

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
Public Opinion Survey on
Physical Exercise Participation in Hong Kong

Executive Summary



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The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region commissioned the Hong Kong Polytechnic Technology & Consultancy Co. Limited of Hong Kong Polytechnic University to conduct the Public Opinion Survey on Physical Exercise Participation in Hong Kong in September 2006. The Centre for Social Policy Studies of the Department of Applied Social Sciences of the university was tasked to design and execute the survey. The objectives of the survey were to collect information on the physical exercise habits and preferences of Hong Kong people aged 12 or above, together with their opinion on organized recreational activities in general and the recreational activities and facilities of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD).

2. The fieldwork of the survey was carried out in the period from 12 to 14 September 2006. In total, 1,011 persons aged 12 or above were successfully interviewed through telephone. The sampling error for percentage estimates computed from the collected data was at most 1.6%, and the margin of error at 95% confidence level was at most +/- 3.1%. The overall response rate was 50.0%. The following is the summary of findings.

Participation in physical exercise

3. Eighty percent (79.7%) of Hong Kong people indicated that they did physical exercise in the past three months. If the students who only did physical exercise during physical exercise lessons were excluded, the percentage would be reduced to 79%, indicating that the percentage was higher than that (47%) of the Millennium Sport Study conducted by Hong Kong Sports Development Board in the period from October 2003 to February 2004. The result showed that there was increased participation of Hong Kong people in doing physical exercise. (Note: The target respondents covered by the Millennium Sport Study refer to the people aged 5 or above, while those covered by this survey refer to the people aged 12 or above.)

4. Though a large majority of Hong Kong people (79%) did physical exercise in the past three months, the frequency and amount of physical exercise of Hong Kong people were obviously not adequate, especially for the young and the adults. 92.3% of the young did physical exercise in the past three months, which was higher than the percentage of the adults (75.5%) and the elderly (80.4%). However, only 24.6 % of the young and 21.6% of the adults did physical exercise 3 times or above per week and spending on average 30 minutes or above in each occasion. For the elderly, the situation was much better, at 53.1%.

Characteristics of Hong Kong people without physical exercise habits and their reasons

5. Twenty percent (20.3%) of Hong Kong people indicated that they did not do physical exercise in the past three months. It is noteworthy that 62.4% of them indicated that they would not do any physical exercise in the coming three months. They were mainly:

- Aged 26-34 (73.6%) and 45-59 (76.8%);
- With lower educational attainment;
- Living in private rental premises (86.7%);
- Retired persons (77.3%);
- Skilled and manual workers (82.5%); and
- Employed persons with lower monthly personal income.

The major (including primary and secondary) reason for not doing physical exercise was “Lack of time due to working/ studying/ domestic work” (54.5%), followed by being “lazy” (25.8%), “never did physical exercise” (11.2%) and “lack of energy” (12%).

Comparison on the physical exercise habits of the young, the adults and the elderly

6. There were significant differences in the usual time period for doing physical exercise among different age groups. Most of the elderly (84.1%) usually did physical exercise in the morning, while 38.3% of the adults usually did physical exercise in morning and 30.2% in evening. The young usually did physical exercise in the afternoon (40%) or evening (27.5%). Such differences might be significantly related to their living style (working/schooling/leisure period, etc.) and daily schedule. Attention should therefore be given in the arrangements of sports activities and allocation of sports facilities to ensure that the resources would be well utilized.

7. The elderly were more likely to express that physical exercise could “enhance health” than the young. 70.9% of the elderly said their primary reason for doing physical exercise was to “enhance health”, while only 59.1% of the adults and 28.6% of the young said so. For the adults and the elderly, the sports they chose to do were mainly health-oriented, but the young preferred skill-oriented sports, which required certain techniques and larger exercise volume. 44.3% of the adults and 78.2% of the elderly most often did physical exercise relating to “dance and fitness”. The physical exercise they did most often were “walking”, “swimming” and “fitness exercise”. On the other hand, the young (35.0%) most often did physical exercise relating to “team games”. The physical exercise they did most often were “basketball”, “running”, “football” and “swimming”.

8. Overall speaking, among those who did physical exercise, 42.9% usually did physical exercise alone, with the proportions of the adults and the elderly being higher than that of the young. Besides, their choices of venues and time for doing physical exercise were more

flexible. The proportion of doing physical exercise alone for the adults was 50.1%, which was higher than that for the young (17.1%). This might reflect that the adults were busier in their daily work, with an unstable off-duty time schedule, and thus it was more difficult for them to make appointments with friends and relatives to do physical exercise together. As a result, the physical exercise not requiring particular venue and with no time constraints, like “running”, “walking”, and “fitness exercise”, were more welcome to them. Also, it was worthy to note that the proportion of the elderly doing physical exercise alone was relatively high (53%). Their favourite physical exercise were more individual-based, and mainly aimed at preserving health. The physical exercise they did most frequently were “fitness exercise”(26.7%), “walking”(25.9%) and “Tai Chi”(18.6%). On the contrary, the young enjoyed doing physical exercise with friends (56.5%). Therefore, they tended to choose physical exercise with participation of partners, such as “basketball”, “football”, “badminton”, and etc.

9. “Swimming” was the most hoped-to-learn physical exercise for different age groups. The adults and the elderly hoped to learn “swimming” and “Tai Chi” most, because these sports mainly involved the whole body, were health-preserving and could be practised continually. The young also hoped to learn “swimming” most, followed by “tennis” and “badminton”, which required certain techniques.

10. A higher proportion of the elderly did physical exercise daily. Among the people who did physical exercise, over fifty percent (52.6%) did physical exercise 3 or more times per week and thirty-five percent (34.6%) did physical exercise daily. The proportion of the elderly, the adults and the young who did physical exercise daily was 85.5%, 28.3% and 12.1% respectively, showing that most of the adults and the young did not have the habit of doing physical exercise daily, especially for the young.

11. The major (including primary and secondary) criterion for choosing venues for doing physical exercise was “convenience”. Among those who did physical exercise, 56.9% usually chose to do physical exercise at “private housing facility”, at “home” and in “general open area”. These were the most convenient places accessible to them. Also, 54.1% of the Hong Kong people indicated that they usually chose “leisure facilities of LCSD / other government departments”. These were the main venues for doing physical exercise for the young, the adults, as well as the elderly.

Comparison on physical exercise habits of the young, the adults and the elderly

	The young (aged 12-24)	The adults (aged 25-59)	The elderly (aged 60 or above)	
Did physical exercise in the past 3 months	92.3%	75.5%	80.4%	The young and the adults indicated that they did physical exercise. However, the frequency and the amount were not adequate
Did physical exercise 3 times per week and spending on average 30 minutes or above in each occasion	24.6%	21.6%	53.1%	
Did physical exercise daily	12.1%	28.3%	85.5%	
Spending on average an hour or above in each occasion	73.9%	45.9%	42.2%	
Spending on average less than half an hour in each occasion	10.5%	25.2%	24%	
Preferred time period to do physical exercise	Afternoon (40%) Evening (27.5%)	Morning (38.3%) Evening (30.2%)	Morning (84.1%)	
Primary reason for doing physical exercise is “enhance health”	28.6%	59.1%	70.9%	
Primary venue for doing physical exercise	Leisure facilities of LCSD / other government departments (53.0%)	Leisure facilities of LCSD / other government departments (37.1%)	Leisure facilities of LCSD / other government departments (37.1%)	
	“Private housing facility”, “home” and “general open area” (28.0%)	“Private housing facility”, “home” and “general open area” (45.0%)	“Private housing facility”, “home” and “general open area” (51.4%)	
Did physical exercise alone	17.1%	50.1%	53%	
Category of physical exercise that they most frequently did	“Team games” (35.0%)	“Dance and fitness” (44.3%)	“Dance and fitness” (78.2%)	
Physical exercise that they most frequently did	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Basketball (18.6%) ● Running (16.5%) ● Football (13.5%) ● Swimming (12.9%) ● Badminton (11.2%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Running (19.9%) ● Swimming (14.9%) ● Walking (12%) ● Fitness exercise (9.5%) ● Badminton (5.7%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fitness exercise (26.7%) ● Walking (25.9%) ● Tai Chi (18.6%) ● Hiking / Expedition / Excursion (8.7%) ● Swimming (5.9%) 	<p>The young preferred skilled-oriented physical exercise</p> <p>The adults and the elderly preferred health-oriented physical exercise</p>
Physical exercise they hope to learn most	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Swimming (14.2%) ● Tennis (10.1%) ● Badminton (6.1%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Swimming (9.2%) ● Tai Chi (7.7%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tai Chi (11.8%) ● Swimming (4.2%) 	

Recreational sports activities organized by organizations and LCSD

12. Hong Kong people generally thought that there were benefits in the participation of recreational sports activities. The benefits mentioned included “expanding social circles” (25.5%), “improving health conditions” (22.3%), “for enjoyment” (6.3%), “gathering with friends” (5.1%) and “strengthening physical fitness” (5.0%). However, only 10.0% of the Hong Kong people had participated in organized recreational sports activities in the past three months. One of the reasons was there might be not enough recreational sports activities organized to meet the demand. If the related organizations could organize more recreational sports activities, it would help to arouse Hong Kong people’s interests in doing physical exercise and attract more people to participate in it.

13. Disregarding those who answered “don’t know” about the charges for LCSD’s recreational sports activities, a relatively high proportion of Hong Kong people thought the charges for LCSD’s recreational sports activities were reasonable (33.8%) or cheap (11.2%), and only 7.6% thought they were expensive. Similarly, a relatively high proportion of Hong Kong people thought the charges for the LCSD’s recreational sports facilities were reasonable (37.5%) or cheap (7.0%), and only 15.3% thought they were expensive. These indicated that the charges for LCSD’s recreational sports activities and facilities were affordable to Hong Kong people at large.

14. Disregarding those who answered “don’t know” about the quality of LCSD’s recreational sports facilities, a relatively high proportion of Hong Kong people thought the quality of LCSD’s recreational sports facilities was good (32.4%) or average (30.7%), and only 3.9% thought the quality was bad. This indicated that the quality for LCSD’s recreational sports facilities could meet the expectation of Hong Kong people at large.

Recommendations

15. Based on the above survey findings, it is proposed that:

- (i) The message of “Doing physical exercise regularly could enhance health” should be heavily promoted to the public. The survey showed that there was increased participation of Hong Kong people in doing physical exercise. However, due to the living style and daily schedule of the young and the adults, the frequency and amount of doing physical exercise were obviously not adequate. According to a health report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, regular effective physical exercise should be referred as any kind of moderate physical exercise lasting for at least 30 minutes in 3-5 days per week, with moderate physical exercise referred as the physical exercise level which raises heart beats, with sweating, but still be able to talk smoothly.

There were plenty of evidences showing that doing physical exercise could enhance health, improve physical fitness, and prevent chronic diseases. Thus, the habit of doing physical exercise should be nurtured among the children and the young as early as possible. According to the proposal in the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1996, all people should do physical exercise throughout the entire life. Also, different types of physical exercise could have different effects. For instance, doing moderate exercise a few times a week and for at least 30 minutes in each occasion could prevent cardiovascular disease and type II diabetes. Muscle training and balance training could improve and maintain the muscle strength and agility of the elderly. To encourage the young and the adults to nurture the habit of doing physical exercise, it is proposed that the Government should allocate more resources on promoting regular physical exercise (日日運動身體好，男女老幼做得到) to these two groups of people. Result of the survey indicated that people who had participated in physical exercise in the past three months was quite satisfactory (79%). However, percentage of people who had done physical exercise lasting for at least 30 minutes in more than three days a week was relatively low (27%). Hence, it is recommended that Government should focus the effort and resource in encouraging people to regularly participate in physical exercise of moderate intensity. Reference could also be drawn from the experience of other countries, for example, a government funded independent agency, the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, was established by the U.S. government to promote the importance of doing physical exercise. The members included various professional bodies, universities, and relevant societies which helped in promoting physical exercise through broadcasting television episodes regularly.

- (ii) The planning on the location of sports facility venues should be based on “convenience” and the opening hours should be compatible with the living style of people. The survey showed that the primary reason of Hong Kong people for not doing physical exercise was “Lack of time due to work/ study/ domestic work” and that the primary criterion for choosing venues for doing physical exercise was “convenience”. Thus, in order to encourage more working people to participate and to do physical exercise more frequently, it is proposed that LCSD should consider to organize more sports promotion activities at the sports facilities of LCSD in commercial areas, so as to encourage the working people to go and do physical exercise before working hours or during lunch hours. Also, it is proposed that LCSD should increase the promotion on the venues and opening hours of community sports facilities to companies and organizations and provide concrete guidelines to encourage them in organizing recreational sports activities (during office or leisure hours) to nurture the habits of their employees in doing physical exercise.

- (iii) The existing community and school resources should be well utilized. The survey indicated that the young liked doing physical exercise together with their friends and the activities they liked were “basketball”, “football”, “badminton”, and etc. To encourage the young to do more physical exercise, it is proposed that LCSD should consider utilizing the existing community and school resources for organizing more sports activities with district organizations. This could help to promote the atmosphere of doing physical exercise in the community and to provide more opportunities for the young to participate in sports.

- (iv) Opportunities and methods should be provided to the people in the lower class to do physical exercise. In 2002, the World Health Organization proved that physical exercise could improve health as well as the overall quality of life. The U.K. Chief Medical Officer Annual Report (2004) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000) also pointed out that if people could increase the physical exercise volume and improve the habits of their daily life, it would be an effective preventive measure against certain severe acute and chronic health diseases, and it would lower the medical costs of the society in the long run. The survey showed that those without habits of doing physical exercise and would not do physical exercise in the coming 3 months were mainly those with lower educational attainment, the retired persons, and the skilled and manual workers with low monthly personal income. In order to encourage people in the lower class to participate and do physical exercise more frequently, it is proposed that LCSD should consider designing some recreational sports activities which could be done at home or in nearby locations, like walking and stretching. This could help the people in lower class to understand that doing physical exercise does not cost much. It would also be very convenient for them to do physical exercise at home any time after work. Such physical exercise could help them to improve health and relieve stress encountered in their daily life.

- (v) Public opinion surveys on physical exercise participation in Hong Kong covering all households should be conducted periodically (say, every year). For the review and improvement of the related strategic service plans and policies, the Government could trace the trend and the variations in the physical exercise habits of people with different demographic characteristics by comparing the longitudinal data of the annual surveys.