"THE PROMOTION OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG STAFF IN BARLINNIE PRISON"

Results of a Health Needs Assessment conducted by the Health Promotion Department of Greater Glasgow Health Board

by Hazel Henderson
June - August 1997
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their support throughout the Health Needs Assessment:

The PT department at Barlinnie, especially Willie McGurk
Norma Greenwood (Greater Glasgow Health Board)
The Barlinnie Staff Health Forum
The staff of Barlinnie Prison
Greater Glasgow Health Board
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- To employ a female PTI or train a female employee as a fitness instructor
Introduction

During 1994/5 a staff health survey was carried out in Barlinnie Prison. It revealed that the prison staff were above the Glasgow workplace average in terms of the following health risks:

- smoking
- alcohol consumption
- overweight
- blood pressure

The report revealed that staff would like help from the SPS with exercise, healthy eating and stress management.

Another report, entitled 'A Woman's Eye View of Working in Barlinnie' recommended that women's health should be promoted in the prison.

As a result of these findings, the Barlinnie staff health promotion forum decided to address staff physical activity levels. The following report was written after a Health Needs Assessment of staff at Barlinnie Prison with regard to physical activity and health gain. As part of the assessment, a 6 week exercise programme was provided for staff who were not regularly physically active. The aim of the assessment was to support proposed work on a physical activity policy for the prison, which would cover the exercise needs of staff at all levels of fitness.
Health Needs Assessment

The assessment aimed to explore physical activity among staff and the use of exercise facilities at work. A 6 week exercise programme was provided for staff in conjunction with the assessment. This programme was aimed at staff who did not exercise regularly, especially female staff.

Exercise Facilities

There are currently two facilities available to staff at Barlinnie Prison, with a new staff gym due to open in 1998. Both gyms are primarily for prisoners, and are only open to staff at the following times:

- 8am - 9.20pm
- 12pm - 1pm
- 5pm - 6pm

This obviously restricts staff who do not have fixed break times.

There are two gymnasiums; the 'new' gym and the 'old' gym. The 'new' gym has 3 activity areas. The first area is a well-equipped conditioning room, containing a multi-gym and a range of free-weights. There is some cardiovascular equipment available, including exercise bikes, a treadmill and a rowing ergometer. The middle area is the larger of the two activity areas, and can be used for a range of different activities. The most popular are circuit training and short tennis. This section was once used for football, but this stopped due to health and safety problems. The area is not ideal for high-impact activities, as the floor is made of concrete. Air conditioning is also poor. The smaller activity area contains treadmills and punchbags. This area is used for circuits and boxercise. Some staff use this area to train alone. The 'old' gym has one activity area with basketball hoops, and is used for badminton and volleyball.

Sports equipment

A variety of equipment is available, including dynabands, exercise mats, steps, skipping ropes, boxing gloves, badminton and short-tennis equipment, footballs and volleyballs.
Shower and changing facilities

Staff shower facilities consist of a few showers located in a portable cabin outside the gym. Staff have to go outside to shower. A common problem is use of the female showers by male staff. It is also common for male staff to change in the activity areas, regardless of who is present.

New staff gym

A new gym is currently under construction and is due to open in April 1998. Although the plans have not yet been finalised, the gym will contain muscle conditioning equipment and cardiovascular machines. A small floor area may be available for exercise classes. Shower and changing facilities will be provided on-site. The gym is for staff only, so times of use should not be restricted.

Staff exercise programme

During my first week in the prison, I spoke to a number of staff about which activity classes they would be interested in, and which times would be most suitable. The most popular class was circuits, and staff seemed keen on a relaxation class. Posters were put up around the prison advertising the following classes:

- Monday at 12pm: women's circuits
- Tuesday at 12pm: mixed circuits
- Wednesday at 12pm: relaxation

The turnout to the classes was good in the first few weeks. The emphasis was on staff who did not exercise regularly, and participants were told to exercise at their own pace. It was encouraging to see staff who hadn't exercised for years participate in the classes. The relaxation class was poorly attended, despite being positively received by staff. Those who did attend enjoyed it. Relaxation tapes and literature were made available to staff (courtesy of Greater Glasgow Health Board).
Two new classes were added to the programme, as requested by staff:

Thursday at 8am: mixed circuits
Thursday at 12pm: mixed circuits

Monday's women's class was eventually changed to a mixed class, as female participants had no objection to men joining in. The 8am class was cancelled after 2 weeks, as only one person turned up. It seems that those who use the gym at 8am prefer to do their own workout. 8am is not the best time to attract those who do not exercise regularly.

Staff who requested it were given advice on exercise or personalised training programmes. Some staff were too busy to follow a fixed exercise programme, so I provided them with a home-based exercise routine, which could be done at any time.

Increasing awareness

Since it was unrealistic to give each member of staff a one-to-one consultation, leaflets on physical activity were made available to all staff with the aim of raising awareness of the benefits of active living. A number of leaflets from Greater Glasgow Health Board were used, which covered active living, healthy eating and relaxation. Leaflets were placed in the Muster Room, as this is used by staff during breaks. The literature was very popular, and had to be replenished several times.
Research Methodology

The Health Needs Assessment aimed to find out about staff physical activity levels and use of exercise facilities at work. I attempted to reach staff from most sections of the prison. Information was gathered using several methods:

- Exercise consultations
- Questionnaire
- Talking to staff

- **Exercise consultations**: These were provided to female staff from admin/finance, personnel, clerical, residential and the health centre. 19 were carried out with the aim of improving physical activity levels. The consultations provided information on all-round physical activity levels in female staff.

- **Questionnaires**: The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of male and female staff from most sections of the prison. The questionnaire explored aspects of physical activity at work, and contained a section for those who don't use the exercise facilities at work and those who do. 24 questionnaires were returned.

- **Talking to staff**: Informal chats to staff from most areas of the prison yielded a great deal of information about attitudes towards exercise at work. Staff were very co-operative, and provided a great deal of insight into prison culture and how it affects physical activity at work.

Exercise Consultations

Exercise consultations were provided for female staff with the aim of improving physical activity levels. The consultations provided information about staff physical activity levels, perceived benefits of exercise and barriers to exercise. The sheet used for exercise consultations can be seen in Appendix 1. Consultations lasted 10-20 minutes, and staff were encouraged to set physical activity goals.
These goals aimed to reach one of the following physical activity targets:

I. Accumulate 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days
II. Exercise at target heart rate for at least 1/2 hour, 3 times a week.

Goals were set according to what was most realistic in terms of time and current physical activity level.

Physical activity levels

When asked which of 3 statements best described their current physical activity levels, the following responses were given:

13 of the 19 women interviewed managed to accumulate 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days. Only 4 achieved the target of 30 minutes, 3 times a week, and 2 did no physical activity at all. This suggests that most women were active enough to achieve some health benefits.
Women were then asked how active they were in each of 4 areas: at work, commuting, at home and for recreation. The following graphs illustrate the patterns of physical activity in these 4 areas:

**Physical activity levels at work**

Physical activity at work includes walking, climbing stairs and manual labour at work. Activity levels varied depending on which department staff worked in. Some health centre staff spent most of the day on their feet, and often had to carry heavy equipment around the prison. Most of those who reported a low level of physical activity at work had a desk job. 12 of the 19 respondents reported a low level of physical activity at work.

**Active Commuting**

Active commuting refers to commuting either to work or during other everyday chores. 11 women reported a low level of physical activity, and 5 reported a moderate level. This was due to car ownership or use of public transport. Only 3 people were active commuters.
Physical activity at home

Women were asked how active they were at home in terms of time spent each day on household chores. This was one sphere in which women were at least moderately, if not highly, active. This is encouraging, as it suggests that many women are at least reaching the minimum target of 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days.

Physical activity - recreational

Over half of the women interviewed were not physically active for recreation. This is one area where women could benefit from being more active, as only 4 had a high level of recreational physical activity (high was defined as 1/2 hour 3 times a week).
Pros and cons of active living

A decision-balance sheet was used to encourage women to lead a more active lifestyle. The hope was that the perceived benefits of being more active would outweigh the costs. This provided insight into the gains expected from being more active, and the obstacles preventing women from exercising.

Perceived benefits

The most popular reason for being physically active was weight control. Unfortunately, some women associated being thin with being fit, and were unaware of the health risks of sedentary living. The 'feel good' factor was mentioned as a reason for exercising. Exercise was associated with having more energy and feeling healthier. Mental health benefits were often mentioned, especially the stress-relieving aspect of exercise. Improving physical fitness was a common perceived gain. Less common were relief of boredom during breaks, long-term health benefits, lower blood pressure, pain relief and an incentive to give up smoking. Surprisingly, only 2 respondents mentioned enjoyment of physical activity. This suggests that many people saw exercise as a chore, rather than as an enjoyable activity. Likewise, only one person mentioned the social aspect of exercise as a benefit.

Perceived barriers to exercise

The most frequently mentioned barrier to exercise was lack of time, both at home and at work. For some employees, work was the only place they could find time to exercise. Three reasons often given for not exercising at work were poor shower and changing facilities, feeling self-conscious and feeling intimidated. Other reasons given for not exercising were breathlessness while exercising and lack of motivation.
Questionnaire results

The following charts provide information on the gender, age and job title of questionnaire respondents. The questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 2.

**Gender**

- Male: 29%
- Female: 71%

**Age**

- 21-30: 8%
- 31-40: 38%
- 41-50: 54%

**Job title**

- Other: 8%
- Health centre: 9%
- Personnel: 12%
- Residential: 71%
Staff fitness and participation in PE activities at work

How would you describe your current fitness level?

- Could be better: 70%
- Good: 25%
- Couch potato: 5%

Does your job require a minimum level of fitness?

- Yes: 66%
- No: 34%

Do you participate in PE activities at Barlinnie?

- No: 63%
- Yes: 37%
Physical activity and the SPS

The SPS should encourage all staff to be more physically active

I think the SPS should have a formal exercise policy

I believe that all staff should maintain a certain level of fitness
A range of fitness activities to suit the needs of all staff should be made available

There are adequate PE and changing facilities made available to female staff in Barlinnie

Regular health checks should be made available to all staff
Have you found the current exercise promotion to be of benefit to yourself?

Each establishment should have a staff Health Forum.
Reasons for not participating in physical activity at work

- not interested in activities available
- not interested in physical activity
- poor exercise facilities
- poor shower/changing facilities
- class times unsuitable
- current state of health
- other reason

Other reasons:
- injury
- not enough instruction
- poor facilities in comparison with previous establishment
- became bored with it
- bronchial problems
Staff comments

Civilian staff (admin/finance, clerical, personnel)

One of the main barriers to exercise in this section of prison staff was lack of time. Many of these employees frequently worked through their lunch breaks. The majority of female staff would like to exercise at work, but only in an all-female environment. Many felt too intimidated to use the gym, and felt they would receive little support or encouragement from male gym users. The attitude of male gym users towards women was often described as negative and discouraging. The problem of men getting undressed in busy activity areas was frequently mentioned as a reason for not using the prison gym. One female member of staff had experienced this, and had felt too intimidated to return to the gym. Lack of consideration for female staff by some of the male employees is a problem which must be addressed. Inadequate shower and changing facilities was frequently mentioned as a reason for not exercising at work. A problem encountered by women using the facilities was male staff using female showers, despite the fact that they have their own. It would be helpful if male staff would refrain from using female facilities, as this prevents women from gaining access to them.

Civilian staff (health centre)

The most common reason given by health centre staff for not exercising was the restraints of the prison regime. Although staff are entitled to breaks, the prison regime tends to dictate when breaks can be taken. Staff are required to respond to any medical emergencies, and deal with varying numbers of patients each day. The shift system makes it difficult for this group to adhere to a regular exercise routine. Some female staff were interested in attending classes, but found it difficult to attend classes at fixed times. The restricted times for staff use of the gym poses problems for staff who work shifts and can't take regular breaks.

A different approach to improving physical activity habits had to be taken with these employees. Due to the problem of attending classes at fixed times, those who wished to start exercising were given advice on exercising outside of work, or were given an individualised training...
programme which could be done at any time. Restricted times available for staff use of the gym is a major obstacle for these staff, as was the intimidating atmosphere in the gym. Some female staff mentioned that having a female PTI would make women more likely to exercise.

Residential staff

It emerged from talking to both male and female residential staff that Barlinnie falls behind other prisons in terms of providing exercise facilities and encouraging staff to exercise. Barlinnie was compared to two other all-male prisons, in which the majority of residential staff exercise at work, rather than the minority. Exercise facilities at Barlinnie were criticised on a number of grounds: restricted access for staff, concrete floor, poor shower and changing facilities, provision of male-oriented sports only, lack of exercise activities for staff and no female PTIs. Most staff members agreed that, since they are expected to maintain a level of fitness for work, time to do so should be incorporated into their working day. This is practised in some English prisons, and results in the majority of officers exercising. At present, staff are expected to exercise in their own time. It appears that little value is placed on physical health in Barlinnie. Some staff members who used to exercise most days when working in other establishments had not exercised at all since working at Barlinnie. The reasons given were poor exercise facilities and lack of encouragement to keep fit.

A common reason for lack of participation in activities by female staff was teasing by male colleagues. Although most female staff were quite resilient to teasing, most would not dare exercise in front of male colleagues. Personal comments about women's physiques were often made by male staff. Ironically, the same reason was given by male officers who were either unfit or overweight. It seems that the only ones who feel comfortable about using the facilities are those who would consider themselves fit. Some women said it would be easier to exercise if women were not in the minority.

It was said that the gym at Cornton Vale is well attended by female staff, and by women of all shapes and sizes. The atmosphere is apparently less intimidating, and female PTIs are available for staff. It was suggested that women-only times be allocated in the gym, and that suitable classes be provided for women. Since women are in the minority at Barlinnie, activities provided by the PT department tend to cater primarily for men.
It was mentioned, once again, that men stripping off in full view of female staff in the gym is extremely embarrassing, and discouraged women from using the facilities. This behaviour would not be tolerated in a private or council-owned gym, and should not be allowed in the staff gym. By allowing this to happen, the prison is inadvertently discouraging women from using the gym.

Male officers also provided a great deal of insight into exercise at work. Reasons for not exercising given by male staff were very different from those mentioned by female staff. None of the male officers mentioned feeling intimidated as a reason for not exercising. The main reason for not using the facilities at work was inadequate facilities. Other than the weights room, which was commended, the gym was criticised for its concrete floor, poor air conditioning, lack of proper shower and changing facilities, problems gaining access at weekends, restricted staff access, lack of activities for staff and lack of supervision by PTIs.

It was suggested that PTIs be on hand to provide advice on training, and that a set programme of activities for staff be provided. If more was done to encourage staff to exercise at work, such as better facilities and more staff activities, more officers may use the gym to maintain a level of fitness.
Problems encountered

Several problems arose which made the Health Needs Assessment and promotion of physical activity difficult tasks. Most of the problems were related to the nature of prison life. The main problems encountered were:

1) **Communication:** Despite using a number of methods of advertising the Health Needs Assessment and exercise programme, a number of staff were still unaware of both activities. Communication in the prison is poor, and any future attempts to promote staff health must take this into consideration.

2) **Movement around the prison:** For security reasons, I was very restricted in terms of movement around the prison. I had to rely on the PTIs to let me in and out of the gymnasium, which had to remain locked at all times. My movement around the prison was slow as a result. However, staff were extremely helpful at all times.

3) **Facilities:** The toilet and changing facilities for female staff are poor. I found the facilities (or lack of them) to be a hindrance, and often had to walk to the main building to find a female toilet.

4) **The prison regime:** Due to the nature of the prison regime, it is difficult to provide a set programme of activities for staff. The prison regime tends to dictate attendance to classes, so a great deal of flexibility is required for anyone providing staff classes. Restricted access to the gym is not practical since the prison regime affects staff break times.

5) **Women as a minority group:** This poses a number of problems, including poor toilet and shower facilities for women. Many women suggested that allocating women-only times at the gym would encourage them to exercise. The whole prison environment is very male dominated, and this is a definite barrier to women using the gym. Many staff expressed the need for a female PTI, and the provision of classes aimed at women.

6) **PTI staff shortages:** Many staff members who already use the gym suggested that supervision and advice should be made available. The PTIs seem more than willing to provide help for staff if there is a demand. Unfortunately, the PT department is currently understaffed by 20%. This means that PT activities for prisoners would have to be
compromised if staff were to be provided with activities. The PTIs are primarily employed to provide PT for prisoners, and not staff. Staff health is a need which must be addressed, given the health problems and high absenteeism. There are two possible options. One is to employ an independent fitness instructor to work with staff only. The other alternative is to employ another PTI to work with both staff and prisoners. Since all current PT staff are male, a female instructor would be a good idea, and may encourage more women to exercise. Perhaps a female member of staff could be trained as a fitness instructor under the LAY scheme.
Summary

- The 6 week exercise programme encouraged some non-exercisers to begin regular exercise.

- Staff agree that the SPS should encourage all employees to be more physically active.

- The majority of staff interviewed agree that the SPS should adopt a formal exercise policy.

- Staff agree that fitness activities to suit the needs of all staff should be made available.

- Shower and changing facilities are inadequate.

- Female staff generally find the gym environment intimidating, and do not feel that they are encouraged to exercise.

- Many employees cannot attend the gym at the allocated times.

- The exercise facilities at Barlinnie are inadequate compared to other prisons.

- The majority of employees do not participate in PE activities at work.
Appendices
Appendix 1

EXERCISE CONSULTATION

1. Name ___________________________ Department ___________________________

2. Physical activity level
   ◆ I do 30 minutes of moderate physical activity each day, eg. walking, housework etc.
   ◆ I exercise for at least 1/2 an hour 3 times a week
   ◆ I am not regularly physically active

3. How physically active are you in the following areas:
   - At work, eg. walking at work, climbing stairs or manual labour such as lifting and carrying /5
   - Commuting, eg. walking or cycling to work or to the shops /5
   - At home, eg. housework, gardening or DIY /5
   - For recreation, eg. walking, exercising or playing a sport /5

4. What type of physical activities do you enjoy? (please circle)
   - walking
   - swimming
   - dancing
   - exercise classes
   - other ___________________________

5. Reasons to be more active

For                                                                 Against

6. Support
   Who will you exercise with? Eg. Friends, family, workmates

7. Goals (see separate sheet)

8. Are there any classes you would like to see provided at work?
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GOALS

Name:

SHORT TERM (next 3 weeks):

INTERMEDIATE (next 2 months):

LONG TERM (next 6 months):
You may be aware that an Exercise Promotion is currently being carried out in the prison. This promotion is aimed particularly at prison staff who do not exercise regularly. The promotion will last 6 weeks (beginning Monday 23rd June). A report will be written based on the results on the promotion, including staff participation in exercise classes. Recommendations will be made regarding exercise facilities for staff. Your comments and views on current exercise facilities and any changes you would like to be made would be helpful. The results of this questionnaire will be used in the report. Please be honest as the questionnaire is anonymous. Questionnaires should be returned to Hazel Henderson (PTI) as soon as possible.

Thank you for your co-operation.
PART 1

1. Do you work in:
   - ☐ residential  ☐ operations
   - ☐ health centre  ☐ facilities
   - ☐ activities  ☐ admin/finance
   - ☐ personnel  ☐ clerical
   - ☐ other (please specify) ___________________________

2. Are you aged:
   - ☐ under 21  ☐ 41-50
   - ☐ 21-30  ☐ over 50
   - ☐ 31-40

3. Are you:
   - ☐ male  ☐ female

4. Is your fitness level:
   - ☐ excellent  ☐ could be better
   - ☐ good  ☐ couch potato

5. Does your job require a minimum level of fitness?
   - ☐ yes  ☐ no

   If yes, what aspects of your job require physical fitness?
   - ☐ restraining prisoners
   - ☐ responding to alarm bells
   - ☐ responding quickly to a medical emergency
   - ☐ manual handling, eg. lifting, carrying
   - ☐ active job, eg. PTI, tradesman
   - ☐ other (please specify) ___________________________

6. Do you participate in P.E. activities at Barlinnie?
   - ☐ no - please go straight to Part 2
   - ☐ yes - please continue
7. When can you attend P.E. activities at work?
   - [ ] during lunch break  
   - [ ] before starting shift  
   - [ ] after work  

8. Are the P.E. classes you attend at work:
   - [ ] too long  
   - [ ] too short  
   - [ ] about right  

9. Are the facilities (ie. showers, changing) available at exercise sessions:
   - [ ] excellent  
   - [ ] good  
   - [ ] could be better  
   - [ ] poor  

10. Is the equipment available at sessions (ie. dyna-bands, weights):
    - [ ] excellent  
    - [ ] good  
    - [ ] could be better  
    - [ ] poor  

11. Is the quality of instruction:
    - [ ] excellent  
    - [ ] good  
    - [ ] could be better  
    - [ ] poor  

12. Is the variety of activities on offer:
    - [ ] excellent  
    - [ ] good  
    - [ ] could be better  
    - [ ] poor  

13. Of the activities on offer, which do you most enjoy?
    - [ ] aerobics  
    - [ ] weight training  
    - [ ] boxercise  
    - [ ] short tennis  
    - [ ] badminton  
    - [ ] volleyball  
    - [ ] Health Awareness  
    - [ ] carpet bowls  
    - [ ] ten-pin bowling  
    - [ ] P.E. activity courses  
    - [ ] S.P.S. entry fitness test  
    - [ ] C.P.R.  
    - [ ] fitness testing  

14. What activities would you be interested in taking part in?
PART 2 - Non-Participants

Why do you not participate in any of the activities on offer at work?

☐ not interested in the activities available
☐ not interested in physical activity
☐ class times are unsuitable
☐ poor shower/changing facilities
☐ poor exercise facilities
☐ current state of health
☐ other reasons (please specify) ___________________________

Please use this space for additional comments on the facilities available at Barlinnie: ________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

SECTION 3 - Maintaining physical fitness

1. Time for maintaining physical fitness is built into my working day
   ☐ agree  ☐ unsure  ☐ disagree

2. I have no access to the P.E. equipment in my establishment
   ☐ agree  ☐ unsure  ☐ disagree

3. I receive support in maintaining my fitness level from the P.T.I.s
   ☐ agree  ☐ unsure  ☐ disagree

4. A fitness training schedule tailored to meet my needs is made available to me
   ☐ agree  ☐ unsure  ☐ disagree
5. I have access to showers and changing rooms when I use the P.E. facilities
   ☐ agree ☐ unsure ☐ disagree

Section 4 - General

1. The SPS should encourage all staff to be more physically active
   ☐ agree ☐ unsure ☐ disagree

2. I think the SPS should have a formal exercise policy
   ☐ agree ☐ unsure ☐ disagree

3. I believe that all staff should maintain a certain level of fitness
   ☐ agree ☐ unsure ☐ disagree

4. A range of fitness activities to suit the needs of all staff should be made available
   ☐ agree ☐ unsure ☐ disagree

5. Each establishment should have a staff Health Forum
   ☐ agree ☐ unsure ☐ disagree

6. There are adequate P.E. and changing facilities made available to female staff in Barlinnie
   ☐ agree ☐ unsure ☐ disagree

7. Regular health checks should be made available to all staff
   ☐ agree ☐ unsure ☐ disagree

8. Have you found the current Exercise Promotion in the prison to be of benefit to yourself?
   ☐ yes ☐ don't know ☐ no
9. Please use the space provided for any additional comments regarding the current Exercise Promotion in the prison

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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