weightlifters reported satisfaction. Participants involved in Zumba (n=21), however, were 95% satisfied (n=20). Happiness rates followed the same trend in Zumba (p=.62), running and jogging (p=.51), and weightlifting (p=.48).

Q3 Identify the type(s) of physical activity you most often participate in.



Conclusion

While small increases in satisfaction levels occurred in groups who exercised more frequently, the difference between the number of participants who exercised often and those who did not was too significant to truly measure correlation between exercise and life satisfaction.

Larger numbers of those who exercise less frequently are needed, as well as participants who are involved in more diverse exercise activities.

It would be beneficial to perform this study in groups of people who are not college students, as it might lower the ratio of participants who have recently felt bothered by emotional problems such as feeling anxious, depressed, irritable, or sad.

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