Determinants of Older Adults’ Commitment to Organized Sport Activities Using the Sport Commitment Model

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Although people are living longer, this does not necessarily mean they are living healthy lifestyles (Brockman, 2019). Researchers and health administrators suggest that people need to establish a healthy lifestyle through regular participation in sport and physical activity (McPhee et al., 2016). However, sport and physical activity participation declines considerably as people get older. Therefore, understanding how an older adult makes a decision to continue or discontinue sport participation is critical to understanding why some people are physically active whereas others are not (Molanorouzi et al., 2015).

The concept of commitment has been widely examined as a construct explaining individuals’ desires to continue to participate in sport and physical activities (Chang & Gibson, 2015; Mullin et al., 2014; Tokuyama & Greenwell, 2011). Scholars have demonstrated that highly committed sport participants are more likely to frequently engage in and spend considerable time, effort, and money on sports (Mullin et al., 2014). The Sport Commitment Model (SCM) is widely used to explore antecedent factors of sport commitment influencing persistence in sport participation by youth and adults (Casper et al., 2007; Jeon & Casper, 2016; Scanlan et al., 1993). Moreover, Snyder (1981) suggested that sport satisfaction and sport identity are associated as positive predictors of sport commitment for older adults.

This study sought to understand the factors contributing to continued sport involvement by older adults. To address this question, a model of sport commitment antecedents (sport enjoyment, involvement opportunities, personal investments, involvement alternatives, social constraints and social support), sport satisfaction, and sport identity was developed and tested.

A convenience sample of adults over 55 years of age (N=276) completed a self-report paper-based survey at various recreational sport sites (e.g., bowling alleys, tennis facilities, community centers, YMCAs) located in the southeast United States. For data analysis, a three-stage hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. The results suggested: first, SCM was a valid theoretical framework to examine the older adult population (R$^2$=0.44); second, sport enjoyment ($β=0.33$) and involvement opportunities ($β=0.15$) lead to increased sport commitment; third, sport satisfaction, as a distinct construct from sport enjoyment, was one of the strongest predictors of sport commitment ($β=0.19$); and fourth, sport identity was a significant predictor of sport commitment ($β=0.11$). Overall, the six antecedents, as well as sport satisfaction and sport identity, in combination accounted for 47% of the variance in sport commitment.

Theoretically, the findings advance knowledge on sport participation among older adults by addressing the theoretical relationships between sport satisfaction, sport identity, and sport commitment. Practically, recreational sport managers working closely with older adults will gain a better understanding of the importance of the psychological aspects which influence older adults to continue to participate in organized sport activity. Knowing this could help in developing effective marketing plans to maintain current participants and encourage beginners or inactive older adults to start to participate in organized sport activities. Specifically, it is important to develop organized sport programs that focus not only on enjoyable activities (e.g., leagues) but also valuable opportunities (e.g., health benefits) to increase participants’ commitment to staying active.