

Physical Activity insecurity in young people at risk of marginalisation

Dr Caroline Dodd-Reynolds

Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Durham University

Fuse Centre for Translational Research in Public Health



Physical activity insecurity

• *“A limited or restricted ability to be active, reinforced by worries and experiences of feeling uncomfortable, emotionally or physically unsafe”*

- Can potentially be experienced by any young person at risk of marginalisation
- Particularly nuanced for non-cis and non-binary young people living with deprivation



RESEARCH

Open Access



Young people's experiences of physical activity insecurity: a qualitative study highlighting intersectional disadvantage in the UK

Caroline Dodd-Reynolds^{1*}, Naomi Griffin², Phillippa Kyle³, Steph Scott², Hannah Fairbrother⁴, Eleanor Holding⁵, Mary Crowder⁵, Nicholas Woodrow⁵ and Carolyn Summerbell¹

Abstract

Background Intersecting socioeconomic and demographic reasons for physical activity (PA) inequalities are not well understood for young people at risk of experiencing marginalisation and living with disadvantage. This study explored young people's experiences of PA in their local area, and the associated impacts on opportunities for good physical and emotional health and wellbeing.

Methods Seven local youth groups were purposefully sampled from disadvantaged areas across urban, rural and coastal areas of England, including two that were specifically for LGBTQ+ young people. Each group engaged in three interlinked focus groups which explored young people's perceptions and lived experience of PA inequalities. Data were analysed using an inductive, reflexive thematic approach to allow for flexibility in coding.

Results Fifty five young people aged 12–21 years of different sexualities, gender and ethnicity took part. Analysis yielded four themes: PA experiences across spaces; resigned to a lack of inclusivity and 'belonging'; safety first; complexities in access and accessibility. Young people felt more comfortable to be active in spaces that were simple to navigate, particularly outdoor locations largely based in nature. In contrast, local gyms and sports clubs, and the school environment in general, were spoken about often in negative terms and as spaces where they experienced insecurity, unsafety or discomfort. It was common for these young people to feel excluded from PA, often linked to their gender and sexuality. Lived experiences or fears of being bullied and harassed in many activity spaces was a powerful message, but in contrast, young people perceived their local youth club as a safe space. Intersecting barriers related to deprivation, gender and sexuality, accessibility, disability, Covid-19, affordability, ethnicity, and proximity of social networks. A need emerged for safe spaces in which young people can come together, within the local community and choose to be active.

Conclusions The overarching concept of 'physical activity insecurity' emerged as a significant concern for the young people in this study. We posit that PA insecurity in this context can be described as a limited or restricted ability to be active, reinforced by worries and lived experiences of feeling uncomfortable, insecure, or unsafe.

*Correspondence:
Caroline Dodd-Reynolds;
caroline.dodd-reynolds@durham.ac.uk
Full list of author information is available at the end of the article



© The Author(s) 2024. **Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. The Creative Commons Public Domain Dedication waiver (<http://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>) applies to the data made available in this article, unless otherwise stated in a credit line to the data.



Home About us **News** Events Research Public involvement AskFuse NIHR SPHR Blog Get Involved

Funding opportunities

Our response to COVID-19

News archive

News

Physical activity insecurity is stopping youngsters from getting active

New research suggests that feelings of discomfort and unsafety are preventing some young people from being physically active - and more work is needed to create environments where they feel confident enough to exercise and play sport.

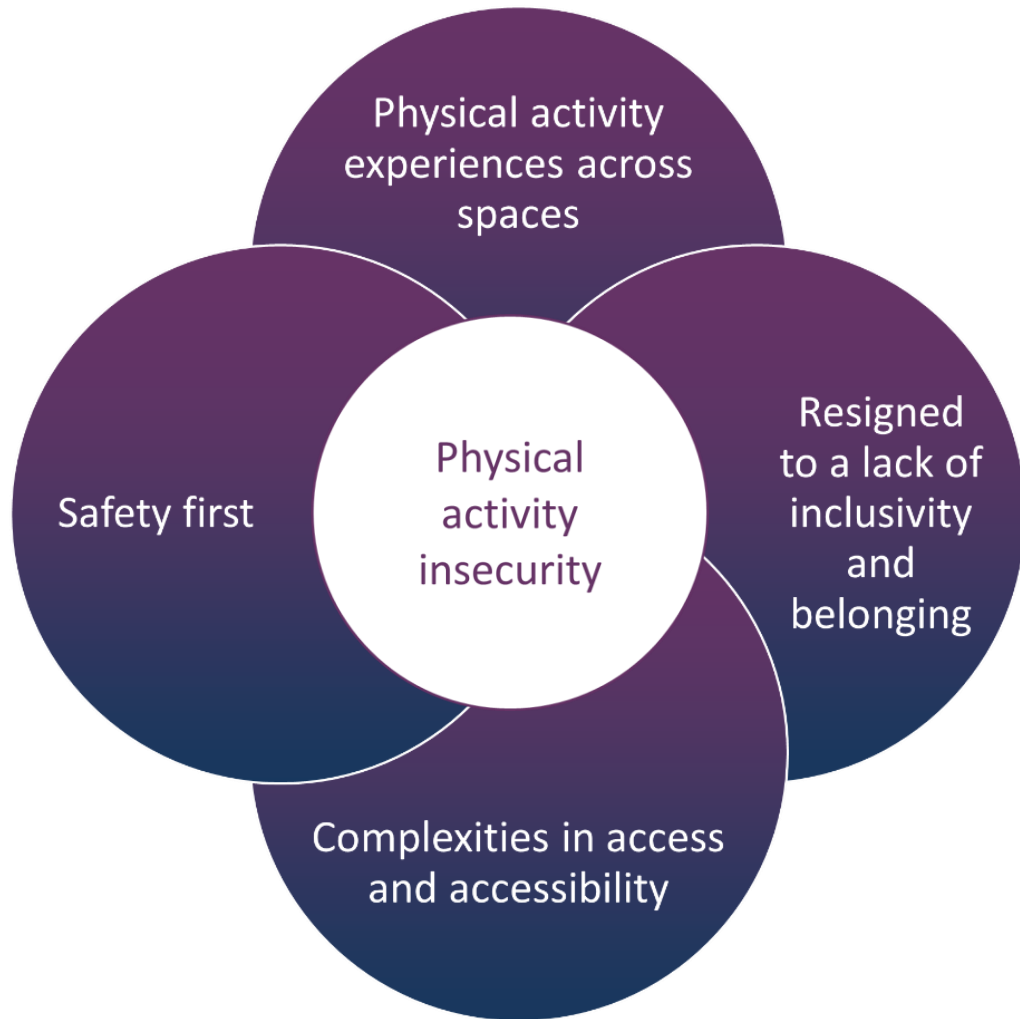


The study, led by researchers at Durham University from Fuse, the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, explores how 55 young people aged 12 to 21 feel about engaging in physical activity such as sports, exercise and walking in public places.

Rather than focusing on the traditional barriers to physical activity, such as a lack of facilities, the researchers instead explore how young people feel about the environments associated with physical activity.

The researchers found that feelings of insecurity, worry and even fear were prevalent among the study group, who were all living in areas of England with high deprivation.

[Fuse article](#) [Dodd-Reynolds et al. \(2024\)](#)



'I did trampolining competitively...I was just getting to a point where I wasn't comfortable. Because I was still having to wear the girl's uniform ...when you look at the differences between the uniforms, it's really stark'.

'So I go into the girls' PE and I'm sick of it because I go in and it's just like, "hi girls!!" and I'm just like just kill me now'

'I think, particularly for trans and LGBTQ people, it's difficult to feel secure in a sport ... I don't feel safe going to the club because if they find out I'm trans, they'll just pick me out'

I feel like I'm in danger and scared....who feels unsafe out and about?

You could barely go [to a park] without that [harassment] happening...Makes me not want to leave my house.'

Physical activity insecurity' as experienced by LGBTQ+ children and young people living with deprivation: what would safe spaces for physical activity look like for this community?

Caroline Dodd-Reynolds¹, Scarlet Hall¹, Mary Crowder², Hannah Fairbrother³, Vicky Goodyear⁴,
Naomi Griffin⁵, Steph Scott⁵, Stacey Pope¹

¹Department of Sport and Exercise Science, Fuse, Durham University, Durham, UK; ²ScHARR, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK; ³Health Sciences School, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK; ⁴School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences, PHRESH, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK; ⁵Population Health Sciences Institute, Fuse, Newcastle University, Newcastle, UK



Joyful and Safe Physical Activity Project (JASPA)



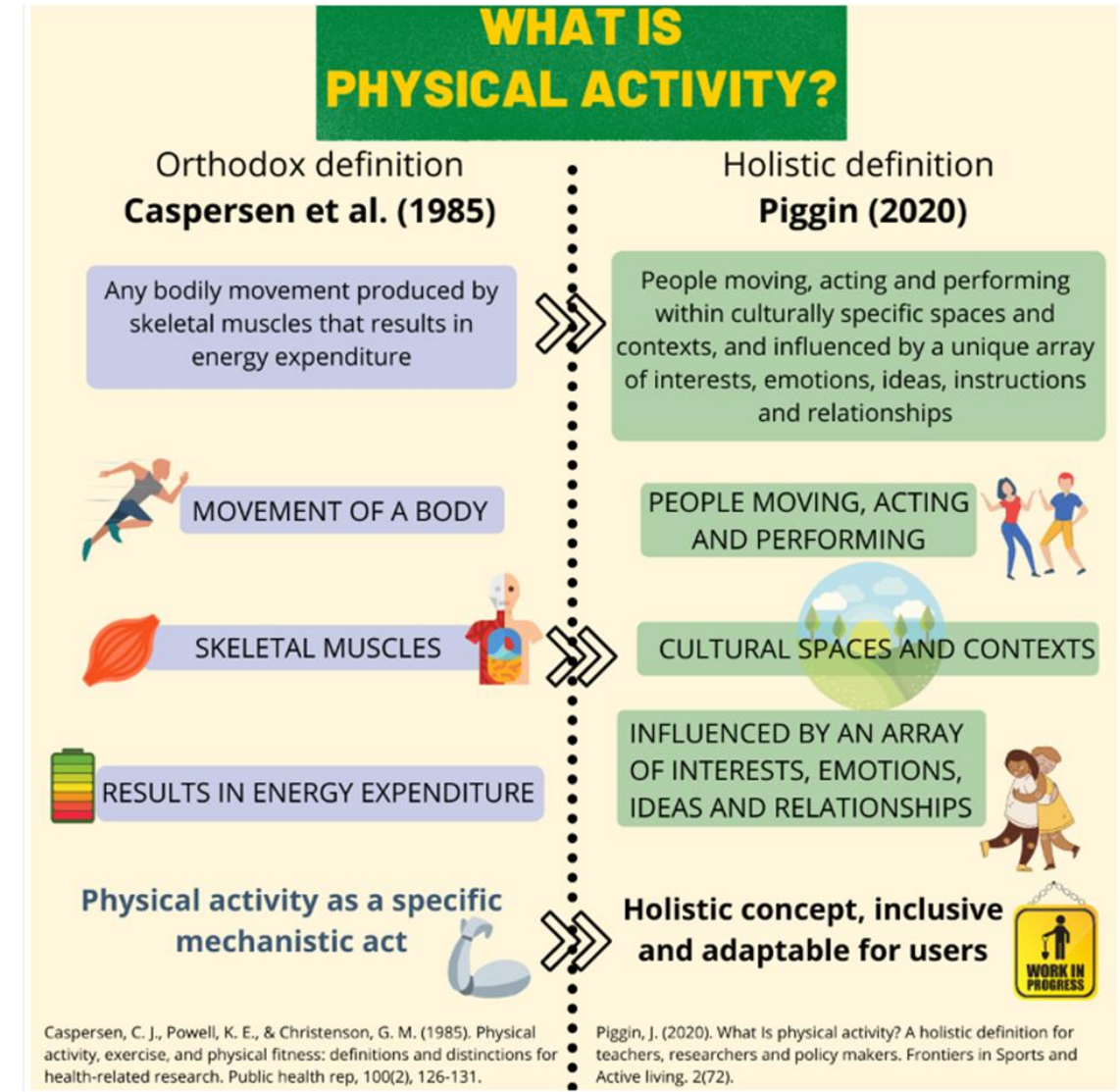
What would make physical activity feel joyful, safe and inclusive for LGBTQ+ children and young people?

Carefully considered methodology crucial in understanding these lived experiences

- **Lived experiences**
 - Building of trust
 - Accessible methods
 - Fun!
- **Co-production**
 - Equitable & experientially-informed-research (Smith et al., 2023)
 - Sharing of power, reciprocity
 - Ethical 'hanging out'
 - YP as co-researchers in design and analysis?
 - **Creative visual methods**

Further considerations

- **We wanted audio/text (dialogue) but was this the priority?**
 - Visual methods can be useful in understanding concepts in ways that words cannot.
 - Participants are able to show, rather than just tell, about their lives; can be a useful method of understanding experiences of (at-risk of) marginalised groups (D'Alonzo and Sharma, 2011).
- **Researcher-created (or found) visual data, or respondent-generated visual data (Phoenix, 2011)?**
 - E.g. Photos, diagrams, sketches, posters, maps
 - Question re visuals as data, or means to obtain dialogical data (Harrison, 2002)
 - Questions re interpretation (young people co-researchers and rest of research team)



Iterative workshops: Workshop 1

- *Think about a physical activity experience and draw a map of your journey to wherever/whatever that might be...*

- *Mark on any 'moments' that you notice (lego, pen etc.)*

What next?

- [SPHR blog on our CP process](#)
- Workshop 3 Zine-making with young people
- Workshop 4 – Influential adults
- IAA funding bid over Summer
- Complete interpretation and publish
- Partners for the next bid

We would love to hear from you!

caroline.dodd-reynolds@durham.ac.uk

 carododd

[Find out more on our project page](#)

With thanks

“This study/project is funded/supported by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) School for Public Health Research (SPHR) (Grant Reference Number NIHR 204000) The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.”

