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How to re-engage older adults in community sport? Reasons for drop-out and re-engagement

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ABSTRACT

Internationally, many sport policies articulate a desire for lifelong participation in sport. However, participation often fluctuates throughout the lifespan and most people drop-out at some stage. Most research on drop-out of sport focuses on children and adolescents, with little attention towards other age groups. The aim of this study was to investigate why adults aged 50+ years dropped out of sport during their life, and how and why they may re-engage later in life. Eight focus groups (n = 49) were conducted, with Australian National Sporting Organisations; adults aged 50+ years, who were either currently involved in sport (e.g. player/volunteer/coach) or not currently involved. The Socio-Ecological Model was used to frame the interview questions, and Leisure Constraints Theory was used to analyse the results. The main themes on drop-out included lack of appropriate playing opportunities; competing priorities; and low priority from sporting organisations. The main themes for re-engagement in sport at an older age included improving physical health; social opportunities, especially with family/friends; and having more leisure time. It is recommended that to re-engage adults aged 50+ years in active sport participation, organisations should focus on providing age appropriate playing opportunities, whilst ensuring that social interaction is an integral focus.

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Drop-out; sport participation; older adults; re-engagement

Introduction

A main tenet of both leisure and community sport policies is the promotion of lifelong participation in sport. For example, Sport England and Sport Australia's respective strategic plans both encourage playing sport during childhood and to be active for life for numerous individual health benefits (Sport Australia, 2018; Sport England, 2016). These include physical health (e.g., Heo et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2014) and social health (Leipert et al., 2011), such as bonding with families (Jenkin et al., 2018a). Furthermore, lifelong participation has the potential for wider societal benefits, including social inclusion (e.g., Schaillée et al., 2019; Welty Peachey et al., 2013), reduced health expenditure (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016) and can also support the development of social capital (e.g., Darcy et al., 2014).

Despite policies encouraging lifelong participation, research shows that continuous lifelong participation in organised sport is highly unlikely for most people. Participation tends to fluctuate

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throughout the lifespan, and at transitional life stages, with changes in education, work and relationships (Eime & Harvey, 2018), often resulting in individuals dropping out of sport.

Whilst participation in sport is very popular for children and young adolescents, research consistently highlights that the highest rate of drop-out in sport is during adolescence and young adulthood (Crane & Temple, 2015; Eime et al., 2015a; Rowe et al., 2018). As such, most research on drop-out has focused on adolescence, and more specifically, on girls and young women. Although some drop-out may occur due to sport sampling (Coté et al., 2009; Eime et al., 2015b), recent research has indicated this is not solely due to sampling (Eime et al., 2019). Previous research indicates that explanations for adolescent drop-out tend to be individual and social reasons, such as lack of enjoyment or fun (Crane & Temple, 2015; Visek et al., 2015); perceived lack of competence and confidence (Bauman et al, 2012; Crane & Temple, 2015; Rowe et al., 2018); and potentially negative influences of friends and peers (Rowe et al., 2018; Slater & Tiggemann, 2010).

Although, as documented above, many people drop-out of sport and specifically during adolescence, there are other stages of sport drop-out throughout the lifespan, particularly during transitional life stages (Eime & Harvey, 2018). One population group that is often highlighted is older adults. Some sports have developed different programmes to try to re-engage older adults in active participation, for example, different formats, such as, informal/social sessions or events. Some organisations have also developed modified versions of their sport, to mitigate potential barriers, such as reduced physical capability (Jenkin et al., 2018b). For example, Back to Netball sessions or walking versions of sports, including football, netball, basketball and rugby (e.g., England Netball, 2020; Walking Football Association, 2020) have been developed in the past 10 years. Exploratory research (e.g., Jenkin et al., 2018b; Reddy et al., 2017) suggests that walking sports are enjoyed by some older adults, and that some older adults have re-engaged in sport through these type of programmes. Despite this, very few adults aged 50+ years currently play sport (Eime et al., 2015a; Sport England, 2020), as they tend to choose other forms of leisure-time physical activity (Eime & Harvey, 2018), such as walking (Eime et al., 2015a). Therefore, it is important to gain a better understanding of why adults have dropped out of sport and then may have re-engaged in sport at an older age, to identify ways to develop and deliver sport which is suitable for the older adult participation.

To do this, Leisure Constraints Theory was utilised. This theory was first developed by Crawford and Godbey (1987) to understand the barriers people face to undertake leisure activities. The theory proposes that human behaviour is complex, and that there are three types of constraints that can prevent participation in leisure activities such as sport.

These three constraints are intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. Intrapersonal constraints can include suitability of an activity for a particular person, personal motivations and personal perceptions of ability. Interpersonal relates to social factors that can prevent participation, for example, not having any friends to participate with or family commitments. Structural constraints refer to external factors that interfere between wanting to participate and not being able to, such as cost, inadequate facilities or time (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). This theory was expanded in 1993 by Jackson et al. (1993) to also consider the negotiation proposition. This concept suggests that leisure participation is dependent on negotiating through these constraints and therefore succeed in participating, rather than passively accepting them.

The Leisure Constraints Theory has been widely used to explore participation in other leisure activities, such as going to the park or watching television (Badia et al., 2011; Dong & Chick, 2012; Son et al., 2008). Furthermore, this theory has also been used to understand why adults (Alexandris et al., 2002; Wood & Danylchuk, 2012) and children (Crane & Temple, 2015) may drop-out and also engage in physical activity and sport, thus was deemed suitable for this study.

At present, there is no known research that examines why older adults (aged 50+ years) may have dropped out of community sport during their adult life, and on why they may re-engage in playing sport at an older age. This knowledge is important, as older adults are a growing population group who are currently underrepresented in sport, and thus are essentially an untapped

participation market for organisations. This research can support the sport and leisure sector to design strategies and programmes to assist with re-engaging them at an older age.

This study investigated reasons why adults aged 50+ years may have dropped out of sport at an earlier age and their re-engagement in community sport as they aged, specifically focusing on the following two research questions: What are the potential reasons why adults aged 50+ years drop-out of sport during adulthood? And what are the reasons why adults aged 50+ years may re-engage in sport at an older age?

Methods

Three different groups were engaged in this research study, with data collected via eight focus groups (n = 49). The focus groups obtained the views of representatives from two Australian National Sporting Organisations (NSOs); adults aged 50+ years who were involved in community sport clubs; in addition to adults aged 50+ years who were not involved in community sport clubs. As no previous research had explored these research questions, this was an exploratory study.

For this study, sport was defined as '*a human activity capable of achieving a result requiring physical exertion and/or physical skill which, by its nature and organisation, is competitive and is generally accepted as being a sport*' (Australian Sports Commission (now Sport Australia), 2009).

To gain a broad understanding of why adults aged 50+ years may have dropped out of sport at an earlier age or re-engage in sport at an older age, the perspectives of an NSO who had relatively high levels of older adult participation rates, and also an NSO with relatively low levels of older adult participation rates, were sought. The Australian national Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey (ERASS) data were used to select appropriate NSOs. ERASS was a joint initiative between the States/Territories' Departments of Sport and Recreation in Australia and the Australian Sport Commission (now known as Sport Australia). It sought to measure sport participation rates for Australians aged 15 years and older. The data were sorted by the research team to determine participation rates for adults aged 50+ years, with the 10 most played and 10 least played sports identified (for both genders). The sports were considered in the context of their appropriateness for this population group, in addition to existing relations with these respective NSOs. If sports could be played by adults aged 50+ years with a variety of physical capabilities, they were deemed appropriate for consideration. For example, combat sports and some martial arts were therefore excluded. From this analysis, tennis was chosen from the 10 most played sports, whilst cricket was chosen from the 10 least played sports.

Of the eight focus groups, two were with the respective NSOs; four, single-gendered interviews were with sport club participants (two with cricket club members and two with tennis club members); and two were with non-sport club members (single-gendered). Sport Australia assisted in the process of recruiting the NSOs. They provided appropriate contacts within the two NSOs, who then recruited colleagues for the focus groups. Employees of Tennis Australia and Cricket Australia with an interest and expertise relevant to the study were invited to participate. These representatives suggested appropriate community sport clubs to recruit for those groups. To supplement this recruitment, additional sport clubs, through their Presidents and Secretaries, were contacted independently by the research team.

For the sport club member groups, eligible participants had to be over 50 years old; and either involved in administration, coaching or actively playing within the club environment. For the non-sport club member groups, eligible participants had to be over the age of 50 years and not belong to a community sport club. The non-sport club member participants were recruited through community organisations and public advertisements.

The Socio-Ecological Model (Sallis, Owen, & Fisher, 2008) was used as a framework to develop the interview schedule for the semi-structured focus groups. The model proposes that behaviour is influenced by intrapersonal, interpersonal, organisational and policy factors; and that these factors

often influence each other. This model has been used to understand sport participation across different life stages, including studies on potential benefits and barriers to sport participation for adolescence (Eime et al., 2013; Fowlie et al., 2020); and older adults (Jenkin et al., 2018a). As such, it was deemed appropriate to frame the focus group questions for this study.

Potential participants were provided with an information sheet, informed consent form and a demographic questionnaire. The latter document was to provide context to their responses, including their age and sporting history. The focus groups took place at the university; in sport club houses and at NSO offices, in Melbourne, Australia. Two academic researchers attended each interview and undertook peer debriefing at the conclusion of the respective sessions, to start initial coding of the data. Discussions on drop-out and re-engagement in sport took approximately 20 minutes in each group, with the complete respective focus groups lasting for 1–1.5 hours. For example, participants were asked whether their participation in sport had changed over their adult years and the potential reasons for that, in addition to discussing any initiatives that organisations had developed, to re-engage adults aged 50+ years in their sport. Ethics approval was granted by the Victoria University Human Ethics Research Committee.

The interviews were transcribed externally and then studied by the lead author for accuracy. NVIVO 10 software (QSR International Pty Ltd, Version 10, 2012) was used for the content and thematic analysis of the data. Whilst the Socio-Ecological Model was used to frame the data collection, Leisure Constraints Theory was used to analyse the data. The early focus of this study was to understand drop-out in sport framed in the context of the Socio-Ecological Model. However during the focus groups, discussions naturally led onto why some of the participants had re-engaged with sport at an older age. As such, this topic became an equally important part of the project and was further explored during discussions. At that stage, the research team decided that Leisure Constraints Theory might offer added value in regard to the data analysis, to help understand how some participants were able to negotiate previous constraints for their re-engagement in sport.

Each focus group was analysed and themed individually, before common themes across the wider study were identified. The emerging themes and subthemes were discussed within the research team to provide academic rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and once the themes had been finalised, they were organised into the three categories from Leisure Constraints Theory: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. The most prominent themes across the two research questions are discussed in the Findings section.

Findings

This research consisted of eight focus groups, with 49 participants, and the group size ranged from four to nine participants. In the sport club member groups, there was an equal number of male and female participants, where the age ranged from 50 to 85 years old (mean age was 62 years). In the non-sport club member groups, male and female participants were also equally represented, whilst their ages ranged from 51 to 65 years old (mean age was 57 years). For the National Sporting Organisations' groups, participants were mainly male (85%), with an age range of 23–67 years (mean age 41 years). The average years of engagement in respective sports for the sport club members ranged from one to 52 years (mean engagement was 18 years) and the average years of working in the sporting industry for the National Sporting Organisations' participants ranged from one to 30 years (mean engagement was 11 years). Table 1 provides the participant demographics of those with prior sporting engagements

In line with Leisure Constraints Theory, the findings for adults aged 50+ years potential dropout of sport at an earlier age and re-engagement in sport, have been categorised into three sections: intrapersonal constraints/negotiation, interpersonal constraints/negotiation and structural constraints/negotiation.

For the drop-out section, there were 14 themes, the majority of which were categorised as structural constraints, with two themes as interpersonal, whilst one theme was considered as an

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of sport club member and national sporting organisations' focus group participants.

Participants	Age (yrs)	Gender	Type of participant	Years of engagement in respective sports (as of 2014)
1	61	Female	Sport club	7 yrs
2	70	Female	Sport club	15 yrs
3	62	Male	Sport club	Missing
4	64	Female	Sport club	42 yrs
5	81	Male	Sport club	10 yrs
6	85	Female	Sport club	52 yrs
7	70	Female	Sport club	15 yrs
8	69	Female	Sport club	7 yrs
9	69	Male	Sport club	20 yrs
10	66	Female	Sport club	16 yrs
11	62	Male	Sport club	4 yrs
12	68	Male	Sport club	20 yrs
13	57	Male	Sport club	25 yrs
14	51	Female	Sport club	2 yrs
15	52	Female	Sport club	Missing
16	62	Male	Sport club	7 yrs
17	54	Male	Sport club	39 yrs
18	69	Female	Sport club	Missing
19	51	Male	Sport club	25 yrs
20	50	Male	Sport club	1 yr
21	53	Male	Sport club	34 yrs
22	50	Female	Sport club	5 yrs
23	29	Female	Sporting organisation	6 yrs
24	49	Male	Sporting organisation	25 yrs
25	27	Female	Sporting organisation	8 yrs
26	47	Female	Sporting organisation	6 yrs
27	58	Male	Sporting organisation	4 yrs
28	59	Male	Sporting organisation	30 yrs
29	43	Female	Sporting organisation	11 yrs
30	31	Male	Sporting organisation	14 yrs
31	34	Male	Sporting organisation	1 yr
32	37	Male	Sporting organisation	12 yrs
33	33	Male	Sporting organisation	15 yrs
34	23	Male	Sporting organisation	1 yr
35	67	Male	Sporting organisation	4 yrs
36	56	Male	Sporting organisation	22 yrs

intrapersonal constraint. For structural constraints, the key themes were adults aged 50+ years as a low priority group for sporting organisations; lack of playing opportunities with peers; and competing priorities. Minor themes included physical health concerns; working patterns changing; lack of societal acceptance that older adults play sport; and non-inclusive marketing.

For the re-engagement section, there were four themes. Two themes for structural, with one theme each for intrapersonal and interpersonal negotiation, respectively.

Why adults aged 50+ years may drop-out of sport at an earlier age

The majority of potential reasons why adults aged 50+ years may have dropped out of sport at an earlier age were agreed upon by participants across the eight focus groups. However, there were some differences that emerged. There were 14 themes in total. The majority of the reasons for drop-out of sport in this study were categorised as structural constraints (n = 11), with two results as interpersonal constraints and one as an intrapersonal constraint. These are detailed in Figure 1.

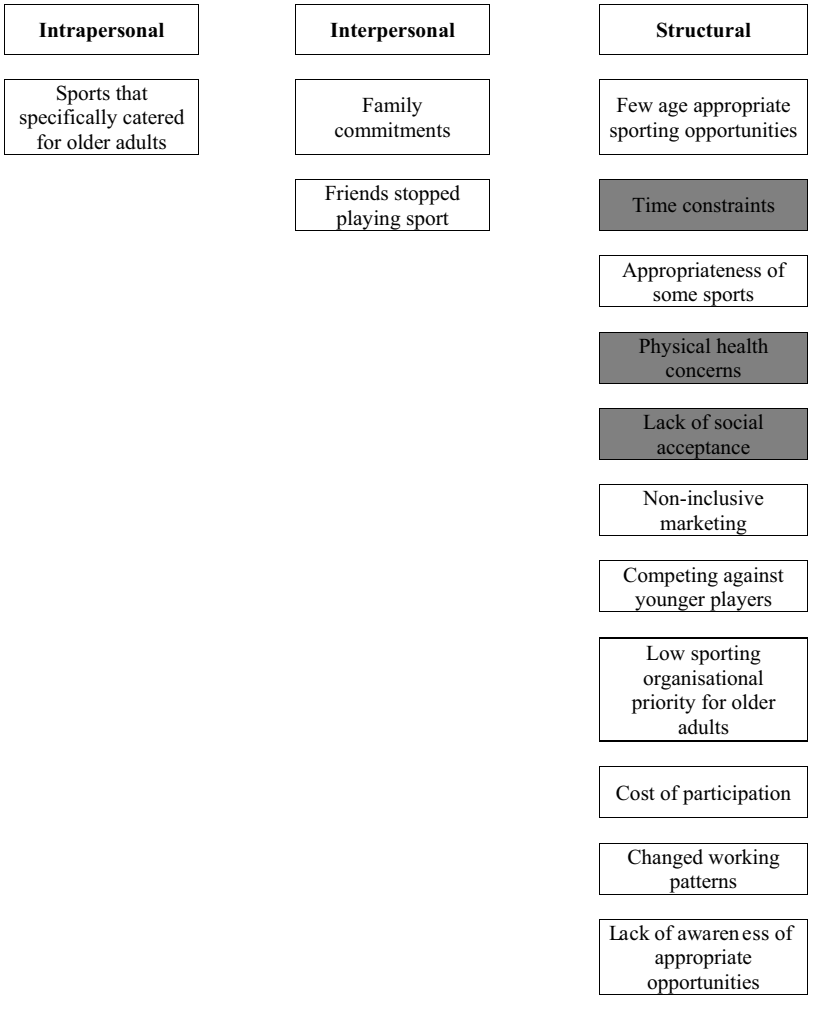

Figure 1. Factors that influence adults aged 50+ years drop out of sport at an earlier age. * Dark grey boxes = Constraints that some participants aged 50+ years had negotiated to re-engage in sport.

Structural constraints

Two of the most prominent structural constraints were time constraints and few age specific sporting opportunities as people age; whilst physical health concerns, lack of social acceptance and non-inclusive marketing were also discussed.

A number of the participants felt they had competing priorities for their time, especially as they often prioritised their children's participation over their own: *'It was two nights a week for them [kids], then it was on the weekend with them with their sport . . . you don't have time to do your own stuff, when you're there two nights and half a day over the weekend. Family is more important'* (54-year-old male non-sport club member). Some participants also reported that sport matches were often too long and too structured, so participation in other activities was prioritised.

Another widely discussed concept was that there were few age-specific sporting opportunities. This included opportunities for older adults new to a sport: *'There's a lack of adult beginner programmes. I think if you haven't played at age 50, people are too embarrassed and too nervous to start picking up a racquet when they start retiring'* (male NSO participant); those who wanted to continue playing sport *'There didn't seem to be anywhere they could go to next for that age group [in netball], so they both stopped playing . . . I always thought that was such a shame because they loved*

netball and really enjoyed it so much for years' (65-year-old female non-sport club member); and also those who wanted to start playing sport again: *'For older people there are not many sporting clubs or anything that you could just go and join except lawn bowls'* (61-year-old male non-sport club member). Another theme that relates to lack of opportunities was the appropriateness of some sports. Some participants believed that contact sports became less desirable as people aged, due to physical health concerns: *'I don't want to have the contact sport anymore'* (60-year-old female non-sport club member).

A linked structural constraint discussed by some participants were physical health concerns. There was a perceived increased risk of injury with age: *'As you get older, you're more susceptible to injuries'* (53-year-old male non-sport club member). Additionally, some participants believed that existing injuries meant it was harder to participate in sport at an older age for some people: *'Usually they [older adults] play every second Sunday because it takes them two weeks to get over the physicality of the whole thing'* (53-year-old male non-sport club member).

A number of participants also believed that as people aged, they did not want to compete against younger players and were therefore likely to transfer to individual/lower contact sports or visit the gym: *'I think when I was younger, I played more team sports. And as I got older and I couldn't compete anymore, I did individual things like karate'* (50-year-old male cricket club member). Furthermore, some participants felt that whilst competition was still important (especially to men), the desire to play sport in a competitive structure decreased with age: *'I'm not as competitive as I was when I was younger. Nowhere near'* (54-year-old male cricket club member).

The concept that as people aged, they were not a high priority for sporting organisations, was widely mentioned by participants. Some of these participants, mainly from the National Sporting Organisations, believed that specific needs of ageing people were often not catered for due to a lack of organisational capacity: *'At the end of the day, our business is about junior development'* (female NSO participant), and *'We tend to focus on the players that we currently have and then recruiting new players and fans, so that's very much pitched at younger age groups'* (male NSO participant).

Some participants perceived that a lack of social acceptance for people as they aged to play sport contributed towards drop-out of sport. They felt that sport was an activity for young people and not for other age groups: *'Some people also perceive it as culturally not really appropriate to play competitive any longer once you're getting older, especially on the female side'* (female NSO participant).

Three minor structural constraints were mentioned by a few participants: cost of participation, the fact that working patterns had changed and non-inclusive marketing. Some participants felt that income was often spent on other priorities, whilst marketing was usually targeted at younger age groups, using graphics and photographs that appealed to younger people: *'It would be really good if they showed a range of women who are playing, not just the young'uns [sic], perhaps a few older women? That would be a broader advertising campaign'* (69-year-old female cricket club member) and *'You think sporting clubs are for when you're young and then you're going to give them up, but maybe they haven't really been advertised as something that's appropriate for all age levels'* (55-year-old female non-sport club member). Additionally, some participants believed their peers had a general lack of awareness of sporting opportunities available.

Finally, a small number of participants felt there had been a change in working hours in the past generation, where hours had become more flexible and people often worked on weekends, instead of playing sport. This meant that traditional weekend competitions sometimes had fewer participants: *'Saturday tennis isn't the same as it used to be because the workforce are working a lot of Saturdays now instead of working just weekly, five days a week … I think that's taken a lot of participation out of tennis'* (69-year-old male tennis club member).

Interpersonal constraints

The two interpersonal constraints mentioned were family commitments and friends stopped playing sport.

Most participants believed that adults often did not play sport as they aged, because they had families to look after: '*if you got a young family, it's almost impossible*' (62-year-old male tennis player), whilst some participants felt that they sometimes stopped playing when their friends stopped playing sport.

Intrapersonal constraints

The one intrapersonal constraint discussed was sports that specifically catered for people as they age. A few of the participants felt that some 'age appropriate' sports were seen as boring or unattractive: *'Golf is one of those games that a lot of people take up in retirement, but I find it boring'* (60-year-old female non-sport club member) and *'It's [bowls] boring. You roll the ball and then you walk out'* (54-year-old female non-sport club member).

Why adults aged 50+ years may re-engage in sport at an older age

Some of the participants spoke of how they had re-engaged in sport as an older adult. There were four key reasons discussed on this topic, which are shown in Figure 2. These are improving health, having more time, to socially interact with others and that the sporting ability of players becomes less important in older age.

Intrapersonal negotiation

A number of participants perceived that playing sport had contributed to improving their physical health and mental health as they had aged: '*I feel heaps better on a Wednesday afterwards* [playing tennis]. *I feel I've lost weight. I can definitely feel it dropping off on the court*' (70-year-old female tennis club member).

Structural negotiation

Several participants perceived that adults aged 50+ years often had more time to pursue their own activities, as they had retired or their children had grown up: *'I've found the mid-30s when your kids are sort of less than 10, it's harder to leave the home, whereas now my kids are all in their 20s, I never see them. So my wife's happy to not have me under her feet and stuff, so it's actually easier now in the 50s to actually spend more time at the club without young families'* (53-year-old male cricket club member) and *'Now you're semi-retired . . . you've got time on your hands and so you can [play sport]'* (64-year-old female tennis club member).

Some participants felt that the sporting ability of players became less important in older age, and thus sport became more attractive to less 'sporty' types: *'In those days you couldn't play those sports unless you were good. Really you just weren't welcomed. Nowadays it's probably the same, but tennis people have given up laughing at me because I don't give a stuff'* (62-year-old male tennis club member) and *'I don't care what the younger ones think anymore'* (59-year-old female non-sport club member).

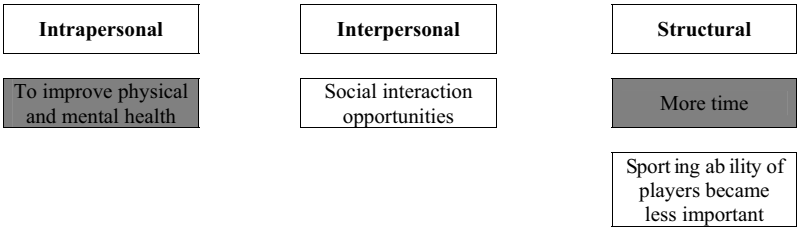

Figure 2. Factors influencing re-engagement with sport at an older age. * Dark grey boxes = Constraints that some participants aged 50+ years had negotiated to re-engage in sport.

Interpersonal negotiation

Sport was also seen as an opportunity to socially interact with others, as many participants had taken up a sport only when their children or grandchildren had started to play that sport: *'My daughter roped me into doing a bit of cricket and I thought, "Oh that looks like fun!"'* (69-year-old female cricket club member). A number of participants also perceived that older adults had used sport as an opportunity to interact with their families or friends: *'A friend of mine played tennis, so I joined in and actually from then we played every week'* (68-year-old male tennis club member).

Discussion

This study focused on understanding why adults aged 50+ years may have dropped out of community sport at an earlier age, and why they may re-engage at an older age.

Due to the paucity of research on sport drop-out for those post-adolescence, it is difficult to ascertain whether the constraints discussed in this study resonate with the wider older adult population. As such, the results of this study will be discussed in the context of other relevant literature that focuses on physical activity and/or sport for older adults, and sport drop-out for adolescents.

The findings in this study suggest that adults aged 50+ years largely dropped out of sport earlier in their adult lives due to structural constraints, such as perceived lack of playing opportunities. In comparison, the research for adolescents suggests their drop-out is largely for intrapersonal and interpersonal reasons, such as social pressures (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Mudrak, 2010; Shakib, 2003) or lack of enjoyment (Calvo et al., 2010; Figueiredo et al., 2009; Guzmán & Kingston, 2012), rather than structural issues. The findings therefore suggest that the structure and nature of traditional sport may not be ideal for older adults, but suitable for adolescents. Together with the aforementioned research on adolescent drop-out, this study corresponds with previous research that insinuates the structure of sport and sporting policy has resulted in the prioritisation of children and adolescents as participants (Jenkin et al., 2016). Therefore, a key aspect of this research, and for policymakers, is to understand how older adults can negotiate these constraints to re-engage in sport.

Out of the four main themes for those who had re-engaged in sport, two were structural (more time and that the importance of sporting ability decreased with age), whilst one was identified for interpersonal (using sport to socialise with others) and one for intrapersonal (using sport to improve health) negotiation, respectively.

The re-engagement theme of using sport to improve health is particularly pertinent for older adults, as there is a general decline of health as people age (Rydwik et al., 2013; Toepoel, 2013). However as most traditional sports are often high intensity, it can often be quite unsuitable for most older adults and can directly link to the structural constraint of lack of appropriate playing opportunities. For some participants in this study, there were appropriate opportunities available to them, such as informally modified tennis sessions, which meant they could negotiate this constraint to use sport to improve their health. As more appropriate opportunities, such as walking sports and other forms of modified sport, continue to be developed and delivered to a wider proportion of this population group, more older adults will be able to negotiate the constraint of few appropriate opportunities, and more frequently use sport to improve their health.

Another reason for re-engagement in sport was linked to social health, where participants used sport to socialise with their families and within their local community, which could help negotiate the competing priorities constraints theme that emerged in this research. The importance of the social aspect of sport for this age group cannot be understated. Various researchers suggest that whilst loneliness can be experienced by those of any age, it is far more prevalent amongst older adults than any other age group (e.g., Perissinotto et al., 2012; Valtorta & Hanratty, 2012). Lindsay-Smith et al. (2017) suggest that older adults who have more social support, especially from family members, are more likely to undertake physical activity. Thus, encouraging family members to

support older adults to be physically active through sport, whilst also providing sporting opportunities where older adults can build social capital through sport (Coalter, 2007) and use sport to socialise with their families, is a key facet of re-engaging this population group in sport.

In this study, participants felt that as they grew older, being highly skilled in the sport became less important, which is an interesting concept. One of the structural constraints discussed was lack of social acceptance, where participants felt that sport is largely marketed at and for young people, and that it was unusual for adults aged 50+ years to play sport. However, some of the participants in this study stated they had managed to negotiate this, as they cared less about social perceptions and their (perceived) lack of skill. This may be due to the sporting culture at their respective clubs, in that they felt welcomed despite their skill level or age. Therefore, the concept of the importance of sporting (club) culture for older adults should be further explored to see if any of these strategies could be utilised in other sport settings. If so, this could enable more older adults to negotiate the lack of social acceptance constraint, whilst also ensuring society is more accepting of older adults' active involvement in sport.

Thus far, the focus has been on how older adults can negotiate their participation in sport. However, the findings suggest that a number of the constraints older adults face are structural and thus cannot, and should not, be negotiated in isolation. Sporting organisations also need to consider how to ensure their respective sports are suitable and welcoming for older adults. This, in conjunction with greater societal acceptance for older adults' participation, should in time, result in older adults not needing to negotiate this constraint, as sport would be more accessible for them.

There are a number of other actions organisations can undertake to become more accessible and support older adults to overcome various constraints and renegotiate their participation. These are often multi-faceted, but older adults are a largely untapped market for most sporting organisations. As the majority of constraints in this study related to offering age appropriate opportunities, sporting organisations should adapt their products accordingly. This should result in modified, appropriate sport that caters for this population group with a range of differing physical capabilities, whilst also focusing on the fun and social aspect of sport, which is integral for this population group (Jenkin et al., 2018b).

Although there is research on the benefits and barriers of older adult participation, investigating why adults aged 50+ years dropped out of sport at an earlier age and their re-engagement in sport at an older age, is a new research perspective within the older adult and sport topic area. Consequently, there are numerous future research opportunities. Firstly, as this was an exploratory piece, it did not explore potential demographic differences between older adults, such as gender, ethnicity and disability. Therefore, future research should investigate this. Additionally, future research could focus specifically on how and why older adults re-engaged in sport through modified sport programmes, and to identify whether there were any key triggers that propelled this action. Another opportunity would be to evaluate projects that have purely engaged older adults who had previously dropped out, to better understand what components of the project helped them to negotiate potential constraints.

A final opportunity could be to understand what modified sport for older adults should look like, for example, whether current offerings focus on mitigating most barriers previous research has identified for this population group. At present, most modified sport for older adults consists of walking sports, but future research should investigate other opportunities that could be developed for this age group.

This study was the first to explore why adults aged 50+ years dropped out of sport at an earlier age in addition to re-engagement in sport when they were older. As such, this is an innovative addition to the body of research for older adults' participation in community sport. Furthermore, it engaged a wide variety of participants to gain a more holistic understanding of this topic. The qualitative nature of this study enabled participants to provide in-depth responses, and the semi-structured approach to the focus groups enabled the consideration of re-engagement in sport,

which has arguably strengthened the study. However as per all qualitative research, these findings cannot be generalised and are only representative of the participants involved in this study.

Additionally, it must be recognised that most of the study researchers were under 50 years old, which may have influenced any stage of the research process.

Conclusion

Most constraints for older adult sport participation relate to lack of appropriate playing opportunities, as traditional sport is often not best suited for this population group. Whilst some of these constraints can be negotiated with modified sport options, these opportunities are often ad hoc. Therefore, sporting organisations need to develop and implement more suitable sport programmes, or specifically modified sport programmes, that are sustainable, and specifically designed to meet the needs of older adults, to enable their re-engagement in community sport.

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