This study examines the exercise related behaviour of clients in three metropolitan fitness centres. In the belief that behaviour is a product of the individual in the environment, it utilises the conception of the behaviour setting that comprises the milieu (or physical characteristics of the setting) and the standing pattern of behaviour of the participants within a setting(3).

Using the Physical Activity Observation System(2) 57 clients (46% female and 54% male) in three facilities (milieux) were systematically observed in the conduct of their regular personal exercise sessions. Data were gathered throughout the day with 27% of observations falling before 9.00 a.m. and 29% after 5.00 p.m. reflecting the most popular exercise times.

The average time spent by an individual in each exercise session was 50 minutes (SD=15 minutes.) Sixty nine per cent of the time was spent in appropriate activity which would lead to fitness benefit, 23% in related on task behaviour and 8% of time spent was off task. Significant differences between the three milieux were observed for both active appropriate (F= 4.43, p=.011) and off task behaviour (F=6.23, p=.003). The source of the difference in appropriate activity was in larger amounts of time committed to cardiovascular exercise whereas time spent in break and in transition were the major sources of difference between settings in off task behaviour.

Some differences were noted between male and female behaviour in this study. Females spent longer in the gym, and more of that time in active cardiovascular exercise. Males spent more time in active strength exercise and also in rest/recovery. An unexpected finding was the minimal amount of time spent in social interaction with other clients. These findings provide evidence of strongly task oriented behaviour by clients in these settings.

Systematically characterising exercise environments and relating them to the exercise behaviour of individuals is a task of some enormity(1). However the notion of identifying selected dimensions of exercise milieux and examining their relationships to the standing patterns of behaviour elicited by the milieu has some more appeal. As well as providing insights for managers to make informed decisions about for example the equipping or decorating of their facilities, it also provides a way forward for increasing our understanding about those variables which positively support more successful exercise behaviour.

References:

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