Research Issues in the Sociology of Physical Activity, Health and Wellbeing in the Context of ‘Families’

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Physical Activity & The Family

Most parents experience declines in physical activity (PA) level, intensity and structure following the arrival of children (Hamilton & White, 2010).

A belief exists amongst parents that it is ‘natural’ for young children to be active, yet over time this is de-programmed by society (Dwyer et al., 2008).

At the same time, parents appear to have a short-term focus for the health of their primary school aged children, with little concern for the long-term consequences of an active/inactive childhood (Hart et al., 2003).

Relationships exist between the sedentary time of parents and daughters (Jago et al., 2010) as well as family income and adolescent PA variety (Kantomaa et al., 2007).

Parents’ biographies and interests are transmitted to their children and thus shape children’s PA preferences (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2010).

12-16 year old children are about twice as likely to engage in the recommended level of PA than their parents and grandparents. Grandfathers are more vigorously active than grandmothers, although more grandmothers participate in the recommended amount of PA. There is a significant correlation between children and their mothers’ PA levels (Zach & Netz, 2007).

Increasingly diverse families and personal lives mean that ‘friends’, ‘community’ and ‘intimacy’ have become contested terms in sociological studies of families (Chambers, 2012).

Although studies of families in the context of ‘households’ and ‘kinship’ have remained robust (Allan & Crow, 2001).

“The concept of ‘family’ is becoming more fluid and changeable” (Chambers, 2012; p. 1).

Societal problems continue to be attributed to a widespread decline in family values associated with the erosion of the ‘proper’, ‘traditional’ and ‘stable’ nuclear family (Chambers, 2012).

Predetermined ethnocentric ideas of white middle-class family values as superior have been prevalent in sociological research and ‘academic’ ‘debates’ (Chambers, 2012).

Active & Inactive Ageing

The growing number of infirm elderly people emerged as a concern for governments towards the end of the twentieth century (Allan, 1999). In the West people are now living longer whilst fertility rates have fallen below the ‘replacement level’ (Cheal, 2002).

PA levels decrease sharply with age (Zach & Netz, 2007).

Regardless of the health status of middle-aged and elderly people, the more they are supported by their family, the more likely they are to be active (Yuan et al., 2011).

The trend of more people living longer has increased health policy focus on longstanding issues of disease, disability, care and economy (WHO, 2002).

Intergenerational Health Values: Families, Communities & Personal Lives

Wellbeing, ‘Being Active’ & Qualitative Research

Research Issues

Multidimensional nature of family PA cannot be captured via qualitative methods alone (Archbold et al., 2009).

‘Established’ links between parent and child PA have been produced by largely white middle-class research participants (Lim & Biddle, 2012).

Terminology debates in family sociology (Chambers, 2012).