

Physical activity in the Active People Survey:

developing an indicator that includes walking and cycling for transport

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Summary

The Sport England Active People Survey (APS) measures adult participation in physical activity. The main purpose of the survey is to measure the percentage of adults participating in moderate intensity physical activity, for 30 minutes or more on at least three days a week (National Indicator 8).

This indicator is based on recreational walking, cycling and other sports. It excludes walking and cycling done for transport i.e. walking and cycling to get from place to place.

NOO analysed APS data to estimate the percentage of adults participating in moderate intensity physical activity for 30 minutes or more, including walking and cycling for transport on: (a) at least three days per week; and (b) at least five days per week.

The results indicate that on average, the percentage of adults participating in physical activity, *including* walking and cycling for transport, is approximately 5% higher than the percentage *excluding* walking and cycling for transport.

This analysis produces a useful physical activity indicator that includes walking and cycling for transport.

Introduction

The APS is a telephone survey conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Sport England. It measures the level of participation in physical activity by adults (defined as people aged 16 and over) living in England. The survey began in 2005 and is repeated annually.

The survey is conducted across every local authority in England and collects self-reported physical activity levels in the four weeks prior to interview. Random digit dialling generates a representative sample of telephone numbers and computer-assisted telephone interviewing is used. In the first Active People Survey ('APS1'), conducted between October 2005 and October 2006, 363,724 interviews were conducted with an average of 1,000 interviews per local authority. For the second Active People Survey ('APS2'), conducted between October 2007 and October 2008, 191,325 interviews were conducted with an average of 500 interviews per local authority.

The percentage of adults participating in moderate intensity physical activity for 30 minutes or more at least three times per week (National Indicator 8) is obtained from the APS.¹ This indicator is used to monitor local authorities' progress in improving physical activity levels.² Sport England publishes these data.³

This indicator only includes recreational walking, cycling and sport. It does not include walking and cycling for transport. Therefore this may not be an appropriate indicator for local authorities that promote walking and cycling for transport and wish to monitor physical activity data including walking and cycling for transport.

This report uses the APS1 and APS2 data to calculate the percentage of adults participating in moderate intensity physical activity, including walking and cycling for transport, for 30 minutes or more on at least three days per week and at least five days per week.

Methods

The APS1 dataset was obtained through the UK Data Archive. The APS2 dataset was obtained directly from Sport England. The data were analysed to estimate the percentage of adults participating in 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity, including walking and cycling for transport, on at least three and five days per week.

The results of this analysis are not comparable with National Indicator 8 data published by Sport England. This is because it uses data based on the answers to different questions within the APS questionnaire for its calculation. Therefore a comparable indicator was calculated which excluded walking and cycling for transport.

For each local authority, the number of respondents who participated in moderate intensity physical activity including walking and cycling for transport for 30 minutes or more on at least three days and at least five days per week was calculated. This was then divided by the total number of respondents to give the percentage of adults participating in moderate intensity physical activity, for 30 minutes or more on at least three and five days per week that includes walking and cycling for transport. The same calculation was used for the percentage of adults participating in physical activity excluding walking and cycling for transport.

A more detailed description of the methods is available on the National Obesity Observatory website – www.noo.org.uk.⁴

Results

The data are presented in the form of an interactive mapping and analysis tool, (Instant Atlas) on the NOO website.⁵

The results indicate that for every local authority in England, the percentage of adults participating in physical activity including walking and cycling for transport is higher than the percentage excluding walking and cycling for transport. This is observed for both three and five days per week. On average, the percentage participating in physical activity of at least moderate intensity including walking and cycling for transport is approximately 5% higher than the percentage excluding walking and cycling for transport for both three and five times per week.

Limitations

The possibility of measurement error in the APS is high. Respondents were asked to report levels of physical activity in the last four weeks. Self-report measures of physical activity are likely to be an overestimate⁶. Respondents were asked to recall how long each activity lasted and to describe the intensity level of the activity. This introduces recall bias as respondents could have recalled doing more or less activity than they actually did. It is not clear whether the sample is truly representative of the study population. It is important to be aware that the indicator including walking and cycling for transport is not comparable with National Indicator 8 published by Sport England.

Conclusions

This analysis provides an indicator that includes walking and cycling for transport in the percentage participating in 30 minutes or more moderate intensity physical activity on at least three and five times per week. This will be of use to local authorities and other organisations who wish to include walking and cycling for transport when monitoring physical activity.

References

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- 3 <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/doc/5767%5Cmrdoc%5Cpdf%5C5767technicalreport.pdf>
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- 5 <http://www.noo.org.uk/maps/eatlas>
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- 6 Health Survey for England 2008: Summary of key findings. The NHS Information Centre

Reader Information

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