



'Mother of all sport': an evaluation of a women's community sports programme

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UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

‘Mother of all Sport’:
An evaluation of a women’s community
sports programme

Thesis submitted to the University of Limerick for the Degree of
Master of Education

By Tracy Mahedy

G Dip. (Hons) & BSc. (Hons)

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ABSTRACT

‘Mother of all Sport’:

An evaluation of a women’s community sports programme

Tracy Mahedy

The purpose of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme is to investigate the effect of a physical activity programme on women in disadvantaged communities and evaluate whether this type of programme can encourage women to participate in physical activity in their local community. This research project subsequently examines women's perception of sport and physical activity and explores whether a community approach to sport and physical activity can change women's views and acceptance of physical activity. It is important to note that the terms sport and physical activity are used interchangeably throughout the course of this paper.

Introduction: The ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme is a physical activity programme developed by the researcher in conjunction with Limerick Sports Partnership. It was established to encourage more women to get involved in sport and physical activity. The programme primarily targeted mothers over the age of 18years from disadvantaged populations but as the purpose of the programme was to encourage more women to get involved in physical activity being a mother was not a prerequisite and therefore all interested women over 18years were invited to take part. The researcher randomly chose three sports for the programme and purposely picked team sports so groups would have to work together during training and when competing against other teams

Background: While literature suggests that there is a need to increase physical activity among women in disadvantaged areas (Kavanagh, Goller, King, Jolley, Crawford, & Turrell, 2005; **Withall, Jago & Fox, 2011**) there is very little evidence available on programmes that specifically target this group, with programmes tending to focus on women or on disadvantaged areas but seldom evaluating the two together. For this reason the researcher felt it imperative to examine the impact of a women’s physical activity programme in designated disadvantaged communities.

Methods: This research took place over two years and involved four groups of women from different disadvantaged areas. Three of the four groups engaged in structured physical activity sessions which were led by the researcher and involved the groups learning the skills and rules of tag rugby, basketball and rounders. The fourth group conducted their sessions independently

and was not led by the researcher. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, field notes and social media. This programme endeavoured to include women from disadvantaged communities in the planning, development and implementation of a sports programme in their own community.

Results: Results have shown an increase in the number of women participating in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme and has led to an overall increase in physical activity levels among the target group. While additional physical activity was not primarily measured in this study the researcher was privy to physical activity data through her work as a Sports Development Officer in the communities and thus could witness first-hand the additional programmes that were set up as a result of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme. The researcher also communicated with the physical activity leaders who lead the additional programmes and was able to access the numbers that were attending the extra physical activity sessions. Results have also shown that sustainability of the programme can be achieved through guidance and education.

Conclusion: The results suggests that a community physical activity programme can influence physical activity levels among disadvantaged women and can create a pathway for women to get involved in a range of different activities. In order for a programme to become self-sustainable it is imperative that women are given an opportunity to have a say in the structure of the programme, that they believe the programme is based around their needs and that the researcher/coach facilitates their move towards fulfilling their aims and goals.

PREFACE

My love of sport stems back to an early age. As a child I spent days with my sister and brother in the Physical Education and Sport Sciences (PESS) building at the University of Limerick playing on the ropes and trying out the gymnastics equipment. Some of the best days would be when the trampoline was left out and we got an opportunity to have a go when the students had finished their session. Throughout the summer months we would spend hours in the swimming pool perfecting our stroke, playing on the giant float and trying to get the big rubber sinking blocks off the bottom of the pool. On many occasions we were used as subjects for student teachers to practice their swim teaching techniques and on a few occasions we were permitted to go to the diving pit for diving lessons. I will never forget the sheer joy when I finally picked up the courage to jump off the three meter board. It was probably the scariest thing I did, but once I had it done there was no stopping me. I became fearless and started diving forwards and backwards off the board without a second thought.

Sport and physical activity played a major role in both the primary and secondary schools I attended. In primary school I had so many opportunities to get involved in sport as the school timetabled weekly PE sessions which introduced students to a wide variety of sports. The school was located in close proximity to a university and therefore had access to top sporting facilities including a swimming pool, sports halls and pitches. The school had an excellent after school sports programme and I had my first opportunity to take part in team sports when I joined the school basketball and camogie teams. It was a great insight into sport and from there I joined the local camogie team and continued to play with this team up until the age of fifteen.

The secondary school I went to was across the city and even though it was not the closest school to my family home, it had an excellent reputation for both academic and sporting opportunities. It was difficult to get accepted into this school as there were a limited number of places available. To ensure that my siblings and I got our places, my dad volunteered to coach the local rugby team thus highlighting to us how much he respected this school and how committed he was to make sure we had the best education possible. The school was noted for its hockey and rugby prowess so our first PE block was six weeks of hockey. This was the school's way of viewing potential talent that could be beneficial to its teams in the coming years. As I had played camogie I was able to hit the ball and play on the wing but I could not get the hang of the differing rules and thus opted to continue to concentrate on camogie. The hockey coaches tried tirelessly to convince me to attend after school training sessions and when

I refused I was asked to meet with the Principal to discuss why I would not play. I finally agreed to attend a one day blitz but I really could not get used to the different rules so I hung up my boots before I ever really gave it a serious try. Looking back I do regret not trying a little harder as maybe I could have excelled in hockey whilst at school.

Throughout my five years at the school physical education was given the same respect as any other subject timetabled. All students had to attend a double session of PE every week and there were clear timeframes scheduled where different sports were introduced. Although there was a lot of emphasis on invasion sports (e.g. soccer, rugby, basketball), we did try sports from all strands of the curriculum. We even had to complete six weeks of ballroom dancing which went down a treat with some of the boys! My experience of physical education in school and the relationship I had with sport growing up lead me to the realisation that this was the area that I was supposed to study and enjoy a future in.

When I was sixteen years of age I had the honour of representing Ireland at the World Scholar Athlete Games at the University of Rhode Island. The purpose of these Games were to highlight that sport was an universal language, understood by many regardless of wealth, culture, age, race, religion etc. Sport builds bridges and unites people from all corners of the World. While at the Games I was really struck by the different cultures that were present and how much we all had in common. I would later get an opportunity to see that from a Leader's point of view and that experience will always remain with me.

As I knew I wanted a career in sport I was lucky to get an opportunity to begin working as a receptionist in the PESS building. While working there I completed my Pool Lifeguard exam and began working as a lifeguard and continued to do so right through my college years. This enabled me to earn some money while in college but also helped me to stay connected to an environment that I enjoyed being part of.

Probably one of the most heart breaking days was the day I received my Leaving Cert results. I waited until 5pm that evening to open my results because I knew that the chance of me securing enough points to study physical education was very slim and I wanted to hold on to hope for just a little bit longer. When I finally opened them and the realisation of failure hit, I did not know what I was going to do. I contemplated repeating my Leaving Certification but was advised that I probably would not do that much better. My lack of ability to comprehend foreign languages and my insufficient motivation to focus in geography had hampered my

ambition to study PE and subsequently denied me the opportunity to be involved in a subject that I was passionate about. The disappointment began to wane when I received an offer to study Health in Leisure in Tralee. It was not PE but to me it was the next best thing. I knew that there was a slight possibility of being able to study PE in a roundabout way via my course in Tralee, and so I began Health and Leisure with the intention of doing my utmost to ensure that I could secure a place on the new PE Postgraduate programme that would be starting in UL the very year I was due to finish in Tralee.

The five years I spent at Tralee I.T really shaped how I would develop as a sports professional in future years. The course examined so many aspects of sports and showed the many different strands of employment that were available to people who wanted a career in this area. I was intrigued by the concept of sports development and was fascinated by ways and means of encouraging people to participate in sport. This was an area that I never considered as a career path until I began to study this in detail.

Finally after five years in Tralee I was home. It took me a few extra years but I made it into physical education. It was the first year of the Postgraduate course and I was surrounded by fellow graduates from Tralee, in fact, all but one of the class were Tralee graduates and like me they all had a passion for sport and a desire to get into teaching. The year was tough and action packed but after nine months I had qualified as a physical education teacher and now it was time to seek employment in the area I had longed to work in.

My first job as a PE teacher was in a school that cared more about getting students into the school than how well they excelled whilst there. The school had a large turnaround in staff as people found it hard to settle into the school's way of doing things. While there I began to realise that some students did not get as many opportunities as others. Some, who were a little disruptive, were distanced and not given their chance to shine. I found as a PE teacher I could interact with these students better through the medium of sport and thus was able to create a connection and form a mutual respect. This was the first of many signs that I was destined to follow a sports development path with particular emphasis on disadvantaged communities.

I only lasted four months in that school. I was continuously looking for another job when someone handed me an advert regarding a position as a physical education teacher in Limerick prison. At first I was unsure but applied for the job anyway. Upon hearing that I had been successful in the interview I was hesitant about taking the job but was willing to give it a go. I was so nervous walking in the prison doors on my first day. The feeling of doors being locked

behind you was a little unnerving. The further in you went the more doors that stood between you and freedom. I will never forget the smell that greeted you as you approached the cell blocks, it was stomach turning. Once inside the prison gym you had to put aside where you were and concentrate on providing students with an opportunity to get involved in gym activities and sports. The more the students got to know you and trust you, the more they opened up about their past. Some told harrowing stories of how they had no choice but to get involved in family feuds and that if they did not kill they would have been killed. Others told stories of how boredom and the lack of activities led them to drugs and robbery. This was an eye opener because as stated earlier I grew up with a range of things to do and boredom was not a real option for me. I began to think about my childhood and question if I did not have all the opportunities where might I have ended up? I was always upset when asked if I was to meet the students on the outside would I refer to them as a prisoner or would I acknowledge them as real people? To me they were real people who had made mistakes but what could I do to help prevent this mistake happening to others in the future? This is when the job I was waiting for turned up. The Limerick Sports Partnership was looking for Sports Development Officers to work in disadvantaged communities in Limerick City and to help with the regeneration projects. Social regeneration was highlighted as a major aspect to the success of regeneration and therefore along with two colleagues I was put in place to help provide local people with a range of activities to do and try to divert some from crime and anti-social behaviour. At the start people were a little reluctant to get involved in sports programmes as I was a stranger in their local community, but as time passed and they began to trust me they were more willing to get involved and to try out new activities.

Over the years I saw how responsive local people were to local coaches and to ensure that this continued I set up the VIP (Volunteer Inspired Participation) programme. This programme educated local teenagers to deliver sports sessions to the children in their area. The programme inspired ten teenagers to attend third level education and as a reward for their success and commitment to the programme, they too got an opportunity to represent Ireland in the World Scholar Athlete Games. In a way I had travelled full circle as now I was giving teenagers an opportunity to experience the joy of representing their country in the World Scholar Games. Attending this event as a coach made me appreciate all the hard work and dedication my coaches had put in to get me there. The group I had the pleasure of accompanying to the Games were teenagers who came from disadvantaged communities in Limerick and for many this was their first opportunity to travel to America. Once there they were the life and soul of the Games.

People from all over the World wanted to know the Irish group. They were never referred to as the group from a disadvantaged area because people did not know where they came from and it did not matter, they could be themselves without being prejudged. There were two groups from Limerick on the trip, the Limerick Sports Partnership group which consisted of teenagers from disadvantaged communities, and an additional group who came from middle class backgrounds. These two groups lived approximately five miles away from each other but it took a 5,000 mile trip for them to become friends. To me it highlighted how barriers and expectations can affect people's interactions. To this day the majority of the group remain friends and meet on a regular basis.

Over the past few years my role as a Sports Development Officer has expanded and now includes the enjoyable task of providing women of all ages with a pathway to connect to sport. This role has allowed me the opportunity to examine sports and physical activity programmes that are available to women and develop sessions that meet the needs and desires of the target group. I have learned so much about perceived barriers that prevent women from getting involved in physical activity and have a greater understanding of ways and means of encouraging more women to get involved in sport and physical activity. Working with local women has inspired me to develop new programmes to attract more women to fun and worthwhile activities and thus I developed the 'Mother of all Sport' programme to not only get more women active but also highlight the positive outcomes that sport and physical activity can bring to one's life. My work as a Sports Development Officer requires me to deliver sport and physical activity sessions in local communities and as a result enables to me to carry out a joint role as a researcher and a facilitator for this programme. I believe that the 'Mother of all Sport' programme will be a stepping stone that encourages more women to get physically active in their local communities and provide opportunities to make sporting activities self-sustainable. I envisage that this programme will not only benefit the women involved but will also have a positive influence on others in the local community.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently in candidature for any degree

Tracy Mahedy

Date:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

“Sport is all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships, or obtaining results in competition at all levels” (European Sports Charter, 1992, 2.1A).

Sport and physical activity can mean different things for different people; some people get involved in sport for health and fitness reasons (Surgeon General for the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 1996), others enjoy the recreational benefits it can bring (Harris, 1998), while some like the challenges it possess (Theeboom, De Knop, & Weiss, 1995). For the purpose of this study sport and physical activity will be an interchangeably entity that alludes to a person who participates in a physical activity that requires additional physical effort to be performed. To ensure all people are catered for in an activity it is crucial to develop physical activity programmes and initiatives that address the needs of specific target groups. There has been a range of different sport and physical activity programmes that have been implemented to engage people in physical activity. However, there are very few examples of programmes that have been specifically developed to encourage women from disadvantaged areas to get involved in sport and physical activity. The following chapter will set the context for developing a sport and physical activity programme for women in disadvantaged areas and explain the related processes.

1.2 Sport and physical activity in disadvantaged communities

Many studies have evaluated the impact sport and physical activity can have on the lives of people in disadvantaged communities. Studies have shown that sport can be used as a means of reducing the prevalence of crime (Coalter, Allison, & Taylor, 2000), and to tackle issues such as drugs and antisocial behaviour (Smith, & Waddington, 2004). However, the majority of the studies conducted refer to disadvantaged communities as one entity and seldom distinguish between genders. In order to ensure that specific policies are put in place to attract more women to sport and physical activity, it is essential that women in disadvantaged communities are identified as a specific group as this allows them to be targeted by policy (Lunn, 2006). Therefore it is paramount that policy makers and programme planners begin to evaluate the needs of specific groups and develop programmes that cater for their requirements;

“Policy should not only be targeted at the socially disadvantaged, but needs to be tailored to suit people at different stages in life: disadvantaged schoolchildren, disadvantaged young adults at risk of dropping out, and disadvantaged older people who might take sport up again” (Lunn, 2006, p.79).

1.3 Developing policies and strategies to address inactivity levels among females from disadvantaged areas

Policy makers often apply a ‘whole population’ approach when developing programmes and interventions to address inactivity levels. A ‘whole population’ approach is based on Geoffrey Rose’s principle of engaging more people in a programme through mass media campaigns (Peeters, Hockey, & Brown, 2014). This method can sometimes result in a ‘one size fits all’ approach to programme development and can neglect to address the specific needs of different target groups. To ensure that minority groups are included, it is important to apply policy and programmes that cater for ‘high risk’ populations and, although they may not have specific reference to the general population they can address issues that occur in specific communities. In the case of disadvantaged communities aspects such as transport, funding, childcare and social integration can be evaluated and addressed to ensure that as many participants as possible can avail of the physical activity programme.

1.4 Significance of the study

This research provides important information on the impact of sport and physical activity for women in disadvantaged communities. This research is relevant to a number of organisations including Local Sport Partnerships who develop programmes to engage women in sport and physical activity and the Irish Sports Council who have invested a great deal of time and money developing a national Women in Sport network and the Limerick Regeneration Agency who has invested approximately €30 million through a social intervention fund (O’Sullivan, 2013) believing that sport and physical activity has the potential to strengthen communities and impact on social capital.

1.5 Purpose of the study

There is a lack of research available regarding the benefits of a sport and physical activity programme for women in disadvantaged communities. This programme sought to involve women from disadvantaged communities in the planning, development and implementation of a sports programme and evaluate the impact that this type of activity had on their perception of sport and physical activity and their sport and physical activity levels.

1.6 Research Question

The three research questions are;

- (1) Can a community approach to a sports programme influence the physical activity levels of a number of women in disadvantaged communities?
- (2) Will this type of programme change women's views and perception of physical activity?
- (3) What personal, social and community impacts will this programme have?

1.7 Aims

Three aims related to the research question are;

- (1) To explore the extent to which the introduction of a women's community sports programme influences participants' perception of sport and physical activity.
- (2) To explore the extent to which involvement in the programme affects participants' physical activity levels.
- (3) To investigate integration through sport for groups that would not normally engage with each other.

1.8 Role of the researcher

Throughout the 'Mother of all Sport' programme the researcher will;

- (1) Plan, implement and deliver all practical sessions.
- (2) Organise and facilitate 'Mother of all Sport' tournaments.
- (3) Gather information through questionnaires, interviews and focus group interviews.
- (4) Evaluate practical sessions and formulate researcher field observation notes.

- (5) Review social media to determine participant's personal reflections on the 'Mother of all Sport' programme.
- (6) Provide participants with information regarding additional sport and physical activity programmes available locally.

1.9 Structure of thesis

This chapter has set out a context for the importance of developing and implementing a sport and physical activity programme for women in disadvantaged communities. Chapter two provides a more detailed account of relevant research regarding the benefits of sport and physical activity for women. The literature review is divided into four sections that discuss many aspects of sport and physical activity for women and where possible relates research to women in disadvantaged areas e.g. health benefits of sport and physical activity, physical activity levels of women, women in sport initiatives and the importance of community sports development.

Chapter three outlines the framework and study design used in this programme. It will outline detailed information on data collection and methodologies. This will include the impact of practical sessions, information gathered through questionnaires, interviews, focus group interviews, researcher observation field notes and social media. Data on additional physical activity sessions participants engaged in outside of the 'Mother of all Sport' programme will also be alluded to.

Chapter four reports on the five key findings of the study and analyse data. The five key findings include (1) participation levels in sport and physical activity, (2) common perceptions of involvement in physical activity, (3) promotion and awareness of physical activity, (4) design and implementation of physical activity programme. This section also examines (5) the impact that practical sessions had on the 'Mother of all Sport' programme.

Chapter five discusses the finding from this programme and pays particular attention to the five key codes in the results chapter.

Finally, chapter six considers the results and findings reported in the previous chapters and outlines recommendations for the future development of the 'Mother of all Sport' programme and future related programmes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter will examine the importance of women's sports programmes in local communities and pay particular attention to women from disadvantaged communities. This chapter will look at the physical, mental and social health benefits of sport and physical activity in the lives of women and discuss barriers that may be preventing women from taking part in sport and physical activity. While it is important for all women regardless of age to become physically active, this research will concentrate primarily on women between the ages of eighteen and sixty five years. There seems to be less information on the impact of sport and physical activity on this age group compared to research available on younger girls, teenage girls and older women. Throughout this chapter international initiatives that have been developed to motivate and engage women in physical activity will be reviewed and their success will be evaluated. Finally, this chapter will discuss issues regarding disadvantaged communities and highlight particular barriers that are preventing such women from participating in sport. A section of this chapter will review current physical activity initiatives (or lack of initiatives) that are available for women in this target group and discuss how these initiatives impact the lives of women in local communities. As 'disadvantaged communities' could incorporate many different sectors such as rural, urban, economic and education disadvantage, this chapter will pay particular attention to women from urban disadvantaged communities and specifically look at programmes that cater for the needs of women from the Limerick Regeneration communities. It is hoped that by examining all aspects of sport and physical activity the reader can appreciate the need for the development of structured community based self-sustainable programme.

2.2 Advantage of women being physically active

“Physical activity is defined as ‘any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscle that results in energy expenditure’” (Caspersen, Powell, Christenson, 1985, 100: 126-31).

To class physical activity as just physical activity is truly underestimating its full potential. Physical activity can be associated with many positive physical, emotional and social benefits for women and regular participation in physical activity can be associated with experiencing a longer and better quality of life (Bailey, Wellard & Dismore, 2004). In order to develop programmes that can encourage women to become more physically active it is important to highlight the associated benefits of physical activity and indicate how these benefits can influences all stages of a woman’s life.

2.3 Health Benefits of physical activity specifically for women

Studies have shown that regular vigorous physical activity can lead to approximately 20-40% risk reduction for breast cancer (Lee, 2003) and there is a 25-30% reduction in stroke among active individuals (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008). A report conducted by the Surgeon General for the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (1996) examined the health benefits of physical activity in women and found that regular physical activity;

- Reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease and of developing high blood pressure, colon cancer, and diabetes.
- Helps maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps control weight, build lean muscle, and reduce body fat.
- Helps control joint swelling and pain associated with arthritis.
- May enhance the effect of estragon replacement therapy in decreasing bone loss after menopause.
- Can help reduce blood pressure in some women with hypertension.

Physical activity has also been linked as an aid to osteoporosis which is a condition that affects mostly women and causes a loss of bone mass which can result in bone fractures (Christodoulou, & Cooper, 2003). Studies have indicated that weight bearing activities can help reduce the onset of osteoporosis. However, it is important to note *“physical activity does not appear to prevent bone loss post-menopause but it may be effective in maximising and*

maintaining bone mass” (Biddle & Mutrie, 2007, p.23). Physical activity is also associated with improved balance, strength and coordination which can reduce the risk of falls especially in older women (Barnett, Smith, Lord, Williams, & Baumann, 2003).

Obesity is a global health problem seen across all sectors of society. In 2008, 1.4 billion people in the world were overweight and 300 million women were obese (WHO, 2013). In Ireland 33% of women are overweight and 26% of women are obese resulting in Irish women having the seventh highest prevalence of obesity in the European Union (Irish Heart Foundation). The WHO (2013) linked obesity and overweight with an imbalance between calories consumed and calories expended.

Physical activity consumes calories and the more a woman exercises (frequency, time and intensity) the greater the number of calories expended. If a woman has a balance between calories consumed and expended they can maintain a specific weight which can prevent the likelihood of a person becoming overweight or obese (Hill, 2006). Therefore physical activity and a healthy diet is an essential element in weight management.

The health benefits of exercise can be seen throughout a woman’s life and although it is highly recommended that women become physically active at a younger age, studies have shown that health benefits can occur at all stages of a person’s life (Jette, Lachman, Giorgetti, Assmann, Harris, Levenson, & Krebs, 1999). Often people who are classed as least fit or living a sedentary lifestyle can gain the greatest increase in health when they change to a more active lifestyle (Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). Therefore it is important to highlight that it is never too late to get involved and benefit from physical activity. While the health benefits indicated are specifically for women it is important to note that there are also additional health benefits that impact on the lives of both females and males and therefore these benefits can contribute to women living healthier lifestyles.

2.4 Health benefits of physical activity for both females and males

Throughout the ages sports professionals, researchers and medical experts have conclusively indicated that physical activity is a fundamental aspect in improving one’s health (WHO Europe, 2006; United States. Public Health Service, 1996; Fox, 1999; Lee, et al., 2012). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2010), states that physical inactivity has been identified as

the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. There is also strong evidence to suggest that the frequency of physical inactivity is increasing among many populations and in particular with people living in low to middle income countries. The WHO suggests that this trend will continue unless physical activity recommendations are adopted by international government policy makers. Research has shown that physical inactivity is linked to a range of life threatening illness such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer. It is suggested by ensuring that people engage in 30-60 minutes of physical activity five days a week the prevalence of NCDs could be reduced.

2.5 Mental health benefits of physical activity

Physical activity has also been linked to positive mental health outcomes and although this research is not as widely documented there has been an increase in the number of studies carried out to examine the correlation between physical activity and positive mental health. Clinical studies report that physical activity can be associated with improved mood and can be connected to the reduction of symptoms of stress, anger, depression and job burnout (Taylor, Sallis & Needle, 1985). Physical activity can also lead to the reduction of problematic levels of anxiety and depression (Bailey, Wellard & Dismore, 2004). In a study carried out by Goodwin (2003) entitled '*Association between physical activity and mental disorders among adults in the United States*', over eight thousand American males and females between the ages of 15 and 54 years were interviewed to examine the prevalence of mental disorders. Among those who did and did not report regular physical activity, the study found regular physical activity was linked with a decreased prevalence of physiological illness such as depression, panic attacks and social phobias (Goodwin, 2003). Physical activity releases chemicals known as endorphins. These endorphins affect the central nervous system and result in a feeling of calm and improved mood after exercise (Peluso, et.al, 2005). Due to this it has been suggested by some researchers that physical activity could be used as a treatment for clinical depression and may be as effective as anti-depressants (Dimeo, Bauer, Varahram, Proest & Halter, 2001; Fox, 1999). Overall, physical activity has been proven to reduce stress and anxiety (Petruzzello, Landers, Hatfield, Kubitz, & Salazar, 1991; Salmon, 2001), increase self-esteem and self-confidence (Taylor, Sallis, & Needle, 1985) and contribute to better sleep and a healthier appetite (Fox, 1999) and therefore has vast contributions to the mental health of both female and male participants.

2.6 Social benefits of physical activity

Developing friendship through physical activity is an extremely important motivational aspect for many women and studies have shown that women who receive very little social support from family and friends are more likely to live a sedentary lifestyle (Eyler, Brownson, Donatelle, King, Brown, & Sallis, 1999). Physical activity can create opportunities to form friendships and social associations across different religions, classes and other barriers (Harris, 1998). Therefore, when promoting physical activity programmes it is essential to highlight the potential to meet new friends and develop stronger social networks.

Physical activity also has the ability to strengthen socializations as, *“socialization via sport concentrates on the degree to which skills, traits, values, beliefs, and norms learned in a sport setting can be generalized to other social institutions”* (McPherson, Curtis & Loy, 1989, p.51). However, it is important to note that socialization through sport can only be achieved if the focus of the activity is to teach life skills (Danish, 2002). Many programmes have been implemented internationally to address certain cultural issues that exist within society. The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) developed a programme to educate participants that racism is not accepted. The programme entitled ‘Show Racism the Red Card’ Anti-Racism Creative Competition invited youths from schools and community groups to design posters and promotional material that focus on the impact that racism can have on society. Bösze & Mullan (2011) carried out a study on the impact that this initiative had on primary school children and asked teachers, principals and youth workers to fill out a survey relating to the programme. Bösze & Mullan found *“with support, the project has the potential to have a lasting effect in supporting inter-cultural education in Ireland. The competition [‘Show Racism the Red Card’ Anti-Racism Creative Competition] offers each year a renewed opportunity to engage with anti-racism education to a purpose”*. The programme was deemed to be an important programme as it not only made participants more aware of the impact of racism in the game of football but also showcased the individual and social effect of racism within local communities and society (Bösze & Mullan, 2011).

Sport and physical activity can also instil qualities such as sportsmanship, patience, tolerance and respect (Svoboda, 1994), all of which can be used in everyday life by nurturing life values and skills within an individual. Sport also has the ability to build bridges in communities and enables people with different educational and social backgrounds to interact and work together for the benefit of their community (Paxton, 1999). Physical activity is also a key component in

attempts to address crime and anti-social behaviour (Makkai, Morris, Sallybanks, & Willis, 2003; Crabbe, 2000; Smith & Waddington, 2004) and many believe “*the sports environment emphasises traits such as deferred gratification and hard work, which lead to increased self-discipline and self-control*” (Coalter, Allison, & Taylor, 2000, p. 32).

In general, physical activity and exercise has an abundant amount of positive outcomes that can enhance a woman’s physical, emotional and social wellbeing. While Lane, Murphy & Bauman’s (2008) study has shown that women are aware of these benefits there is still an extremely high percentage of women who do not engage in an adequate amount of physical activity to impact on their health and well-being (Fahey, Layth & Gannon, 2004).

2.7 Physical activity levels of women

Over the last number of years there has been a positive change in the number of people participating in sport and physical activity. It is estimated that 47.2% of Irish adults take part in physical activity (Irish Sports Monitor Data, 2013). Many of the statistics that evaluate participation in physical activity examine the activity levels for both male and female adults. However, when gender is evaluated separately, participation levels are significantly lower for females throughout many countries and social classes. In Ireland the Economic and Social Research Institute’s (ERSI) ‘Sport and Physical Exercise survey’ (2003) established that more men participated in physical activity compared to women (52% male and 34% female) and people with higher educational backgrounds (64% third level, 50% leaving cert & 25% no leaving cert) tend to continue in sport for longer (Fahey, Layth & Gannon, 2004). These statistics excluded walking as a form of physical activity however, when walking was examined further it was discovered that it was a more female orientated activity with 44% of females compared to 26% of males participating in this form of physical activity. This survey also highlighted that 67% of females did not take part in any form of physical activity within the last twelve months and therefore were living a sedentary lifestyle, which, in turn could have huge implications for the health and well-being of females in Ireland. An additional study entitled ‘*Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes and Nutrition in Ireland*’ (2007) found that 55% of respondents were physical activity with an additional 24 % not engaging in enough physical activity to be considered physical active and a further 22% not participating in any form of physical activity (Morgan, et al., 2008). Thankfully the Irish Sports Monitor (2013) has indicated that the gap between women and men participating in sport and physical activity is narrowing and in 2013 it was reported that 42.7% of Irish women participate in physical activity.

Similar studies have been conducted in a number of other countries such as Australia (Cortis, Sawrikar, & Muir 2007), New Zealand (Sport New Zealand, 2013) and Great Britain (UK Sport, 2006) and all have indicated that the males are more active than females and that the number of females that participate in physical activity is considerably low. Where women are aware of the benefits of physical activity a number of studies have highlighted barriers that exist that may be preventing women from becoming more physically active.

2.8 Barriers preventing women from engaging in physical activity

“Research into physical activity correlates is an evolving field showing that the aetiology of physical activity is complex and varies by domains, such as leisure time and transport” (Bauman, et al., 2012).

Over the past two decade an extensive amount of research has been conducted to determine why people are physically active or inactive. Bauman, et al., (2012) found that individual factors such as age, sex, health status and self-efficacy were consistent correlates of physical activity and they also indicated that ecological and environmental aspects such as economic conditions, societal norms and urban development. These too can motivate or deter people from becoming physically active.

The ERSI physical activity survey (2003) evaluated why women did not participate in physical activity and found that of the 67% of women who reported non participation in sport, 49% indicated that this was due to *“no interest to participate”*, 22% stated that they were physically unable to take part and 23% were too busy or did not have time to get involved (Fahey, Layte, & Gannon, 2004). When looking at barriers to participation it is important to categorise different elements that may be perceived as a barrier. The Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation (2008) compiled a list of reported barriers to participation in sport and grouped them according to practical, personal and social/cultural barriers (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Practical, personal and social/cultural barriers to women’s participation in sport

| |
|--|
| Practical Barriers – Lack of time, lack of childcare, lack of money, lack of transport, personal safety, funding and access to facilities. |
| Personal Barriers – Body image, clothing and equipment, lack of self-confidence, parental and adult influence |
| Social/ Cultural Barriers - Male dominated culture of sport, attitudes & prejudices about sexuality, attitudes and prejudices about disability, sexual harassment & abuse, female invisibility- media representations and lack of female role models in sport |

When developing sport and physical activity programmes it is imperative that perceived barriers are taken into account and addressed prior to the implementation of those programmes. The Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation (2008) has produced a document that gives clear recommendations to address these issues. It hopes that by encouraging more physical activity coaches and leaders to be more conscious about barriers, they can develop programmes that enable all women to attend regardless of issues such as income, childcare, transport etc.

Kilgour & Parker (2013) noted that some women did not take part in sport and physical activity as they feared being watched or ridiculed. The thoughts of other people judging them or commenting on their participation made some women feel embarrassed and nervous. Kilgour and Parker (2013) reported “*women conceptualised fear through three dominant discourses: social and cultural environment discourses (people and reputation of certain areas), spatiality discourses (spaces and places) and temporality discourses (time of day/night, dependent on seasonal variation)*” (p. 48).

Additionally Kilgour & Parker (2013) noted that providing physical activity in outdoor spaces that are poorly lit, have busy roads or unsafe pathways could deter women from participating as they fear for their own personal safety.

The fear of the unknown was also highlighted as a barrier to participation as Allender, Cowburn, & Foster (2006) have indicated that the stress and anxiety of entering a programme or facility without knowing other people can deter women from every starting an activity

Unfortunately some women may be put off trying a sport or physical activity due to a previous negative experience. A study carried out by Allender, Cowburn, & Foster (2006) found “*negative experiences during school physical activity [physical education (PE)] classes were the strongest factor discouraging participation in teenage girls*” (p.831).

These negative experiences can carry into adulthood and be a deterrent to future participation. While many women are aware of the health benefits associated with physical activity and the ability to gain fitness and lose weight due to participation, some women feel that they lack the general fitness needed to begin a programme. Ball, Crawford, & Owen (2000) conducted a study with over two thousand Australian adults and discovered *“4.4% of respondents reported being too fat as a barrier to physical activity; this being more common among women (6.2%)”* (p.331). While it is clear that many barriers do exist it is imperative that physical activity leaders examine barriers according to the needs of the target group and implement strategies to address these barriers thus creating an environment that is open and appealing to as many women as possible.

2.9 Women in Sport Initiatives

To combat the lack of women participating in sport and physical activity many countries such as Ireland, England, Canada and New Zealand have implemented strategies and procedures to encourage more women to become physically active. These developments can be viewed as either (a) a top-down approach where institutions such as government departments and influential organisations set out policy and standards to address women in sport issues or (b) a bottom-up approach where local programmes encouraging women to become physically active are developed and implemented in local communities i.e. women setting up meet and train groups to encourage women in their local communities to become more physically active.

2.9.1 The Irish Sports Council

In Ireland, the Irish Sports Council (ISC) is a leading agency in the development of sustainable competitive and recreational sport. Their aim is to provide all members of society with an opportunity to get involved in sport and physical activity (Irish Sports Council Act, 1999). The ISC works closely with the Governmental Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and is the leading agency in the distribution of sports funding to many sectors including elite sport, National Governing Bodies of Sport, and recreational sport through the Local Sports Partnerships. In 2005 the ISC developed the ‘Women in Sport’ initiative with the aim to *“raise overall physical activity levels among women and to support women's roles within sports organisations”* (Irish Sports Council, 2005). This initiative was developed as a result of the ERSI (2003) survey that indicated that approximately two thirds of Irish women were not engaging in physical activity. From 2005 to 2013 the Irish Sports Council invested over €2

million in the programme and in 2012, through the Federation of Irish Sport, reported an increase in the numbers of women participating in sport. The numbers were attributed to an increase in the numbers of women involved in sports clubs and/or the numbers participating in specific ‘Women in Sport’ events. These events included the Flora Women’s Mini-Marathon, the Women on Wheels programme, and the Girls in Golf initiative (Federation of Irish Sport, 2012). In 2011 an independent review of the ‘Women in Sport’ initiative was carried out and it reported *“the overall aims of the WIS programme are fully absorbed by the Local Sports Partnerships and that the Partnerships have increased the level of women’s participation in sport and physical activity”* (Irish Sports Council, SPEAK Report, 2011, p.33).

While the ISC was not directly involved in the delivery of Women in Sport programmes, their strategies and procedures to increase participation among women led to funding being made available for organisations such as the Local Sports Partnerships to carry out programmes targeted at women at a local level thus reaching a large proportion of the female population. The Irish Sports Council found that programmes such as ‘Fit4Life’, ‘Meet and Train’ and ‘Sportstaster’ teenage girls programme, enabled more girls and women to participate in sport and physical activity as these group based programmes were developed to cater for the needs and requirements of local women at a pace and level that they were comfortable with (Irish Sports Council, SPEAK Report, 2011).

2.9.2 Women’s Sport Foundation & Brighton Declaration

In England the Women’s Sport Foundation (WSF) was set up in 1985 with the aim to *“promote the interests of all women in and through sport and to gain equal opportunities and options for all women”* (White, 2003, p.38). The foundation consisted of women who worked in sport and who had a concern for the equality of women’s sport in the UK (White, 2003). Many of the members involved in this organisation were influential in policy development and in 1993 the first women in sport policy was developed by the Sports Council. The policy stated;

“Sports development is about ensuring that pathways and structures are in place to enable people to learn basic movement skills, participate in sports of their choice, develop their competence and performance, and reach levels of excellence. Sports equality is about fairness in sport, equality of access, recognising inequalities and taking steps to redress them. It is about changing the structure and culture of sport to ensure it becomes equally accessible to everyone in society whatever their age, race, gender or level of ability” (Sports Council, 1993 as cited in White, 2003, p. 39).

This policy led the way for Women in Sport initiatives and was the pathway for many women to find equality and fairness in sport and physical activity, *“the WSF has done a tremendous amount to keep the campaign for women’s sport constantly alive; to stimulate interest in women’s sport; to nurture talent; to educate and inform”* (Hargreaves, 1994, p.288).

The Brighton Declaration (1994) is an example of an international movement to address the imbalance that women face in sport. In 1994, the British Sports Council invited 280 delegates from 82 countries to the first international conference on Women in Sport. These delegates included governmental and non-governmental organisations, Olympic Committees, international sports federations, along with research and educational representatives. The main aim of the conference was to address issues that women face in their participation in sport and ways to overcome imbalance and discrimination that may exist in many societies. The conference established international strategies with the hope of all governmental and non-governmental organisations adopting these strategies in their own countries thus enabling a shared international approach to the development and sustainability of Women in Sport. The international conferences on Women in Sport takes place on a regular basis. The sixth International Working Group conference took place in Finland in June 2014. This conference enabled delegates to share information regarding successful Women in Sport programmes and discuss continuing issues that are impacting on further success (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2014).

2.9.3 Bottom up approach

While governmental and organisational influence on Women in Sport development is vital to ensure that strategies, procedures and funding are in place to address participation issues, it is often the programmes themselves at local level that really attract, or sometimes deter women from engaging in activities. There are many examples across the world which showcase specific programmes that encourage women to get involved in sport and physical activity. The following examples highlight a range of different activities that can encourage women of different ages and socioeconomic backgrounds to engage in sport and physical activity. These examples are important as they highlight that sport can impact on all women regardless of age, income, social status and ability and showcase that sport and physical activity is important to all. These example outlines how targeted programmes that cater for the needs of women can be successfully developed and delivered in a community setting.

2.9.4 Flora Mini Marathon

In Ireland the Flora Mini Marathon is an event that engages women from all across the country to take part in a mass participation event. This event provides women with a goal to train towards and enables them to set aims and objectives to achieve. Lane, Murphy & Bauman (2008) researched the impact that the Flora Mini-Marathon had on the physical activity behaviours of women. In this study approximately eleven thousand participants were asked to complete a survey regarding their physical activity levels two months prior to the mini-marathon event. The researchers followed this with an additional survey to monitor participant physical activity levels six months after the event. Over two thousand of the same participants responded to both surveys and therefore only the matched analysis was used to assess physical activity levels post event. When comparing the perceived physical activity levels of the mini marathon participants to the SLAN [Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes and Nutrition] survey, the researchers found that 76% of the mini marathon participants categorised themselves as having moderate to high activity levels compared to 69% of the SLAN survey. This indicated that the mini marathon activity encouraged more women to get involved in sport and physical activity and for many it increased the amount of physical activity they engaged in. However, the researchers found that physical activity levels began to drop six months after the event and therefore suggested that an event or target is essential when motivating women to continue to engage in regular physical activity (Lane, Murphy & Bauman, 2008).

They also reported that women who compete in this event tended to participate again and often trained at a higher level for subsequent events. The study showed that women are more likely to train in groups and close to home and therefore indicated a need for community centred training opportunities. The researchers also found that motivating factors resulting in participation in the mini-marathon were not always health related. Some were motivated to take part for physical activity, others for a challenge and some participated as a means of raising money for charity. The authors suggested *“linking physical activity participation to non-health or fitness-related outcomes, which contribute to the greater good may hold potential”* (Lane, Murphy & Bauman, 2008, p.11). However, the second survey did find that six months after the mini-marathon the numbers participating in physical activity had dropped and therefore stressed the need to ensure that additional events and challenges are put in place to encourage and motivate women to continue to train and stay physically active.

2.9.5 Young Women's Healthy Living project

In Scotland the Underground Young Women's Healthy Living project was set up by the Rock Trust in October 2008. This programme aimed to encourage women from the homeless community to engage in sport and physical activity. The programme employed two project workers to develop 10-week programmes that introduced women to different forms of physical activity. The programme enabled women to provide feedback on activities they felt did and did not work. They highlighted that activities that provided childcare or included their children were successful as they catered for their childcare needs. Activities such as gardening, streetdance, boxercise and trampolining were flagged as successful activities. This programme found that even though women were struggling to secure and maintain accommodation they could still incorporate physical activity into their lives thus catering for their health and physical well-being (The Rock Trust, 2009). A programme review conducted by Pollard in conjunction with Big Lottery Fund Research (2009) revealed that engaging with participants and discovering their needs and interests and allowing them be part of programme planning has resulted in a proactive programme. The evaluation of this programme also highlighted by providing free crèche facilities this programme increased and sustained participation levels in activities (Pollard, 2009).

2.9.6 Empowering Women and Girls through Sports Initiative/ female role models

In America, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has developed a programme entitled '*Empowering Women and Girls through Sports Initiative*'. This global programme was established in February 2012 with the aim to encourage women and girls from around the world to get involved in sport. The programme pairs American sports professionals, coaches and administrators with women from communities across the world. Many of these communities would be classed as disadvantaged communities or underserved communities and would often have little or no access to sport and physical activity. One participant on the programme came from a west central region of Pakistan where educating women was discouraged and recreational sports for females were non-existent. As this particular participant had a love of sport she was given the opportunity to attend university in America where she completed a Master's Degree and in Health and Physical Education. She is now working as a Director of Physical Education at a College for girls in the US. She hopes that her journey and development will motive others in her region to take every opportunity possible to ensure that they can get the most out of their lives;

“I want to be the eyes for all those who cannot see the things I will see. I want to be the role model that people deserve. I want to convince them and motivate them to take initiative and be confident. In my country, people are scared. They are defeated. If I can take these steps, we can learn to move without hesitation or reservation. My movement can give hope to others and cause them to be brave. It will show them what is possible”. (Mehwish, 2014, website)

Another aspect of this programme allows the sports professionals to share their sporting stories with leaders from across the world and encourage them to implement programmes to cater for the needs of women and girls in their own communities. During the programme the sports professionals also get an opportunity to travel to the local communities and meet the girls and women in person. While in the local communities the sports professionals have a chance to demonstrate their sporting skills and interact with the local girls and women to discuss issues that may be preventing them from becoming involved in sport. The final aspect of the initiative involves bringing young athletes and coaches to the United States for two weeks where they can experience participating in sports activities, but also take part in group discussions regarding issues that may affect girls from participating in sport and physical activity and to talk about the benefits that physical activity can have on the lives of girls and women. This programme is based upon women role models encouraging girls and women to become active and showcase the success that sport and physical activity can have on the lives of women throughout the world (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2013). Research on the success of this programme is limited but detailed blogs and inserts from the girls and women involved in this programme suggests that this initiative has had an impact on women’s lives both physically and personally.

2.9.7 Additional programmes that influence women to become physically active

Another example of Women in Sports initiatives include, ‘On the Move’ programme (Fenton, Binder, Kopelow, & Viviani, 1994). This Canadian programme provides female only, fun filled activities that cater for the needs of non-active girls and women in Canada. It aims to increase the numbers participating in recreation sport and physical activity.

In Ireland, the National Governing Bodies (NGB’s) of sport are working hard to create pathways for women to join their clubs and organisations. Many NGB’s have dedicated Women in Sport Development Officers who promote sport and inform women how to get involved in different sporting activities and organisations.

“Sports development is a process whereby interest and desire to take part may be created in those who are currently indifferent to the message of sport; or by which those not now taking

part, but well disposed, may be provided with appropriate opportunities to do so; or by which those currently taking part may be enabled to do so with meaningful frequency and greater satisfaction, thus enabling participants at all levels to achieve their full potential” (Sports Council, NW, 1991:3)

An example of sport development includes Triathlon Ireland who hosts national workshops to encourage women of all abilities to join triathlon clubs (Triathlon Ireland, 2014). This approach to engaging more women to become physically active is new and further research is needed to establish whether a Sport Development Officer approach to attracting more women to sport and physical activity has been successful.

A number of research papers have suggested that as women grow older they tend to move away from team sports and either drop out of sports altogether or move towards individual activities (Fahey, Layte, and Gannon, 2004). However, in a study carried out by McLeod (2013) entitled *Mothers’ Physical Activity Experiences Participating in Team Sports*, it was found that the nine volunteers who took part in this study reported positive aspects with regards to being involved in a team activity. The study evaluated experiences under four themes 1) positive team experience, 2) emotions, 3) strategies for overcoming time constraints and 4) role modelling/ encouraging others. It found that engaging in physical activity with social interaction was an important element in attracting women to the activity. It was also highlighted that the experience of positive emotions such as pride and satisfaction/ achievement was another way for mothers to enjoy physical activity. Importantly the research found *“being an active role model was deemed important by the mothers because it encouraged their families to be more active together. The mothers liked that their children got to see them play a sport and be active”* (McLeod, 2013, p.2). The study also found that being a role model extended outside of the family setting as they felt that by them being more active and talking to their peers about their experiences it encouraged some of their friends to become more active.

2.10 Physical activity initiatives for women from disadvantaged communities

While literature suggests that there is a need to increase physical activity for women in disadvantaged communities (Kavanagh, Goller, King, Jolley, Crawford, & Turrell, 2005; Withall, Jago & Fox, 2011) there is little evidence available of programmes that specifically target this group with programmes focussing on either women or on disadvantaged communities rather than both.

StreetGames UK is one such organisation that specifically target women from disadvantaged communities. It was set up in 2007 and since its conception has developed a range of activities to encourage people from disadvantaged communities to engage in sport and physical activity (Streetgames UK). In 2011 the Active Women Project began with the aim of getting more women of 16-24 years of age involved in sport and physical activity. The programme encourages women to join local clubs and enables them to participate in activities such as cycling, streetdance, netball, aerobics, volleyball and football. The initiative provides local clubs with funding for equipment and enables coaches and volunteers to attend training courses. The programme also acts as a link between women and local clubs and youth groups by providing them with contact information for their desired activity. To date the programme has resulted in over 580 women participating in the programme on a regular basis with over 75 different activities to attract participants (Active Women Project, 2013).

In Northern Ireland a community sports initiative entitled 'Active Lifestyle Project' was set up to encourage 'hard to reach' participants to engage in physical activity. This programme did not specifically target women from disadvantaged communities but due to the range of activities available, it subsequently engaged members of this target group. It was reported that 49% of 'Active Lifestyle' participants were female and 61% of the 34,309 participants lived in disadvantaged communities (Pollard, 2009). Similar initiatives were developed in Wales and Scotland and although these programmes encouraged both women and men from disadvantaged communities to participate, the study did not elaborate on how many women from disadvantaged communities actually took part (Pollard, 2009).

The 'Link 2B Active' programme enables people who are in receipt of unemployment benefit or who cannot afford gym membership to use sports facilities and leisure centres at a reduced rate. This is not specifically a disadvantaged sports initiative but does cater for those who are unemployed. This programme encourages people who may not be able to afford gym membership rates to avail of a cheaper option, thus allowing them to remain physically active. This programme was developed by the South County Dublin Sports Partnership and to date has been implemented in most counties in Ireland through the Local Sport Partnerships (Sligo Sports Partnership, 2014).

In Limerick, Sports Development Officers have been employed to ensure the needs of the community are being met and that sport and physical activity is available to all. A number of

programmes have been developed through the Limerick Sports Partnerships to ensure that women in disadvantaged communities have an opportunity to engage in physical activity. Three examples of such programmes are provided here.

In 2008 the Moyross Gym was open to the public, however within the first few weeks it was noted that women were not attending the gym, even though they suggested that they would like to. It was discovered that many of the women felt intimidated by the number of males using the gym and felt out of place. To ensure that women had an opportunity to use this local facility, women only hours were put in place. This enabled women to use the gym at a time that suited them and in an environment that they felt comfortable.

Local facilities across many disadvantaged communities of Limerick engaged in community fitness classes which saw qualified instructors using local facilities to conduct classes such as Zumba, circuits, aerobics and yoga. The classes were at a reduced rate and were open to all. The programme encouraged local women and women who were not from the area to attend thus enabling interaction from difference social groups and communities.

A number of running events were held in disadvantaged communities. This enabled people who were not from the area where the training took place to experience the area and gave local people an event to train for. A number of women's 'Meet and Train' groups were developed in a lead up to these running events. (Limerick Sports Partnership, 2014)

These specific programmes were developed as a result of consultation between the Sports Development Officers and local women and were developed as a means to meet the needs of the target group.

2.11 Community Sports Development

It is clear that the success and sustainability of any physical activity programme lies in the acceptance of the community to engage in the activity. If they believe in the message the programme is promoting and feel that they have been consulted with to ensure that the activity is tailored to suit their needs then they may be more likely to attend. Also, if they are given a certain amount of ownership over their programme it could lead to an increase in participation levels as they may see it as 'their' programme instead of an organisation running a programme in their community.

The involvement of community members in the implementation of sports programmes and interventions is vital to ensuring its success. Vail (2007), Craig (2007) and Skinner, Zakus & Cowell (2008) all suggest that traditional sports programmes that are introduced through ‘off-the-shelf’ initiatives do not work as they do not evaluate what the community truly needs. A ‘one programme fits all’ approach to sports development has led to the roll out of short term programmes that have very little sustainability in the community;

“Community development is the strengthening of social resources and processes in a community by developing those contacts, relationships, networks, agreements and activities outside the household that residents themselves identify will make their locality a better place in which to live and work”. (Thomas, 1995 cited in Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008. p. 256)

Community development involves consulting with key stakeholders prior to the implementation of a particular programme and ensuring that the community believes in the message that the programme possesses. Bolton, Fleming & Elias (2008) state *“a fundamental facet of developing a sense of community belonging relies on focussing on individual preferences as a way of attracting people to the service”* (p.101).

The opinions, reflections and observations of local people are vital when developing any community based programme and it is essential that community members are consulted with in order to understand their needs and desires. A recent study conducted by the Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sports (PEPAYs) Research Centre entitled *‘Our Words Don’t Matter’* (McEvoy, MacPhail & Enright, 2012) examined the perception of physical activity with youths in the Limerick Regeneration Area and gauged its importance in the lives of the youths in question. The study involved 40 young people who resided in the Limerick Regeneration area. The group was divided into subgroups of approx. 6 people and asked to participate in two separate interviews, which were conducted in a focus group setting. The aim of the first interview was to get a clearer understanding of each individual and find out what their interests were and their understanding of physical activity, while the second interview delved into their physical activity habits and aspects that they felt could hinder or support physical activity participation. The study found that the influence of family and friends had huge bearings on ones willingness to get involved in activities and *“although physical activity is a priority for some, family, friends and social connectedness are the highest priorities for young people”* (McEvoy, MacPhail & Enright, 2012, p.6). The group indicated that supportive school environments, family members, peers and community figures were all

motivating factors to participate in physical activity but barriers such as lack of knowledge, friends not taking part, lack of facilities, lack of physical activity options both in school and in the community and the use of drugs and smoking were highlighted as reasons for not participating in physical activity. The study highlighted the importance of allowing young people to *‘have a voice in decision making’* and stated that the delivery of physical activity programmes needs to be more varied and based on the requirements of the community thus creating an environment that allows a range of individuals with differing desires to participate in physical activity. Although this study is based around the opinions of youths the researchers believes that similar outcomes would be reiterated by women living in similar communities and thus considers this element to be vital in the success of physical activity programmes in local communities.

The importance of Community Sports Development (CSD) was also highlighted in a case study researched by Bolton, Fleming and Elias (2008). They examined the impact CSD had on the delivery of leisure and physical activity programmes in Blaenau Gwent, an area of Wales that is considered to be socially disadvantaged. They highlighted that CSD was based on a ‘bottom-up’ approach and involved the *“engagement of citizens in order to enhance community development”* (Bolton, Fleming and Elias, 2008) With the aid of five professional practitioners the researchers investigated the impact that a bottom up approach had to sports development compared to a top down approach. The study investigated the impacts that CSD had on the community as well as the service providers and they found *“leisure provision can enhance the quality of life of ‘otherwise disadvantage groups’ through cultural policies leading to some form of enhanced autonomy”* (Bolton, Fleming and Elias, 2008, p. 97).

This study also established that it was imperative that time was spent assessing the needs of the target group and community members needed to be included in the decision making process prior to the implementation of a specific targeted sports programmes. The researchers also recommend that community sports development is not solely about the worker and what they want to achieve but instead needs to take into account the environmental and personal influences that incorporate the target group. (Bolton, Fleming and Elias, 2008).

Partington & Totten (2012) also carried out a review of the impact that community development had on programmes implemented by Rochdale Community Sport. Their study examined *‘what contribution community development makes to community involvement and subsequently community empowerment’*. They viewed the study from the community

members' perspective and found that by allowing the community to have an input in the process of community development they were more willing to engage with the organisation. Rochdale Community Sport encouraged its members to approach them regarding programmes that the community members wanted and thus facilitated initiatives that were relevant to the needs of the community. The research found *“tenants overwhelmingly endorsed this approach and confirmed that they felt consulted by project staff, involved in the decision-making and able to access support at a level they are comfortable with, as and when needed”* (Partington & Totten, 2012, p. 36).

These studies and many more have undoubtedly indicated that community involvement is quintessential to successful sports development. Vail (2007) suggested that along with community input it is paramount that a key driver within the community is found. This person should be from the area, have links with other community leaders and have a strong belief in the benefits of the programme. Vail carried out a study on the impact of promoting tennis using a community model that focused on three key elements: identifying a community champion, developing collaborative partnerships and delivering quality sport programmes. The study focused on eighteen communities across Canada and found;

“A catalyst for community development is an individual or group who believes change is possible and is willing to take the first steps needed to create interest and support. The individual or group believes in the power of people to build healthy communities and is well connected and respected. This catalyst is needed to identify appropriate community partners and to initiate action in the community” (Vail, 2007 p. 575).

While the community catalysts in this study were professional tennis players there is no reason why this position could not be held by a regular community member who believes in the benefits of sport and physical activity and actively promotes the health, social and educational values that physical activity could bring to the community.

2.12 Disadvantaged communities

Society can be divided into a range of social classes. It can be categorised according to income level and employment status of its population. Also, it can be evaluated by crime levels and the frequency of anti-social behaviour and it can be determined by the age of the population and the geographical location of the community. Regardless of social status physical activity programmes need to address the realities that exist within the target group. Therefore factors such as time, cost, location and physical requirements of a programme will have a bearing on the numbers of women who attend physical activity sessions. Whilst there is an abundant

amount of research regarding physical activity in different social classes (Huggins, 2008; Huan, 2008), emphasis is placed on the analysis of sport and physical activity in disadvantaged communities;

“Disadvantage, deprivation and social exclusions are all terms used to describe communities suffering acute social problems such as: increasing population densities, low socio-economic status, high rates of chronic disease, high levels of migration and multiculturalism and young people at risk of exclusion/ disaffection from society” (Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008, p. 264).

2.13 Limerick Regeneration

In Limerick, there are a number of communities that have been classed as disadvantaged and are noted for having high crime and anti-social behavioural problems. At one point Limerick had the highest murder rate per capita in Western Europe with a ratio of seven homicides per one hundred thousand population, compared to the next highest (Glasgow) which reported five homicides per one hundred thousand population (Irish Independent, 2012). Limerick has been associated with the nickname ‘Stab City’ and has been tarnished by the national media for its prevalence in gang-related feuds. In recent years, national strategies have been put in place to address public concern regarding crime rates and on the 15th June 2007 the Regeneration Agency in Limerick was set up by the Irish Government. The purpose of the Regeneration Agency is to oversee the implementation of regeneration programmes in four estates [Moyross, Southill, Ballinacurra Weston and St Mary Park] in Limerick City (Power and Burns, 2011) and provide;

“Safe and sustainable communities where people of all ages enjoy a good quality of life, a decent home and feel a strong pride of place. Well serviced and attractive neighbourhoods will be fully integrated with the social, economic and cultural life of Limerick” (Limerick Regeneration, 2013. p. 16).

The Limerick Regeneration has placed particular emphasis on the physical, social and economic elements of Regeneration. To date there has been little evidence of physical or structural developments within these communities and it has been seen as a very slow process. However, significant emphasis has been placed on promoting social regeneration, particularly with children, youth and family support, education and training, health and well-being, neighbourhoods and people, and sport (Power and Burns, 2011).

2.14 Characteristic of disadvantaged communities

According to Watson, Lunn, Quinn & Russell (2012) there are six areas of disadvantage which include education, labour market, participation, unemployment, social class and lack of access to a car. Studies report that being socially disadvantaged has the same impact on people not participating in physical activity as gender and age does and people who have both a financial and educational disadvantage are at an even higher risk of inactivity (Lunn, 2006). Research has also shown that people from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have been brought up in a 'sporty' household, are generally less healthy and do not own their own cars (Lunn, 2006). All contribute to the probability that individuals will not participate in sport or physical activity.

While disadvantaged communities can be seen in many communities across different societies, the 'Mother of all Sport' study highlights particular characteristics and barriers associated with the urban disadvantaged. The key characteristics of these communities are;

“High rates of unemployment and dependency, with low household income. A disproportionate number of families are lone parents. The local environment is bleak and local facilities and amenities inadequate or non-existent. To further complicate the picture, crime levels may be high. If drug abuse is extensive, outsiders, including service agency providers, may be reluctant to enter the area at certain times, thereby isolating the community even further from the economic and social life of wider society” (Irish National Teachers Organisation (I.N.T.O.), 2004, p.3).

While not all citizens within a specific area will necessarily experience all aspects of urban disadvantage, each characteristic could create a further barrier to participation in sport and physical activity and therefore each trait must be examined individually.

2.15 Barriers to participation in urban disadvantaged communities

As indicated previously there are a number of barriers that prevent women from taking part in sport and physical activity. However women from disadvantaged communities may be faced with additional barriers due to economic, social, educational and family issues. A study carried out by StreetGames UK entitled '*Mobilising Young Women and Girls from Disadvantaged Communities*' (2011) evaluated barriers to sport and physical activity. They found that the main barriers included cost, confidence, time, transport, facilities, childcare, role models, coaches, clothing, equipment and personal safety.

Unemployment, social welfare dependency and low household income can have a huge bearing on the amount of disposable income a person has and can contribute to their participation levels in sport and physical activity. In the Limerick Regeneration area 30% of people aged between 25-64yrs are either unemployed or looking after their home (Barrett, Walker & O' Leary, 2008). For this population it may not be feasible to spend money on activities such as sport and physical activity and therefore if there is a cost associated with an activity it could discourage them from attending the session.

Being a lone parent can have both financial and childcare implications on participation. In the Limerick Regeneration area 33.5% of women between the age of 25-64yrs are lone parents (Barrett, Walker & O' Leary, 2008). A recent study on lone parents found “.... 16.4% of households headed by a lone parent were living in consistent poverty compared to 6.9% of the general population, and 56% were living with material deprivation more than double the average for the State” (National Women's Council of Ireland, 2011, p.1). While it is clear that lone parents may not have an ample amount of disposable income, there is also the added burden of insuring that they have adequate childcare in place to allow them to take part in physical activity programmes. A report ‘*Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation*’ (McLoughlin, 2009), carried out on behalf of the Women's Centres Regional Partnership, found that the greatest barrier to participation for women in disadvantaged communities was the lack of appropriate childcare. Over the past number of years many strategies have been put in place to help address childcare issues including the Community Childcare Subvention programme (Pobal, 2014) and the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (Citizens Information, 2013). However, these facilities are only open at certain times and therefore it is important to ensure when developing a programme that childcare issues are considered and where possible programmes take place at times that can incorporate the operational hours of the local childcare facility.

Transport may also be a barrier to participation if programmes are carried out away from the local community. In the Limerick Regeneration area 57.25% of the population do not have access to a car (Barrett, Walker & O' Leary, 2008). In a study carried out to investigate the individual, social and physical environment determinants of physical activity, it was found that as the distance to a facility doubled, the use of the facility fell by more than half (Giles- Corti & Donovan, 2002). Using local facilities and amenities can attract women to physical activity programmes although safety within certain communities may also be a further barrier. A study

entitled '*Feeling Safe in Our Community*' found "*despite a significant reduction in the crime rate, residents in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston continue to exhibit elevated fears of being victim of crime and / or social behaviour in their estates*" (Power & Barnes, 2011, p.73).

Power and Burns (2011) also suggest that public grounds and pathways are often areas where anti-social behaviour can occur and many residents feel distressed or nervous about using these areas. They found that the loss of 'streetlife' is having an effect on the community as people no longer feel safe integrating with others on the street or allowing their children to play outside their homes. They suggest the use of CCTV cameras and a greater Gardaí presence could assist more local residents to reclaim public and communal spaces. In the context of sport and physical activity it is important to address any safety issues that may exist and ensure that all sessions are carried out in areas that are safe, well lit and easily accessible. That is, people should not have to go through any dangerous areas to access the facility.

Family influence could also be perceived as a barrier for some as "*those born into more disadvantaged families may be less likely to have sporty parents and so be less likely to play sport themselves*" (Lunn, 2006, p.37).

Many of the barriers experienced by women in disadvantaged communities are interlinked and are unlikely to change if only one issue is addressed (McLaughlin, 2009). Therefore it is imperative to consider all barriers and address them as a whole. It has been suggested when planning activities that developers should consider sessions that are low cost and where childcare is taken into consideration. The programme should be held at a suitable time and be associated with good recruitment and retention. Sessions should focus on fun and socialising and emphasise the potential to meet new people. Sessions should also be clearly branded 'beginners' and advertised in a way that the target group will be notified about the activity (Withall, Jago & Fox, 2011).

2.16 Enablers to participation in urban disadvantaged communities

While the previous section outlined the barriers preventing women from participating in sport and physical activity it is important to note that there are also motivating elements that can attract women from urban disadvantaged communities to participate in physical activity programmes. Most women are aware of the health benefits associated with sport and physical activity (Lane, Murphy & Bauman A, 2008) and often women are motivated to participate for weight loss and fitness reasons. However, Withall, Jago & Fox (2011) found that women

responded more favourably to programmes that encouraged fun, enjoyment and socialisation. From this finding they reported if weight loss and fitness was incorporated in a programme that was fun and enjoyable it would result in higher participation levels. This information is vital as it enables practitioners to set out programmes that cater for the needs and desires of the target audience.

2.17 Conclusion

By exploring the benefits of physical activity and assessing the needs of a particular target group, physical activity programmes can be developed to incorporate the aforementioned elements and aspects of sport and community development. It is envisaged that this proposed research project will highlight the need for additional physical activity programmes for women in disadvantaged communities and, with the aid of community input, develop a sustainable physical activity programme that benefits the health of the participants and creates an environment that will support the role of physical activity in social capital and community development;

“The literature is clear that community development programmes are not ‘quick fixes’ for entrenched social problems. Effective programmes take time to mature. However, given strong and not over-complicated structure, adequate resources, good governance and management, careful design, high-quality delivery standards and proper monitoring, evaluation and feedback, they can achieve important positive changes for local communities across a range of outcomes” (Bamber, Owens, Schonfeld, & Ghate, 2009, p.9).

Chapter 3 will outline the methodology and related methods that were undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of a physical activity programme for women in disadvantaged communities.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

It is imperative that the needs of women are being met when it comes to sport and physical activity. If sports professionals fail to evaluate why women attend physical activity sessions and examine what women want to get out of sessions it may be difficult to attract them to a programme. If programmes fail to recognise factors that encourage participation, physical activity sessions will remain a short term and unsustainable entity (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006).

This research examined the impact the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme had on the physical activity levels of women from disadvantaged communities. The chapter discusses the use of a qualitative framework and action research in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme and provides detailed information on the practical approaches taken throughout the programme. This chapter also examines the use of qualitative methodology in data collection and discusses the impact that questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, researcher observation field notes and social media had on the implementation and evaluation of this programme.

3.2 Qualitative framework

Qualitative research refers to “*the way in which people being studied understand and interpret their social reality*” (Bryman, 1988:8) and therefore is paramount when assessing the impact that community based programmes have on local participants. While quantitative research can determine the provenance of a certain phenomenon, qualitative research can enable the researcher to examine in more detail why this phenomenon occurs as the study can be evaluated in its natural environment using information people bring to the research (Snape & Spencer, 2003). This approach to data collection allows for a variety of perspectives as it seeks information from a number of sources including participants, the coach and community members (Flick, 2009). The inclusion of the researcher’s reflections and observations make up an important element of this research project and aspects such as researcher’s reflections, feelings and frustrations become valuable data (Flick, 2009). To ensure that researcher reflections and observations were included in the evaluation of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme the researcher kept a detailed journal that highlighted both the positive and negative

aspects of each session and often included references to emotions and feelings that the researcher experienced throughout the programme.

This project examined the development of a community based physical activity programme through a constructivist approach and allowed both the researcher and the participants to engage in an investigation to determine different methods that could be implemented to ensure the programme's success. A constructivist approach allows participants' the opportunity for *"concrete, contextually meaningful experience through which they can search for patterns; raise questions; and model, interpret, and defend their strategies and ideas"* (Greene, 2005, p.112).

This constructivist approach was valid and an important aspect in the development of the 'Mother of all Sport' programme. The researcher believed that a collective approach to community sports development would be beneficial to all involved and therefore did not rely on an individual to make suggestions but instead required feedback from all members. This programme was based on the needs and desires of the groups and therefore it was imperative that all groups were given an opportunity to provide feedback. This feedback was acquired through interviews, focus groups, field notes, questionnaires and social media.

These aspects will be discussed in more detailed in a later section of this chapter.

3.3 Study Design

The study of the 'Mother of all Sport' programme relied heavily on action research as a means of accessing and evaluating the success of the programme. Action research *"seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities"* (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 1). It was believed that use of action research would provide *"a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling the readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles"* (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.181).

3.4 Action Research

Action research is a powerful process that enables a researcher to address a concern and implement procedures that address these issues. McNiff & Whitehead (2006) describe action research as continuous reflective cycle that requires a researcher to observe, reflect, act, evaluate and modify an action to ensure the best possible results are obtained. In the case of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme the researcher highlighted that there was a need to get more women in disadvantaged communities involved in sport and physical activity. The researcher developed a programme that provided a specific activity for the women in these target areas and observed how the group responded to the programme. The researcher evaluated how the programme progressed over time and modified the activity to suit the needs and desires of the women e.g. participation levels were highest during tag rugby sessions and the majority of women reported a desire to concentrate more on this activity compared to basketball. As a result the activities in year two were altered to address these issues. These modifications did not suggest that the programme failed but instead provided a more realistic pathway in ensuring that the overall aim of the programme was achieved i.e. in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme it did not necessarily matter what sport the participants were involved in as long as they continued to be physically active.

Throughout the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme the researcher not only relied on action research to evaluate the programme through a researcher perspective but also heavily depended on the women involved in the programme to engage in their own action research to ensure that the programme met their needs. Meyer (2000) stated *“participation is fundamental to action research: it is an approach which demands that participants perceive the need to change and are willing to play an active part in the research and the change process”* (p.178). Throughout the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme it was vital that the participants were aware that the programme was based on their needs and that their feedback would ensure that the programme was delivered in a way that was beneficial to them.

Examples of methods used to collect participations reflections are discussed in more detail in the data collection section of this chapter.

3.5 Participants

Participants in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme were women over the age of eighteen years who lived in Limerick City. Each team consisted of approximately ten to twenty players. As this programme involved encouraging women to connect with a specific team, players were allowed to join throughout the programme and therefore numbers fluctuated from the beginning of year one to the completion of year two. There was no long term obligation for women to commit to this programme. The programme was open to beginners and intermediate participants and particularly targeted women who had little to no experience participating in sport and physical activity. Initially participants were recruited through promotion of the programme in local primary schools. This programme was promoted in primary schools as it was felt that a number of the target group would see the information regarding this programme when they dropped off and collected their children from school. Posters and flyers were also distributed in community centres and local shops for the target audience to view. While the programme is entitled ‘The Mother of all Sport’ this programme was open to all women over the age of 18 and therefore did not exclude females who did not have children. Recruitment through face to face interaction between the researcher and potential participants was also possible, as some participants had participated in previous programmes developed the researcher. This previous connection allowed the researcher to approach women who were likely to engage in this type of activity. As the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme progressed many of the women took it upon themselves to promote the programme and recruit new participants thus creating an environment where both the researcher and the women were informing others of the activity. This resulted in a larger proportion of the population becoming aware of the existence of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme.

3.6 Research Setting

The ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme was designed, developed and implemented by the researcher as a means of addressing physical activity levels of women in disadvantaged communities . This new programme was supported by the Limerick Sport Partnership in conjunction with the Irish Sports Council’s Women in Sport Initiative. It is important to note through the role of Sports Development Officer the researcher had prior knowledge of physical activity programmes and activities going on in the specific communities. This information was vital and it enabled the researcher to assess the physical activity levels of the participants

through the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme and during additional physical activity sessions/programmes.

As the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme was developed by the research there was a degree in which the researcher may be considered to be biased in the endeavour to prove that this programme was successful in engaging more women from disadvantaged communities in sport and physical activity. However as stated in the following chapters there were a number of elements of the programme that did not work and therefore the researcher highlighted these as aspects to address to ensure further programmes could be more successful.

This programme focused on women aged eighteen years and over from disadvantaged communities in Limerick City. According to the 2011 Census, Limerick City has a population of approximately 29,159 females (Central Statics Office, 2011). The programme consisted of four groups that were specifically recruited to participate in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme. They represented different elements of disadvantaged areas. One group had participated in this type of activity before and represented a specific community; another group also represented a community but had little experience participating in this type of activity. The third group did not represent a community, while the fourth group were women who attended a local training course and did not represent a community. Throughout the majority of the programme the four groups (see below) participated in training sessions separately and did not interact with each other. The only time groups were required to amalgamate was during the ‘Mother of all Sport’ tournaments. Their initial physical activity levels were assessed by the researcher on the first evening and these were noted in the researcher’s observation notes.

Group 1: This group was the biggest group and consisted of approx. twenty women from the age of twenty to forty five years. The majority of the group had children and were married or in long term relationships. The group came from a designated Regeneration area in Limerick City and all their practical sessions took place in local facilities. A large number of the group had participated in previous physical activity programmes and therefore a strong relationship already existed between some group members and the researcher. This group was highly motivated and keen to get involved in physical activity.

Initial physical activity level – approx. half the group had participated in previous physical activity programme. Prior to the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme the majority of the group had not participated in team sports. Of those who had participated in team sports they did so

during school and therefore it had been a number of years since involvement. This group did a lot of walking and would be considered moderately active.

Group 2: This group consisted of approx. fifteen women from twenty to thirty eight years. The majority had children and there was a mixture between single mothers and mothers who had the support of a partner. This group was from a designated Regeneration area in Limerick City and similarly all their practical sessions took place in local facilities. While some members of this group had participated in previous physical activity programmes, this was the first time that many had an opportunity to get involved in a team activity. While there was a relationship between the participants and the researcher, it was not as strong as the relationship between group one and therefore they were at a different level of development. The group were willing to get involved in physical activity but had concerns, therefore elements such as trust needed to be developed between group and the researcher to ensure that this team would continue in the programme.

Initial physical activity level – the majority of this group would be considered sedentary to low physical activity levels. Four participants had participated in previous physical activity programmes with the researcher. For the majority of the group walking was their only form of physical activity.

Group 3: This was the newest group and consisted of approx. eleven women between the ages of twenty six and forty years. Some members of this group had children but it was not clear what their relationship status was, as this information had not been communicated. The researcher believed that this was due to the fact that a personal relationship between the participants and the researcher had not been previously developed. The majority of this group were in employment and therefore were the only group to meet in the evening time. This group did not have a tie or alliance to any specific group or community and therefore carried out their training sessions in a neutral venue. This group was highly motivated and took it upon themselves to recruit new members.

Initial physical activity level – This group had not participated in previous physical activity programmes with the researcher. The majority indicated walking/ jogging was their only source of physical activity. They were not used to participating in team sports. Many saw this programme as a means of increasing fitness levels and engaging in more physical activity.

Group 4: This was the youngest group and consisted of approx. eight women between the ages of eighteen and twenty six years. Members of this group were part of a FAS course (an initiative to provide further education through an Irish national training and employment authority) that educated people about community sport and art programmes. This group had minimal contact with the researcher as they learned the skills and rules of each sport through a FAS course. A personal relationship between the group and the researcher was limited and seen more on a professional level as the researcher had delivered training courses to this group on previous occasions. This group did not have ties to one specific area and was made up of women from different communities across Limerick City. There was a financial incentive for this group to attend their FAS course but no obligation for them to participate in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme. For many, this was the first time that they had an opportunity to participate in a team sport.

Initial physical activity level – this group had the highest physical activity levels as they were involved in a sport and community development FAS training course. The group were required to do regular gyms and participate in weekly sports training courses. Only two members of this group were involved in team sports.

While all groups had similarities it was the differences such as community ties, personal relationships and motivations that would shape this programme and enhance the findings of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme. As previously stated this programme was open to beginners/intermediate players and therefore it primarily attracted women who were not considered ‘sporty’ but were looking for a means to increase fitness levels and socialise. They did not consider winning to be an important element for their participation.

3.7 Entrée

The groups recruited to participate in this programme were chosen due to the relationship that the researcher had with particular communities across the city. The researcher had previously worked within many of the communities and thus had access to participants, facilities and the support from community figures. As the researcher had four years’ experience working in designated disadvantaged communities it was noted that there was a need to develop a programme that catered for the physical activity needs of women over the age of eighteen years and therefore the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme was developed to accommodate this need.

Prior to the commencement of the programme a meeting was held with the researcher's Coordinator to discuss the feasibility of running this type of activity. On receiving the go ahead to run the programme a Sports Partnership planning template was drawn up (Appendix A). A meeting was set up with the researcher and her supervisor and an ethics proposal was formulated. On receiving clearance from the University Ethical Committee, posters (Appendix B) were designed and placed in specific community locations to promote the programme and provide details of training times and locations. Time was spent advertising the programme through direct conversation with interested participants, allowing for people to ask any questions about the programme and seek clarity on any issue they may have had. Posters were also given to School Liaison Officers and Community Development Officers as they also had direct contact with intended parties and thus could advertise the programme further.

During the first meeting with each group the researcher verbally explained and distributed information regarding the programme. This information highlighted the aims, objectives and outcomes of the programme and underlined the data collection protocols that were attached. Consent forms were circulated to each participant and they were asked to sign the form if they understood and were willing to participate in the programme. As the programme involved participants taking part in physical activity, all were asked to complete a physical activity readiness questionnaire (Appendix C), informing the researcher about the health of the group and highlighted any injuries and/or illnesses that could be affected by physical activity. Signed consent forms and completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher prior to the commencement of any physical activity.

3.8 Season Design – Year One

During the programme participants were asked to attend twenty seven practical sessions which were broken into three blocks of eight weeks and three tournaments. Each session consisted of one hour of physical activity. A different sport was introduced to the group during each block and they were divided as follows;

- Block 1 – Tag rugby (week 1 – week 8)
- Block 2 – Basketball (week 10 – week 18)
- Block 3 – Rounders (week 20 – week 28)

These sports were randomly chosen by the researcher as a means of engaging the group in 'team' activities. Even though the Irish Sports Monitor (2013) indicated that walking and

dancing were the most popular activities to engage women in sport and physical activity, the researcher wanted the groups to participate in team sports where they could work together as a team and compete against other groups. It was also envisaged by introducing team sports it would give women a chance to represent their communities in a sporting event. Between each block all groups competed in a tournament that showcased the skills they had learned in the previous weeks. The tournament was held in a neutral venue and involved all four teams.

3.9 Season Design – Year Two

Feedback from year one highlighted the groups desire to concentrate solely on tag rugby and therefore season two was altered to suit the requirements of the participants. Year two consisted of two blocks of eight week sessions that concentrated on the skills and rules of tag rugby. On completion of the second block of practical sessions all groups participated in a tag rugby tournament that was held in a neutral venue.

3.10 Practical Sessions

Initially all practical sessions were led by the researcher and conducted as follows (see Appendix D for example of session);

Table 3.1: Outline of practical session

| Phase | Activity | Time |
|----------------------|---|---------|
| Warm up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full body movement that prepared the group to take part in a medium to high intensity physical activity session. The majority of activities involved were fun children's games that got the group moving and having fun. | 10 mins |
| Ball Handling Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This aspect of the session worked on ball handling skills and concentration. During this section the researcher introduced team penalties if a person dropped the ball. The penalties involved some form of physical activity that enhanced physical fitness. | 10 mins |
| Skills and Rules | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing new sports specific skills and rules. As there are many rules involved in each games it was decided to break the sections down to avoid complicating the learning process | 20 mins |

| | | |
|-----------|--|---------|
| | thus ensuring that groups learned only one or two aspects of the game at a time. | |
| Match | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each week the groups introduced additional skills and rules to a match situation thus moving from an adapted match situation to eventually being able to participate in a full match situation. | 15 mins |
| Cool Down | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cool down activities were included to lower heart rate levels and aid in muscle recovery. This time enabled the coach/ researcher to assess each participant after the session and allowed the group time to provide feedback on the session and ask any question they may have had. | 5 mins |

All practical sessions took place in a venue and at a time that suited the group. All equipment used during the practical sessions was supplied by the researcher.

3.11 Group leaders/ Coaching courses

As the group developed and gained confidence in their knowledge of each sport the researcher encouraged members of each group to lead certain parts of the session. The aim of this section of the programme was to identify leaders in the groups and encourage them to take ownership over their sessions thus allowing the group to move away from a leader-centred programme to one that encouraged group leadership and interaction (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). The researcher was always present during this part of the programme and was available to give advice and correct any imperfections. To ensure that groups were adequately qualified to coach parts of the sessions they were given an option to attend sports specific coaching courses. These courses were run by instructors including Munster Rugby Development Officers and the Irish Sports Council. The courses were optional and groups were not obliged to attend. The courses were held in venues that were easily accessed by the groups and were free of charge to anyone who was part of the programme.

3.12 ‘Mother of all Sport’ Tournament

On completion of each block, participants took part in a tournament that showcased the skills they had learned during the practical sessions. A tournament timetable was developed which scheduled all teams to play each other in twenty minute matches, with the top two teams playing off in a tournament decider. The winning team received the ‘Mother of all Sport’ trophy which was engraved with the winning team name and were asked to display it in a venue that community members could see e.g. the local national school or community centre. The trophy was used throughout the programme and thus was returned prior to the next tournament.

3.13 Team colours and names

Each team was asked to pick a team colour to be used for jerseys and hoodies and would easily distinguish one team from another. Players were also asked to come up with a tag line for their team and thus be known as that team in the future. The purpose of this was to give the group ownership over their team and have an identity associated with each group. Participants were also asked to contribute €2 per week for eight weeks to cover the cost of buying the jerseys. Once the jerseys were paid for the groups no longer had to contribute money.

3.14 Data Collection

A number of methods of data collection were used throughout the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme. These included interviews, focus groups, researcher observation field notes and social media. The following section will examine each method in more detail.

3.15 Questionnaire

In order to ensure that the needs of the groups were being met, all participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire (Appendix E). This questionnaire evaluated what they deemed to be the most important reasons for taking part in a physical activity programme. Participants were given ten examples of reasons to take part and asked to rank them in order of importance, with one being the most important and ten being the least. Participants were given an option to articulate any additional reasons in a comment section at the bottom of the page. This questionnaire was important as it highlighted motivating factors that encouraged women to participate and set out guidelines for the programme.

3.16 Interviews

“Interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view” (Joy, 2007, p.349). The use of interviews as a means of gathering information was vital to ensure that the experiences of the participants were documented. Two interviews took place throughout the course of this programme. However it is important to note that there were a number of challenges associated with this type of data collection. Trust was a major issue for a number of the participants involved in this programme and many did not feel comfortable opening up to somebody they did not know. As ‘interviews one’ took place at the start of the programme a number of the participants did not have the opportunity to get to know the researcher and develop a level of trust. This lack of trust could have resulted in information being withheld by some participants. As the second interviews took place in year two it was felt that the participants knew the researcher and were more open to sharing information. Many of the women involved in this programme had experienced first-hand how recorded information could be used against them. There were some incidences where the media took statements out of context and made the women or their community’s look bad, as a result of this negative experience some of the women were apprehensive about being recorded when interviewed. The researcher had to reassure the participants that the information shared was for the purpose of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme and would not be shared with the media. The researcher also guaranteed that their names would not be shared and a pseudo name would be used to protect their anonymity.

3.16.1 Year one interviews: One member of groups two, three and four along with two members of group one, were asked to take part in individual interviews. It was decided to include two members of group one as the researcher had done previous programmes with members of this group and believed that it would be beneficial to gather information from a known and unknown source. Groups were asked to put their names forward if they were willing to participate in the interviews. If more than one person agreed to do the interviews names were placed in a hat and one was picked at random. The interviews were done on a one to one basis between the interviewee and the researcher. The interviews took place in a venue and at a time that suited each participant and took approximately seventy five minutes to complete all interviews. Each interviewee was asked the same questions (Appendix F) and their responses were recorded. The questions in the interview focused on four key areas which included;

- Thoughts and observations on the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme.
- The perception of women participating in sport.
- The promotion of sports programmes in their communities.
- The range of sport/physical activity programmes available in their communities both past and present.

3.16.2 Year two interviews: Three members of group one (including the two who had participated in year one) and three members of group three (including one member who had participated in year one) were asked to participate in interviews at the start of year two. It was decided to use participants from groups one and three as they represented two different backgrounds i.e. team one came from a community setting while team three did not have an alliance to a community and both represented different employment status as the majority of team three were in employment compared to a minority in team one. Again the interviews took place on a one to one basis with the researcher and were conducted in a venue and at a time that suited the interviewee. Each participant was asked the same questions (Appendix G) and their responses were recorded. Year two interviews were shorter than year one and lasted approximately thirty six minutes. The interviews for year two focused on the following areas:

- Observations on the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme.
- Changes in lifestyle due to participating in the programme.
- Promoting the programme to other people.

3.17 Focus groups

Focus groups not only rely on the response to the questions that the researcher asks but are led by the conversation and interactions that are generated between different groups (Kitzinger, 1995). Ethical issues in focus groups may occur as the information shared in the conversation are heard by all participants and therefore can limit the type of questions that the researcher can ask (Morgan, 1997). In this programme all participants who took part in ‘interview one’ were asked to attend a focus group discussion at the end of year one. This took place in a neutral venue at a time and day that suited the group. The same questions that were asked in the individual ‘interview one’ were asked in the focus group interview. As there was a representative from each group at the focus groups, participants were able to share their thoughts on similarities and differences in their responses to each question. The focus group interview lasted approximately forty minutes and involved five participants.

3.18 Researcher Observation Field Notes

Researcher observation field notes allow a researcher to use valuable data to highlight the impact that a programme has on participant's physical, social, and emotional setting. This form of data collection involves interacting with participants on a long term basis and documenting observations that occur as a result of participant's involvement in an activity. *"Participant observation involves not only gaining access to and immersing oneself in new social world but also producing written accounts and descriptions that bring versions of these worlds to others"*(Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011, p. 352). Researcher observational field notes were an integral part of this programme as it enabled the researcher to document the attitudes and participation levels of the group during all the practical sessions. Researcher observation field notes allowed for the reality of the situation to be clearly highlighted (Flick, 2009) and both the positive and negative aspects of each session were clearly outlined. All notes were taken directly after each session to avoid important information and reflections being omitted. A format was developed for the collection of researcher observation field notes and this format was used after all practical sessions for all groups. Researcher observation field notes also included information on additional physical activity sessions or events that groups took part in independently to the programme; including extra group sessions, new activities and mass participation events. During some of the sessions photographs were used to illustrate certain aspects of the programme and these along with the researcher observation field notes were used as data for the 'Mother of all Sport' programme.

3.19 Social Media/ Facebook

"Social media can help develop identities and aid in community building and while structured around a niche audience can have an impact beyond the target market" (Papacharissi, 2009). Through interaction with all groups the researcher found that social media, and in particular Facebook, was an important promotional and social tool for the participants involved in the programme. Dimovski & Paunova (2013) described Facebook as a *"powerful informative and communicational channel"* and this was true in the study of this programme as Facebook allowed the women to communicate and motivate all team members through one medium. It is important to note that the information was gained through team Facebook pages that were specifically set up for team members to post message to other team members. The messages were only seen by people the team accepted as being part of their community group and each team had a say in who was allowed access to their page. Team one and team two both set up a

team Facebook page and both invited the researcher to be part of these pages. Team three did not have a team facebook page and therefore the researcher could not gain as much insight into their perspectives about the programme. Some members of team three shared their love and admiration for the programme through their own personal Facebook pages. The researcher felt that it was not appropriate to use this information as ethical approval had not been sought to access and use such information.

This form of information sharing was successful as all team members could collectively view and respond to posts. It diminished the need for participants to go back and forward between team members when organising training sessions as all could view information at the same time. The cost of using Facebook was also considerably less compared to sending group text messages and therefore was a cheap form of communication between teams. The Irish Independent Newspaper (2013) reported that Ireland had the highest number of Facebook users compared to any other English speaking country. It found that 63% of Irish adults had Facebook accounts and in one month 2.25million people used Facebook (Weckler, 2013). These statistics showed that Facebook was a prominent form of communication in Ireland and as a large number of people used this medium, the researcher felt that it was important to incorporate this element in the programme. Only one woman in the programme did not have a Facebook account but as her daughter was involved in the programme, she was able to be kept up to date on any information that was shared. The researcher believed that Facebook was a crucial element in the 'Mother of all Sport' programme and without it many additional physical activity sessions would not have taken place.

Due to the volume and quality of material shared the researcher believed that social media was an extremely important source of data collection for the 'Mother of all Sport' programme. As there was a blurred line between what constitutes public and private material (Quennerstedt, 2011) the researcher developed an information sheet and consent form outlining the reasons for using social media and the methods that would be used to collect material was distributed to all participants. Participants were asked to sign the consent form if they agreed for their social media contributions to be used in the evaluation of the 'Mother of all Sport' programme. The consent form also assured that confidentiality would extend to ensure names or personal profile pictures would not be used. All signed consent forms were returned to the researcher. As the range of themes and topics available on social media is extensive, Fono and Raynes-Goldie (2006) suggest that researchers develop their own codes for data collections and look

at general themes such as likes, dislikes and interests. For the purpose of this programme the researcher paid particular attention to material that highlighted motivational information, encouragement and community /personal pride in the programme. Social media material was screen grabbed by the researcher and kept on file.

3.20 Data analysis collection

In the quest to ensure that all relevant data was collected the researcher adapted the constant comparative method as a procedure for gathering and evaluating data. This method relied on four key stages which included: *“comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory and (4) writing the theory”* (Glaser, 1969, p.220). On completion of interview one, the researcher evaluated the key themes that were present and formulated themes and codes related to these findings. Furthermore, the researcher applied these themes and codes during the evaluation of interview two, focus group interviews, researcher observation field notes and social media. A number of narrative passages were constructed that demonstrated the findings in all data collection mediums. This procedure became constant when the researcher compared *“coding over and over again to codes and classifications that have already been made”* (Flick, 2009, p. 408). To ensure that additional themes and codes were not omitted from this research all material was subjected to a secondary review and any additional information that did not coincide with the themes and codes were noted. The researcher found that the themes and codes selected were apt for interviews, focus group interviews and researcher observation field notes. The researcher included an additional information column when evaluating social media as some of the information shared on social media did not correspond with the themes and codes selected. This information was evaluated and relevant information was included in data analysis.

3.20.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire used ranked data and analysed participants responses by adding up the number each person associated with each reason for participating in the programme. The option that received the lowest score was deemed the most important as the questionnaire indicated to rank the most important reason as number one and the least important reason ten (Appendix H). Additional comments were noted and added to the list of reasons.

3.20.2 Interviews

All individual interviews were transcribed and coded. Coding was done through structural coding. Structural coding involves identifying themes or categories that are present in large segments of text (Saldaña, 2009).

“Determining frequencies on the basis of the number of individual participants who mention a particular theme, rather than the total number of times a theme appears in a text.....can help identify which themes, ideas, or domains were common and which rarely occurred” (Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2008, p. 68).

Once the themes (Appendix I) of the ‘interview one’ were determined sub codes for each theme were developed and a further breakdown of themes and ideas were illustrated. Information from each interview was combined and the themes and codes of all interviews were transferred into a narrative passage. The interviews for year two used the same themes and codes for ‘interview one’ and a narrative passage was also developed for year two interviews.

3.20.3 Focus Group Interview

The focus group interview followed a similar procedure to the interview and was transcribed using the same themes and codes. A narrative passage was also developed to highlight the outcomes of the focus group interview.

3.20.4 Researcher observation field notes

Researcher observation field notes were evaluated using the same themes and codes for the interviews and focus group interviews. A spreadsheet was developed to display these themes within practical sessions.

3.20.5 Social media

The researcher viewed all facebook entries that appeared on team one and team two’s Facebook team page. Team three did not have a facebook page. All entries were documented on a spread sheet and again categorised according to the themes on codes outlined in ‘interview one’ (Appendix J).

All data collected was saved on the researcher’s computer and password protected.

3.21 Conclusion

The methodologies and procedures involved in this programme were paramount in the evaluation on the importance of community sports programmes for women in disadvantaged communities. All data collected throughout the course of this programme was explored and analysed to develop the subsequent sections of this thesis. The next chapter will examine the results obtained from the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme, reporting data from questionnaires, interviews, focus group, researcher observation field notes and social media.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is presented in five key sections and will closely examine the four main themes found throughout all data collection which are (1) participation levels in sport and physical activity, (2) common perceptions of involvement in physical activity, (3) promotion and awareness of physical activity and (4) the design and implementation of a physical activity programme. This section will also examine (5) the impact of practical sessions on the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme and evaluate the outcomes that resulted from participant’s involvement in this activity.

4.2 Context: Participation levels in sport and physical activity

“Most people are stereotypical. They think sport is a man’s sport. It’s not; it is for all people whether you are a woman, man or child” (Claire, interview 1). When considering peoples’ exposure to sport and their views of physical activity, it is essential to reflect back on their previous experiences and highlight how both positive and negative aspects can contribute to a person participating in sport and physical activity. The following section characterised different elements that the women believed impacted on their participation levels in sport and physical activity.

4.2.1 Gendered opportunities

The women in this study have stated that this may be due to lack of opportunities they had both growing up and in the present day, reporting similar encounters when it came to their involvement and opportunities in sport. It was overwhelmingly reported by the women that males had more opportunities than females to participate in sport, *“the boys had all the teams and we had nothing. They had soccer teams but there was nothing there for the girls”* (Dawn, interview 1).

Some of the women felt that gender had a lot to do with the opportunities available to girls in the community and thus believed that girls were expected to follow certain free time pathways growing up;

“My brothers would have played hurling, GAA, all types of soccer for years but there was never a big push for the girls to get involved or anything. I would have got involved in other areas like the brownies, youth clubs and things like that, but very little sporting groups for us to join”(Alison, interview 1).

Alison also believed that the perception of boys’ sports and girls’ sports could in turn deter people from participating in certain activities;

“Sports is very much so a boys thing. Women are so used to aerobics, gym classes, do you know things like that, what people consider to be a women’s sport or activity. When it comes to team sports it’s very hard to challenge yourself and your own perception about what a team sport is, so that would be one of the main reasons that they [girls] don’t get involved straight away” (Alison, interview 1).

During a focus group interview this aspect was further highlighted as some believed that the lack of exposure to sport and physical activity could have resulted in a vast reduction in the number of women getting involved in sport or trying new activities, *“you probably won’t have the confidence [.....] to get back out and try and do it or try running”* (Dawn, focus group interview 1).

During the practical sessions two of the groups (team one and two) had an opportunity to engage with male third level students who attended the session in a coaching capacity, with many feeling that their presence in the session had a positive influence on their physical activity levels. The sessions were higher tempo and the competitiveness of both the women and the students were evident (Team one, researcher observation field notes 16/10/13, Team two, researcher observation field notes 16/10/13). While both teams asked if it would be possible to get the students to come back again, when they were asked if they would like to include local males in the programme the response was less positive. The teams felt that there was a possibility that the local males would take over the session and that they would lose control of the physical activity sessions they enjoyed. One woman felt that if the males were involved they would push the women out and it would become a male only activity (Team two, researcher observation field notes 30/10/14).

4.2.2 Lack of exposure to sport

Although males were perceived to have had more opportunities to take part in sport when they were younger, the women also identified the lack of exposure to certain sports as a reason for them not participating in different activities. When asked about the opportunities the women had to join a sports clubs when you were younger, Alison (Interview1) swiftly responded *“very*

little, very little when I was younger". A similar reply was offered among the majority of women interviewed, *"there was definitely no tag rugby, there was no real clubs, there wasn't anything going on and if there was we didn't know about it"* (Sarah, interview 1). Sometimes it was up to individuals to create their own activities but the women felt that they missed out on certain opportunities when they were younger, *"we played our own games on the roads but none of us were in a club. It's a pity cause I actually now know how much fun it is. I probably would've had a ball as a youngster"* (Dawn, interview 1).

The group were asked to pick a sport that they would have liked to have tried when they were younger and the majority picked sports that could be termed 'alternative' and were not related to the major three Irish sports (rugby, soccer and Gaelic Games [hurling and Gaelic football]). Alison (interview 1) would have loved to have tried ice-skating because *"it was so like out of reach for us when we were younger"*, while Claire (interview 1) expressed her desire to try kayaking and told of only being able to take part in kayaking when she attended day trips. Alison (interview 1) also believed that athletics would have been interesting to try and that it may have been suited to her, *"that might have been what I wanted to be, a high jumper"*. Unfortunately lack of exposure to a range of sports affected some of the groups desire to think of an activity that they would have liked to have tried, *"we didn't really do much sport at home so it wasn't a thing that I missed or said I'd love to try that"* (Dawn, interview 1). While some believed that women's lack of exposure to sport was improving others still considered there to be a lack of activities available. Sarah was adamant that *"there is no soccer team in the area. The soccer team in the area is only for teenagers"* (Interview 1).

However, this is not evident in other communities as Julie explained that there has been an increase in sporting opportunities in her area, *"there is a lot because you have the xxxxx soccer club above, you have zzzzz soccer club; they do school boys and girls soccer. You have yyyyy, they do Gaelic"* (Interview 1).

Regardless of the amount of clubs or sports available in the different communities, school sport stood out as being a vital component with regards to women's relationship to sport.

4.2.3 School Sports and physical education

School was consistently referred to throughout the interviews and was depicted as a vital component in women's experiences of sport, with the school environment playing a role in all the women's positive or negative memories of sport. Four of the five women indicated that without school they probably would not have had an opportunity to participate in sport or be part of a sports team. Physical education was part of all women's regular school lives and for some it was the only way they participated in physical activity. Dawn had fond memories of physical education in primary school;

"Primary school was good for P.E. We always tried different sports and we had competitions and stuff to show how we were able to do different things. We did a lot of soccer and basketball and then in the yard we used to play a lot of different games and sport. They were always telling us to play more sport; it was a great school for sport". (Interview1)

Claire believed that her experience of sport was enhanced by her physical education teacher, who spotted that Claire was a talented basketball player encouraging her to continue basketball for five years;

"I never joined basketball when I was in first year but I played it in PE and my PE teacher she kinda (sic) pushed me to do it when I got into second year and from second year to sixth year I played basketball". (Claire, interview 1)

Physical education was a significant component when evaluating women's exposure to sport. The entire group referred to physical education as a team sport activity and stated that it did not always cater for people who preferred individual activities, *"some people aren't good at sports and some people aren't team players and if you are forced into it, it can just put you off for a long time after that"* (Julie, focus group interview 1).

During the focus group interview the group strongly agreed that there was not an equal emphasis/promotion on team sports and individual sports when they were growing up, believing that team sports received more promotion than individual activities. While most suggested that they liked sports in school, the women often felt that if a pupil did not excel at the preferred sport chosen by the school, then they had little options to participate in alternative activities, *"there was no other sport, there was nothing to do, no-one wanted to hear about it unless you could play hockey"* (Julie, focus group 1).

As indicated above, gender, lack of exposure to sport and experiences in school sport and physical education had an impact on all women's interaction with sport growing up, in many instances deterring them from participating. The women also specified perception of involvement as another crucial element that existed and resulted in a number of women missing out when it came to participating in sport and physical activity.

4.3 Context: Common perception of involvement in physical activity

While the above barriers to participation involved external reasons, internal elements and personal beliefs were also reported to be factors affecting women's decisions to join (or not join) a group. Many felt that the perception and stigma attached to certain physical activity programmes prevented women from getting involved.

4.3.1 Lack of fitness

Prior to the start of the programme many feared that they would not be able to take part in physical activity because they felt that they were not sufficiently fit to do so, *"I think a lot of women are embarrassed to be seen running or anything, they think that I'm too fat or I'm too heavy and they don't want to be seen by anyone doing any physical sport"* (Sarah, Focus group interview). Some of the women believed that this fear was reduced once they began training and saw first-hand that the sessions were designed to suit their fitness levels, *"you can drop in and drop out of the game you don't have to stay at it the whole hour; you can drop in and out for your fitness level"* (Claire, Focus group interview).

Some indicated that their fears were reduced when they discovered that the venue for each session would be in a private location away from the public eye;

"I think one of the positives was when we were playing on the all-weather. It was like a closed court, people couldn't be seen from the outside, so they thought and next thing you know there are people standing outside the fence watching and we didn't care anymore we played away". (Sarah, Focus group interview)

Some noted that once they truly understood the nature of the activity they were glad they got involved, *"the biggest move you can make is to get off the couch.... I found once I got started nothing could stop me, all I wanted to do was do it (play tag)"* (Julie, focus group interview).

Over time the researcher noted that the groups wanted people to see what they are doing and opted to showcase their achievements on national television and in local media. The groups

noted that their children were aware of them taking part in the programme and were proud of their mothers for being involved, *“they think I’m mad, they think it’s cool, they say mammy is doing tag rugby this is cool”* (Dawn, interview 1).

4.3.2 Role Models

The women began to see themselves as role models for people in their community and were adamant that their involvement in the programme led to an increase in physical activity among local children;

“Watching us training our own kids want to go do it as well, I mean they see the fun we had with the tag rugby. [Daughter] is only waiting to come over during the summer to watch us training, she is hoping to get a game as well”. (Sarah, focus group interview 1)

Some of the women took it upon themselves to create sporting opportunities for their children and other children in their community. They utilised the skills they had learned in their own sessions to provide activities in the evenings for their children. Although they did not have all the required equipment, they came up with novel ways to get their children involved;

“They have started to include some of their children in their evening session, which really highlights how this type of activity can have a knock on effect for physical activity. I thought it was funny but brilliant when they were telling me that they didn’t have tags so they put socks in the kid’s waistbands (very inventive)”. (Researcher observation field notes, 6/3/13)

Their belief in themselves as role models in the community led to them becoming a driving force for sport and between setting up summer sports initiatives (Team one, researcher observation field notes 3/7/13), reintroducing an underage soccer team and teaching local teenage boys how to play tag rugby (Team two, facebook post 25/6/14), they became a group who reacted to a situation instead of a group that sat back and waited for someone else to take the lead.

4.3.3 Fear of getting hurt

The fear of getting hurt has always been an issue for participants and some believed that this affected people's decision to join;

"You are afraid that if you hurt yourself you will be down for good [.....] There is a fear that you can't do anything else because you are waiting for something to heal and if you are not training then you are not keeping up with everyone and you are falling behind". (Julie, focus group interview)

While all groups agreed that this was a common concern, Alison stated that this concern decreased with time and exposure to the sport, *"it's a fear at the start but once you get to know the game you know that it's non-contact and no matter what you can't be hit"* (Alison, focus group interview). The group collectively referred to people's lack of understanding as a reason why some people may fear taking part in an activity like tag rugby and this in turn could have deterred people from joining, *"they won't listen, the minute they hear rugby it's just no, no, no"* (Alison, focus group interview 1).

To ensure that people were fully aware of the expectations involved in the programme the group insisted that appropriate promotion was needed to motivate and encourage participants to join.

4.4 Context: Promotion and awareness of physical activity programmes

While a fundamental aspect of sports development is to ensure that there are programmes in place to engage more people in physical activity, it is fruitless if the population in which you are trying to engage is unaware of such activities. All women indicated that at some point in their lives they did not participate in specific programmes because they were unaware they were going on, *"there was no real clubs, there wasn't anything going on and if there was we didn't know about it because it wasn't published enough"* (Sarah, interview 1). The group suggested that posters and leaflets could be beneficial in the promotion of activity but would only be successful if they are located in places where the target group congregated;

"Posters are good, ya posters but only if they're in places where we go like Eurospar or the post office or the school. None of us go to the community centre so no-one will see it there so it would be a waste of time to put anything up there". (Dawn, interview 1)

"Leaflets I don't think are really good, people see them as junk mail, they come in the door and they throw them away, they are a waste of time". (Sarah, interview 1)

4.4.1 Self-promotion

As the programme progressed the researcher observed that the responsibility of promotion shifted from her and became a mission for the groups involved. Each team wanted to ensure that they had more participants available at both training sessions and tournaments and they took it upon themselves to recruit new players;

“I constantly recommend this programme to people constantly on facebook, talking to them face to face; try to get as many people down at the school gate trying to get them involved and we managed to get a small few”. (Dawn, interview 2)

“Did you see all the new players I brought them with me because I want this to keep going and there is no point training if we don’t have players”. (Jamie, team two, researcher observation field notes 15/01/14)

At the start of the programme the group suggested that involving local figureheads to promote the programme may attract more participants, however as time went on there was little reference to external people promoting the programme and more emphasis placed on self-promotion;

“They all know what’s going on from us all talking about it telling them what’s happening. We are always talking about it at the[school] gate, we are all saying sure you should come down and join the tag rugby or try The Zumba class and telling them how great it is”. (Sarah, interview 1)

4.4.2 Come and Try promotion

All the interviewees stated that they felt intimidated about trying new activities prior to commencement of the programme, commenting that they were unsure of the games involved and were scared that they may get hurt while taking part in the programme. The majority felt that if they had an opportunity to observe a demonstration of the games beforehand it may have eased their anxiety about what was involved in the programme and may have led to additional participants signing up at the beginning of the programme;

“If you did a promotion day of what is going on in your community and do a demonstration of how to play the game people are inclined to look and say that is not as bad as I thought it was going to be, I might be able to do that”. (Sarah, interview 1)

The group were extremely vocal about this and truly believed that if they took it upon themselves to show others the enjoyable side of the activity then more people would join;

“If the other parents can see what’s going on and they can actually see that it’s not as rough a sport as they think it is [.....] if we brought the parents down to let them see it they might be encouraged to join in themselves as well”. (Sarah, focus group interview 1)

4.4.3 Facebook

Without a doubt the most successful form of promotion seen throughout this programme was the introduction of social media and in particular Facebook. Team one and team two created specific team Facebook pages to publicly promote their involvement in the programme. The successful use of this commanding form of promotion was evident as, in the space of nine months, team one had posted over three hundred messages that included posts about training times, physical activity challenges, motivational posters and team pictures (Researcher observation field notes, team one facebook breakdown). This form of promotion allowed family members and friends to post messages of support and admiration for those involved in this programme and team members from the different community group had a way to connect with each other to share stories and pictures. Both team one and two found this component of promotion extremely effective as it provided people with up to date information on the programme within their own team/community and further afield.

4.5 Context: Design and implementation of physical activity programmes

“You just want sport to be never ending really don’t you; you just don’t want sport to end because it is too enjoyable. It should be never ending for young and old” (Dawn, focus group). Over the past two years the numbers of women participating in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme has increased from an average of thirty women in year one to an average of forty six women in year two (Researcher observation field notes – attendance records). There were a number of aspects that enticed participants to remain on the programme, while also attracting women to join. This section will look at the impact that the programme had on personal motivating factors and examine the findings related to the design and implementation of the programme.

4.5.1 Reasons for participating in the programme

The majority of women who signed up to take part in the programme did so as a means to improve health and to become more physically active (Questionnaire one). They highlighted that meeting new people was the second leading reason to take part, with having fun as the third prime motivating factor. At the other end of the spectrum they conveyed that representing

their community and winning were the least significant elements when deciding to participate.

Table 4.1 denotes the women's reasons for participating in the programme.

Table 4.1: Response to questionnaire asking what attracted women to the 'Mother of All Sport' programme– most important reason was given lowest score

| | Learn new skills | Make my kids proud | Meet new people/friends | Represent my community | Lose weight/improve fitness | Win | Challenge myself | Have fun | Set a good example | Improve my health/get more physically active |
|---------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|------------------|----------|--------------------|--|
| Group 3 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 10 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 2 |
| Group 1 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| Group 4 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 10 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 6 |
| Group 2 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 9 | 1 | 10 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 2 |
| Total | 25 | 32 | 12 | 33 | 16 | 40 | 14 | 13 | 20 | 11 |
| Ranking | 7 | 8 | 2 | 9 | 5 | 10 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 1 |

The top three reasons for participating in the programme (noted in Table 4.1) were explored further.

4.5.2 Fitness and Health

When asked about their main reasons for taking part in the programme, the majority of the women reported that health and fitness reasons were an important motivating factor when beginning and continuing a physical activity programme. Sarah stated that she got involved as a means of improving fitness, *"I suppose to be able to run around with the children because you know you get out of breath when you are not fit. I suppose to gain fitness for myself"* (Interview 1).

Fitness was also an appealing factor for Julie who explained that one of the main reasons she was involved was to, *"keep up my fitness level I suppose and to maintain a goal for myself. Just straight ahead just think to keep my fitness levels up"* (Interview 1).

Fitness remained a prime reason to participate when the groups were interviewed prior to the commencement of the programme in year two. When asked "Why they were returning to the programme?" Jane responded *"because I enjoyed it so much last year and I just wanted to get fit again"* (Interview 2).

The importance of fitness was also evident throughout many of the practical sessions, with fitness elements being incorporated into the majority of activities. The researcher set goals for

the groups to achieve and used equipment such as pedometers to showcase how much physical activity was achieved during an average session. Team one and two also requested additional fitness classes to coincide with their training sessions and took part in activities such as circuits, aerobics, insanity fitness classes, walking groups and boot camp. Through their Facebook , team one continuously sought new challenges to motivate and encourage each other to get involved in fitness challenges (facebook 1/2/14 poster regarding the Tough Mudder challenge, Facebook 16/4/14 motivational poster regarding running, Facebook 29/5/14 poster regarding “thirty day ab challenge”). Team one’s dedication to getting involved in a range of sporting classes led to them being filmed as a means of promoting local fitness activities, *“we got filmed in circuits dis morning it’s a short video to promote classes for nxt year n u no me now chatter box I had to get a word in”* (Facebook post, 19/05/14).

While team three did not introduce their own additional physical activity challenges, they did share stories with their group about different classes they have tried and encouraged other participants to come along with them and try it out (Team three, researcher observation field notes). Team three also took part in some of team two’s fitness classes and this not only motivated them to get more involved in fitness activities but also provided a social aspect for both teams to interact. By developing programmes that cater for the needs of the group it prompted the group to remain active and enabled them to seek alternative forms of physical activity.

The women were also asked about lifestyle changes that occurred as a result of their involvement in the programme. Two women reported that they have given up smoking and had successfully refrained from smoking. Claire stated that her success was due to being part of a fitness programme and stated, *“definitely without the training and all that I probably won’t have given up smoking”* (Focus group interview 1).

The women also referred to the changes in their appearance and how they are more aware of healthier options for an improved lifestyle;

“There is no point in sitting down and eating a load of junk if you are going to try run it off an hour later and sit down again and eat more junk (Dawn, focus group interview 1); *“It defeats the purpose [of training]”* (Sarah, focus group interview 1).

“With me stopped eating chocolate (laughs) and gone back on diet coke. I’ve watched what I have eaten but I haven’t cut back majorly but I have watched it. Ya my weight

hasn't went down but it hasn't went up and it would've went up if I was still sitting at home" (Fiona, interview 2).

The researcher reported a change in the women's attitude towards healthy eating and observed a gradual switch from the consumption of fizzy drinks to water during training sessions. The researcher also noted that the groups wanted advice on healthy eating and information on the best foods that would give them energy during the tag rugby tournament;

"They wanted advice on what to eat before the game and what they should bring with them. I get the impression that they see themselves as athletes and want to ensure they eat right so they have energy. They have decided that they need bananas and jaffa cakes for during the match" (Researcher observation field notes, 27/2/13).

4.5.3 Social aspects

It was apparent through interaction with women in interviews, focus groups, practical sessions and Facebook entries that the social impact of the programme was deemed an extremely important element in the continuation of many on this programme;

"It gets you out of the house; it gets you to meet new people. Some of the mothers I go down to the school gate and say hi, [...] but now I know the others a lot better all because of this". (Sarah, Interview 1)

With the introduction of team Facebook pages it was found that team one and team two considered their teammates to be friends and posted public messages to show their appreciation for both the programme and the friendships that had developed as a result of this, *"so glad to have ye stunning amazing talented so kind and warm hearted ladies (sorry just having a moment lol) Xx"* (Team one, Facebook post 9/9/14).

The social benefits of the programme were also relayed through practical sessions as the women shared with the researcher stories of nights out and breakfast meetings. The researcher observed how the group appreciated their physical activity sessions and looked forward to attending;

"It's nice to have something to look forward to; I love my phone going off at 12.30 every day. Before I was doing sport I was going home on to the couch me and Jeremy Kyle and sleep". (Alison, focus group)

For those who felt that they were not part of a community group this programme led to a sense of belonging and some reported that the programme united people, *"it brought communities together as well, we are not from out here and we came out to play it [tag rugby] so it real brought a lot of people together"* (Julie, focus group).

4.5.4 Hobby/ Fun

The most unified reason for all five women interviewed in year one to take part in the programme was to have fun and to try something exciting;

“For good fun, a lot of my friends are doing it as well, so it’s good banter. Tag rugby so far has been very good fun, we have laugh as much as we have broken nails but we are enjoying it and that’s the main thing”. (Claire, interview 1)

The fun element of physical activity was maintained during practical sessions with the researcher and women constantly referring to ‘hidden exercise’ (the means of getting women physical activity but doing so with a smile on their faces). The researcher adapted this form of training by introducing physical activity through fun games and activities and expressed that if people are running around with smiles on their faces it is enabling a healthier lifestyle to be maintained in a happier way. It was apparent that the majority of the women appreciated this approach to physical activity and it was noted that a number of participants who were sick or injured still attended training sessions so they would not miss out;

“One player injured but still turned up to watch training as she said she enjoyed the sessions and would miss out on the fun if she wasn’t there. She also said that she wanted to get out of the house for her sanity” (Researcher observation field notes 6/2/13)

Fun remained a leading reason behind the return of many women in year two and a selection of statements emphasised the success of maintaining and increasing participant numbers through a relaxed and fun approach to physical activity;

“Because I really enjoyed it last year and I got to get out of the house to meet new people that joined this year and basically have the craic with the girls”. (Sarah, interview 2)

“I played it in previous years, I found it great for my health; I loved mixing with the girls. It’s a great social sport”. (Dawn, interview 2)

“Because I enjoy rugby and I think its great exercise and it’s great to meet new people”. (Alison, interview 2)

“Because it was fun and I got out of the house for an hour for so and I like playing tag with the girls it’s a laugh and like to keep doing it”. (Sonya, interview 2)

When asked about additional reasons for getting involved, many outlined that finding a new hobby or trying a different activity motivated them;

“To have something to do a, new hobby, I have never played tag rugby before; I didn’t know what it was about. I hadn’t a clue if I could even play it and it’s after turning out fantastic so I’m delighted I did it”. (Sarah, interview 1)

By enabling the women to experience different sporting opportunities it opened up their mind to the range of activities that were available locally and highlighted that a hobby could be found at any age;

“Go way u nutter. Why didn’t u ask me 20 yrs ago”. (Responding to a group request to get involved in the Tough Mudder challenge, Facebook 1/2/14)
“Would you have played rugby 20 years ago?” (Team member’s response to previous comment)

This programme highlights the importance of examining the social, health and mental needs of women and ensuring that these needs are considered when developing and implementing a physical activity programme for women.

4.6 Context: Design and implementation of a physical activity programme

4.6.1 Practical sessions

The practical element of the programme produced mixed results when evaluating the success of group participation levels. Tag rugby was deemed the most popular activity and it sustained high attendance numbers, *“I love tag and hopefully will continue it for a few more years anyway”* (Sonya, interview 2).

When the groups changed from participating in tag rugby to basketball there was a notable change in attendance;

“Only four people turned up today. It is so frustrating especially after all the effort they put in during the tag rugby sessions. Of the four that were there, one was pleading with me to go back to tag rugby. I had to make a call; stick with the intended timetable and risk losing people or revert back to an activity that they enjoyed and keep them active. As one of the main purposes of this programme is to get women active I agreed to return to tag rugby”. (Researcher observation field notes, 3/4/13)

For team three the change in activity from tag rugby to basketball proved to be detrimental to team morale and resulted in the early exit of the year one programme. Although the researcher had opted to change the activity the women had already decided that they did not want to continue and would re-join next year when the tag rugby sessions started again.

To ensure that team one and team two continued with the programme the researcher consulted with the groups and reassessed the needs and desires of the group. This process resulted in team two continuing with tag rugby, while team one opted to train for a 10km run. While this was not part of the programme plan it was seen as an essential element in sustaining involvement in physical activity. By consulting with the groups the researcher allowed the group to gain more control over their own programme and thus created independent groups who took ownership over their own needs and requirements. As a result a steady number of participants from team one and team two continued with their training sessions. However, it was noted that tag rugby was regarded as the most popular activity and would be the sole focus of the activities in year two, *“that was not my sport [basketball]. I couldn’t take to it what so ever, like as I said I’d prefer the rugby, I tried other sports even since and rugby is just the one I prefer”* (Dawn, interview 2).

As the teams moved into their final sport of year one, it was noted that it was coming into the summer season and due to communion, confirmation and holiday commitments, team two would need to take a break from the programme and opted to return in September (Researcher observation field notes, 1/5/13). The option to choose not to participate in an activity highlighted the need to timetable programmes at a time that suited the group and ensure that programmes are not clashing with family obligations.

Team one were the only group who chose to take part in the rounders section of the programme. All participants reported a positive response to the activity and their enjoyment for the activity was not only seen during their practical sessions but was also evident in additional community sessions;

“Rounders I preferred ya, we did it with the kids here in the summer and I actually found it was much more fun to do it with the kids then to do it with all adults. It’s fun with adults but more fun with kids”. (Dawn, interview 2)

As all teams responded best to tag rugby, year two was designed with this in mind. All teams participated in two eight week blocks of tag rugby. As teams were now more familiar with the rules and skills involved in the game, it allowed sessions to focus on playing matches and gaining game experience. Team two began to attend team three’s training session so they could take part in friendly matches. As the sessions were in the evening some of the group brought their children along to watch. A local social worker was present to witness this and stated, *“This is amazing, you must be so proud to see the impact that this activity is having on family bonds,*

seeing children support their mothers is not something you see every day” (Social worker, researcher observation field notes 11/2/14).

Through the practical sessions the group began to become more aware of their physical activity levels and during one session a member of team one was wearing a pedometer and on completion of the session she shared through Facebook her reaction to the discovery that she had accumulated 4464 steps while participating in the tag rugby session and simply stated to all other teammates *“so it did count”* (Team one, Facebook post 5/2/14). This realisation was a motivational factor for some women as they now began to see the health and fitness benefits that this type of activity could bring.

The importance of including family was also evident in team one as a member of the group convinced her mother to attend. This highlighted that the programme was open to all people regardless of age and ability and could have lasting impacts for those involved, *“it’s the sense of belonging and achievement and being yourself again, not to be someone’s mother like, just to be you, to have a laugh to get out and have a laugh”* (Claire, focus group).

4.7 Context: The impact of practical sessions on the programme

4.7.1 Social media/ Facebook

Facebook allowed the researcher to gain personal insights into the feelings and thoughts that the women shared about the programme and to witness first-hand the impact that the programme had on both their physical activity levels and their personal lives, *“I know it was a good training session this evening, my body is broken”* (Team one Facebook post 23/9/14).

During interviews and questionnaires there is always a chance that women will answer questions in a way that they believe the researcher expects or wants them to answer. Facebook provided the researcher with a truer reflection on the thoughts of the participants;

“Feeling great after another good training session in tag this morning we all really put great effort in with all that came so keep up the good work and it will be on again on wednesday morning at 9.30 at the [REDACTED] and all welcome so ladies great team work done enjoy yere weekend” (Team two, Facebook post 24/01/14).

Having a team specific page allowed participants to share information they wanted their teammates to see. They controlled what they put up and were aware of who can see this information. Team Facebook pages were used to highlight training times and venues, *“tag*

rugby is wednesday at 9.30 to 10.30 all welcome to join its a great game and fun to play come and try easy to learn game” (Team two, Facebook post 17/01/14).

And also used as a means of motivating other participants to take part in additional physical activity;

“Hi ladies brilliant session dis morning back training Monday nites 7 til 8 and Wednesday morning half 11 til half 12 BRING IT ON !!!! If ye are doing the mini marathon it is 15 euro so we have to pay it by d 9th of October if ye want ye can give half and half or it all on d 7th of October WE CAN DO THIS LADIES” (Team one Facebook post 24/9/14).

4.7.2 Independence

Over the course of the programme the main aim was to get more women involved in sport and physical activity. A secondary outcome was that that the group could continue to participate in physical activity without the aid of the researcher. Team one successfully fulfilled this latter expectation as the researcher has observed that the group were capable of doing their own sessions without the need of the researcher being present. They have organised their own additional sessions and were happy to lead sessions themselves. Team two were close to achieving this outcome but due to a small lack of confidence they still rely on the researcher to guide and assist them. They also introduced their own additional training session and the researcher is confident that they will achieve a level of independence in the near future. Team three did not fulfil this brief as they still require the researcher to organise and deliver each session and thus have yet to become independent. It is believed that this is due to a number of factors including lack of community support, no local facilities and over reliance on the researcher to take sessions, *“we eat drink sing play tag rugby rain will just cool us off or it might help us grow a bit”* (Team one, facebook post 1/2/14).

4.7.3 Facilities and community

It was evident that the timing of sessions was extremely important to all groups. Teams one and two consisted of mothers and homemakers and thus required sessions to take place during the day, while team three represented women who were in the workplace and therefore could only train in the evening time. The venues available to team three were limited as it was not possible to use outdoor greens to facilitate the sessions and therefore they relied on indoor venues. As it was the evening time the researcher had to compete with other groups and clubs to secure a venue and thus resulted in the team having to use a facility that was away from their

homes and involved them having to travel further distances to attend training sessions. Teams one and two had more options when it came to facilities as there were more venues available during the day, allowing both teams to remain in local facilities and did not require teams to travel far.

The community element attached to the 'Mother of all Sport' programme proved to be a vital element in the sustainability of the programme. Team one and team two had a direct connection with two specific communities and therefore had the support of many local amenities including the school, community centres and community buses. Both teams trained in local facilities that were free of charge and were supported in their quest to run additional training sessions in the community. As they trained in their own communities they were able to attract more local women to join. Team three did not have a strong connection with their community and did not represent one particular community, missing out on recruiting additional players as they did not have the support of local groups or organisations. As previously mentioned team three were required to train in a public facility and, although they did not have to pay for the use of the hall during their scheduled activity, they would be required to pay for any additional sessions.

4.7.4 Teammates/ Friendships

While a community element stood out to be an important factor in the success of the programme, having the support of teammates was reported as being one of the leading factors in the women's desire to participate, *"there is no competition, it is a team, it is done as a team [.....] Everyone gets a fair shot at the game and it was made into a real team sport"* (Alison, focus group interview).

The importance of teammates is seen primarily in both the practical sessions and in particular through Facebook comments;

"Hey motherz of all tag. Ada gr8 day @ d blitz.. Got in2d finalz & mis'd out on d cup by 'I' try. Play'd against class teamz. Who were all there 4d fun & luv of d game.. It brought our communitiez 2get'r. We work'd n play'd hard & it paid off. All d girlz wer class. We'l stick 2d train'n. Keep our line & work on our tacticz.. Tanx girlz. I'l nvr 4get 2day & d team spirit.. N especially tanx 2 our train'r trace.. Shez a1. Keep up d gr8 work my lady soldierz no woman.. No try. Woop woop x" (Team two, facebook post 30/3/14).

The group have built strong connections and motivate each other to train, *"7 tonight ladies (smiley face) not sore from last nite woo hoo so might go in n run d park if ye want"* (Team one, Facebook post 8/7/14).

It is obvious through their Facebook photos and comments that they have become teams that socialise together and enjoy the friendships they have formed, *"We have to meet up sonne ladies (smiley face) miss ye loads xz"* (Team one, Facebook post 29/7/14). These friendships have led the groups to seeking alternative ways to challenge themselves and are frequently finding new activities for their team to take part in;

"Would be brilliant to do this [an adventure race] as a group id personally LOVE to do it n be even better with the tag team (smiley face)" (Team one, Facebook post 28/5/2014).

*"yes yes yes !!! WE ALL CAN DO DIS ****WE GOT DIS ****"* (Team one, Facebook post 28/5/2014)

4.7.5 Team branding

Teams were allocated a team colour and logo in year two, providing participants with an identity that enabled them to refer to themselves as a team



Fig. 4.1 'Mother of all Sport' team jerseys

Their team brand was unique to them and it gave them a visual presence both at the tournament and in the communities they lived and trained.

Each team were assigned a tag line and this became their team name and branding



Fig. 4.2 Team one logo



Fig. 4.3 Team two logo

(Please note that both team one and team two had the community where they lived on the logo but this has been removed for anonymity)



Fig. 4.4 Team three logo – as they did not represent a specific location they did not have a place name on their logos

All participants were given a jersey and a hoodie. The hoodie displayed their team logo and was also the same colour as their jerseys. The group not only appreciated the clothing but also began to identify it as a team uniform, ensuring that it was worn at all training sessions and events that involved the group. Since the introduction of the team colours and logos there has been many facebook postings that refer to their new team name and numerous pictures showing team members wearing their jerseys and hoodies.

“Its not about the team you play its about the team you are up [redacted] no women no try bring on the blitz tomorrow.xx” (Team two, Facebook post 29/3/14)

4.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to gauge what the women believed to be issues that motivated and prevented them from taking part in sport and to evaluate the impact that the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme had on all participants. The following chapter will discuss the impact that this programme had on women’s physical activity levels and their perceptions of sport and physical activity.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

Over the past two years the researcher has witnessed many outcomes and observations resulting in the study of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme. This chapter will follow the same structure as the results chapter and discuss the impact of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme with specific reference to (1) participation levels in sport and physical activity, (2) common perceptions of involvement in physical activity, (3) promotion and awareness of physical activity and (4) the design and implementation of physical activity programmes. This chapter will also consider (5) the impact that practical sessions had on the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme and discuss the outcomes that resulted.

5.2 Context: Participation levels in sport and physical activity

While it is not possible to change a woman’s previous experience of sport and physical activity, it is possible to address the issues that women felt deterred them from taking part. By providing a programme that addressed these issues it allowed women to reconnect with sport and physical activity in a way that they felt was beneficial and achievable.

5.2.1 Gender opportunity

Findings from this study suggest that many women felt that they were not given an equal opportunity to participate in sport compared to their male counterparts and therefore regarded gender opportunities as a barrier to participating in sport and physical activity.

These findings are similar to results obtained from The Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation (2008) that suggest that male dominance is a social and cultural barrier to women’s involvement in sport. Due to this the researcher felt that it was imperative to offer a programme that solely catered for women thus allowing them to feel that their needs were being accommodated and that they were given a fair opportunity to participate in sport and physical activity. It was also believed that offering ‘women only’ activities would reduce anxiety and fears about skill levels and ability (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006) and allow women to participate in an environment that was supportive of their desires (Ennis, 1999).

5.2.2 Lack of exposure to sport and physical activity

The ERSI physical activity survey (2003) found 49% of women referred to lack of interest as a primary reason for not participating in sport and physical activity. These statistics suggest a need to introduce women to a range of different activities as a means of helping them discover an activity they might enjoy. The ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme was designed to introduce women to three different sports. The purpose behind this was to allow women an opportunity to try new sports. As a means of presenting to the women as many opportunities as possible the researcher also informed the groups of a range of ‘alternative activities’ such as aerobics, circuits and ‘meet and train’ groups that were already taking place in their communities. This information sharing allowed the women to take more control over their physical activity levels. This aspect did not rely on the researcher conducting all sessions, but instead provided a pathway for women to make their own decision on which activities they wished to partake in. The researcher liaised with fitness instructors and organised additional programmes. These included weekly fitness classes in conjunction with the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB) and a training plan with reduced entry fee for groups to participate in the Great Limerick Run. Through consultation with both the LCETB fitness instructor and the Great Limerick Run event organisers, an average of 18 participants took part in the weekly fitness classes and 12 participants completed the 10km run. A further and more detailed study may be needed to establish the true impact that the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme had on participation in additional programmes. From a general overview the researcher felt that the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme provided adequate information to encourage women to seek alternative sources of physical activity.

5.2.3 School sports

Although this programme could not alter the participants’ experience of sport during their school days it did highlight to them how they could get involved with schools in their locality to ensure that their children had more opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity. Allender, Cowburn & Foster (2006) found a strong link between negative experiences of school sport and a decline in future participation levels. To help ensure that their children were exposed to a positive experience of sport and physical activity, many of the women involved in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme volunteered with schools and community groups to provide local children with opportunities to get involved in fun and worthwhile after school and summer sports sessions. This led to increased opportunities for children to commence in

sport and physical activity and thus reiterated the Reynold, Brown & Fleming (2003) findings that parents who participate in sport and physical activity are more likely to be motivators for their children to participate in physical activities.

5.3 Context: Common perceptions of involvement in physical activity

5.3.1 Perception

A shift in the women's perception of sport and physical activity was evident. They were no longer intimidated by new challenges but instead embraced every opportunity that came their way. Allender, Cowburn and Foster (2006) identified the stress and anxiety of entering a new programme as a deterrent for some women to start an activity. This was the case for some of the women involved in this programme, but it was found that after a relatively short period of time, their perception of sport and physical activity changed as they developed a better understanding of what physical activity entailed and from there began to view sport in a fun and beneficial way.

5.3.2 Fear of getting hurt

The fear of getting hurt is a common barrier to participation (Ball, Crawford, & Owen, 2000) and it was noted by the Researcher that this did register as a concern for some women from the onset it did register as a concern for some women from the onset. This also concurred with findings from The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2008) on women's barriers to sport and physical activity where it was reported that women regarded fear for personal safety as a practical barrier to participation. However by the end of the programme this anxiety had significantly faded and was no longer a major concern for the women. Many attributed this decline to a developing clearer understanding of what each game entailed.

Ball, Crawford & Owen (2000) found that some women do not participate in a programme because they perceive themselves to be too fat or not fit enough to do so. While initially some women involved in this programme referred to their fitness levels as a reason for not taking part they quickly began to realise that the 'Mother of all Sport' programme was developed to suit their fitness levels and therefore they did not need high levels of fitness in order to participate.

By allowing the group time to understand that they were capable of participating in this type of activity, the women were enabled to form their own judgement on the programme which helped them to re-examine their perceptions of sport and physical activity. This self-discovery of their ability to participate in such a programme could impact positively on physical activity levels in the future as they now had the confidence to take part.

5.4 Context: Promotion and awareness of physical activity programmes

While a fundamental aspect of sports development is to ensure that there are programmes in place to encourage more people into physical activity, it is fruitless if the population in which you are trying to engage with are unaware of such activities. With this in mind it was important to gauge the impact that sport and recreation promotion had on the women and its influence of participation levels.

5.4.1 Lack of knowledge

While many organisations such as the Irish Sports Council, National Governing Bodies of Sport and Women in Sport have developed strategies to engage more women in sport and physical activity (Irish Sports Council, SPEAK report, 2011) there are often times when women miss out on opportunities to participate because they are simply unaware that initiatives are taking place. A common theme throughout the interviews and focus groups was a lack of knowledge regarding specific activity opportunities that the women could access. Many women indicated that at some point in their lives they did not participate in specific programmes because they were unaware that they were happening.

Sports programmes were often given budgets for glossy colourful posters to promote activities but the women believed that if these were distributed and displayed in places where they did not visit then they were pointless. Likewise, the women indicated that leaflets and flyers were not a successful form of promotion as only a small percentage of the target audience viewed these materials.

5.4.2 ‘Come and try sessions’

Many of the women stated that they felt intimidated about trying new activities prior to commencing the programme. They stated that were unsure of the games involved and were apprehensive they may get hurt while taking part in the programme. The majority felt that if they had an opportunity to see a demonstration of the games beforehand it may have eased their

anxiety about what was involved and may have led to additional participants signing up at the beginning of the programme. The three sports chosen for this programme were completed prior to the recruitment of all groups and, in hindsight, it would have been beneficial to carry out ‘come and try’ activities to assess participants’ interest in each sport. Many initiatives use interventions such as ‘come and try’ days to attract participants. However, the majority of studies conducted on the success of interventions are done through case studies with no baseline data (Jackson, Howes, Gupta, Doyle, & Waters, 2005) and more research is needed regarding the evaluation of these interventions. It is evident from this study that women would like the opportunity to try an activity before they commit to a physical activity programme.

The most successful form of promotion appeared to be self-promotion where the participants took it upon themselves to entice new members. The power of the women’s experiences outweighed any posters or leaflets and their ability to attract new members through word of mouth was greater than any other form of their chosen media propaganda.

The participants responded well to activity and wanted for other people to experience the joy and exhilaration that a physical activities could bring.

The admiration that women had for the programme led to additional women joining and experiencing what it was like to participate in a female only physical activity environment.

5.5 Context: Design and implementation of physical activity programmes

5.5.1 Reasons to participate

The women determined that improving their health by getting more physically active was the primary reason for their participation in this programme. This insight was essential to enabling the researcher to develop a programme that adhered to their needs. They did not consider learning a new skill as a priority and if the programme was marketed around skill development it may have deterred some from joining. In essence, the introduction of a sport was a secondary component to the importance of getting women active. It was therefore imperative that the programme catered for the needs and respected the fitness levels of the women, and was not at a level that the researcher just assumed would be achievable. This corresponds with the finding that community sports development is not about the worker and what they want to achieve but is more concerned with ensuring the personal and environmental influences of the target group are being adhered to (Bolton, Fleming and Elias, 2008).

‘Mother of all Sport’ emphasised the importance of physical activity through the medium of fun which was an essential motivational factor when women were deciding whether or not to participate in the programme. These findings are similar to Withall, Jago & Fox (2011) who found that women responded better to activities that incorporated fun and enjoyment. From the outset the researcher referred to sport and physical activity as ‘hidden exercise’. It was vital that the women could understand that physical activity did not need to be difficult but instead could be achieved through fun games and activities. The researcher explained that ‘hidden exercise’ meant that women could take part as well as enjoy the activity. To achieve this, they were introduced to games often associated with children’s activities. This allowed them to have fun but more importantly they were active while involved.

The phrase ‘hidden exercise’ became part of the women’s vocabulary and members of the groups began to use this expression to entice women to take part in additional training sessions.

5.5.2 Fun

Fun was an essential way to keep women involved and was a driving force in adding new members to the group. In addition, many of the women felt that the programme allowed them the opportunity to gain back their identity and become the people they once were; to escape from daily stresses and strains and a means of getting out of the house.

The introduction of the programme through fun activities also had a secondary outcome as it enabled women to learn games that they could play with their children. It provided a pathway for children to get added physical activity as their mothers now had the knowledge and experience in playing a range of exciting games which they could pass on to them. Both team one and team two participated in programmes that involved teaching children/ teenagers in their community how to play a range of sports, providing the opportunity for more community sports to become available. As the researcher had previous experiences delivering physical activity sessions for youths in these communities, it was evident that the children taking part in sessions led by women were more attentive and less disruptive compared to sessions facilitated by external coaches. This was perhaps due to the fact that the children knew the women and the women knew the children’s parents, thus creating a personal bond where any disruptive behaviour could be reported directly back to the participant’s parents.

5.5.3 Role Models

As a result of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme many of the women became recognised as role models within their own communities. Family members, children and community organisations respected the women’s commitment to participating in a physical activity programme and valued their desire to get more people active.

Community members travelled in large numbers to support the women during the tag rugby tournament and many left encouraging and heartfelt messages of support on their facebook pages.

Notably the women themselves indicated that they had become role models within their communities. They could see the impact that their involvement in the programme was having on other people and this motivated and encouraged them to continue to inspire others to get active.

These findings were similar to results found in a study carried out by McLeod (2013) entitled *Mothers’ Physical Activity Experiences Participating in Team Sports*. McLeod discovered that being an active role model was important to the mothers in the study as their activity levels encouraged their family members to become active. This was also the case in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme as participants in the programme encouraged their children to get involved in physical activity.

Having female role models in the community is vital to encouraging more girls and women to get involved in sport and physical activity (Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2008; Reynolds, Brown and Fleming, 2003). Over the past two years the researcher has witnessed an increase in the number of programmes and activities that are available to girls and women in the local communities. Many of these new activities stem from the success of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme and the realisation that sports and physical activity programmes can actually happen in local communities for local women. These programmes are a direct result of the women involved in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme determining that sport and activity can be fun, enjoyable and worthwhile and importantly the realisation that physical activity sessions do not have to take place in expensive gyms but can be accommodated in local facilities.

5.5.4 Social Aspect

A positive element of this process was the social benefit that formed as a result of the women taking part in a sport and physical activity programme. Harris (1998) found that sport can create opportunities to form friendship and this was evident in the 'Mother of all Sport' programme as each team formed special bonds and not only became teammates but also friends. They motivated and encouraged each other to train and supported one another outside of the programme, showing admiration for one another. When times were tough the whole team got behind their teammates to show their support for each other and offered a helping hand to anyone who needed it.

The social dimension did not stop on completion of training sessions as the women organised specific team 'nights out' where they had an opportunity to socialise with other teammates away from the training pitch. Most importantly they posted messages on Facebook about their feelings towards the friends they had made through the 'Mother of all Sport' programme and displayed posters to remind their teammates of how grateful they were to have a group of friends around them.

The researcher believes that friendship was the driving force for many to continue with the programme and this social aspect was another motivating factors for others to join. This conclusion could not have been discovered without the use of social media and in particular the impact of Facebook.

5.6 Context: Design and implementation of physical activity programmes

5.6.1 Physical activity sessions

During year one the programme was to include eight weeks of tag rugby, eight weeks of basketball and eight weeks of rounders. The groups were also timetabled to take part in a tournament which would highlight the skills they learned during the eight weeks and to compete against the other teams. All members of team one, two and three took part in eight weeks of tag rugby and responded very well to the activity.

However, as the groups transitioned to the other sports, the numbers began to drop and a decision had to be made on whether or not to continue with the developed plan or alter it to suit the needs and desires of the group.

As the philosophy behind the programme was to get more women active, it was deemed more appropriate to allow the women to take ownership as to what activity they wanted to do and provide training sessions that adhered to their desires. As a result of this change, team one trained to participate in a 10km run and took part in rounders, while team two continued with tag rugby. As the researcher did not alter team three's sessions in time they ended up losing a lot of members. The remaining members were given an option to try a different activity but as a lot of women had left they decided that they would take a break and return to the programme at the start of year two. This highlighted the need to ensure that the desires of the group are being met and that consultation with all participants is vital for programme continuation. As a result of these changes and with consultation with all team members, it was decided to concentrate solely on tag rugby in year two. The response to this decision was looked on favourably by all women and the researcher agreed to provide information on alternative activities if any individual member wanted to try something different.

5.6.2 The impact of the 'Mother of all Sport' tournament

At the start of the programme it was unclear if the women would enjoy taking part in a sports tournament. They had reported that winning was the least important reason for participating and there was a fear that some participants would find competing in a tournament daunting and off putting.

However over the course of the programme the tag rugby tournament became a vital component for motivating and encouraging women to continue to train and excel to the best of their abilities in the programme. This realisation was similar to Lane, Murphy & Bauman (2008) who found that an event or a target was essential when motivating women to continue to engage in regular physical activity. The tournament continued to be a driving force for many of the teams and was often used as a way to encourage new players to join and motivate additional players to attend training sessions. The tournament was regarded as a success and it opened people's eyes to what can be achieved with a little training and encouragement.

5.6.3 Recruitment process

All women except the participants of team four were asked to volunteer to take part in the programme. Posters and leaflets were advertised in places where the women could see them and it was made clear that this programme was suited to all ages and abilities. Participants did not have to sign up for a year long programme but were informed that they could come and go as

they pleased. They were encouraged but not required to attend as many training sessions as possible. New players were encouraged to join at any point of the programme and advised that they could come down to a session to see what it was like prior to them committing to the programme. It was mandatory that all women who attend a session had to participate in the activity. This rule was also imposed on any student or external coaches who attended a session. It was felt that participants would gain a greater insight into physical activity through a practical approach as *“participation is depicted as central to situated learning since it is through participation that identity and practices develop”* (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham, & Clark, 2006). During year one both team two and team three had lower numbers compared to team one. Each member of team two and team three were asked to bring one friend to the next session and attract new members through word of mouth and participant self-promotion.

5.7 Context: The impact of practical sessions on the programme

5.7.1 Being part of a team

“Social identity theory suggests that sports teams serve as important targets of identification. A team identity is based on an individual’s sense of belonging to a group [...] or on a perceived psychological connection with a sports team” (Heere, & James, 2007, p.g. 320)

Throughout the programme it was vital that participants felt part of a team. From the outset groups were not referred to as individuals but were described as members of team one, team two, etc. They were given ownership to develop their own team names and were consulted with when deciding on team colours. Klann (2007) suggests that involving team members in the development of team values, norms and boundaries can provide an excellent opportunity for a meaningful shared experience.

As a means of establishing a team the researcher introduced team jerseys thus giving members a visual presence at tournaments and in their local communities. Bull et al. (1996) have suggested that team identity can be heightened by providing the team with exclusive identifiers such as jerseys, shirts, logos, mottos and/or identical sweat suits.

The women were not obligated to purchase a jersey but those who wanted one were given an easy payment option to cover the cost of them. It was felt that the group needed to understand the cost attached to branding a team and therefore were asked to contribute €2 per week for eight weeks to cover the cost of buying branded jerseys. Once the teams received their jerseys they wore them with pride. The new jerseys became a uniform in all training sessions and were

worn in additional physical activity sessions that the women participated in and as Heere, & James (2007) found the jersey not only served as basis for group identity but also offered a symbolic representation of other aspects of community life (e.g., community pride, geography, partnership, etc.)

5.7.2 The impact of the programme on the groups involved

The ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme was designed to include four teams from different communities and to provide women with an opportunity to participate in sport and physical activity. When evaluating the success of the programme in these different communities a number of key outcomes arose. Team four did not respond well to the programme and the researcher believed that this was due to the nature in which they were recruited. Team four were members of a FAS¹ group who were paid to attend training courses to gain qualifications and experience in the delivery of sport in a local community setting. They were not given a choice to participate in the activity as their tutors informed them that they would be doing the activity as part of their FAS hours. It appeared that team four associated the programme with attending their training course and thus felt it was an activity that they had to do instead of an activity they wanted to get involved in. When they realised that the tag rugby tournament would be held on a Sunday the majority of the group declined to take part noting that they would not get paid to participate. This led to the discontinuation of team four mid-way through year one of the programme. The lack of contact between team four and the researcher somewhat contributed to the failure of team four in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme. The FAS tutors encouraged team four to participate in the programme and ensured that they received training courses in the specified sports. However, they were not required to participate in regular weekly training sessions and therefore missed out on forming a team bond or gaining experience playing as a team. The researcher was not given an opportunity to spend an adequate amount of time explaining the process of the programme or encouraging the group to continue to participate. Team four did not receive the same amount of guidance and information on ways to include more physical activity in their daily lives and did not form a team bond as they did not primarily identify as a team, but rather as a group who were paid to attend. This group did not have the same community alliance as the others because they all came from different parts

¹ **FAS Ireland** - Irish employment authority promotes job opportunities and training courses for school leavers, post graduates and professionals. (FAS, 2014)

of the city, and it is possible that this lack of association and community pride also contributed to the team's reluctance to continue with the programme.

Team three responded well to the programme however they too lacked community motivation as they came from different parts of the city. Unlike team four, this team chose to get involved in the programme and were not forced into joining. This team represented many women who were employed and, to accommodate this, training sessions were held in the evening. This alone could have impeded other women from joining as it meant they had to source childcare prior to commencement of the programme. While the late training times did not suit all, the researcher felt that it was important to provide an opportunity for women in the work force to participate in sport and physical activity.

Team one and team two were deemed as the most successful when it came to commitment and participation in the programme. Both teams reported an increase in the number of participants from year one to year two and both engaged in additional training sessions outside of their timetabled hours. At the start of the programme, all women indicated that representing their community was not an important motivating factor and ranked it second least important when they were deciding whether or not to participate in the programme. However, throughout the two years, the researcher observed that community was a driving force in the implementation and sustainability of the programme. The success of team one and team two was somewhat due to a number of factors stemming from community involvement.

5.7.3 Doorstep sport

Both team one and team two carried out all the training sessions in local facilities, allowing easy access for women to attend. The women did not need to rely on cars or public transport to get them to and from training sessions as these took place within walking distance. Team three did not have the same luxury as they did not represent one community and therefore their sessions took place in a neutral venue that required all participants to travel. This created a reliance on transport to and from training sessions and could have prevented additional women from attending if they did not have access to transport. This corresponds to Giles- Corti & Donovan (2002) findings which suggest that lack of transport could be a barrier for participation in sport and physical activity. Providing sport and physical activity in a location that is easily accessed can reduce barriers to participation and entice more women to attend.

5.7.4 Cost of community centres versus public facilities

The use of the community facilities throughout the programme was provided to team one and team two free of charge. This included additional training sessions that both teams organised and facilitated. Team three, on the other hand, were required to cover the cost of hiring their venue for any additional sessions sought outside the timetabled 'Mother of all Sport' sessions. This cost resulted in team three abstaining from organising additional training sessions as they did not want or feel it was necessary to attach any additional financial burden on any team member. As team three trained in a public location there was very little opportunity to negotiate the cost of pitch hire although there were an abundant number of community halls and centres scattered in close proximity to the facility in which they trained.

5.7.5 Visual presence in the community

The facilities used by team one and team two were in locations that members of the community regularly congregated at and allowed for the programme to have a visual presence within the community. It enabled women who were not involved in the programme to watch and witness what the sessions involved and allowed them an opportunity to see local women of all ages and abilities taking part in sport and physical activity. Regularly the women of team one and team two reported that people would stop them in the street or outside the school to ask them about the programme as they had observed them taking part in a session. These observations led to additional women enquiring about joining the programme and getting involved in the activity. As team three were situated in a location that was not their community they did not share the same experiences with regards to attracting new players through session observation.

5.7.6 Community support

Being associated with a community allowed other people and organisations within that community to support the women who were involved in the programme. Over the past two years there have been many examples of people within the community conveying support for their local teams. In the lead up to the tag rugby tournament, a local bus company offered their services to transport family members to and from the tournament. This allowed children the opportunity to attend the tournament to support and cheer their mothers on. Local papers and community newsletters wrote articles highlighting the women's success and commitment to the programme and local sports professionals offered a helping hand in training sessions.

The support of the community was a huge motivational factor for the women to continue to participate in a physical activity programme. If people are aware that others are supporting them and proud of them it motivates them to continue to strive to be the best they can possibly be thus, indicating that sport and physical activity can impact on community development and social capital (Bamber, Owens, Schonfeld, & Ghate, 2009).

5.7.7 Importance of a researcher led programme at the start

The lack of a researcher or coach led programme was damaging to the continuation of team four in the 'Mother of all Sport' programme. The impact that a researcher led approach had to the programme was a vital component in the overall success of the activity. At the start of the programme many of the women did not have an adequate amount of knowledge or skill levels in the specific sports and therefore needed a tutor to lead all sessions. The tutor was also able to regularly inform the group of the importance of participating in sport and physical activity and give teams advice on alternative activities that were available to them. As the groups became more aware of the skills and rules involved in each game the researcher encouraged team members to lead specific parts of the sessions thus creating an environment where the women had more control over their sessions and the researcher was at the session in an advisory capacity. To ensure that all the women felt they had the required skills to take on a session, the researcher provided opportunities for them to attend training courses where they could gain qualifications to deliver their own sessions, both within the programme and in additional programmes in the community. This created a self-sustainable programme which could continue as the researcher stepped away. To date both team one and two have transitioned from relying on a tutor, to leading physical activity sessions to groups who are qualified and capable of running their own activities. This has created an environment where women are in control of their own activity levels with an interest to continue to include physical activity in their lives for the foreseeable future. Team three are not at the same level but it is anticipated with a bit more instruction and motivation, they will reach a level where they no longer need the researcher to carry out all sessions.

5.7.8 Additional activities

The amount of extra physical activity sessions that the women engaged in as a result of their participation in the 'Mother of all Sport' programme was surprising and welcomed.

Over the past two years there has been a notable increase in the number of fitness classes available in both team one and team two's communities. These additional sessions have been organised as a result of the teams' request to hold more physical activity sessions in their communities. Team one organised weekly fitness classes that included activities such as aerobics, circuits, bootcamp, insanity, boxercise and also included at least two run/walk/jog sessions per week.

Team two set up weekly circuit classes in their local community hall and encouraged as many women as possible from the team to come along and join in. Team two also invited members of team three to join as they were aware that team three did not have any additional training sessions. Both team one and team two organised additional sports sessions in preparation for the tag rugby tournament and continued to participate in these sessions after the tournament was over.

Along with their own additional training, team one and team two participated in activities that provided local children with an opportunity to get more physical activity through weekly fun games. The women taught them the rules and skills of a range of children's games they had learned in their training sessions and also taught them how to play tag rugby and rounders.

Team two took it upon themselves to organise a tag rugby match between them and the local teenagers that attended their community centre. Similar to team one they taught the group the rules of tag rugby and also invited them to regular matches if desired.

These sessions were not only beneficial for the teenagers as they learned new skills but were also important for the women as it reiterated that they had come a long way since the start of the programme.

5.8 Conclusion

‘Mother of all Sport’ has been an extremely successful programme which has resulted in approximately fifty women taking part in regular physical activity. The programme has taught participants a range of different skills and rules and as a result has encouraged them to get involved in other physical activity programmes available locally. It has enabled women to form new friendships and find connections with other women. It has created local role models who are qualified and capable to deliver independent sessions as well as providing children with additional physical activity sessions. It has allowed women to connect with sport and physical activity in a fun and productive way and provide them with a pathway to ensure that physical activity can remain part of their lives for years to come. It is hoped that this programme can be expanded and offered to additional communities in the future thus allowing more women to engage in sport and physical activity. To help ensure that this is possible the next chapter will outline recommendations for the implementation of this type of programme in other communities and suggest changes and alterations to improve the programme in the future.

CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS/ CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

Over the past two years the researcher has observed how the introduction of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme has resulted in a greater number of women from disadvantaged communities participating in sport and physical activity. The following chapter will provide advice on procedures that should be implemented to increase the probability that this programme can be replicated in other communities both locally and nationally. This chapter will highlight aspects of the programme that worked and indicate procedural changes that could result in additional women joining the programme.

6.2 Planning and designing a programme

Prior to the commencement of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme it is essential to evaluate the needs and desires of the target audience. A programme should take into account why women want to get involved in a physical activity initiative and determine what goals they want to achieve from participating in it. While studies have shown that involvement in sport and physical activity can result in a longer and better quality of life (Bailey, Wellard & Dismore, 2004), it is not always the reason why women join a particular programme. Therefore it is essential to conduct information sharing sessions or questionnaires prior to its commencement in order to understand the requirements of the intended participants and to discover the motivational factors encouraging women to get involved in the first instance. This programme was successful for women who wanted to participate in the chosen activity of tag rugby and chose to do so through their own free will. It is not recommended to pinpoint specific groups to participate in the programme but instead encourage women to join the activity for their own personal benefits.

6.2.1 Women only activity

The ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme was designed specifically to engage women in sport and physical activity. Many women have indicated that having a male presence can deter them from participating as they can feel intimidated or inferior (The Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2008) and therefore it is recommended that this programme remains a female

centred activity. If females become comfortable participating with males they can be encouraged to join additional programmes that cater for both males and females.

6.2.2 Remaining a beginner/ intermediate programme

This programme encouraged women who had little to no experience of participating in a sport and physical activity to get involved. The aim of the programme was to introduce women to the skills and rules involved in a number of sports and enable them to become competent to compete in a number of tournaments. It was never the intention to develop elite athletes who would compete at a high level. Therefore it is important this remains the ethos for this programme. If the goal of a new programme is to recruit talented players then the target audience of this activity will be missed. There is a large number of sports teams that cater for advanced to elite athletes and therefore anyone who wished to compete at this higher level should be given information and encouraged to join teams that cater for their intended intensity.

6.2.3 Addressing fears and concerns

The fear of injury or not having the perceived fitness level to participate in a programme can deter women from trying a new activity (Ball, Crawford, & Owen, 2000). To address this it is imperative that fears and concerns are discussed prior to the commencement of the programme. A practical demonstration that informs women of the skills and rules involved in a game may help to relieve anxiety as they can be assisted and observed in what they are being asked to do.

6.2.4 Programme location and time

The 'Mother of all Sport' programme is a community based activity that is centred on the availability of the women involved. Where possible this activity should be operated in a community venue that is in close proximity to participants and reduce the need to rely on transport (The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2008). Initially practical sessions should be held at a time that suits the group and in venues that allow privacy as this can reduce fears of being judged or intimidated by external persons (Kilgour & Parker, 2013). When participants feel comfortable and confident to exercise in public locations they should be encouraged to do so, as the visual presence of them exercising in the community could attract additional women to join and participate in the 'Mother of all Sport' programme.

6.3 Promoting the programme

The success of a physical activity programme relies heavily on the ability to inform women that specific programmes exist (Fahey, Layte, & Gannon, 2004). Women need to be aware of the nature and details of programmes in order for them to interact with the activity. Through the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme a number of key promotional issues were uncovered and it is recommended that the following aspects are considered when promoting a similar programme.

6.3.1 Posters and leaflets

Posters and leaflets are invaluable when promoting sport and physical activity programmes. However, these are only useful when they are viewed by the intended audience. Posters need to be displayed in areas where women congregate and visit and therefore should be placed in areas such as local shops and schools. One suggestion obtained from a participant on the ‘Mother of all Sports’ programme was to have posters that required children to colour in the information. She felt that she would probably take more notice of this poster as she regularly viewed the work that her children had completed. This approach to poster promotion not only shared important information about a programme but also included children in the development of an activity.

6.3.2 Come and try sessions

This aspect of promotion was indicated as one the most important elements to ensuring that women are aware of activities that would take place during a physical activity programme. The fear of the unknown is a major deterrent when engaging women in sport and physical activity (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006) and thus needs to be addressed prior to its commencement. When some women hear about activities such as tag rugby, they automatically associate it with full contact rugby that they see on television and regard it as a rough sport that could cause injuries. By allowing women a chance to see the actual skills and processes involved in a game it could help relieve the anxiety of participating. ‘Come and try’ sessions are also one-off events that do not require women to commit long term. If they do not like an activity they are not obligated to continue to attend. It is essential that ‘come and try’ sessions take place in venues that are accessed by women and therefore it is suggested to use school yard venues at the beginning or end of the school day as a means of enabling women to view the sports that will be included in the programme.

6.3.3 Facebook

Facebook is a powerful promotional tool. It enables information to be shared and viewed by a large proportion of the population and allows people to ask questions and seek clarity. Ireland has one of the highest levels of Facebook use in the English speaking world (Weckler, 2013) and is used daily as a means of interacting with others. Throughout the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme, Facebook was used as a means of promoting the programme and informing women of the time and venue of practical sessions. Facebook had an additional function in this programme as teams created their own Facebook pages to connect with their teammates. This allowed for motivational messages to be shared amongst groups and was seen as a source of encouragement for people to continue to participate in the programme. It is recommended that teams are encouraged to create their own Facebook page to share information and supportive message to all involved in the programme. Team Facebook pages can also enable people to connect through a public forum without having to share information on their own personal pages.

6.3.4 Self Promotion

The belief that a participant has in a programme can have a positive and/ or negative effect on encouraging others to join an activity. Word of mouth is a fundamental aspect in enticing additional women to a programme. With this in mind it is important that the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme is accessible to all women at any time. Women should not be restricted to join the programme at the beginning but allowed to sign up at any point throughout the activity. During the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme women were asked to bring one additional friend to the next session. This task required participants to promote the programme and recruit new members. This element was important as it placed the onus of recruiting new members on current participants and shifted the responsibility from the researcher. This process prepared the teams to become more independent and less reliant on the researcher.

6.4 Elements of the programme to consider

The ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme was designed to cater for the physical activity needs of women in disadvantaged communities over two years. The programme set out a specific timeline to ensure that women had an opportunity to engage in a range of sporting activities. It was found that the participants responded better to certain activities and therefore it is suggested to use shorter timelines when setting out a programme. It may be more beneficial to

start with one specific activity and through consultation with the group determine the next activity they want to participate in. It is important that the group can come up with an activity that all participants can agree on and are willing to try. The overall aim of the programme is to get women active and therefore the sports included in the programme are secondary to activity level.

6.4.1 Practical sessions

It is important that structured practical sessions take place on a regular basis and it is advisable to conduct weekly sessions consisting of warm up games, skill development, match practice and cool down activities. As the ultimate goal of the programme is to develop teams that are capable of running their own sessions, it is recommended that participants take the lead on certain aspects of the session so as to develop their own confidence in doing so. If possible participants should be encouraged to attend training courses to gain recognised qualifications in the delivery of specific sports.

Fun and enjoyment should always remain a central element in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme as it has motivated many to join the activities. Therefore sessions should not be strict and regimental but allow for fun activities that increase participants’ physical levels.

6.4.2 The ‘Mother of all Sport’ tournaments

Having an event or tournament at the end of a programme motivates women to continue to train as it gives them a goal to work towards (Lane, Murphy & Bauman, 2008). It is recommended that the ‘Mother of all Sport’ tournament remain an integral part of the programme as it is an activity that can showcase the skills and rules participants have learned during their practical sessions. It is advisable that tournaments take place in neutral venues and at a time that suits all groups. If possible tournaments should be conducted at a time that allows for children to attend as it is important that children have an opportunity to support their mothers in a sporting activity.

6.4.3 Team names, colour and jerseys

The development of team names and associated colours are important as it gives groups an identity. It allows them to feel that they are part of a specific group that is connected through sport and physical activity. It is vital that teams choose their own name and develop a colour that will be synonymous to their team. Jerseys are also associated with pride and often reiterate to people that they are part of a unique group. The introduction of jerseys in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme was seen as a positive element as it symbolised the connection groups shared. As stated in previous chapters the women involved in the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme were asked to contribute €2 per week to cover the cost of buying jerseys. It is recommended that this process continues as it enables groups to appreciate the cost in purchasing jerseys and educates them on how best to budget.

6.4.4 Additional activities

A surprising and welcome outcome of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme was the amount of additional activities the groups participated in. It was felt that the ‘Mother of all Sport’ programme allowed participants to gain confidence to take part in physical activity programmes and showed them that sport and physical activity can be fun and beneficial. It is strongly recommended that participants who take part in a similar programme should be constantly informed about alternative activities that are taking place locally, and encouraged to try new sporting challenges.

6.5 Limitations

Throughout this study the researcher experienced a number of limitations. These limitations are outlined below;

Over the course of the ‘Mother of all Sport’ initiative, the researcher was responsible for developing the programme, coaching the teams involved and evaluating the success of the project. This approach could result in a perceived bias on the researcher’s part as they are evaluating their own accomplishments as a coach. It is suggested that if a similar programme was to be conducted again it may be worthwhile to separate the roles and recruit an independent coach who is not responsible for the evaluation of the overall programme.

The researcher had worked in all of the communities prior to the commencement of the programme and was aware of physical activity trends. When evaluating additional physical activity programmes that the women participated in the researcher was able to use knowledge gained from work on the ground to indicate that there had been an increase in physical activity levels. This information was not thoroughly investigated and therefore additional research may be needed to capture the impact that the 'Mother of all Sport' programme had on additional physical activity levels.

The researcher had worked with many of the participants before and had built a cordial relationship with the women. As trust was already earned it was easier for the researcher to recruit participants. It is believed that it may take longer to recruit women if the researcher/coach is new to the group and therefore extra time should be allowed in programme planning to accommodate the develop of a working relationship.

Finally the decision to include tag rugby, basketball and rounders as the three sports for the programme was made prior to the recruitment of the participants. In future it may be worthwhile to recruit participants and then decide on activities through consultation with the groups involved.

While these limitations existed it is believed by the researcher that they did not impact of the results of the study.

6.6 Conclusion

The 'Mother of all Sport' programme has been an extremely successful programme that has engaged over fifty women in sport and physical activity. It has taught women in disadvantaged communities that sport can be fun and beneficial and shown communities the possibilities that exist for community based physical activity programmes. It is believed that this programme has the potential to impact on women's activity levels on a national basis and engage even more women in sport and physical activity. The intention is that the programme will not only continue and improve as it does but that the research conducted for this study highlights how best to initiate and develop other physical activity and sport programmes that address the needs and interests of women in disadvantaged communities.

EPILOGUE

Over the past two years I have witnessed the women involved in this programme transforming from a near sedentary state to athletes. I know when most people hear the word ‘athlete’ they think of a professional sports person who trains at an elite level and alters their lifestyle to ensure that they are at their optimal best to succeed. While the women involved in this programme are not necessarily elite they do pose all the attributes and traits that an athlete possesses. They have become women who want to learn and improve their skill level. They have organised their own additional training sessions to ensure that they have all the opportunities available to attempt to perfect the skills involved in each game they try. They have altered their lifestyle to increase their fitness levels and become healthier people. Some have given up smoking while others have changed their diets to include healthier food and drinks that can benefit them in training. They have taken it upon themselves to organise extra fitness classes that not only aid their fitness levels but can also have a positive impact on their lifestyle both now and in the future. They have attended training courses so they have the knowledge and expertise to pass on what they have learned to other people in their community, thus creating a sustainable independent sporting environment that is led by the community for the community. Most of all they have become role models for the children they interact with and for other people in their community. Prior to this programme if you had asked the women to pick a role model that they knew in their community many would have said a local sports star but now, when asked, the first people they say are role models are themselves.

The reason that this programme was successful was down to the women’s willingness to take on an idea and run with it. It is easy to draw up a plan that you think will work but unless you have a group of women who are willing to give it a go, it will always remain a plan. A major learning outcome for me was that although this was my programme on paper it was their programme in reality. I simply gave them the ideas and guidance to get involved and learn that sport and physical activity does not need to be tough and strenuous but can be fun and exhilarating.

I have watched and seen how sport and physical activity has created a social network between the women who have taken part in the programme. They have developed such a strong support system where they motivate and encourage each other to train but also offer help and friendship in everyday life. They are a group of women who share a passion for sport and physical activity but also understand the positive emotional and social support that being part of a team can

bring. They continue to attract new members to take part because they know what one can gain from being part of a team.

I regularly refer to the women involved in this programme as ‘my superstars’ because they inspire me. They have taught me so much about sport development and how little changes can bring huge rewards. They may come from disadvantaged communities but through sports they have taken every advantage that sport and physical activity can bring, and used them to enhance their lifestyles for the better. They have found fitness, friendship, fun and challenges through physical activity and they continue to seek new challenges and obstacles that test their ability and motivate them to train harder to achieve success. Notably they never do this alone as they use the support of the team around them to succeed. This programme and the women involved have proved that I am working with people who I admire and respect and I am thankful that I get an opportunity to create a pathway for women to get involved in sport and physical activity.

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Appendix A

LSP – Planning template (Year 1)

Planning Document for Proposed Initiative

PART (A) Plan Overview

| |
|-------------------------------|
| 1. Project Name |
| Mother of all Sport programme |

| |
|--------------------------------|
| 2. Link to LSP Strategy |
| |

| |
|--|
| 3. Objectives of the Project |
| 3a. Primary objective/s: (Must be measurable) |
| To engage more women in sport and physical activity |
| To introduced women to new sport skills and rules |
| To encourage women to take part in coaching workshops |
| To introduce sports programmes in local communities and using local amenities |
| 3b. Secondary objective/s: (Could be considered for evaluation) |
| To support the participant's to carry out additional programmes independently of the LSP |
| To engage family members to take part in sport and physical activity |
| To enable integration between people in different communities |

| |
|--|
| 4. Outputs of the Project (Quantitative) |
| Increased number of women taking part in sport |
| Developed of a number of community teams across Limerick |
| To promote additional physical activity programmes that are available to women in Limerick |
| To provide opportunities for participants to attend sports coaching course |
| |

| | |
|--|--|
| 5. Evaluation Measures (KPIs) and Methods | |
| What are you measuring | Method |
| Physical activity level prior to joining club | Baseline survey at the beginning of programme |
| Feedback through social media | Posting information on the programme and clubs |
| Participants views on the programme and evaluations of what works well and what could change | Survey on impact of programme |
| | |

PART (B) Plan Delivery

7. Description of Project

The Mother of all Sport is a new women's physical activity programme. This programme looks to introduce women to tag rugby, basketball and rounders. This programme will consist of four teams from different areas across Limerick City. Each team will have approx. 12-15 women 18+ yrs. It is proposed to approach women/mothers through local schools and community centres and encourage them to attend physical activity training sessions. These sessions will be held for an hour a week in local community facility and run for approx. 24 weeks. (8 weeks tag rugby, 8 weeks basketball and 8 weeks rounders). Each team will develop a team name and create an identity through team colours.

At the end of each block teams will compete against each other in a 'Mother of all Sport' tournament. This tournament will be held in a neutral venue and involve all teams who completed training programme. Each match in the tournament will last 20 mins and teams will get 2 points for a win, 1 point for a draw and 0 points if they lose. The top 2 teams will play off for the title of the Mother of all Tag champions.

8. Target Group

Women 18+

9. Partner Commitment

| List partners | Resources provided |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Munster Rugby | Provide referees for the tournament |
| Local community centres | Provide training facilities |
| Local schools | Promote the programme |
| | |
| | |

10. Key Action Areas, Time Commitment and Timelines

| Action Areas | Staff Time | Timeframe |
|---------------------|---|---------------------|
| Planning: | 30 hours | August/ September |
| Managing Risk: | | |
| Promotion: | 20 hours | September & January |
| Delivery: | 1hr/wk x 24 weeks (per group) 4 groups per programme = 96 hours | September to April |

| | | |
|------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Tournament | 3 tournaments x 6 hrs per tournament = 18 hours | November, March and May |
| Evaluation & Analysis: | 6 hours | May |
| Health and Safety: | | |

| 11. Budget Breakdown and Income Source | | |
|--|--|--|
| Expense area | Amount | Source |
| Venue Hire | €20 per hour = €1920 (24 hours per group x 4 groups) | Ideally facilities should be free and within the community |
| Tutor cost | €35 per sessions = €3360 | BIK – sports development officer to conduct sessions |
| Refreshments | €50 x 3 = €150 | Water for 'Mother of all Sport' tournaments |
| Promotion | €1000 | Advert in the paper on 2 occasions throughout the year |
| Equipment | €1000 (€250 per team) | Tags and rugby balls, basketball equipment and rounder's equipment |
| Tournament cost | €120 per tournament x 3 = €360 | Pitch Hire |
| Total Cost | €7790 | €5280 should be covered by BIK |

| 11. Detail actions to be taken to support sustainability/exit strategy |
|--|
| <p>The longer a team participates in this programme the more confident they become at taking their own sessions. Slowly development officer can spend less time with the longer running groups and spend more time concentrating on developing new groups. Teams will be encouraged to attended coaching courses it enable them to carry out their own sessions independently from the LSP</p> |

Appendix B

Mother of all Sport – Poster

The Mother of all Sport

LIMERICK CITY SPORTS PARTNERSHIP
An Irish Sports Council Initiative

Represent your community



The Limerick City Sports Partnership is looking for participants to join their newly developed women's sports programme.

This programme will introduce participants to the skills and rules involved in tag rugby, basketball and softball. This programme is open to people of all abilities from beginners to advanced and is a great place to improve fitness levels while having fun

Get fit and healthy



This programme is open to all women 18+ yrs
Beginners to advanced

Learn new skills



The Mother of all sport programme is divided into 3 blocks—

Block 1—tag rugby—8 weeks of tag rugby training followed by a tag rugby blitz with the other groups from across the city

Block 2—Basketball— 8 weeks of basketball training followed by a basketball blitz with the other groups from across the city

Block 3—Rounders —8 weeks of softball (rounders) training followed by a softball blitz with the other groups from across the city

Have fun & be part of a team



Training will be held in a local facility and at a day and time that best suits the group

**For more information
Please contact Tracy**

Phone: 061333600
E-mail: tmahedy@limerickcitysports.ie

University Arena
University of Limerick
Limerick



Appendix C

Physical activity readiness questionnaire – Par Q form

The PAR-Q

Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire

If you have decided to increase the amount of physical activity in your life, completing the questionnaire below is a worthwhile first step. For most people physical activity should not pose any problem or hazard, but the *PAR-Q* has been designed to identify the small number of people for whom it would be wise to have medical advice before starting.

1. Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition and recommended only medically approved physical activity?
2. Do you have chest pain brought on by physical activity?
3. Have you developed chest pain at rest in the past month?
4. Do you lose consciousness or lose your balance as a result of dizziness?
5. Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be aggravated by the proposed physical activity?
6. Are you currently on any form of medication (e.g. tablets, inhaler)?
7. Are you pregnant, or have you been pregnant in the past three months?
8. Are you aware, through your own experience or a doctor's advice, of any other reason why you should seek medical approval before exercising?
9. Are you aware of any medical condition which may affect your participation in sport and which the leader should be aware of. If so, please detail.

If you answered YES to one or more of the above questions, you should consult your doctor before undertaking a programme of physical activity.

Signed: _____
(Participant)

Date:

Appendix D

Mother of all Sport Session Plan

Mother of all Sport

Session Plan 3

Tag rugby

Group 1

Date: 30th Jan 2013

Time: 11.00am

| Phase | Activity | Teaching Points | Equipment | Time (mins) |
|----------------------|---|--|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Warm up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bull dog tag | -One person on – team must try to run to other side without the person on getting a tag. If person loses one tag they still has another go. If they lose both tags they are on too. Winner is the last person with a remaining tag | Tag rugby belts and tags | 6 |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stretch | -full body stretch – group to lead this section | | 4 |
| Ball handling skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passing | -Pass ball in a circle If person drops ball team must 10 jumping jacks Change direction, add in extra balls | Rugby balls | 5 |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pass and run | -First women in the circle pass the ball left. Once the ball has left their hands they must run around the circle. Their aim is to get back to their place before the ball gets back around (beat the ball). Once back the next woman goes and so on until all have had a go. Change direction and repeat Penalties still remain for dropped ball, team must do 10 lunges for dropped ball | Rugby balls | 5 |
| Skills and rules | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tagging | -Introducing of steps required to carry out when tagging a player - where person stands - Onside rule -Offensive and defensive set up for roll back | Rugby balls, belts and tags | 20 |
| Match | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mini match | Play match which includes tagging rules and set up and also included forward pass rules (as learnt last week) | | 15 |
| Cool down | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freezie bean bags | -Women put bean bags on their head and must walk around in different directions. If bean bag falls off they must stand still until another teammate bends down and places the bean bag back on their head. | 20 Bean bags | 2 |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stretch | Group lead end of session stretch | | 3 |

Appendix E

Questionnaire Year One

Hand out to all participants

Please rank the following in order of importance

1= Most important aspect

10= less important aspect

I am participating in this sports programme to:

- _____ Learn new skills
- _____ Make my kids proud
- _____ Meet new people/ friends
- _____ Represent my community
- _____ Lose weight/ improve fitness
- _____ Win
- _____ Challenge myself
- _____ Have fun
- _____ Set a good example
- _____ Improve me health/ get more physically active

Please state any other reasons for participating in this programme?

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix F

Interview Year One



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

Mother of all Sport

Interview Questions 1

1) On a scale of 1-10 how physically active would you rate yourself

1 = never take part in any forms of PA, 10= take part in pa everyday

2) What sports/ physical activity programmes have you taken part in before?

3) What are your main goals/aims for taking part in this programme?

4) What are your main concerns/ fears about taking part in this programme?

5) What opportunities were there for you to join a sports clubs when you were younger?

6) What are your memories of physical education during your school years?

7) If you could have participated in any sport when you were younger, what would it have been and why did you not try it when you were younger?

8) What do you think your children would say about you taking part in a sports programme?

9) As part of this programme you are about to take part in 9 weeks of tag rugby, 9 weeks of basketball & 9 weeks of softball. What are your views on each of these sports and what concerns have you about trying each of these activities?

- 10) It is sometimes difficult to recruit women to participate in physical activity programmes. Why do you think this is the case and what approaches would you take to engage more women in this type of activity?
- 11) What are your views on opportunities for children to participate in sports and physical activity within your area? Do you think your community encourages youth to participate in physical activity? If so to what level?

Appendix G

Interview Year Two



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Mother of all Sport

Interview Questions 2

- 1) Why did you return to the Mother of all Sports Programme this year?
- 2) What were the positive outcomes of last year's programme?
- 3) What aspects of the programme would you change this year? Why would you change these aspects?
- 4) Did you enjoy participating in tag rugby and would you continue to participate in this activity?
- 5) Did you enjoy participating in basketball and would you continue to participate in this activity?
- 6) Did you enjoy participating in rounders and would you continue to participate in this activity?
- 7) If you were to recruit new members, how would you describe this programme to them?
What are the attractive features of the programme?
- 8) Have you received or heard any feedback regarding the Mother of all Sports Programme from people within the community?
- 9) Do you think that the community see this programme as
 - a) A positive programme for the area

b) A negative programme for the area

c) Has no impact on the community

10) In your option how important was the tag tournament on Mother's Day?

11) Was this tournament a positive motivator as it gave people a timeline and goal to work towards or was it a negative factor as people worried too much about the outcome of this tournament?

12) What was attractive about the day and time of this tournament? What was challenging about the day and time?

13) Did you participate in any additional programmes/ activities due to the Mother of all Sports programme? How did you hear about these additional programmes / activities? Who offered the programmes / activities?

14) Would you recommend this programme to another person, and if so why?

15) Can you discuss any healthier lifestyles changes that may have occurred due to this programme?

Appendix H

Results from Questionnaire

| | Learn new skills | Make my kids proud | Meet new people/ friends | Represent my community | Lose weight/ improve fitness | Win | Challenge myself | Have fun | Set a good example | Improve my health/ get more physically active | Other |
|---------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-----|------------------|----------|--------------------|---|---|
| Group 3 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 10 | 4 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 1 | na |
| | 7 | 10 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 6 | 4 | na |
| | 8 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 10 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 1 | na |
| | 6 | 10 | 2 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 7 | 3 | na |
| | 6 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 9 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 5 | na |
| | 2 | 7 | 3 | 9 | 6 | 10 | 4 | 1 | 8 | 5 | na |
| | 4 | 10 | 6 | 8 | 3 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 2 | fun with friends and improve community spirit |
| | 4 | 10 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 2 | na |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 42 | 69 | 33 | 55 | 38 | 71 | 41 | 14 | 50 | 23 | |
| | 6 | 9 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 10 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 2 | |
| | Learn new skills | Make my kids proud | Meet new people/ friends | Represent my community | Lose weight/ improve fitness | Win | Challenge myself | Have fun | Set a good example | Improve my health/ get more physically active | Other |
| Group 1 | 9 | 1 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 5 | |
| | 2 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 4 | |
| | 8 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 7 | 10 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | to prevent boredom |
| | 7 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 10 | 6 | 9 | 2 | 1 | |
| | 4 | 7 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 10 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 6 | |
| | 5 | 8 | 4 | 9 | 6 | 10 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| | 7 | 10 | 9 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 4 | |
| | 6 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 2 | 10 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 1 | |
| | 8 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 10 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | |
| | 7 | 9 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 10 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 2 | time to do something for myself |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 63 | 61 | 54 | 66 | 55 | 83 | 38 | 44 | 54 | 32 | |
| | 9 | 7 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | |

| | Learn new skills | Make my kids proud | Meet new people/friends | Represent my community | Lose weight/improve fitness | Win | Challenge myself | Have fun | Set a good example | Improve my health/get more physically active | Other |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|------------------|----------|--------------------|--|-------|
| Group 4 | 3 | 10 | 5 | 8 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 9 | |
| | 2 | 10 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| | 7 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 5 | |
| | 2 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 1 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 5 | |
| | 2 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 10 | 8 | 3 | 7 | 5 | |
| | 7 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 10 | 9 | 4 | 5 | 6 | |
| | 6 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 9 | 10 | 2 | 8 | 3 | 4 | |
| | 9 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 10 | 5 | 8 | 4 | 1 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 38 | 66 | 29 | 44 | 39 | 73 | 33 | 40 | 38 | 40 | |
| | 3 | 9 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 10 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 6 | |
| | Learn new skills | Make my kids proud | Meet new people/friends | Represent my community | Lose weight/improve fitness | Win | Challenge myself | Have fun | Set a good example | Improve my health/get more physically active | Other |
| Group 2 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 9 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 7 | |
| | 7 | 9 | 4 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 3 | |
| | 7 | 5 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 6 | 10 | 1 | |
| | 8 | 7 | 6 | 9 | 1 | 10 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | |
| | 8 | 10 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 7 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 36 | 36 | 24 | 38 | 8 | 39 | 25 | 21 | 28 | 20 | |
| | 7 | 7 | 4 | 9 | 1 | 10 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 2 | |
| Overall Result | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Learn new skills | Make my kids proud | Meet new people/friends | Represent my community | Lose weight/improve fitness | Win | Challenge myself | Have fun | Set a good example | Improve my health/get more physically active | Other |
| | 179 | 232 | 140 | 203 | 140 | 266 | 137 | 119 | 170 | 115 | |
| | 7 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 1 | |

Appendix I

Interview 1 – Themes and Codes

Interview 1 - Themes and Codes

| Theme | Programme | Sport/ Physical Activity | Promotion | Perception |
|-------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Codes | 1. Fitness / Health | 1. Gender | 1. Flyers/ Posters | 1. Proud |
| | 2. Hobby/ Something(new) to do | 2. Lack of exposure | 2. Word of mouth | 2. Funny |
| | 3. Friends/ Social | 3. School | 3. Innovative | 3. Norm |
| | 4. Fun/ exciting | 4. Encouragement / confidence | 4. Social Media | 4. Cool |
| | 5. None | | | |
| | 6. Injury | | | |
| | 7. Embarrassing self or team | | | |
| | 8. Responsibility | | | |
| | 9. Challenge | | | |
| | 10. Ending | | | |

Appendix J

Social Media – Collection of data using themes and codes

| Team 2 | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Post Date | Promotion | Perception | Participation | Physical Activity | Pictures | other | No of Views | No of Likes | No of post |
| 16th Jan 14 | | | | | | Page was created | 19 | 4 | 0 |
| 16th Jan 14 | | | training | | | | 20 | 7 | 6 |
| 17th Jan 14 | | | training | | | | 20 | 8 | 7 |
| 16th Jan 14 | recruiting new players | | training | keep fit & social | | | 20 | 10 | 12 |
| 21st Jan 14 | | | | | | Added new member to group | 19 | 4 | 0 |
| 21st Jan 14 | | | | | | Added new member to group | 19 | 3 | 0 |
| 24th Jan 14 | New players welcome | feeling great after training | training | | | | 20 | 11 | 0 |
| 24th Jan 14 | | | | | Team photo after training | | 20 | 7 | |
| 24th Jan 14 | | | | | Team photo after training | | 20 | 8 | |
| 24th Jan 14 | | | | | Team photo after training | | 21 | 12 | 3 |
| 24th Jan 14 | | | | | Team photo after training | | 19 | 6 | 1 |
| 24th Jan 14 | | great work done by the team | | | | Full team photo will be taken next week | 20 | 8 | 10 |
| 24th Jan 14 | | | | | | Added new member to group | 19 | 3 | 0 |
| 24th Jan 14 | | | | | | Added new member to group | 19 | 4 | 0 |