



Understanding participation in sport: What determines sports participation among lone parents?

July 2006



**Research conducted by:
GfK NOP Social Research**



GfK NOP



Foreword

Sport England has the challenging target of increasing participation in sport in England, against the backdrop of static participation over the last two decades. In order to meet this challenge, it is vital to understand the motivations and attitudes of those who do not participate or who may have dropped out from an active lifestyle.

The Framework for Sport in England¹ identified the need to build the evidence around non-participation. In response, the research team commenced a three-year research programme around 'understanding participation' in 2005. The research focuses on transitions or 'lifestages' where participation drops off, or is characteristically low.

Having completed two previous studies (15-19 year old women and recently retired²), the decision was made to focus a study on lone parents. A significant proportion of the population are lone parents and this poses particular challenges with respect to sports participation.

The purpose of this study was to understand better the barriers and motivations to sport and physical activity among lone parents and to form practical ideas that will encourage participation and therefore help inform policy interventions.

This study reveals interesting insights about the challenges faced by lone parents. It also goes some way to suggesting practical interventions which would encourage participation. The challenge is not only prompting this change in behaviour, but sustaining it.

Sport England welcomes this research undertaken by GfK NOP, and believes that the findings will help inform those providing sporting opportunities to lone parents and indeed 'family-based' projects. By increasing our understanding of the barriers to participation and how to overcome them, it is hoped that the research will help shape interventions to increase participation in sport in England.

Sport England research team

July 2006

¹ The Framework for Sport in England, 2004.

² 'Understanding Participation in Sport' reports can be found at www.sportengland.org/research



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1 Executive Summary

Research objectives

Sport England wished to understand better the determinants of sports participation among lone parents. In particular, feelings about sport and physical activity, the perceived benefits and an understanding of the barriers and ways in which some lone parents had overcome these barriers. Sport England also wanted lone parents to come up with practical ideas that would encourage participation and therefore help inform policy interventions.

Sample and methodology

Qualitative research was conducted amongst the lone mothers and fathers and a workshop was held with Stakeholders.

Twelve ethnographic depth interviews were conducted amongst lone parents in the South East, each lasting at least three hours and involved the respondents producing a video diary.

Four idea generation workshops took place around the country and used creative techniques to come up with possible solutions to the barriers of participation in sport and physical activity.

A Stakeholder workshop was held with six Stakeholders from DfES, Womens Sports Foundation, Amateur Swimming Association, Eltham Green Sports College, Gingerbread and London Borough of Hackney & Tower Hamlets and with six of the respondents from the ethnographic depth stage. This was used to identify the feasibility of the ideas from the idea generation workshops and identify which ideas were taken forward to be tested in the focus groups.

Ten focus groups were held in five locations across England which were used to evaluate the ideas from the idea generation workshops.

Key findings

The impact of being a lone parent

- Lone parents have daily struggles with having to fit in their household tasks and possibly work along with looking after their children with very little assistance. All lone parents put their own needs second to those of their child's and the majority of their time and money was spent on their children.
- The demands of being a lone parent meant that including physical activity into their routine was considerably difficult and this made it increasingly harder when other barriers came into play such as lack of transport and facilities.
- Whilst sport and physical activity is a key part of all of their children's lives, doing something for themselves was less common and not thought to be as much of a priority.



Differences in attitude by current participation level ('Always', 'Sometimes' and 'Nevers')

- Respondents were classified into three categories dependent upon the level of physical activity they participated in: 'Always', 'Sometimes' and 'Never'. In each category there were considerable differences in terms of attitudes and motivations towards sport and physical activity.
- 'Always' respondents tended to have been brought up with sport and exercise as a main part of their lives. They look upon the attributes of doing a regular form of activity as being beneficial to their own physical and mental health and well being as well as benefiting their children. They have a positive attitude towards physical activity, are very motivated to overcome the barriers they could face in participating and manage to incorporate it into their routine as a priority.
- 'Sometimes' respondents understand and appreciate the benefits of partaking in regular activity and they try to fit it into their lifestyles. However, they are less motivated and find it harder to overcome certain barriers such as those associated with time and cost. They are motivated more by physical reasons such as losing weight rather than increasing their fitness levels and tend to embark upon regimes but quickly lose interest and their activity levels lapse. There were a mixture of those with a more positive attitude who wanted to do more but felt they could not afford to and the more negative respondents who participated slightly reluctantly because they felt that had to, rather than because they really wanted to.
- 'Nevers' tended not to have done a substantial amount of physical activity when they were younger. They suffered the most in terms of internal barriers and often had low confidence levels and felt that exercise 'wasn't for them'. Whilst they were clearly aware of the benefits of participating in physical activity regularly, they did not consider it to be a priority. They had a more general lack of motivation and a negative attitude towards participation and admitted to finding excuses as to why they could not fit it into their lifestyle.

External and internal barriers

- A number of barriers exist towards participation in sport and physical activity, the significance of which was dependent upon their current level of participation, with the 'Always' group finding solutions and the 'Nevers' finding the barriers very difficult to overcome.
- The key external barriers were the cost of participating, the cost and provision of suitable childcare and the availability of good quality facilities accessible by public transport if they did not have their own means of transport.
- The main internal barriers were the low levels of confidence that some lone parents had. This included feeling out of place in a sporting environment and a number of respondents who felt they were "*not the sporty type*", were too overweight or unfit to participate. A



large barrier was a general lack of motivation and low level of enjoyment and interest in sport or physical activity.

Intervention ideas

- Four key ideas were identified and explored:
 - A Dancing Day- which would be held at the local school and would allow parents to try a variety of dancing styles and then do a six week course, followed by regular 'taster' days.
 - Swimming Open Day- which would introduce different activities such as aqua aerobics and would offer lone parents a form of childcare or supervision allowing them to exercise while the children were being looked after.
 - National Walking Day- this would be a family day with a 'local leader' to motivate people. The aim would be to get lone parents to sign up to regular walking groups in their local areas.
 - Activity Sessions- this would give parents the opportunity to try a range of more unusual activities such as abseiling and martial arts. It would be held at the school on a regular basis and would allow people to decide on the day what type of activity they wanted to do.
- The idea of a Dancing Day which allowed for a variety of different dances to be trialled was seen to be the most popular activity overcoming a number of barriers by being held at a local school. It was perceived to be sociable, accessible, affordable and also appealing for people of all levels of fitness.
- The role of schools was key not only in communicating these schemes to the parents but also in being the venue for the Activity Sessions and the Dancing Days. They were familiar to parents, accessible and perceived as being able to offer affordable sports and activities.

Conclusions

- It is important to improve communication of existing initiatives and facilities, as there was a low level of awareness of schemes that were already in place.
- An overall improvement of facilities would encourage more people to use them and this could include simple measures such as repairing nets on tennis courts and improved hygiene at swimming pools.
- The provision of affordable childcare at gyms and leisure centres would enable more lone parents to participate in some type of physical activity.
- Utilising school facilities would allow a significant number of parents to participate, as this would be an accessible location and would be affordable for them to take part in.



- A 'local leader' would benefit a number of lone parents, particularly the 'Sometimes' respondents who need the additional motivation that this person could provide. It would need to be someone who was qualified but not necessarily a personal trainer, more at an informal level so as not to be intimidating. It would also have to be a person who could relate to being a lone parent and who would understand the situations and obstacles they face.

2 Introduction and background to study

Sport England wished to carry out research to examine the underlying factors that determine adult's attitudes and propensity to take part in sport and physical activity, specifically amongst lone parents. The overall aim of the research was to increase the knowledge and understanding that already exists regarding determinants of participation in sport and physical activity among lone parents in order to design interventions that will encourage people in lifelong participation. A number of qualitative research studies have been conducted by Sport England and this work complements these existing studies and adds insight and depth (whilst also aiding the planning of future research projects).

GfK NOP Social Research designed a research project to tackle the objectives in a creative way, going beyond the traditional focus group format in order to uncover understanding and insight (using a combination of qualitative methods and ethnographic and idea generation techniques).

3 Objectives

Sport England's overall aim was to expand upon current levels of knowledge of the determinants of participation in sport and physical activity amongst lone parents.

3.1 Research Objectives

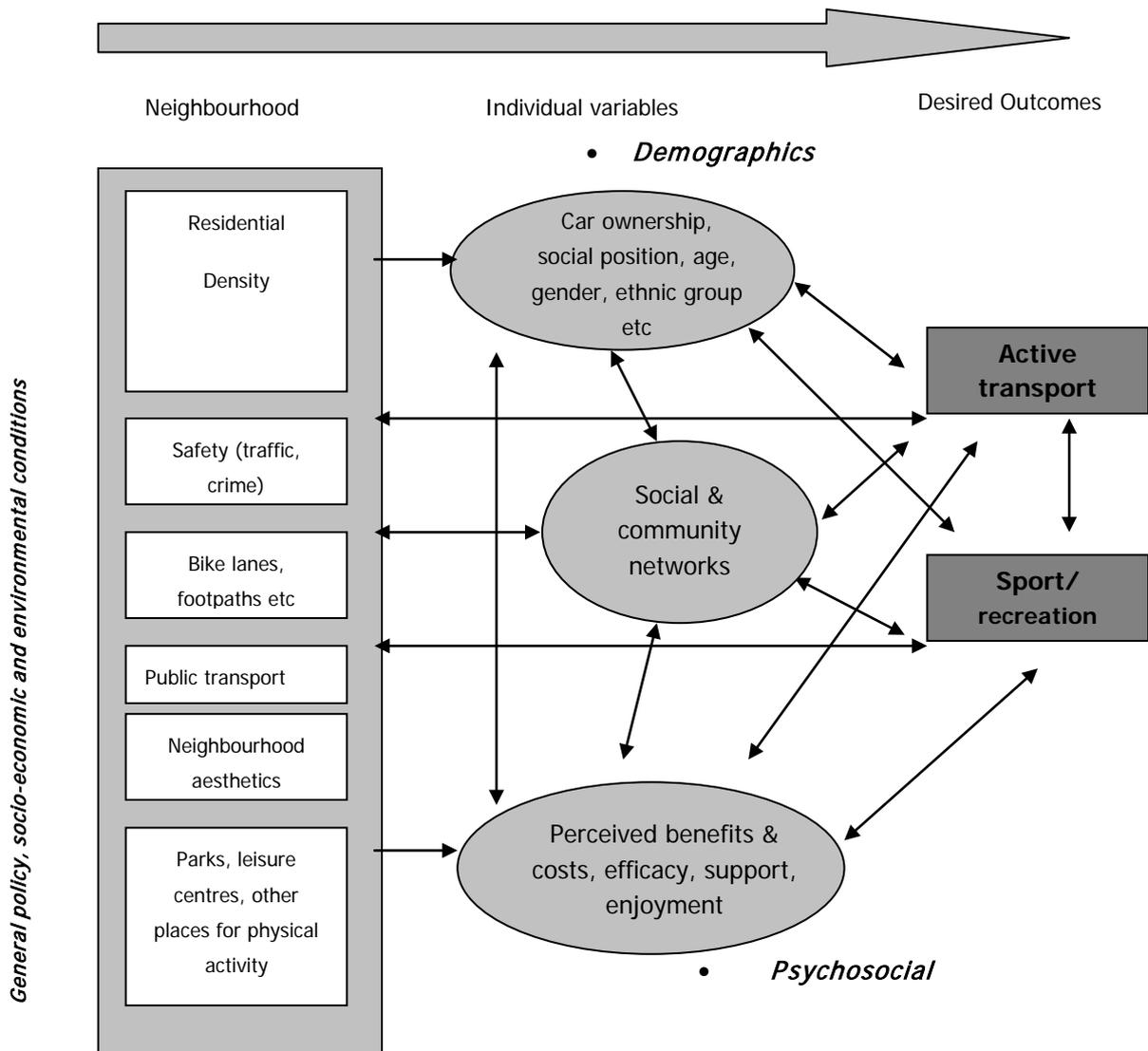
As laid out in the original brief, Sport England had the following specific research objectives they wished to cover in the research:

- to use Oxford University's Framework as an aid to developing the research design (see Figure 1 below);
- to assess the impact of being a lone parent on sports participation and physical activity;
- within 'lone parents', to identify different subsets with motivational and constraining factors in common that impact on their participation and activity levels and for which specifically tailored intervention strategies could be designed;
- to explore previous life experiences and how these may have impacted on current sport and physical activity behaviour patterns;

- to test the likely success of different approaches of seeking to get lone parents to start being active and sustaining levels of activity;
- to identify the specific opportunities for particular sports to engage more lone parents in sport and physical activity and sustain their involvement and to explore how those sports can best present themselves in a way that would engage lone parents;
- to identify priorities for further research in terms of life stages for families.

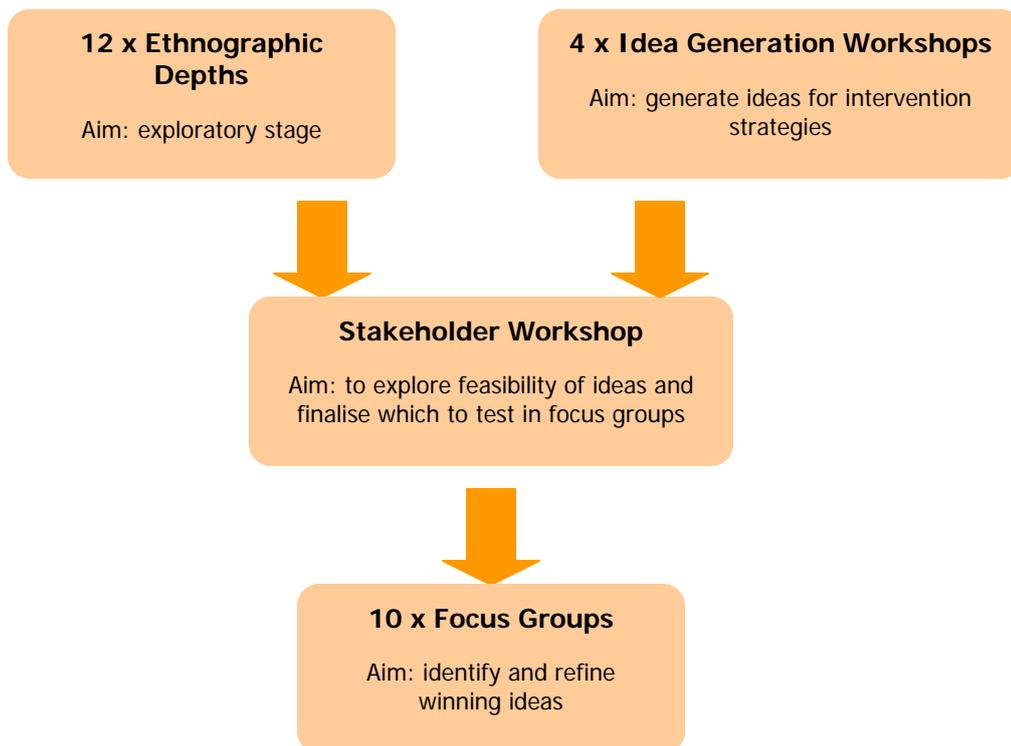
Figure 1

Oxford University's Framework of the determinants of participation in sport and active recreation



4 Methodology

The overall project involved four distinct stages: ethnographic depth interviews, idea generation workshops, a Stakeholder workshop and focus groups.



This mixed methodology allowed for insights and theories to be identified and tested throughout the research and for a wealth of psychosocial issues to be examined, which in turn has led to actionable and realistic recommendations.

Ethnographic Depth Interviews

The ethnographic depths, of which 12 were conducted in the South East, provided insights not only into the respondents reasons for participation or non-participation in sport, but also into their lifestyles and the areas in which they lived. The depth interviews involved the researcher spending 3 hours with the respondent in their home and included observation and participation in their everyday activities, for example preparing their children's dinner and undertaking household tasks such as ironing. The interviews gave the researchers the opportunity to get a real understanding of some of the more sensitive and psychological issues that might not have been divulged in a focus group situation.

As part of the ethnographic depth process, respondents were asked to produce a video diary for 5 days prior to the interview to allow for greater insight into how they spend their time and their thoughts and feelings regarding certain activities. Watching the video with the



respondents during the depths allowed respondents to explain what it was about these activities that they liked or disliked and prompted further discussion into the important things in their life. They were also asked to respond to a series of text messages sent to them randomly in the five days before the interview in order to help build a fuller picture of how they spent their time.

Idea Generation Workshops

A series of four idea generation workshops were held in different areas around the country to allow for urban/ rural locations and differences in facility provision. The aim of the workshops was to use creative techniques to generate ideas for possible intervention strategies that could be used to encourage lone parents to start and continue to participate in sport and physical activity.

Stakeholder Workshop

A Stakeholder Workshop was conducted, with six of the lone parents who took part in the ethnographic depths, together with representatives from DfES, Womens Sports Foundation, Amateur Swimming Association, Eltham Green Sports College, Gingerbread and London Borough of Hackney & Tower Hamlets all attending the workshop. The inclusion of Stakeholders provided a valuable opportunity to obtain a balanced response to the ideas and to explore the practicalities regarding the use of intervention strategies in the future.

At this stage ideas that emerged from the idea generation workshops were discussed in terms of their appeal and feasibility for implementation with both the lone parents and Stakeholders. A shortlist of these ideas were carried forward and tested in the focus groups.

Focus Groups

Ten focus groups were held around the country with nine groups of single mothers and one group of single fathers. Barriers and attitudes towards sport and physical activity were explored briefly but the main emphasis of the focus groups was to evaluate the appeal of the intervention ideas and to refine them.

4.1 Recruitment

GfK NOP's preferred suppliers of recruitment services were used to contact the research participants, and the recruitment was overseen by the project manager at GfK NOP to ensure people were correctly selected for participation in this study according to the sample outline.

Separate recruitment screening questionnaires were developed for each of the stages. The criteria for the screeners was agreed in consultation with Sport England to ensure that the individuals invited to each of the sessions matched the agreed sample structure. For the general public, it was ensured that 'professional respondents' who had recent or regular experience of participation in market research interviews were excluded. The screener was approved by Sport England before recruitment began to ensure that they were satisfied with the recruitment approach.



4.2 The sample

When designing the research sample, the Oxford University Framework was taken into consideration and a range of SEG's, ages, locations, availability of sports facilities, age and number of children were all reflected across the sample. A detailed breakdown of the sample for each stage of the research can be found in Appendix 9.1.

The key differentiator between respondents was their activity 'category' (referred to as their 'typology' throughout the report). All respondents were identified as either 'Always', 'Sometimes' or 'Never' participating in sport or physical activity and below is the criteria used to determine this:

- Always: in a typical week in the past 4 weeks, they took part in **more than 1.5 hours** of activity at a level that raised their breathing rate
- Sometimes: in a typical week in the past 4 weeks, they took part in **1.5 hours or less** of activity at a level that raised their breathing rate
- Never: in a typical week in the past 4 weeks, they took part in **no activity** at a level that raised their breathing rate

Including people with different levels of participation in sport and physical activity provided a thorough understanding of the barriers faced in terms of starting and continuing activity as well as how barriers could be overcome.

Respondents were aged between 17 and 52 years and throughout all of the research stages both single mothers and single fathers were represented (with 1 in 12 single parents in the UK population being male this was reflected in the sample, including men in the idea generation workshop sample and a focus group).

Workshops and focus groups were held around the country in locations including rural, urban and suburban areas. Depth interviews were held in London and the South East and again covered a range of different locations.

Lone parents with different numbers and ages of children were also recruited to gauge the additional impact on their levels of activity. A mixture of parents who were working and those who were unemployed were also included in the sample framework.

4.3 Timings

Carolyn Streek, Debra Crush and Amrita Sood of GfK NOP Social Research undertook the ethnographic depth interviews and the focus groups. Debra Crush, Carolyn Streek and Mary Bard of GfK NOP Business Research undertook the Stakeholder workshop and Mary Bard conducted all of the idea generation workshops.

Fieldwork was conducted between 23rd January and 21st March 2006.



5 Key Findings

5.1 Introduction

Please note that unless stated otherwise, the views expressed throughout this report represent the major themes emerging. Unless otherwise stated, views are of single mothers (and fathers), and quotes are from focus groups.

It is also important to note that throughout the research we discovered that the term 'lone parents' was not a commonly used term among lone parents and was disliked by an overwhelming majority. The term 'single' parent is preferred, as it was felt that 'lone' sounded as if were 'alone' or lonely, which admittedly could be the case for some parents, but they did not wish to be described in that way.

5.2 Defining sport and physical and recreational activity

Respondents were asked to explain what they would define as sport and recreational and physical activity. An extensive list of activities was generated with walking, cycling, swimming and going to the gym being the most top of mind.

'Sport' was thought of as being competitive, often team based, with an organised class or club, requiring a venue, level of skill to participate and some formal organisation. Examples of 'sport' included football, hockey and tennis. 'Physical activity' was considered less arduous than sport, more leisure based and something that could be done either independently or with others. Whereas 'sport' was associated more with health benefits, 'physical activity' was associated more with vanity or appearance. The term 'exercise' was used more frequently than any other and 'recreational or physical activity' was not a term respondents generally used.

When asked to think more creatively about other sports and physical activities, respondents came up with activities such as skiing, horse riding, kick boxing, martial arts, scuba diving, personal training, snow boarding, wind surfing and paragliding- all activities they claimed they would love to be able to do if money were no object, but were not currently realistic. The reasons for the appeal of these activities were that they were considered to be more exciting and stimulating.

Respondents were generally aware of the physical and mental benefits they would gain from undertaking more physical activity. The benefits identified included having more energy, being fitter, healthier, more toned, 'glowing', and being a good role model to their children. A person who does 'the right amount of exercise' was believed to be happy, healthy, attractive, more calm and have a positive attitude.

"I think you want to have a long life so you can enjoy your children as well. I think when you have got children you want to make sure that your life does go on, so the fitter you are the better, because there's an awful lot in the news isn't there at the moment about being healthy, what we're eating, how much exercise we're taking and I think we are all listening to it a little bit more these days, so you are taking it on a bit more." (Sometimes, Nottingham)



Whilst these benefits were all thought to be attractive and desirable attributes to possess, attitudes and behaviour varied according to their respondent category. 'Nevers' level of motivation was insufficient for them to have overcome the barriers in order to achieve the benefits. 'Nevers' have a different order of priorities than 'Always' respondents and perceive activities in different ways. Whereas an 'Always' may see going to the gym as a deserved 'time-out' to relax and enjoy themselves, a 'Never' may see the same activity as an expensive indulgence that is not enjoyable and would rather spend the hour reading a book and relaxing instead.

5.3 General attitudes to being a lone parent

Lone parents felt that they had to be 'both a mum and a dad' to their children and they all took this responsibility very seriously. Some had recently become lone parents and had to adjust to the lifestyle whereas others had been single parents since their child was born. Either way, they felt immense pressure to ensure that their children lead as 'normal' a life as possible and that they did not miss out on anything, be it opportunities, trips, treats or within their general lifestyle.

A few of the respondents had children who were disabled and this increased the amount of care and attention they had to give and the demands on their own time.

"My son lives with me and he has ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder] and so he is really hard work and a lot of my time is spent looking after him and sorting stuff for him for doctors and things like that." (Always, Fathers, Leeds)

There was no typical day for a lone parent and it varied depending on how many children they had and their ages, but it was clear that their days were very full and revolved around their children; getting them up and ready for school and doing the school run which could involve more than one journey depending the location of their schools. They then either returned home and carried out household tasks or went to work.

All lone parents found it very difficult to fit in the household chores in addition to looking after their children. Lone fathers in particular felt it was a demanding role.

"I have realised for a very long time exactly how single mothers get on. It is even worse for a father." (Always, Fathers, Leeds)

Those with young children who attended nursery would need to be collected early in the afternoon followed by the school run for the older children. Those who had children who were too young for nursery spent the day looking after them.

The majority of children attended some after school clubs and activities that required the parents to take them to or collect them from, before helping them with homework at home. This would be followed by preparing the evening meal, continuing with any household chores and putting their children to bed, by which time it could be quite late in the evening.

"...you know, being old dads as we are, heavily involved with the kids, gauging that and balancing it with work. I have had mine since 18 months old and it is damned hard work



to try and fit things in like that when you are having to learn, fundamentally learn from a very young age how to do washing, cooking, ironing, everything and sort kids out, problems, schools, this, that and the other and the time that it gets round to the weekend sometimes, after a week of it you go 'aghhh!'" (Always, Fathers, Leeds)

"To be honest, apart from taking the children to and from school, it works out most of the time I wouldn't even get out of the house for two weeks. If I didn't go shopping or do the things that I do, I wouldn't leave the house." (Nevers, Nottingham)

Most felt that they had given up everything they used to do for themselves so that they could dedicate time to putting their children first. This meant the parents would go without things in order to give their children what they needed and wanted. It was very rare for a parent to have much free time to themselves, if and when they did, they were limited by money, time, childcare costs and constraints imposed by their location.

Overall, lone parents felt they could become quite isolated and lonely at times and had a lack of social interaction. There tended to be more instances of this with the 'Never' and 'Sometimes' respondents. However, a number of the 'Always' were doing physical activity but it was not necessarily with other people, so they were not always benefiting from the social element. For example they were doing exercise DVD's, cycling or using gym equipment at home on their own. This was also more the case when the respondent did not have close family living nearby.

A large number of parents felt that by late evening they were so tired that they preferred to stay at home and rest.

"I never have any time for anything, I mean the only exercise I get is walking to work and when I get home I am doing the homework, feeding the children and I am just knackered. By the time I get to bed it's really late and then there are early mornings and there's just no time to do anything." (Nevers, Lewisham)

Working lone parents found it even harder to find the time to fit in everything they had to do and when they had any free time it was very important for them to spend it with their children.

The weekend was an important time for all lone parents to spend 'quality time' together with their children and this was when the 'Always' respondents would do some type of activity such as going for a bike ride, swimming or a walk in the park with them. The 'Sometimes' and 'Nevers' were less likely to do something that involved physical activity with their children and chose to do activities such as shopping, staying at home on the computer, watching a DVD or taking their children swimming or horse riding, but observing rather than participating.

Being a lone parent meant that even the most straightforward tasks, such as going to the supermarket, required planning and proved stressful because the children either had to accompany them or childcare arrangements had to be made.



5.4 The impact of being a lone parent on levels of participation in sport and physical activity

The impact of being a lone parent on the inclination to participate in sport and physical activity was significant. As well as the barriers that are faced by all parents, lone parents have additional barriers to participation requiring significant motivation to overcome and it was clearly difficult for lone parents to have the time to fit in sport and physical activity on top of their daily routine. The key barriers included a combination of external factors such as lack of suitable facilities, cost, transport, childcare and accessibility and also internal factors including lack of motivation, low confidence levels and generally negative attitudes towards participation.

In order for them to be able to go out in the evening they had to solve the problem of childcare which was a bigger problem for some than for others. If they had a supportive family network close by it was easier, but for others it proved difficult to find reliable babysitters they trusted and were able to afford.

The lone parents attitudes towards sport and physical activity were strongly influenced by their upbringing and how big a role it had played in their lifestyle. Having participated and enjoyed sport as they were growing up meant they were very likely to have a more positive attitude towards exercise and were more likely to still be doing it as a lone parent. Whereas, for those where sport and physical activity had not been a part of their life, they were much less likely to have taken an activity up as an adult and had a more negative attitude towards it.

"I suppose I have never really enjoyed sport since I left school really. I did a little bit of gym before I had my little boy quite a few years ago now, but I just haven't really got any motivation to do much sport at all to be honest, never. It's not the fact that I didn't want to because I am always trying to lose weight and I am sure if I did exercise and stuff it would help, but I just haven't got the motivation to do it." (Nevers, Nottingham)

The common motivational factor amongst all respondents was their children, giving them the motivation to get on with their daily lives and maintain their busy lifestyles but not necessarily to motivate them to do more sport.

"Well, my son motivates me, he gets me out of bed, if I didn't have him I would sleep all day, I would, I would sleep until about two o'clock in the afternoon and then I would go out all night with my friends and not come home until about 6 o'clock in the morning and then sleep again but since I have had my son he has motivated me but not towards fitness or anything it is just put my life in order, 'Mum get up, get me washed, get me dressed, feed me', you get ready, do the housework, everything is done by ten o'clock and I am sitting there twiddling my thumbs, so I do have time to do fitness but I've just not got the 'oomph' in me to do it." (Sometimes, Lewisham)

For the majority of the 'Nevers' and a proportion of the 'Sometimes', the last time they did a substantial amount of exercise was when they were at school. Changes in lifestyle when they left school meant that few continued the same levels of participation. They either began working, travelling or went to college or university and were exposed to more social



opportunities, met their partners or were able to drive meaning that their priorities often did not include sport.

"... back in some other life I used to play 5-a-side football believe it or not, for a company, we had a team, a girls team with another company, we used to play them. That used to be fun but I mean, God that seems another life now. ... we grew up I suppose. We were about 17 at the time. Like everything, it stops, one reason or another, somebody stops, somebody can't make it, somebody left the company. We all just sort of split up and go your own ways. I think we all changed jobs basically at the time. But that was, like I said, it was a laugh. But that's about the most I've ever done." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

On becoming lone parents, activity levels tended to decrease due to the increased time and financial pressures and responsibilities of looking after a child on their own.

"I used to go swimming, all throughout my pregnancy but since I had him I have not had the time at all and really all I do is walk. If I can walk somewhere I will walk, but other than that I don't do nothing." (Lewisham, Sometimes)

"Yes I used to go [to the gym] before I had my girls but now there is just no time." (Lewisham, Sometimes)

"I mean, before I got divorced I used to go and do aqua aerobics once a week and it's hard to get there when you are a single parent." (Sometimes, Leeds)

Many single mothers said that often the only exercise they would do was a lot of walking to and from places such as the shops and the doctors with their child in the pushchair. For the 'Nevers' and 'Sometimes' this was more a case of necessity rather than choice. When the children got older and could walk, those who disliked walking started to use public transport.

"When I first had my son I had to walk literally everywhere because I had a pushchair and like it was a little while before the new buses came out where you could actually get on the bus so I had to basically walk everywhere with shopping and whatever, getting on the bus was a no-no. But now my son is older, if there is a bus coming along and I have got a bus pass I just jump on the bus, even if it is two bus stops down the road I just think 'it is too cold to be walking.'" (Sometimes, Lewisham)

"I've got a bus pass and I feel like I have to get my money's worth out of it so I don't really walk anymore, and it's quicker because my daughter can slow me down. (Never, Wallington Depth Interview)

5.5 Differences in attitude between 'Always', 'Sometimes' and 'Never' typologies

General attitudes towards sport and physical activity varied significantly between the three typologies and this can be attributed to past experience when they were growing up, how their families felt about sport and activity and what their general outlook and interests in life are.

Below is a table illustrating examples of the different attitudes amongst the typologies towards two contrasting activities – going swimming and watching television:

	Sport and physical activity e.g. swimming	Alternative way to spend time e.g. watching TV / reading
Always	<p>I deserve it- it's my 'time out'</p> <p>Adult company, socialising</p> <p>I can involve my children- they're old enough / have lessons or I have someone I can leave them with</p> <p>It gives me more energy and makes me feel better</p>	<p>Solitary</p> <p>Unhealthy</p> <p>Not interactive with children</p> <p>Find it boring (in the way 'Nevers' find sport boring)</p>
Sometimes	<p>I enjoy it when I go</p> <p>Sometimes I can't afford to go</p> <p>When my brother is free I'll go with him so we can take it in turns to watch the children</p>	<p>Tempting to stay in and not do anything</p> <p>The friend they normally go with can't make it and they don't want to go alone- easier to stay in and watch TV</p> <p>Don't need to worry about childcare</p>
Nevers	<p>Don't enjoy it</p> <p>Can't afford to go anywhere</p> <p>Haven't got the transport</p> <p>The classes aren't at the time I want to go</p> <p>I feel self conscious / uncomfortable</p> <p>I haven't got / can't afford childcare</p> <p>I can't go with them because I have more than 2 children / they can't swim/ I can't swim if I have to supervise them</p> <p>I spend all day at work / doing housework and I want to spend some time with my children</p> <p>I'm too tired</p> <p>I can't find the motivation</p>	<p>Costs nothing</p> <p>Relaxing, escapism</p> <p>Don't need childcare and can include the children</p> <p>Their 'time out'</p> <p>Easy</p> <p>Convenient</p> <p>Doesn't involve leaving the house</p> <p>Available 24/7</p> <p>I don't need any motivation</p>

However, regardless of their activity category, all of their children seemed to be participating in lots of sport and physical activity, mainly at school but also after school clubs etc. It was clear that many parents sacrificed their own levels of fitness to allow their children to participate. For example, if there were any money left over it would go to the children and maybe paying for an activity for the children to do and not on the parents pursuing their own activities.



Perceived benefits and attitudes towards sport and physical activity

The 'Always' respondents felt that the obstacles that prevented the 'Sometimes' and 'Nevers' from participating in exercise were fairly minor and they had a much more positive attitude to overcoming barriers. Often their upbringing meant sport and activity had always been a part of their lifestyle and they saw no reason to stop once they became a parent or a lone parent, in fact for many of them it was even more important now they were a lone parent because they wanted to ensure they were as fit and healthy as possible for their children. A significant difference between 'Always' and 'Nevers' was their attitude towards how important they perceived the benefits of sport and activity to be. Importantly, the 'Always' respondents felt the benefits were self-explanatory and would benefit both themselves and their children.

"For me I've always been active growing up, doing this, that and the other and I just like to keep in trim really." (Always, Barnstaple)

"If I'm fit and healthy then it's going to be better for me and my daughter as we can do things together and I'm generally less stressed about everything which makes it happier at home." (Always, Kingston Depth Interview)

Rather than feeling they lacked the time, some of the 'Always' respondents participated in some type of exercise as a productive way of actually filling their time and actively sought out ways to incorporate exercise into their routine.

"I do a keep fit video at least once a week, 2 or 3 times if I've got nothing else to do. I take the children swimming or go swimming myself. Walks, runs, just whatever takes your fancy really." (Always, Barnstaple)

"It's like with me, I work 32 hours a week, and a lot of the time I start work at 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock in the morning. I've finished by about lunch time, any time between sort of 11 and 2, and then I've got all the housework to do and the washing and that, and then my little one finishes school, so by then it's purely the evening, that's why I've bought this cycle thing so I don't have to take him out in the cold as well. It's just nice to fit it in when I can't get out to do it because obviously I'm working and when I'm not I've got him with me." (Always, Barnstaple)

The 'Always' and some of the more positive 'Sometimes' respondents also believed that sport and physical activity could be a social or relaxing event and allowed them to have their 'me time' and therefore this motivated them to keep doing it.

"I joined the gym last year and basically I did it for myself. I lost three stone in weight and I feel a lot healthier and I felt 'well I'll join a gym'. Sometimes I don't go all the time 'cos I've got such a busy life I just can't fit it in, but I just want to do it for myself build up my confidence and since my husband and I separated ... I've met more friends you know and to be honest since we separatedit's swapped over I've been out that much, so much more than I've ever done in 17 years of marriage!" (Sometimes, Nottingham)



The group of 'Always' lone fathers were particularly motivated by their children and they enjoyed spending time with them doing some kind of sport or activity. They had managed to make sport and activity part of their regular routine, mainly because the majority had done so since their childhood and building it into their routine came naturally.

"Yeah, absolutely, we are all the same, but we do make a habit of going out – because we live very close to Roundhay Park and we do make a habit of going for a walk up to the park at least once a week and it does the kids good." (Always, Fathers, Leeds)

"If it wasn't for the kids doing what they were doing and pushing me, constantly badgering at me I wouldn't do half of what I do." (Always, Fathers, Leeds)

"Mine came from my own kids, saying 'Dad come on. You are not just going to sit here and do nothing, we need to be doing this and that and the other, forget the ironing, forget the washing and forget this, forget that and get yourself out in the garden here is a football, kick the thing' and we started doing it. And now we are doing it all the time and now they are into golf." (Always, Fathers)

The fathers also genuinely enjoyed sport and didn't see it as a chore. However, they had a number of the same motivations as the lone mothers in terms of wanting to lose a bit of weight, to be fitter and healthier and to do something with their children that benefits all of them mentally and physically and to be a good role model to their children. But they still felt the pressure to prioritise, and some had had to sacrifice their health and fitness at times for the sake of their family by trying to hold down a job and pay the bills.

" I am lucky because one of my colleagues is a cyclist and does that cycle dome stuff and he has just won a world silver championship medal– and this guy is 57... that was also part of the motivation of buying a bike for myself. I just wanted to get myself doing a bit first, lose a bit of weight, which I have done, I want to lose more, get a little bit more fitter, I don't want to be athletic, my body wont let me now and just look after myself that bit more." (Always, Fathers, Leeds)

The 'Sometimes' respondents felt slightly ambivalent because while they aspired to the benefits of doing a sport or activity on a more regular basis, they also worried about spending time and money on something that they did not consider to be as essential as an 'Always' respondent.

There was a broad range of respondents within the 'Sometimes' category and they had elements of both the 'Always' and 'Never' typologies. There were the more positive respondents who wanted and intended to do more activity but encountered barriers such as cost or transport issues. The more negative respondents had less motivation to do more activity and tended to lose motivation for a sport quite quickly.

'Sometimes' respondents were more likely to do exercise because they 'had to' rather than because they wanted to. They were also most likely to be 'binge exercisers', doing a lot to lose weight for a holiday or a special event and then stopping when the event was over and having to build up motivation to start again.



"I try and do walking because it's expensive to join a gym or anything else so I can't do that, so I do try and walk usually on a Monday to Friday ...about half an hour but instead of going in the car to the shops I try and do a 30 minute walk and that's it really, that's enough!" (Sometimes, Basildon)

A large number of 'Nevers' simply did not enjoy sport or physical activity and felt they would rather spend the free time they had doing something they would actually look forward to and enjoy doing.

"Because I can get dressed up. I very rarely go out so I know that I've got girlfriends coming over and I know that I am going out to the pub next weekend and I know I won't be back until about 2 o'clock and I know that we are going to be dancing and everything like that, and I will be able to let my hair down do you know what I mean." (Nevers, Lewisham)

"If you had to pick or you've only got the time or can afford the babysitter for one or the other, you'll go for the pleasure not the pain." (Nevers, Basildon)

Whilst they understood what the benefits would be in terms of looking and feeling better, they still felt it was low on their list of priorities and did not identify with the more extended benefits such as socialising or relaxing.

Several of the younger 'Nevers' in particular felt that they were doing enough exercise simply by running around after their children or when they went out dancing in nightclubs and did not truly believe they should be doing more. Sport was *"a bit of an inconvenience"* and they were unable to see how it could offer them the same benefits in terms of socialising and relaxing as, for example, going shopping with their friends.

A range of internal barriers were the main factor in preventing the 'Nevers' from doing any activity. While external barriers such as inadequate public transport provision did not make it any easier for them, overcoming the internal barriers is the key to motivating 'Nevers'.

The 'Nevers' also felt guilty about what they consider to be non-essential benefits of sport and physical activity and have not yet put themselves first.

"You get so used to putting yourself second when you're a parent." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

Motivation

The 'Never' and 'Sometimes' groups in particular were very motivated by the idea of functional and physical benefits such as losing weight and toning up. For the 'Always' groups, weight loss and toning was still an important factor but their motivation also came from more emotional benefits such as increased energy, relaxation and socialising. For the 'Always' and 'Sometimes' respondents, weight loss started a positive cycle of seeing the physical benefits which in turn motivated them to do more. The sustainability of this motivation depended upon their current activity level (i.e. 'Always', 'Sometimes' or 'Never').



*"No, you are doing it because you have got your Sienna Millers and all them sort of like skinny girls and all, you know? Something is wrong with me, I have got bulges."
(Sometimes, Lewisham)*

"To tighten up a bit more really, lose some of the baby fat really." (Sometimes, Basildon)

"I wanted to lose weight because I was putting it on. I walk a lot at work because I work in a very large building but the amount of walking I do, I found that my body has got used to it so I need to do something extra as well. Walking the dog, bearing in mind he was a Labrador, so I walked miles with him and so now that's stopped, I was putting weight on because I used to walk a good two or three hours every day with him, so I decided to start training with the jogging...I read somewhere that it was the quickest way to burn fat so I thought I'll have a go." (Sometimes, Nottingham)

The importance of weight loss and appearance did seem related to age. The older respondents were more concerned with health benefits and for some hitting a 'landmark age' such as 30 or 40 motivated them to start taking their health more seriously.

"...for me personally when I was younger I was indestructible, I was going to last forever and as I've got older I've realised I'm not going to last forever and you suddenly realise that and so you want to start getting healthier because as you're getting older... when you're in your 60's/70's you want to be still sort of quite active and start doing something now." (Sometimes, Basildon)

Younger lone parents did not feel the same pressures to look after their health as some of the older parents and for them the benefits would be more physical such as losing weight and toning up.

"...it's an effort and you know, at my age it just doesn't appeal to me and plus, I like my food, you know I enjoy my food and I am comfortable with how I am so to me that is the main thing." (Nevers, Lewisham- older)

"I'm just doing the DVD's to try and lose the baby weight." (Sometimes, Basildon)

Motivation was also required to maintain activity levels, which for many was harder than starting exercise initially. This resulted in frequent temporary or permanent lapses amongst the 'Nevers' and 'Sometimes' groups.

"The gym, I joined that, paid my fee and then gave up. I don't know why really, it's just hard work and finding babysitters at the time. I've done slimming classes that have got the exercise on afterwards. Yet, I can never seem to stay on." (Nevers, Basildon)

"I've done exercise in the past but I join things and within a couple of weeks I give up again. It's a bit on/off really. So not lately I haven't done anything. I always want to, but it's just getting round to it. (Nevers, Basildon)



"I don't think I've found a sport that gives me a 'rush' or the motivation to want to do it again. I've tried several things but never got the bug... I don't know if I could always afford it, to keep it up." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

There were numerous reasons why they might not participate regularly such as feeling too tired, cold or wet weather, or their babysitter letting them down, but for the 'Nevers' and 'Sometimes' respondents, it tended to be only a relatively small event that would shift the slight balance from participation to non-participation, for example the weather or a friend not being able to make it.

"If there is a bus coming along and I have got a bus pass I just jump on the bus even if it is two stops down the road. I just think 'it is too cold to be walking'. If it was the summer time I would have no problem with walking but in the winter I just jump on a bus." (Sometimes, Lewisham)

"I used to do yoga with my sister but my sister has dropped out so now I don't go." (Sometimes, Basildon)

Overall, those participating in the most physical activity are those who are strongly motivated to do so. The barriers are highest for those who have never been involved in sport and who have the most internal barriers while the external barriers contribute to their lack of participation.

6 Barriers to participation in sport and recreational physical activity

A number of external barriers towards taking part in sport were identified by the lone parents and these are explored below. They have been separated into 'External' barriers that refer to physical factors such as facilities, transport and neighbourhood aesthetics and 'Internal' barriers that are linked with their attitudes and motivation.

All of the following barriers impact upon a lone parent's inclination to participate in physical activity, however the extent of the impact depends on the activity level classification of the lone parents and therefore some of these barriers are far more significant to 'Nevers' and 'Sometimes' respondents.

6.1 External barriers

6.1.1 Number and ages of children

One of the key factors affecting the propensity to participate in sport and physical activity is the age of the children and how many children they have.

Many of the parents had more than one child with several having three or more children which has impacted upon the affordability of certain activities. There were often age gaps where older children and toddlers both have different needs, making it even harder for the parents to juggle things like school and nursery pick up times and childcare requirements. Several parents had children at different schools so they had to do more than one school run to collect them.



The age of the children also has a large impact upon childcare issues.

"I would love to fit it in but it is like the childcare, it doesn't fit and my two turn five in April and that is when they can't go to the crèche because they are too old and their childcare stops at 12 o'clock and I work most mornings until 12.30pm, between 12.30pm and 3pm so like after nursery, there is no childcare facilities at all" (Nevers, Nottingham- Younger children)

The lone parents who had a child less than five years old found it difficult to do exercise with their children, so often they would sacrifice their own exercise and activity for the sake of their children.

"I can't take her, I would have to push the bike there to ride back and then ride back and push the bike home it just seems a waste of time really." (Nevers, Nottingham)

"I know it is good to spend time with the kids if you are walking or cycling, but it is not that high impact to have a big effect on you. I would love to lose weight but I know I can slim to my hearts content but I still need to do some kind of exercise and a cycle with the girls wouldn't be long enough or the impact wouldn't make a difference, I'd spend most of the time stopping." (Nevers, Nottingham)

Those with older children tended to be more likely to see sport and activity as a 'reward' or even an indulgence for having devoted so much of their time and energy to their children when they were younger.

"Well, they were so small and so young they couldn't sort of fend for themselves and the youngest is only 13 so he can't. He still wants me around but it's like I've always been a mum first and never a person whereas now I'm a person and a mum together but I have more controlled 'me time' and it's important." (Sometimes, Nottingham)

Generally it was easier for those with older children to participate in sport due to the fact they could often do the exercise together with their children or childcare becomes easier when they are older and they can rely more on friends rather than professional childcare services. Older children can also encourage their parents and it did impact upon the activity levels of all of the respondents, often encouraging the 'Always' and 'Sometimes' to do more physical activity than they normally would.

"It's so difficult and awkward, but as the children are growing up, what I am finding is they are getting frustrated at home and they are wanting to do more things. I don't know if you guys are finding that kind of thing, but the older they get the more they want to be doing sports and this, that and the other and they virtually picking you up by the seat of your pants and saying, 'Dad we need to do this'". (Always, Leeds)

Older children were a particular motivator because often they wanted to do a certain activity themselves but it required adult supervision or transportation and this was enough to encourage some parents to take part themselves. It was also perceived to be a good way to spend quality time with their older children.



"I joined a gym because my daughter wanted to go. But she can only use it at a certain time, so because she wants to go, I have to go because I have to be with her." (Nevers, Lewisham)

"My daughter would go kickboxing with me and we'd have a real good laugh and it would do our relationship good as well." (Sometimes, Basildon)

"I spend so much time with my son that going swimming with the girls is their 'grown up' time with me where I can give them attention." (Always, Walthamstow, Depth)

Teenage children were more body conscious and aware of the need to exercise for themselves and their parents for health and physical reasons.

"One of my sons, my 13 year old, he really, really desperately wants to go to a gym." (Sometimes, Nottingham)

However, despite the pressure the older children put upon their parents, it was still not enough of a motivator for some of the 'Nevers' as they still needed to overcome their internal barriers, yet it was a key reason for them to want to try and achieve overcoming the barriers.

"I really should. She keeps pestering me to go swimming as she doesn't want to go in on her own, and I know I should because it's not fair she misses out because of me." (Never, Wallington, Depth interview)

There was also far more social interaction with other mums when the children are young i.e. mother and toddler groups, Sure Start, at the school gates etc but this decreases with the child's age. When their children get to secondary school, there is virtually no social contact with other parents at the school. Therefore, surprisingly, parents of older children were more isolated in many ways than those of younger children.

6.1.2 Childcare

Unsurprisingly, childcare was a central issue, as well as it being provided, it needed to be in a convenient location, at the right times, at the right price and with the right people.

There were a number of parents with younger children who said they 'wouldn't leave their children with just anyone' and felt that only their own parents or other close family members or friends were suitable babysitters. Those who lived near to their parents or members of their family often had high levels of support but the 'Nevers' and 'Sometimes' were wary about how often they relied on their family for babysitting. They did not want to take advantage of the babysitting for something they would consider trivial or selfish such as going to the gym, whereas going out shopping seemed far more worthwhile. However the 'Always' respondents tended to be fairly dependent upon their family for babysitting if they were available to allow them to do some sport or activity.

Those with younger children in particular felt that childcare was one of the major barriers for them. They did not want to draw on all of their babysitting favours to do sport when there



were other activities they would rather do such as socialising with friends. They also needed the babysitting to be regular, not just a 'one-off' occasion.

"... there is nobody really that I can leave him with constantly if it became a regular thing you know, one-off maybe, but every week who is going to say 'yes I am going to commit myself to looking after your child for 2 hours 3 days a week'." (Nevers, Nottingham)

There is a lot of unease about leaving children in a crèche and with people they don't know, especially those with younger children and those who have 'clingy' children who create a fuss when they are left in a crèche.

"Yes, but even if you started you can't always get the babysitter to do it say every Wednesday or Tuesday that is the main problem, it is all right going there once you build up making friends with people. It is all right and you don't need anyone to go with but it is to get the babysitter every Wednesday at such and such a time, that is a bit hard." (Sometimes, Lewisham)

6.1.3 Cost

Respondents in all groups claimed the financial cost of participating in sport and physical activity was a substantial barrier. There was the cost of getting there either in fuel or by public transport and car parking in some cases. There was also the entrance fee for themselves and possibly their children and some initial outlays such as membership and for equipment such as trainers and sports wear.

"And you can join the gym here but it's £25 for the year, or thereabouts, plus it's £4.75 or something to do the gym, plus it's more to do swimming, plus it's more to do the Jacuzzi." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

Whether a parent was unemployed or was on a single income, money was often very limited and when there was any spare it tended to go towards something for the child be it a towards a school trip, new outfit or just daily essentials.

"It costs £3.50 to go swimming- that's half a pack of nappies." (Nevers, Nottingham)

This was not the case for all parents as some were able to afford gym memberships and were working, but the majority felt that cost was a huge barrier to them doing exercise. However, the 'Always' group were more creative in their ways of getting around this cost barrier. Whereas a 'Never' might say they can't afford to go to the gym or to the swimming pool, the 'Always' and 'Sometimes' utilise the schemes that might be on offer in their area or they look for alternatives such as walking or running and things that are free. Some perceived cycling and purchasing bikes as being a one-off investment but the 'Nevers' see this as an excuse not to do it because of the cost. The Nottingham group were particularly money conscious and a couple had tried a scheme run by Sure Start where they had 6-months of free gym membership but then when they had to pay they said they couldn't afford it and stopped going.



6.1.4 Time

Respondents frequently claimed that not having enough time was a fundamental reason for them not to exercise or not to be able to exercise as much as they would like to. For those who are working full time it is true that they don't have a lot of free time and the time they do have they often want to spend it doing something with their children rather than on their own or they need a bit of time to themselves.

"I get to go to it 3 times a week, but in the evening time after a certain time and Sol's in bed, it is my time, you know what I mean? It is sacred isn't it?" (Always, Fathers)

Again, the age of the children can impact upon what activities they can do together- it tended to be those with older children (12 years old plus) who were able to do activities such as swimming and cycling together.

"I think it is other issues like you know when your child finishes school you get home, cook the dinner, do the homework and then get them in the bath and put them to bed you don't really have any time and then when you finally do get the time you just want to sit down and have a cup of tea and put your feet up really." (Sometimes, Lewisham)

"I would like to but by the time I get home from work my little boy comes back from his Dad's and I have the bathing and everything to do at night and bedtime so I don't have any time the only time I would have is first thing in the morning but then I have got my little boy anyway." (Nevers, Nottingham)

"I don't seem to have the time, a lot of it is tiredness from working and bringing the boys up on my own and that sort of thing." (Sometimes, Basildon)

Also, there is an issue of having free time at the right time of day as some of the classes are only in the evenings or they are unable to use public transport at night because it is not available or they are not happy to do so.

"They do a ladies-only class but it's at 9pm- that's no good for me, who's going to look after my son? If it was in the morning, it would be OK." (Sometimes, Nottingham)

6.1.5 Location

Those who lived in very rural and more deprived areas felt the quality and quantity of the facilities available to them were very poor. Facilities that were better equipped tended to be the more exclusive and private facilities which were considered to be out of their price range. The 'Sometimes' respondents felt that having amenities that were nearby and affordable would be motivation enough to participate on a regular basis. The 'Nevers' felt this would help increase their motivation although on its own, an improved facility would not be enough to motivate the majority of the 'Nevers'.

"If I could find something interesting that was quite cheap and I could do and it didn't take me hours to get to, I would do it. Every week I would go. But there's nothing interesting around. Or that I feel I can do." (Nevers, Barnstaple)



"The swimming baths is so far away, and it is a really long walk to get there, or I have to get a bus. When you start doing that it is like a full day and by the time you have got there and then getting changed and doing the swimming and having to get home and you are thinking 'I have got to make tea.'" (Sometimes, Leeds)

However, some of the 'Always' group who lived rurally managed to use their location to their advantage in terms of the activity they did and those who did not live close to any facilities looked for alternatives.

"... it's about a mile from my house to the school, but a mile there and back in the morning and the afternoon is 20 miles a week and that's just doing the school runs. Other than that, there's lot of walks around the country and when you need to go to the shops and things like that, and quite often I put the MP3 player on and go out, just go out and do like an hours walk and then kind of end up round by the children and then pick them up and then walk home, so yes, I probably walk between 30 and 40 miles a week." (Always, Barnstaple)

"All I have got near me is Roundhay Park which you can take the kids to and the fields around but it is physical activity I have to create on behalf of the kids. My daughter would rather go and have a game of badminton or squash somewhere but we have got no direct access to local gyms, or sports facilities where we, as a family unit, could go and take part without a great deal of hassle." (Always, Fathers, Leeds)

For those respondents living in Barnstaple, being a seaside resort created additional concerns because they felt the tourists 'took over' certain facilities such as the cycle tracks and the walking routes in the summer months.

"I think the area tends to be catered more to sort of tourists. What's going to attract them to the area rather than the people that actually live here." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

For the other locations, Basildon, Nottingham and Leeds, the location was less of an issue as the majority had some access to public transport.

6.1.6 Transport

Transport was a factor in determining what types of sport and activities people did, especially if they did not have their own car. Those who did have a car found it a lot easier and often cheaper to get to leisure centres, especially when they were taking their children with them. Those who had to rely on public transport or walk to a venue had to add on extra cost and time and for those with less motivation, this is an additional barrier.

"If it was easier to get to and get back from, if I wanted to go and do anything I would have to take my daughter to perhaps my Mums which is miles away and then go to wherever I am going and then go back and then go back home. It is just too much really, too much hassle." (Nevers, Nottingham)

"I'm going to be 20 minutes in the car just getting there... it kills the mood" (Nevers, Barnstaple)



For the 'Always' group, expensive transport, or lack of a reliable service put even the most determined people off participating occasionally, but the main difference between the 'Always', 'Sometimes' and 'Nevers' is that the 'Always' respondents tended to still do some form of exercise, for instance at home.

"It's about £2 to Fremington from Barnstaple...that's why I walk!" (Always, Barnstaple)

"I can do a DVD at home without having to go anywhere or spend anything" (Always, Sutton, Depth interview)

6.1.7 Neighbourhood aesthetics

Most of the respondents we spoke to had access to a park or areas of open land they could utilise for walking and cycling such as Wollaton Park in Nottingham, the Tarka Trail in Barnstaple and Gloucester Park in Basildon. The majority of respondents claimed they felt relatively safe in their local areas but there were some places they would avoid going to on their own or at night time and those who did walking would carefully consider where they walked on their own. Importantly none of the respondents felt that their areas were so unsafe that it was a main reason for them not doing any exercise.

However, several respondents were worried about safety issues in parks and open spaces due to the fact that groups of teenagers tended to congregate in these places because of the lack of provisions for them. This in turn was intimidating to some parents and put them off using these open spaces.

6.1.8 Provision and awareness of facilities

All of the areas researched had either local authority or private facilities for sport and physical activity, although the number and condition of each varied by area. Those living in urban and suburban areas had far more choice of facilities than those who lived rurally. Rural dwellers also had very limited public transport and had to travel further to get to the leisure facilities.

In all locations some facilities existed that were too poor to be considered, or at the other end of the spectrum there were new 'state of the art' facilities that were perceived to be too expensive or 'exclusive'.

"They're [tennis courts] indoor. It's very posh, but I can't imagine who uses them, and if they do it's just an elite little club." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

Swimming pools were mentioned most frequently as being in a poor state of repair, unhygienic and therefore not an appealing place to go.

"It just looks and feels dirty, and it is dirty. The changing rooms, the floors ...at first I thought, you know if you clean the floor and you get like sort of the white residue but it actually ...you don't know what it was. I thought it could be out of the toilets, it was just horrible, horrible." (Nevers, Basildon)



"The school has sort of, it's got a crummy swimming pool and it's got the school which you use the facilities for things. You know, they've got a sort of excuse for a gym, it's just appalling. So that's why you don't go really. I mean if it was slightly more inviting like a nice place." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

"I love swimming but some of the places don't look clean and it puts you off." (Sometimes, Lewisham)

There were additional barriers associated with swimming which included child supervision issues, adult to child ratios and swimming lessons taking up too much of the pool. A large number of respondents felt too self-conscious to be in a swimming costume and the times of women only groups were not always convenient. Indeed some of the 'Always' respondents also felt uncomfortable in a swimming costume but their solution was either to find a women's only class at a different location or to simply *"get in the pool very quickly!"*

"I hate it, I hate everything. I hate the splashing in your face. I hate getting changed after, you're freezing cold." (Nevers, Basildon)

For some people there were more personal reasons why they did not like swimming including not being able to swim, having a fear of water, being allergic to the chemicals and the effect of the water on their hair and skin.

"I think that is a black thing though, it is very bad for our hair or we have to wear a cap and that is not something that everyone would think about but it does it really crucifies our hair especially if you have got a perm in it... It is honestly quite a big thing." (Sometimes, Lewisham)

Other facilities that respondents commented on as having become neglected were cycle lanes, playgrounds and tennis courts and therefore not somewhere they wanted to spend time. Interestingly though, of the two groups in Basildon, the 'Nevers' thought the cycle tracks were in poor condition and were not really useable whereas the 'Sometimes' group thought they were good and they used them. This demonstrates the different positive and negative attitudes displayed, depending on current activity levels.

As mentioned in 6.1.3, cycling itself was felt to be limiting to some as it required the actual bikes, but whilst 'Nevers' were likely to see having to purchase the bike as a reason not to do it, the 'Always' and more positive 'Sometimes' respondents saw it as a long term investment which allowed them to save money in the long run. There was an additional safety fear linked with cycling.

"Also actually, to be honest, the roads and stuff. I mean it depends where you live but if you've got to go on roads, it's dangerous, because people ignore you, they don't see you and you're just as likely to come off. Especially if you're not too confident." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

However, it is important to highlight that whilst a lack of facilities or poor standards of facilities were a contributory factor towards not participating, this tended not to be the only reason why people did not participate. The 'Always' and 'Sometimes' would seek out an alternative location



or activity whereas the 'Nevers' are very unlikely to do so and this again is linked to their original motivation levels to partake in some form of exercise.

Levels of awareness of the types of facilities that were available varied significantly and it was apparent that those people who weren't doing any activities tended to have a much lower awareness of the types of things were offered. Because the 'Nevers' were not using the facilities, any communication about what was offered there was not reaching them. In many of the groups information was shared between respondents with lots of surprises as to what was actually available in their area.

Some of the 'Nevers' felt uncomfortable just going into a leisure centre, swimming pool or gym even to find out straightforward information on what activities were available and how much it cost. For others this is not top of mind and therefore they did not actively seek out this type of information. Both can be significant barriers which contributed to the overall lack of motivation to go and take part in more physical activity. These internal barriers are described in more detail in Section 6.2.

"Well I never thought of going to the library [to find out about classes]" (Nevers, Lewisham)

"I don't think there is enough information to let you know, you know what is happening because where my sister lives they have just opened up some completely new leisure centre, new Astro turf, tennis courts this, that and the other, but she doesn't know what is going on and she lives there, she lives literally across the road from it, she can see it, but there is not enough information on what is going on...." (Sometimes, Lewisham)

6.1.9 Awareness of local initiatives

The majority of areas in which the focus groups were conducted had some kind of sport and leisure initiative in place in the form of a discount scheme or card offering a reduction in admission prices for council run sport and leisure facilities. There was variation in the amount of discount, but it could apply to both adult and child prices. Several locations also had initiatives such as walking groups which only cost £1 or dance classes that were available to all, however, the levels of awareness about these schemes and about the events or activities that were being held were very mixed in all the groups and this proved also to be a barrier as the majority of respondents were not aware of what was available to them.

"...if they want to sit on their backsides and not find out, which is quite right and I agree to that to a certain extent, but if you don't know what is going on, you're not going to go out and look for something that you don't even know is there." (Sometimes, Basildon)

"I found this nature walk on Teletext. It was organised by Essex Wildlife Trust and I had no idea it was there, I just saw it. I actually came back from the walk and went on their website and that's how I found out about the RSPB walks because there were some links." (Nevers, Basildon)



In terms of initiatives specifically for lone parents, there were very few that were mentioned other than the Sure Start scheme which was mentioned in Bulwell, Walthamstow and Leeds. Overall there seemed to be adequate facilities and organised activities for those with younger children under five, but those who had older children found it difficult to find things for them to do and felt there was nothing organised specifically or targeted towards lone parents.

Lewisham had a 'Smart Card' that was available for everyone in the Lewisham borough, but not everyone in the group was aware it existed and what it could be used for.

"I went to take some library books back the other day and as soon as I saw someone with a card I asked about it... I would never have known about it unless I'd seen the woman in front of me with it." (Nevers, Lewisham)

This 'Smart Card' offered discounts on leisure and travel in the Lewisham area which would help them overcome some of their barriers but the 'Nevers' and the 'Sometimes' either were not aware of the card or they just were not interested in sport and activity enough to be bothered to get one.

All of the Leeds groups had a 'Leeds Card' or 'Breeze Card' for children which offered local authority discounts for leisure activities including swimming and local gyms, but the local facilities were thought generally to be very old and run down. There was little knowledge of other initiatives amongst most parents, except a few in the 'Always' Leeds group who were most heavily involved in children's sports clubs etc.

Basildon residents had access to a 'Buzz Card' but there was confusion over whether this was still available, who was entitled to it and exactly what it offered. All of the respondents were aware it existed and a couple mentioned there was a scheme called 'Pulse' which was for the local authority gym but at £30 per month it was not perceived to be particularly good value.

Nottingham also had a 'Buzz Card' but respondents thought it was aimed more at those with younger children for discounts on nurseries.

In the Bulwell area of Nottingham there appeared to be a number of initiatives that had been organised and were linked to Sure Start but this was very localised and any respondents who didn't live in Bulwell were not aware of having similar schemes in their areas. They included a nail technician course which would also incorporate some type of exercise class as well, a 6-month free gym membership and a 'Cook and Eat' session with the children after school.

Those people who lived elsewhere in Nottingham thought that there was not enough advertising or promotion of any of the schemes and felt they were excluded because these schemes were not happening in their areas.

"I must admit we hear about things happening in Bulwell all the time, if you can get to Bulwell you will be there all day because most days we are not even in the house we are doing things over there." (Nevers, Nottingham)

Across all groups, it is felt that the schools are not utilised to their full potential, especially over the school holidays.



"It is like 6 weeks holidays. We don't see each other for 6 weeks when we could be doing something at the school, a club where all the parents can go." (Nevers, Nottingham)

Schools were key in helping lone parents overcome a number of barriers. The main factor was that they are local and the parents are able to get to them. This is especially important for those people living in more remote areas or areas where there are no leisure facilities. The facilities were perceived to be free or cheap to use which would overcome the cost barrier and there were several rooms on site allowing for the possibility of provision for childcare. Many felt frustrated that the equipment and facilities existed but were not utilised to their full potential. Schools would also help some parents overcome a number of the internal barriers that are discussed in 6.2. A school does not have the intimidating atmosphere that some lone parents felt in gyms and leisure centres and they are likely to be familiar with a number of other parents at the school meaning they are not 'on their own'.

6.2 Internal barriers

There were a significant number of internal barriers that lone parents faced which they believed held them back and deterred them from doing any activity.

A lack of confidence was a major barrier at all levels from actually participating in a class to not even having the confidence to go into a gym or leisure centre to enquire about prices or times because they worried they would look or feel out of place or that they will be intimidated or pressurised into signing up or taking part when they are not completely comfortable.

Being a lone parent generally had a negative effect on their confidence levels, especially if separating from their partner had been recent or had been complicated and upsetting. Many respondents mentioned that becoming single had resulted in them feeling low and unattractive and their current activity level ('Always', 'Sometimes' or 'Never') impacted on how they dealt with this. The 'Always' look at it as another motivation to do some activity whereas the 'Nevers' and 'Sometimes' feel that this can be more of a reason to spend all of their time with their children and not focus any attention upon themselves.

Many respondents from all of the categories said they felt self-conscious and out of place in the gym, even the local authority gyms, and this put them off going.

"... young people with perfect bodies and you think 'I would probably have a heart attack even walking upstairs to get there.' Also with the young girls they make me feel rubbish because they look so perfect and I don't think I would even enjoy going." (Nevers, Lewisham)

The 'Always' respondents however, would not allow this to stop them participating, instead they would look for alternatives to going to the gym or would go to ladies only sessions where they felt less uncomfortable. They would also look for ways to make themselves feel more confident and motivated which included going to a class or doing an activity with a friend or working out in the privacy of their own home.



For some of the 'Nevers' however, it became a downward spiral where they felt lonely and unable to lose weight which it turn led to them feeling more body conscious and less likely to start doing any exercise.

"I think I've got to lose about 2 stone before I can start doing any exercise. When I've lost a bit of the weight, then I'll start." (Never, Wallington, Depth Interview)

The actual environment of where the activity takes place impacted upon how comfortable they felt and some respondents thought that a less formal location such as a community centre would not be as intimidating and therefore more likely to appeal to them.

"And you don't feel as daft as like walking into an aerobics place at the gym you don't know nobody, but going into the community centre you don't feel as daft because we all feel the same." (Nevers, Nottingham)

Feeling intimidated and out of place was not limited to the gym, it also extended to activities such as dancing classes and tennis clubs. Respondents worried about being the 'new' person and not being able to keep up with the instructor. This would prevent them from going in the first place or it could become de-motivating if they felt they couldn't keep up with other people in the class. They were also worried about "not looking right" by not having or being able to afford the equipment or sports clothing.

"One thing when I first started the aerobics, there were people that were going there for months and months and months every single weekend and they knew everything they were doing and I was sitting there thinking 'what the hell is going on here' and I was trying to keep up and they were so into it, it kind of puts you off in a way." (Sometimes, Lewisham)

Many respondents also felt very self-conscious about going swimming because they felt so exposed in their swimming costumes, particularly those who were overweight or who had recently had a baby. 'Always' respondents who felt like this would actively seek out women's only sessions, but for some they still felt uncomfortable in these sessions and preferred to do other forms of activity instead.

Feeling guilty was a common factor amongst those respondents who did not exercise. The guilt was because the time or money was being spent on them and not on their children.

"...I feel especially with going back to work after having 4 years with them it is guilt as well. I feel so guilty, it is like they will bring a library book home and it will be Thursday and we're taking it back and I haven't read it and it is really because I do marking at home as well plus I will have hairdressing clients at home and fitting sport in is like- and there is the cost as well- that is the last priority." (Nevers, Nottingham)

"...it just absolutely amazes me what I can fit into a day and I get into bed and I feel proud of myself that I have achieved so many things in one day and going to the gym wouldn't be one of them because it's a selfish thing it's something I would doing purely for myself. It doesn't benefit my children in any way you know and I just think that I think



that's half the reason I am tired all the time because everything I do is for the children. I really should allocate a bit more time for myself." (Nevers, Lewisham)

7 Ideas from the Creative Idea Generation Workshop

Through the idea generation workshops, a range of creative techniques were used to allow intervention strategies to be created by groups of lone parents. The purpose was to come up with ideas that would help lone parents overcome the barriers towards participation in sport and physical activity – they would be cost-effective, accessible, fun and sociable.

Walking, swimming and dancing emerged as the top three activities that lone parents could undertake and these ideas along with some more unusual ideas were developed in the workshops to create a more complete 'package' with the intention that each idea would overcome as many barriers as possible. Below is a description of each of the ideas.

7.1 The National Walking Day

The perceived benefits of walking were that it was free, it could involve the children, it was possible for anyone to do and did not require any special equipment or clothing. However the main barriers to walking was that it was considered boring, was dependent on the weather, could be time consuming and it was not always done intensively enough to raise their heartbeat. This idea was based around the principle of a weekend version of 'Walk to School Week' and had the following key features:

- Held locally, therefore making it accessible and run by 'local leaders', increasing the motivation factor.
- The provision of literature highlighting health reasons which could be motivating to some of the 'Never' respondents.
- Provision of pedometers for children and possibly adults to try and overcome the 'boredom' factor of walking.
- To be held in the Spring or Summer when people are more willing to spend time outside.
- A shared picnic at end to incorporate the social element.
- At the end of the day, the possibility of joining a local group for regular walks with the main aim to get respondents to participate on a regular basis. Having met people on the Walking Day, they would feel less intimidated to join a group as they would already have met some of the people.

7.2 Open Day at Swimming Pools

The main benefits of swimming were that it was considered to be reasonably cheap, fun, available to all, good all round exercise and the children enjoyed it. On the negative side, it was difficult to supervise the children and swim themselves, the changing room facilities and state of the pools were not appealing, car parking can add to the cost and some feel self-conscious.

The main aim of this idea was to try to increase the appeal of swimming pools by allowing people to see different activities taking place that might appeal to them. It was also to find ways of incorporating exercise with their children with both of them benefiting.

- The option of parents leaving their children with instructors, therefore allowing the adults to take their children with them but also giving them the opportunity to swim themselves.
 - To reassure parents, there would be qualified pool side instructors, not just lifeguards to supervise their children.
- Discount vouchers would be provided specifically for lone parents to make it more affordable, especially for those with more than one child.
 - Or, being able to bring a friend for free so they could take it in turns to watch the children and swim.
- Proof of achievement such as certificates, badges, etc for the adults and/ or the children to help keep motivation levels up.
- It would offer different activities such as water aerobics and synchronised swimming and the open day would allow respondents to take part or observe these activities without feeling under pressure.

7.3 Dancing Day

Dancing was mentioned in the majority of groups as being an activity most respondents would be very keen to experience. The benefits of dancing were that it was instantly seen as fun and sociable. It could also involve the children, offers variety and can be a reason to get dressed up. The few disadvantages were that it was perceived to be expensive and also held in the evening which could cause issues with childcare and add to the cost.

The key features of this idea were:

- The Dancing Day would give respondents the opportunity to try a range of different dance styles:
 - Line; salsa; break; street; jive; ballroom; tap; ballet; belly; folk; country; Morris, etc.



- It would be held on the school premises, immediately after school with the option for the children to participate. This meant it would be accessible, childcare would not be a problem and it was a journey that the parents would have to make to collect their children.
- Being at school, it was perceived to be less expensive than a class held at a club or a gym.
- The opportunity to sign up for course at end of day meant they would be able to 'try before they buy' and then participate regularly.

7.4 Activity Sessions

This would provide a wide variety of activities such as: abseiling, aerobics, badminton, climbing wall, football, horse riding, netball, squash, swimming, table tennis, tennis, martial arts, frisbee, softball and Ten Pin bowling.

The idea consisted of the following elements:

- It would give lone parents the opportunity to take part in activities that would not normally be available to them.
 - The variety and type of activities helped to overcome the boredom factor felt by the 'Nevers' and to increase the fun and appeal, whilst also being challenging for the 'Always' and 'Sometimes' respondents.
- Held at school or community centre to allow for easy accessibility for all parents.
- Could be done on their own or with their children.
- It would be made affordable and on a par with the other ideas.
- It would be a regular activity day or would allow for the opportunity to sign up to a course to keep the participation levels up.

In addition to the four key ideas above, an 'Activity Bus', a 'Mobile Lending Gym' and a 'National Day for Lone Parents' were suggested but rejected at the Stakeholder Workshop stage.

- Activity Bus- which aimed to get over the barrier of people not being able to or not wanting to have to travel to do exercise. The idea was that the 'exercise came to them'.
- Mobile Lending Gym- along the lines of a library where people could borrow different pieces of equipment or DVDs each week.
- A National Day for Lone Parents, but there were polarising opinions with the majority not wanting to be identified primarily as being a lone parent.



7.5 Likely success of different intervention strategies

The following ideas were chosen to be tested and refined and it was made clear in the focus groups that these were just starting points and that these ideas could be modified to increase their appeal and feasibility:

7.5.1 Dancing Day

The idea of giving the lone parents access to dancing classes was received very well by all respondents and had been spontaneously raised in several of the groups as something that many of them had wanted to try. This idea went one step further by offering them a choice of dancing styles, which enhanced the appeal as there would be something to suit everyone. It also had the benefit of allowing them to 'try before you buy' and make sure that they were doing a type of dancing they enjoyed.

"I like the idea of a dancing day so you can try them all" (Nevers, Basildon)

By choosing the one they enjoyed the most and having met the instructor, it meant that they would be far more motivated to continue.

The fathers were also really positive about the idea and whilst a few had reservations about feeling embarrassed, the majority felt it would be fun and an opportunity they haven't got elsewhere to do this type of activity.

It was envisaged that the Dancing Day would be the introduction and would run quite regularly, i.e. every couple of months and then they would sign up to a course for the one dance style they wanted to do and then they could try another at the next Dancing Day. Several suggested the idea of always having a choice of dancing styles each week but the majority preferred to choose one and pursue it so they could learn the steps and make progress.

Similarly to the walking idea, there were mixed reactions as to whether or not the children would participate with the adults, but generally it was felt that a compromise could be made which would suit everyone. This would allow the older children, aged 12 years and upwards, to participate with the adults but also for the provision of an on-site crèche or supervised classroom for the younger children and for the male children who the parents felt would not want to take part as much as the females.

By utilising the school facilities they felt that the costs could be kept to a minimum, making it more accessible to everyone. Respondents were happy to pay around £2 for a class.

For the 'Nevers' and 'Sometimes' it had the additional motivational factor of being at a place where they have to make the journey anyway to pick up their children, so they would not have to go out of their way or vary their routine. They felt that ideally there would be two time slots so that those who didn't work could do it just before or after school pick up time and then an early evening session could be offered for those who did work.



They thought if they enjoyed it then it would keep them going regularly and they would make friends which would keep them going back.

The 'Nevers' felt it was something different to 'normal exercise' and that it was fun and had a large social element which made it something to look forward to rather than something they feel they should make themselves do. They could also wear what they wanted and not have to invest in specific sports clothing and it was seen as a good opportunity to meet and socialise with other parents.

"It would be something that you would look forward to doing. It wouldn't seem so much of a chore as exercise. Exercise tends to feel like a chore." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

"I'd love to do salsa but as you said, I wouldn't go to a salsa class because they are normally expensive...I can't really dance for toffee but I really do love it, so if it was something more informal, something where you didn't really need to have the right shoes or wear the right clothes and just go and learn the basics, then yes." (Sometimes, Basildon)

The fun factor, an affordable price, childcare provision, the fact that it is not an extra journey they have to make and it is a familiar location all contribute to this idea being the most successful in terms of overcoming a significant number of barriers, both internal and external and for being motivating for them to participate regularly. It also succeeded in being appealing to the 'Always', 'Sometimes' and 'Never' groups.

7.5.2 Activity Sessions

This idea caused a lot of excitement and enthusiasm amongst all lone parents for being an interesting and unusual concept.

"I think it is brilliant. How does it work, when does it start, tell me where to go? I will be there, that is just what I want." (Always, Fathers, Leeds)

However, there were concerns over how it would actually work logistically, where it would be held and how often. They thought the ideal way it would work would be to offer all of the activities on a weekly basis so that they could turn up and choose on the day what activity they wanted to do, although they felt this could be difficult to arrange; they wouldn't be prepared to pay up front in case they couldn't make it on one occasion.

"Yes, a bit of spontaneity to it, so you can do what you felt like doing that day." (Sometimes, Basildon)

It was also suggested that it could be a scheme that ran in the summer holidays and that it would have to be at the local school or community centre. This had appeal but did not solve the problem of being able to participate in ongoing activity.

Many felt that it would be very expensive and a number of respondents said that they would rule this out straight away without investigating it properly because they thought it would be



too expensive for them. Whilst the 'Always' groups were still concerned about the price, their attitude towards these types of activities meant that they would be very unlikely to disregard it instantly, whereas the 'Nevers' and 'Sometimes' tend to think in a less positive way and it is harder to motivate them.

"As adults it's great you can have a taster session, but then you are sitting there and thinking 'but how much is it going to cost me to sign up for the course?'" (Sometimes, Nottingham)

Once it was assumed that the cost would be on a par with the other ideas, reactions were far more positive. It had instant appeal for being a unique idea and for giving the opportunity to overcome internal barriers such as boredom because of the variety and the fact that these activities are normally excluded to them because of the cost.

"I'd love to go horse riding but it cost £17 and I can only afford for my daughter to go, although I'd love to do it." (Nevers, Nottingham)

The idea also gave the impression that it could be attended just by adults or by adults and children together and that there was an element of 'team building' that the 'Always' and in particular the lone fathers found appealing.

The idea succeeded in overcoming a number of barriers for the 'Nevers' and 'Sometimes' which were *accessibility* assuming it would be held at the school premises, *variety*, *fun* and social factor, and children could participate with them which helped their confidence. But it did also raise a number of questions and concerns, mainly regarding *cost* and whether it would really happen if it were not expensive, and *safety issues*.

"I don't think it would be feasible either. I mean where in Barnstaple are you going to do abseiling?" (Nevers, Barnstaple)

Some said it was quite nostalgic and reminded them of school and would give them the opportunity to try something they had not done for years.

The different activities on offer meant that they would be motivated to go back week after week, as would going back and meeting people with whom they did the actual activities with.

"If you enjoyed doing it, you would go back. It's as simple as that." (Nevers, Lewisham)

7.5.3 Swimming Open Day

The majority of respondents liked this idea as it helped to overcome the barriers of boredom, cost and childcare allowing both parent and child to benefit from the exercise. By having an 'open day' it would also help to encourage some of the 'Nevers' overcome the barrier of feeling intimidated by going into the swimming pool to see what it was like during the open day, without having to make a commitment.



The most successful element of this idea was having either a separate area of the pool for the children to swim and be supervised allowing the adults to swim at the same time. Whilst a few raised concerns over trusting the supervisors with their children, it would be acceptable they as long as they were suitably experienced and qualified instructors. Those with very young children would prefer some form of child supervision out of the water such as a crèche.

"If there was somewhere for him to go where you know he is going to be safe ... that would be great. If I could go off I would quite happily go off and do water aerobics or whatever." (Nevers, Nottingham)

The 'Always' respondents felt it could allow them to do more activity, especially if water aerobics or synchronised swimming was offered as this would be more challenging and would be something 'different' to add to their repertoire of activities. These extra activities also appealed to the 'Sometimes' and 'Nevers' who thought it would break the monotony of swimming up and down the lanes and also the aerobics would allow those who couldn't swim or who were weak swimmers to participate.

The lone fathers were less interested in the aerobics sessions but appreciated the idea of variety and were also positive about the idea of their children being supervised giving them the freedom to swim themselves.

"I have had my kids in the pool at the same time, you have to have somebody to oversee them and let me get a few lengths in. As I say, I go swimming about once a fortnight and I don't get the opportunity to swim. Years ago I did my mile. You know, I did 66 lengths non-stop, now I can't do 2 lengths really because of the kids." (Always, Leeds)

Vouchers were appealing to all of the respondents, despite swimming generally being thought of as a reasonably priced activity, any option to make it cheaper would be welcomed. However, it is important to note that there were strong feelings against the vouchers being exclusively for lone parents as this was felt to 'label' them.

"It's like if your children have to have the free school dinners, it singles people out. Why should people be made to feel that way? And that voucher just straight away smacks of that." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

Adapting this idea to allow for another adult to go for free allowing them to take it in turns to supervise the children or for the adult to pay and the children to go free was seen as more acceptable way of administering this.

Whilst the vouchers, child supervision and variety of activities made swimming much more appealing to everyone, for those who had disregarded swimming previously because of the practicalities such as not liking the splashing, the noise or finding the facilities unhygienic, this idea was not enough for them to overcome these barriers. Even a few respondents in the 'Always' category were still wary of the condition of the swimming pools.

"It's freezing. And the changing rooms smell." (Always, Barnstaple)



For these parents, it was felt that the most significant thing that needed to be done to motivate them to go swimming was an overhaul of the facilities to make them warmer, cleaner and more hygienic with basic, but functioning lockers and changing rooms.

With all groups the idea of a certificate of achievement was felt to be unnecessary and not something that would motivate them. They did however think that their children would find this rewarding.

7.5.4 Walking Day

Amongst all groups, opinion was divided over whether or not the walking would include children or not. The age of the child was an important factor in influencing their thoughts on this with those who had younger children wanting to bring them, whereas those with older children knew they would not want to get involved because it would be *"too boring for them"* and then they would still have the issue of childcare. The suggestion of leaving the children with a supervisor while they went off walking was not considered a suitable option as there would be concerns over the professional standards and qualifications of this person. Across all of the groups they felt that an additional element such as a treasure hunt or orienteering would make it more appealing to the younger children and this in turn would make the parents more likely to participate.

The 'Always' respondents felt it was a bit *"bland"* and wouldn't be enough to motivate them to do more, mainly because a lot of them were doing a substantial amount of walking anyway. They can see that there could be appeal if it was targeted more towards the children and made more exciting for them but as parents who already do a lot of activity, this idea lacked any appeal. They felt it would have more appeal to people who did little or no activity as it would be a *"gentle introduction."*

Several respondents likened the idea to the 'Walk for Life' sponsored event although those people who had participated in this event previously had done so for the charity rather than for their own fitness and the main motivation had been raising money.

There were mixed reactions to the Walking Day being exclusively aimed at lone parents. The majority felt it should be for families and lone parents alike because otherwise it was 'pigeon-holing' them and also it would be difficult to promote it if it was just for single parents.

"I reckon you can't then advertise it through a school though, could you? You couldn't go into the school and say 'any of you mums/dads not married or on their own' ...that's even worse." (Nevers, Basildon)

The 'Sometimes' were more positive towards the idea, especially as they thought they could 'make a day of it' and it could be something they could do with their children. But there were doubts as to how it could encourage regular activity and the majority felt that the motivation would wear off very quickly. Because respondents felt it would be an occasional event, it would not be enough to raise their levels of fitness.



The 'Sometimes' and 'Nevers' felt the key positive elements of it were that it was seen as a social event and it was potentially a good way to meet and interact with other parents and this would be their main motivation for taking part.

There were a few suggestions that it could be modified to become a 'Speed Dating / Walking' event just for lone parents as this would make it stand out a bit more and make it a more attractive offer for some. However, it then lead back to issues with childcare and transport that would still need to be resolved. One suggestion was for a mini bus service to collect them from a central point such as the school.

Whilst all respondents could think of a location they thought would be suitable to hold the event, there were still issues with travelling to the venue for those who didn't have their own transport.

7.6 Sustaining activity levels

It was important to establish how these intervention ideas could maintain participation in the long-term rather than just getting lone parents to participate infrequently and a number of 'criteria' would need to be met in order to promote long-term activity.

Lone parents felt that they key to making them want to incorporate activity into their lives regularly would be the enjoyment factor. By overcoming external barriers such as the cost, the times the classes were held and the childcare provisions, the majority claimed that if they had a good time and met people, they would feel less intimidated and would start looking forward to attending or participating. Being 'enjoyable' meant that the activity had to alleviate the boredom associated with a number of sports and this was why the dancing and activity days and the aqua aerobics were all so popular as they were seen to add interest, fun and importantly were not seen as 'traditional' and "*boring*" ways to exercise.

A number of respondents were 'results driven' and thought if they started to see they were losing weight and feeling more positive and energetic, this would make them more motivated and as long as they kept seeing and feeling the benefits, they would continue. Several of the 'Nevers' suggested incorporating an optional 'weigh-in' or body measuring at regular intervals throughout the course of the activity to monitor changes which would encourage them to continue.

Whilst lone parents wanted activities to be more affordable and for provisions to be made for their children they were not prepared to compromise on quality. Some were wary about holding the classes in a school as they felt it might lack a professional element. Several had experienced schools 'letting them down' by cancelling activities or classes at the last minute or stopping half way through the course due to lack of interest. Therefore, it would be extremely important that the schemes would be promoted and run professionally to give parents the motivation to continue.

Parents also required consistency in terms of the prices of the activity with reassurance that the price would not suddenly increase so allowances can be made in their budget. Parents wanted the flexibility to be able to pay weekly but in turn wanted some reward for committing



and participating regularly, for example paying for five classes and getting the 6th class free as paying for a course up front was neither appealing or motivating.

The instructors or leaders of the activity played a key role in motivation and participation, especially for the 'Nevers' and 'Sometimes'. Lone parents wanted a leader who was inspiring yet realistic and who could identify or at least understand the issues faced by a lone parent. The idea of a person specifically to motivate people is explored below in section 7.5.6.

7.7 Feedback on the appeal of a person to act as a 'motivator'

Another idea to try and boost and maintain participation that was explored with respondents was gauging the appeal of having a person to motivate them and who this person should be. Reactions were mixed, but on the whole were positive with some thinking this could be the answer and the key thing that would help them overcome their barriers by giving them confidence and increasing their motivation. For the 'Always' group they thought it could push them so they obtained better results.

For the 'Nevers', they thought having someone like a personal trainer could be too much of a big jump and there were concerns they would be made to do activities they did not want to, but for others it would be the all important 'push' that they needed to get them to do something. However, the idea of another 'mum' as the motivational leader was more appealing for the 'Nevers', although the 'Sometimes' respondents felt this would not be enough and that it should be someone with a bit more authority and influence to motivate them.

"I mean the first time you go to the gym you've got someone following you and you think 'this is good' and then you go the following week and think, 'right, what do I do now?' because no one is with you and you don't know what to do." (Never, Basildon)

"To suit your personal lifestyle as well, you know, the childcare and the commitments that everybody else has got. As a single parent, the time, the travel, if you've got a personal plan that's suited for you, that's designed for you, worked out with you and somebody else so you can work through all these little problems." (Nevers, Barnstaple)

Respondents "don't want to have some size 8 person" training them because they think it would make them feel uncomfortable, especially the 'Nevers'. It was important across all groups that this person would have to be able to identify with the issues that they face as lone parents.

"Someone that can relate, not a super skinny woman that has been eating celery all her life, she can't relate to anyone in this room." (Sometimes, Lewisham)

"I must admit the one time I went to aerobics she was brilliant. She was over weight and all the women there were over weight and we all had baggy T shirts and leggings and puffed and panted but you also kept doing it because everyone was in the same boat." (Sometimes, Nottingham)

The 'Sometimes' group were very positive towards the idea of an 'activity leader' who would be like a personal trainer and nutrition 'expert', who might call on them to persuade them to



sustain their activity, or praise them for achievements. They are probably the most likely group to benefit from this type of motivation as they have already got the motivation to get up and do something and this would allow them to increase the amount or the intensity of what they currently do.

"If it was left down to me apart from, you know, I don't view what I do as exercising, it's my little escape from what is going on in the house but if somebody was to come to me twice a week and say, 'right, come on you out, swimming' ...that would be great for me." (Sometimes, Basildon)

The idea of someone like a personal trainer who comes to their house was mentioned spontaneously by a number of respondents although again this received mixed responses with some finding it too intrusive.

There was some concern about this person being a volunteer or unpaid as they were less convinced of their reliability and commitment.

For a significant number of people in 'Never' and 'Sometimes' category, it was not always necessarily a professional person they needed, but having a friend to go with was a large motivational factor. This meant they encouraged each other and did not want to let the other one down by not showing up. It also helped them overcome the fear of walking into a gym or a class for the first time on their own.

"Yes if like my friend said to me 'oh you know, let's go to the gym' I would be like 'yes let's go, no problem' I wouldn't have a second thought about it, I would try to find a babysitter and I would really like to go. But if it was just me in my own and I thought 'oh I want to go to the gym' then I would be like not really because it would be a bit boring, I don't know anyone." (Sometimes, Lewisham)

"I go walking on a Monday and a Friday and my friend said, 'I'd like to come with you', so she takes one of her children to Cubs on a Thursday so she said 'what I'll do, when I take him to cubs, she said I'll come round to you on a Thursday and we'll do half an hour walking then together'." (Sometimes, Basildon)

It was acknowledged that not all of them had friends who were also single parents or who lived the same type of lifestyle as they did themselves so it was difficult for them to co-ordinate times for activities. But by meeting a group of people through either a personal trainer or an informal leader, this would mean that they could then form friendship groups with similar minded people and then continue their activities when the leader or trainer was not there.

8 Summary and recommendations for future research

There are a number of additional issues faced by lone parents which can make participation in physical activity and sport extremely difficult. External barriers which tend to be common to all respondents include being able to afford to participate, having the time to participate and having access to suitable facilities. Other internal barriers are influenced by attitudes towards sport and physical activity and levels of motivation and confidence. This was demonstrated by



the different 'categories' of respondents identified in our sample, and typically, lone parents from the 'Always' category demonstrated that barriers can be overcome.

A number of ways of overcoming barriers were identified in the form of ideas of actual sports or activities that could encourage lone parents to take part. Those ideas that generated most appeal offered fun, sociable activities in an unthreatening and local environment, at an affordable price. Of the ideas put forward in research, a 'Dancing Day' generated most appeal as it was perceived as overcoming many internal and external barriers. Lone parents who took part in this research generated ways of maximising the potential for this idea to work and ways to reduce external barriers such as childcare and cost.

It was evident from the research that using schools as local venues would potentially reduce or remove barriers to participation as these are considered safe, accessible, local and versatile.

In order for intervention strategies to encourage lone parents to increase their levels of participation in sport and physical activity, it is important to bear in mind the following:

- to improve communication of existing initiatives and facilities, as there was a low level of awareness of schemes that were already in place
- to facilitate an overall improvement of facilities and this could include simple measures such as repairing nets on tennis courts through to general improved hygiene at swimming pools
- wherever possible, to provide affordable childcare at gyms and leisure centres
- to utilise school facilities, as this would be an accessible location and would save on costs

Having conducted the Stakeholder workshop in this research project, it is clear that various schemes to encourage participation in sports and physical activity already exist and we believe it would be valuable to explore these initiatives further so that they can be tailored to make them practical for a variety of areas, for example rural vs urban.

It would be important to explore ways in which they could help to progress the ideas generated in this research, and their perceptions of the feasibility of those ideas, for instance how could a local authority help to improve perceptions of its swimming pools in terms of hygiene, how could a private gym provide affordable activities for lone parents etc.

Finally, as outlined above, it would be important to explore the appropriate communication tools to reach the lone parent audience and ways of maximising their interest in any potential interventions.



9 Appendix

9.1 Sample Structure

Creative Workshops

Participation Level	Type	Locations
'Always'	Urban (more affluent)	More affluent area of London
Mix of 'never' and 'sometimes'	Socially Deprived	Great Yarmouth
'Sometimes'	Rural	Woodford Halse, Northamptonshire
'Never'	Inner City	Manchester

Ethnographic Depths

Depth		Type	Working Status	Location
1	Male	Always	Non-working	North London- Watford
2	female	Never	Non working	North London- NW7
3	female	Sometimes	Working	North London- NW3
4	female	Always	Working	South London- Sutton, Surrey
5	Male	Never	Working	South London- Wallington, Surrey
6	female	Sometimes	Non-working	South London- Wallington, Surrey
7	female	Always	Non-working	East London- Walthamstow
8	female	Never	Working	East London- E17
9	female	Sometimes	Working	East London- E9
10	female	Always	Working	West London- Kingston-upon-Thames
11	female	Never	Non working	West London- Chessington, Surrey
12	female	Sometimes	Non- working	West London- SW15



Focus Groups

Gp		Children ages	SEG	Type	Location	Sports Facilities
1	Male	Spread	C2DE	Always	Leeds- Urban	Adequate
2	female	Spread	BC1C2	Sometimes	Leeds- Urban	Adequate
3	female	Spread	C2DE	Always	Barnstaple- Rural	Limited
4	female	Spread	BC1C2	Never	Barnstaple- Rural	Limited
5	female	Older	BC1C2	Never	Basildon- Suburban	Adequate
6	female	Spread	C2DE	Sometimes	Basildon- Suburban	Adequate
7	female	Younger	C2DE	Never	Beeston- Deprived	Limited
8	female	Older	C1C2	Sometimes	Beeston- Deprived	Limited
9	female	Spread	C2DE	Never	Lewisham- Inner city	Adequate
10	female	Younger	BC1C2	Sometimes	Lewisham- Inner City	Adequate

9.2 Case Studies from Ethnographic Depth Interviews

1. Case study of an 'Always' participant

Respondent C is 31 years old, lives in East London and has three children aged 2, 10 and 11. She doesn't work and lives in a 2 bedroom council house. Despite having three children and a low income, she is able to make sport and physical activity a regular part of her life. She achieved this mainly by choosing activities that are free or cheap such as walking and cycling and involving her children in the activities. Also she takes advantage of the local discount scheme run by the council which offers discounts at leisure centres around the area and also through Sure Start where she received vouchers for free swimming sessions for her son.

A typical day involves walking one of her daughters to school with her youngest in the pushchair and with their dog. This takes about 15 minutes each way. She then comes home, tidies up the house and then goes out with her friend for a couple of hours walking the dog on the marshland near her house. She then has to leave the house again at 3.15pm to collect her daughter from school.

She feels that her area is well equipped for participating in sport and activity with a good choice of swimming pools and local authority leisure centres and gyms. She also lives next to the River Lea and is able to take advantage of the open spaces. She has always lived in the



area and feels safe there although there are areas she would avoid and would not walk on her own in the evening but is happy to do so during the day.

She has a strong support network as her parents live nearby and they look after her 2 year old every Tuesday night so she can take her two older daughters swimming to the 'women's only' session and spend quality time with them. She acknowledged without this support, it would be harder to do activities, but she tried to think of ways of doing things they could all participate in such as investing in a child seat for her bike so they could all go out cycling together.

Her attitude towards sport and physical activity is very positive and it had been a part of her life since she was at school having been a member of the cross-country running team and swimming club. Her activity levels did lapse after she left school, mainly because she didn't feel there was any encouragement to continue. She started to get really into sport about 3 years ago after separating from her son's father. She described this as a turning point and the opportunity to concentrate more on herself and her children.

Her main motivation is to spend quality time with her children and make sure they are getting enough exercise, to save money on petrol by walking, and to make good use of her spare time for herself, to de-stress and relax. Additionally she wants to tone up and loose weight.

"2 years ago I was a size 8. But I was with my little boy's dad then and I was very stressed and very unhappy. I have gained weight and I feel terrible for it. I'm a size 12 now but I need to tone up. So exercise is for me as well but more for the kids, they are the main motivation"

Her barriers to doing more were mainly down to not having someone she felt she could go with to classes or to the gym. Cost was also a concern but she felt that her local authority would offer good discounts at the leisure centres.

"Do you know what, I'd love to do tennis or badminton, but I'd need a friend or someone to go down there, but for me to do it on my own I wouldn't do it. If I went with someone and we enjoyed it then I'd say 'right, Monday nights I'm going to do this' and I'd keep it up. If the price was right as well."

2. Case study of a 'Sometimes' participant

Respondent M is 37, has a daughter aged 10 and lives in Surrey. She doesn't work and lives in a 2 bedroom flat.

She has always lived in the area and her family are nearby and provide a strong support network. They will look after her daughter so she can socialise with friends.

The area has good transport links including busses, trams and trains which she uses on a regular basis and the bus stop is right out side her flat making it *"too easy to just jump on the bus rather than walk."*

The break up between her and her ex partner was very hard for her to deal with and she feels it has significantly lowered her self esteem. She regularly comfort eats and is 5 stone



overweight which she is very self conscious of. Her parents are still very protective over her and she is extremely protective over her daughter.

"I think I over compensated for our break-up and got too attached to her, but I think I did it the right way in the long run, who knows?"

Her daughter has several long term illnesses which she finds adds to general the stress and worry of being a lone parent.

Her daily routine revolves around her daughter and starts with her preparing her breakfast in bed, taking her to school and returning to clean the house and do household chores. By her own admission she is obsessed with cleaning and will vacuum more than once a day but wants to do it during the day so that when her daughter returns from school they have got free time together. She also washes and irons her daughter's school uniform on a daily basis.

Her daughter is very active and she will always turn up to support her in school races or competitions but she tends to always take her daughter, wait and then take her home again rather than participate in any activity herself during that hour. She feels it is more important to support her daughter.

Her main form of exercise is walking to the school to collect her daughter. She has only been doing this recently and her main motivation is that she wants to loose the weight she has put on. She does find it difficult to motivate herself to do it and is often tempted to get the bus as she has already bought the bus pass and it is right outside her flat. She has bought an MP3 player to make the walking more interesting and finds that this helps.

"Since the MP3 player I've found I wanted to do it more. But I don't find it very appealing or enjoyable. I find it a bit of a chore and a bit lonely."

Her barriers to doing more activity are mainly internal factors. She feels she is too overweight to exercise in a gym or to go swimming or on a bike and is delaying starting until she has lost weight through dieting. She also feels self conscious about going to places on her own. To her, being a good parent is the most important thing and that does not include taking time out for herself to do sport, although she thinks she would reap the rewards if she did do more such as being able to go swimming with her daughter and having more energy generally.

Cost was also a factor but was used more as an excuse not to do any more activity rather than a true barrier.

For her to overcome the barriers she felt she would benefit from more women's only sessions at the pool and gym to get over the self consciousness and also having a companion to do sport that she feels comfortable with, for example another mum from the school.

3. Case Study of a 'Never' participant

Respondent J is 37 years old, lives in Surrey, and has two children, aged 7 and 15. She doesn't work, and lives in a small two-bedroom semi-detached house.

A typical day involves dropping her two children at school, and then coming home to do the housework and watch TV. She will also occasionally see a friend or visit her parents. J's eldest



child is fairly independent, and is involved in his own numerous after school activities, including music and sports, and has his own social life. Her youngest child is also involved in a number of after-school sports activities including football and athletics, but spends more time with her outside school.

J finds it difficult to get motivated generally, and often finds her day has been taken up with watching TV and surfing the net. This can mean that the evening is often stressful, as shopping and children's mealtimes must fit in with taking her two children to band practise or football.

"I seem to spend all my time just in the car. You're just finished dropping one of them off and you get home and make the tea, then it's time to pick them up again."

She has been very active as a teenager and as a young woman, and was heavily involved in horse riding before an injury forced her to stop in her twenties.

As there is quite a large age difference between the children, its not easy to find activities that they can be involved in as a family, but would prefer something she can do with her 7-year-old. Currently, exercise for J comes from occasionally leaving the car behind and walking her youngest son to or from school, a ten-minute walk. This happens less frequently in the winter weather however. She has stopped taking her younger son swimming, as the pool opening times are not convenient to her. Ideally, the pool would be open on a Friday so that there were no other commitments and worries about preparing the children for school the next day.

Walking appeals to J as an activity, but though she lives in a fairly green area of outer London, she feels that her opportunities are limited. This is mainly due to bad weather, and to the fact that local places for walking tend to involve busy roads, which are unsafe, particularly in the dark. As well as the less convenient opening times, she would prefer not to go swimming as she feels self-conscious about her physique. Her strongest motivation to be more active comes from seeing herself gaining weight.

"I looked at myself on the video, and thought this is the heaviest I've ever been. I thought, I really need to do something about it now."

Exercise is synonymous in her mind with being single and aiming to look as good as possible. She feels that she's less motivated in this regard than when she was younger, although being slimmer would improve her self-confidence. For J, exercise takes place as part of a full 'diet' regime involving a change of eating as well as activity habits. She says that she needs to 'work up' to this major change, to have it fully planned and be stocked up with healthy foods, before she starts the diet and exercise. The challenge is then sticking to the regime for as long as possible. This has been effective in helping her to lose weight in the past, but she hasn't tried this for a while.

J's main barrier is in motivation, and she could benefit from some encouragement or help to see that there are opportunities to be involved in exercise on a day-to-day basis without a major change of lifestyle.



9.3 Ethnographic Depth Discussion Guide

Overall objective for interviews:

- Use ethnographic interview format to explore psychosocial factors in shaping beliefs & attitudes towards physical activity

Specific objectives:

- Explore lifestyle and routines
- Establish views and attitudes towards physical activity, including impact of psychosocial factors
- Identify key motivating factors and barriers to physical activity
- To identify the critical drivers of positive change – what has helped/ would help respondents to increase physical activity

The aim for the ethnographic depth interview will be to observe some of the daily activities of the respondent, e.g. children's mealtime, trip to the park etc. and the interviewer will accompany the respondent and participate in any activities taking place at the time of the interview.

Introduction

- Thank respondents for taking part in the research.
- Introduce self, explain purpose of research and that discussion will last for about 3 hours

Explain that we are talking to people who are single parents about their lifestyle & routine, and their views about sports and physical activity in general. However, one of the main aims will be to spend time with them and take part in some of the tasks/activities that they would normally complete during this time, so they should continue as normal and the researcher will accompany them and participate as appropriate. We may video some of these activities.

- Ask what participant would normally do over next few hours. If no activities planned, suggest short walk in local area, tour of house etc.
- Reassure re: confidentiality, video and MRS Code of Conduct.
- Explain importance of being able to say what they think, no right or wrong answers.
- Any questions?

2 Participant introduction

(Aim: Build a general picture of respondent life situation)

In 'interview' mode, or whilst respondent completes daily activities:

- General
 - First name, age, who they live with, children(s) age(s).
- Children:



- School/nursery? Childcare, activities?
- Activities:
 - Working? Occupation, hours worked?
 - If not, how time spent?
 - Other key activities, e.g. courses, evening classes, hobbies?
- Local area:
 - How long have you lived in local area, where else lived?
 - Likes/ dislikes
 - Family and friends living locally?
- Life events to date:
 - Own background: where born and brought up?
 - Education: school/college/university?
 - A bit about family of origin. Current level of contact?
 - Significant life events, other places lived, jobs.

3 Routine and lifestyle

(Aim: Understand day to day routines and activities, look at video diary and discuss)

- Tell me a bit about your daily routine: describe a typical weekday from morning to evening.
- A typical weekend day?

Ask to view respondent video diary, and ask them to describe what they are doing in each section. Pause to probe on each activity.

Explore activities in detail and probe as appropriate:

- Likes and dislikes of each activity
- Triggers / barriers to undertaking liked activities
- Causes of pressure & stress – time, other resources

Probe specifically on the following activities:

- Work
 - Benefits/disadvantages of working?
 - Presence of stress/pressure?
 - How demanding is their role? Sense of capability and control?
 - Level of enjoyment & motivation?



- Childcare issues?
- Activities outside work
 - Extent, range and variety of activities?
 - Motivators to undertaking various activities?
 - Triggers? E.g. friends' involvement?
 - Barriers? E.g. lack of time, access to transport?
- Friends, family and contacts
 - People spent time with, main contacts?
 - What role does each person play in your life?
 - Main activities undertaken together?

- Probe on any other topics emerging from video diary
- General motivation
 - Which activities represent 'relaxation' to you? Why?What about activities representing:
 - 'Time well spent'?
 - most 'rewarding'?
 - an 'indulgence'?
 - a 'waste of time'?
 - most 'stressful'?
- Are self-development or self-improvement a priority for you? Why/why not?
What about:
 - Fitness
 - Health and wellbeing
 - 'Me-time'
 - 'Others' time
 - Quality time

4 Current & past participation in sport and physical activity

(Aim: explore history of participation in sport and physical activity, and triggers and barriers to participation)



- Ask respondent to define physical activity and sport. What does this include? Can it include:
 - Pub sports?
 - Housework?
 - Childcare?
 - Walking to school / work / shops?
 - Is it by yourself or with others?

In this section the discussion guide will be used together with the life matrix to look in detail at respondent's attitudes to physical activity and sport.

Moderator to explain to respondent about the life matrix and how it will be used in the interview:

- *"I'd like you to tell me a bit about how much physical activity you've undertaken in your life, starting from childhood and schooling, up to today. I'd like you to 'plot' them on this matrix, leading up to this year. In the left hand column we'll also discuss other things going on in your life at the time"*
- For each type of physical activity, explore:
 - What made them start taking part in this activity?
 - What kept them going with this activity?
 - Positives/negatives of taking part?
 - Reasons for stopping/reducing?
- For any periods of inactivity, explore:
 - Why inactive? Eg: illness, other responsibilities etc.
- For periods of re-starting activity
 - What motivated you?
- How did you feel when you were participating in physical activity or sport? Explore words in relation to:
 - Health & wellbeing
 - Social contact & involvement in community
 - Safety concerns
 - Self confidence, self esteem
 - Impact on stress levels
 - Other
- How do you feel when not participating / participating less in physical activity and sport?



- Explore differences in above factors, and any others mentioned

5 Environment and impact on participation

(Aim: understand impact of environmental triggers / barriers to participation)

Local area

- *Tell me a bit about your local area. If you could describe this area to someone who doesn't know this area at all and who has just arrived here, what would you say?*
 - *Positives and negatives*
 - *Transport provision/ housing in the local area*
 - *Crime & safety*
- *What kind of provision is there for sport and physical activity in the local area?*
 - *Sports centres*
 - *Playing fields*
 - *Parks and green spaces*
 - *Private / community gyms*
 - *Classes run at community centre*
 - *Swimming pools*
- *Do you think it is easy for people in your local area to take part in sports and physical activity? Why / why not? What are the key things that might prevent this?*

Friends and family

- *Own parents' & family of origin participation in sport and physical activity*
 - *Did/do your own family of origin participate in sports / physical activities? If so, what?*
 - *Factors impacting on their participation in sports & physical activity?*
 - *How typical were/are your family compared to others?*
 - *How much time, if any, do you spend with your family?*
- *Friends and key contacts' participation in sport and physical activity (probe as above)*
 - *What do you think of your friends who participate / do not participate?*
 - *Do you encourage each other to participate? If yes, in what ways?*



- *How much time do you spend with your friends in an average day/week?*
- *What do you think your friends would say if you decided to participate in a new sport or physical activity? Explore for positives / negative reactions from friends*
- *Would you feel free to ask for support so that you could take part in sport and physical activity?*
- *Children's participation in sport and physical activity (probe as above)*
 - *Do any of your children participate / not participate?*
 - *Do you encourage each other to participate? If yes, in what ways? If no, what are the reasons why?*
 - *How much time do you spend with your children in an average day/week? (more relevant for older / teenage children)*
 - *What do you think your children would say if you decided to participate in a new sport or physical activity? Explore for positives / negative reactions*
 - *Would you feel free to ask for their support so that you could take part in sport and physical activity?*

6 Mindset and impact on participation

(Aim: understand impact of internal triggers / barriers to participation)

- *How motivated do you feel in general to take part in activities outside of work or childcare?*

Which of these words describes the way that you feel generally:

SEE SEPARATE SCALES SHEET and ask respondent to rate their score for each of the word pairs

- *Supported / isolated*
- *In control / stressed*
- *Scared / secure & settled*
- *Self-confident / worried or nervous*
- *Ignored / appreciated*

- *Considering the amount of effort you put into the various aspects of your life, how well do you feel that you are rewarded?*
- *Would you say that you have control over the various aspects of your life?*
- *Would you say that you have enough support available to you?*

Now changing the subject slightly to sport and physical activity

- *Describe in as much detail as you can, a typical mum/dad who has the right amount of participation in sport or physical activity*



- *Appearance?*
- *Personality/outlook?*
- *Personal circumstances (family, children, work)?*
- *Where does he/she get her motivation to participate?*
- *How would he/she get over the problems in participating?*

■ *Distance from ideal*

- *How is the person you've described similar to, or different from, you? (prompt from list above)*
- *Would you like to be more like him/her? Why / why not?*
- *What prevents you from being more like him/her?*

7 *Barriers to participation*

(Aim: to identify barriers to participation and beliefs about the value of sport and physical activity)

Moderator will show/ read to respondent maximum of 2 short scenarios (see end of topic guide for all scenarios). Please choose at least one scenario that is directly relevant to the respondent's circumstances.

For all scenarios ask respondent:

- How does the circumstances of X compare to your situation – probe for similarities and differences
- Have you encountered any of these problems?
- Specific questions relating to each scenario

Note to Moderator: We want to test here the 'locus of control' theory *ie* is it internal or external factors that act as barriers to participation (for other people and/or self), or a combination of both?

External barriers

Allow spontaneous then probe:

- *Location of sports facilities/ travelling distances*
- *Perceived lack of opportunities*
- *Health problems*
- *Child/adult care issues/ Domestic responsibilities (e.g. caring for relative)*
- *Work commitments*
- *Cost*
- *Weather*



Internal barriers

Allow spontaneous response then probe for:

- *Lack of motivation to try new things*
- *Generally disinterested in sport*
- *Accustomed to current activities/ lifestyle*
- *Issues of confidence/ low self-esteem/ depression*
- *Issues of lack of confidence in body*
- *Attitudes of others eg: friends/family*

Overcoming barriers

(Aim: generate solutions to barriers identified)

- *How do you feel about undertaking more sport or physical activity just now?*
 - *Opportunity*
 - *Motivation*
- *What would you say are the key barriers to undertaking more sport or physical activity just now?*
 - *How might these eventually be overcome?*
 - *How would you imagine that others overcome this barrier?*
 - *Is this realistic?*
- *What kind of support would be useful to you in overcoming these issues?*
 - *Information & advice?*
 - *Personal / emotional support?*
 - *Financial support?*
 - *Childcare support?*
 - *Encouragement? From whom?*

Now refer back to the scales sheet used earlier and ask respondent to imagine they have received the support they need in the above areas – how would they rate themselves now? Explore reasons why, if rating score has changed .

8 The future – sport & physical activity aspirations

(Aim: to identify the critical drivers of positive change – what has helped/ would help respondents participate more)



Refer back to life matrix. Explain to respondent that you would like them to plot their life 2 years from now. Using guided fantasy projective, explain to respondents that they should imagine themselves 2 years from now and they are in control of what happens to them over the next 2 years. Ensure respondent remains grounded and does not give unrealistic aspirations.

Explore the following:

- Where will you be living? Who with?
- Would you be living in the same area or somewhere else – explore reasons for staying/leaving. How will you feel about living there?
- What will your child/children be doing?
- What will your friends/family be doing? Living in the same place or not?
- Will you be working?
- Will you be involved in physical activity or sport?
 - If yes, what kind of activity?
 - How much time will you spend doing this?
 - How good will you be at it?
 - If no, why not? Explore reasons.
- In what ways will your life be different? Better or worse quality of life? Why?
 - Energy levels
 - Stress
 - Health
 - Level of social interaction
 - Finances
- Given your current activity, how likely/realistic is it that you will be doing [PROJECTED ACTIVITY] in two years time?
- Is there any other help or support you might need (that we have not already discussed) to help you to get to this position in two years time? Probe for details: what help, from whom?

Thank respondents and close

SCENARIOS

Scenario 1

Jane is a single mum living in the suburbs of a large city, with her two children aged 5 and 3. Jane would like to be more physically active but she is on a limited income and doesn't have any money to join her local gym. There is good local transport in her area and Jane walks to her part time job.



- What advice would you give to Jane about undertaking more physical exercise within her limited budget?
- What kind of physical activity would Jane be able to undertake on a limited income if she lived in your local area?
- What problems might Jane encounter?
- What help would Jane need, and who could she go to?

'Scenario 2'

Angela has recently moved 50 miles to live nearer her mother who is not very well. Angela is a single parent with two teenage kids and she has only been living in her new home for two months and apart from her mother she doesn't have any friends yet. Angela likes to keep fit and used to go swimming in her old home town. Angela now lives in a small village in a rural area that doesn't have a swimming pool or gym but she does have a car.

- What advice would you give to Angela about getting back into physical exercise considering she doesn't have any friends to go with?
- What other sort of physical activity or sport could Angela do?
- What problems might she have in finding a suitable activity?

'Scenario 3'

Julie hasn't been able to lose the extra weight she put on after having two children. She has never been very good at exercise or sport and feels self conscious doing exercise in front of other people. Julie has been a single mum for a year and finds it difficult to find time for herself and worries that she will never get back in shape again. She wants to lose the weight but just doesn't know how.

- What advice would you give to Julie?
- What would you do if you were in Julie's position? Why?
- What help would she need and where could she go for advice?

'Scenario 4'

Sam has been a single mum for two years and has two children. Sam's eldest, Katie, is 9 years old and has severe asthma. Sam's daily routine involves driving Katie and her other child to and from school, seeing friends, and doctors appointments when Katie's asthma is bad, and after the children are in bed Sam is exhausted. She thinks that doing some sort of physical activity or exercise would give her more energy and make her feel less tired but she's not sure how to fit it in to her daily routine or what kind of activity to do as she hasn't done any sport or activity for years.



GfK NOP



- What advice would you give Sam?
- What kind of activities would be available to her if she lived in your area?
- What problems would she have in fitting in exercise to her routine?
- What help would she need, and who could she go to?

'Scenario 5'

Jackie works full time and is a single parent with three children aged 6, 12 and 14. Her two eldest children are old enough to look after themselves after school and often go to their friends houses to play, but Jackie's 6 year old still needs lots of her attention after school. Jackie sometimes goes to a keep fit class in her local village hall and would like to do more physical activity as it means she can have fun with people her own age but childcare for her 6 year old would be a problem if she exercised on a regular basis.

- What advice would you give Jackie about trying to fit in more physical activity into her life?
- How could Jackie fit in exercise around her 6 year old child?
- What problems might she have?
- What help would she need, and who might be able to help?



9.4 Focus Group Discussion Guide

Objectives:

- To investigate and understand reasons for their **levels of participation** in sports and physical activity
- To assess the impact of their **local area** and facilities on their levels of physical activity
- To Identify key **motivating** factors and barriers to physical activity
 - > To identify the critical drivers of positive change – what has helped/ would help respondents to increase physical activity
- To **test the likely success** of different approaches of seeking to get lone parents to start being active and sustaining levels of activity;
 - > and to explore how those sports can best present themselves / be **communicated** in a

1. INTRODUCTIONS

(10 MINS)

(Aim: explain purpose of research, introduce moderator, introduce respondents)

a) Moderator's Introduction

- Thank respondents for taking part in the research.
- Introduce self, GfK NOP, explain purpose of research: *We are looking at levels of participation in sport and physical activity amongst single parents. The purpose of this research is to understand why people do and don't participate in sport and to look at some different ideas for overcoming the barriers and possible ideas that might make you exercise.*
- Reassure: confidentiality, tape recorder, observers, MRS Code of Conduct.
- Discussion will last for 2 hours and it will be recorded for the purpose of the research. No comments will be linked to individuals.
- Any questions?

b) Respondent Introductions

- Tell us a little bit about yourself:
 - > First name, family,
 - Number and age of children
 - > Where you live
 - Is it a town or village, rough size and location (briefly, this is covered in more detail later)
 - > Do you work?
 - Full time, part time?



- If not, how is time spent?
 - ◆ Other key activities, e.g. courses, evening classes, hobbies?

2. Background to Physical Activity (15 MINS)

(Aim: to explore their current activity levels and reasons for participation in sport and physical activity)

- How much sport and physical activity do you do each week?
 - > What types of things?
 - Are there any sport / physical activities that they do with their children?
 - > What made them start taking part in this activity?
 - > What kept them going with this activity?
 - > Positives/negatives of taking part?
 - > Reasons for stopping/reducing?
 - > 'Sometimes' and 'Nevers'
 - What would have to change in the future to make you take up a sport or activity?
- How have your levels of participation changed over time?
 - > E.g. any times you were more or less active and why?
- For those who participate more now than they used to:
 - > What motivated you to do more?
- For those who participate less now than they used to:
 - > What were the reasons for reducing participation?
 - Probe financial, family, location, facilities
- For the 'Never' and 'Sometimes' groups:
 - > Can you imagine yourself being regular participant in a sport or physical activity?
 - > What do you think it would be like?
 - Probe health, well being, socially, time wise, energy wise, financially
- Summarise key barriers to participation on flip chart
 - > Use these to refer to when testing the ideas in section 5



3. Focus on Motivation (10 MINS)

(Aim: to explore what motivates respondents in general, what motivates the 'Always' groups and more specifically, what types of motivation would be needed to get 'Sometimes' and 'Nevers' to participate regularly)

- What do you think motivates you generally on a day to day basis (not sport or activity, just generally)
- What is an activity you do that you enjoy (anything, not related to sport)?
- What motivates you to do that?
- Why isn't sport and physical activity providing you with that motivation?
- 'Always'
 - > What is it that motivates you to keep participating in sport and physical activities?
 - > What do you think could motivate someone who doesn't do any or does very little sport and physical activity?
 - > What would make you stop or reduce your participation?
- 'Sometimes' and 'Nevers'
 - > What motivation would you need to encourage you to start participating?
 - > What motivation would you need to encourage you to keep participating on a regular basis? What would keep you going back each week?
 - Probe if it was free, is this enough?
 - Having to book or pay in advance?
 - > Who would they want to be motivated by? (e.g. friend or other- who?)
 - Probe the idea of having a 'person' who would motivate them- e.g. like a 'leader'
 - What types of things could this person do?
 - ◆ E.g. accompany them to an activity, participate with them, lead a group activity, be on hand to offer advice
 - Who would this person have to be- another single parent, a sports professional?
 - ◆ Probe the role of formal- e.g. a funded professional person vs a less formal person from the community who volunteers.
 - ◆ Is one preferred over the other? Why? Does it depend on the activities?
 - Would they find this person motivating?
 - ◆ Why / why not?

4. Focus on their Local Areas (20 MINS)

(Aim: to examine the impact of the infrastructure in their area on their levels of participation)

- Ask respondents to describe their local area in detail
 - > Positives and negatives



- > Transport provision/ housing in the local area
- > Crime & safety
- What kind of provision is there for sport and physical activity in the local area?
 - > Sports centres
 - > Playing fields
 - > Parks and green spaces
 - > Private / community gyms
 - > Classes run at community centre
 - > Swimming pools
- Do you think it is easy for people in your local area to take part in sports and physical activity?
 - > Why / why not?
 - > What are the key things that might prevent this?
- If there was a _____(leisure centre, gym – whatever they say is missing), would that be enough to make you go?
 - > If not, what else would be needed to make you go?
- Are you aware of any local initiatives in your area to encourage people to do more sport and physical activity?
 - > If yes, how do they know about it?
 - > How does it make them feel about these ideas- what impact do they have?
- Is there anything specific for parents?
 - > If yes, how do they know about it?
 - > How does it make them feel about these ideas- what impact do they have?
- Are there any other activities they do with other parents where sport and activities could fit in?
 - > E.g. church, coffee mornings, any social get-togethers?

5. Reactions to Ideas (1 HOUR)

(Aim: to explore reactions to the ideas that were generated in the workshops and to understand how they can see this working in their area and how it would be communicated to them)

Moderator introduce ideas for testing one at a time and go through the questions for each idea. (1- Swimming, 2- Dancing, 3- Activity Sessions, 4-Walking (include the idea of meeting up ½ hour before school finishes). Use the boards as prompts and explore in detail with respondents how each idea would work- e.g. how would 'vouchers' work, what time of day would it have to be, how much would they pay etc and how this could help them incorporate it into their life on a regular basis.

- Present ideas on mood boards.



- > Spontaneous reactions
- > Likes, dislikes
- > What works, doesn't work?
- > Does it appeal to them?
 - What would have to be done for it to appeal to them?
- For Activity Sessions: What do you think about these types of activities:
 - > Martial arts, Frisbee, Softball, Ten Pin Bowling
 - If these were available, would you really do them regularly?
 - > If 'yes', what is it about these sports that makes them appealing?
- How much would they be willing to pay?
- Does it overcome the barriers mentioned in section 1? (refer to flip chart)
 - > If not, what is it not doing?
- Would this be an activity they would do on a regular basis- not just a 'one off'?
 - > Why / why not?
 - > What could motivate you to do it regularly?
- How could this idea work in you area?
- How would the idea be communicated to you?
 - > Probe schools- through letters, Parents evenings
 - > Probe Job Centre
 - > Any other organisations? (e.g. Brownies or Cubs)
- What format would you like to get the information from?
 - > Letters, posters, advertising (if so, where)
- Would you use a website?
 - > Which sites?
- Once idea has been discussed and modified, rank on a scale of 1-10 likelihood to participate where 1 is 'not at all likely' and 10 is 'definitely'

6. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION (5 MINS)

(Aim: to summarise key issues and improvements)

- What is the one key thing that could be done to enable you to participate ('Never' and 'Sometimes') or to continue ('Always') in sport and physical activity?
 - > Moderator: elicit one key issue from each respondent.