

# **The Perceptions of Physical Activity Participation among Middle Eastern and North African Born Women Living in Australia**

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## **CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP**

I, Danielle Kristine McDonald, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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## ABSTRACT

Physical activity is widely accepted as a health promoting behaviour, offering an array of physical, social and mental health benefits. Despite the substantial body of evidence pertaining to the benefits of physical activity participation, it is important to consider that not all groups across the Australian population experience equitable access to this health behaviour. This thesis explores the perceptions of physical activity participation among Middle Eastern and North African born women living in Australia, a population group previously identified as being at risk of physical activity inequity.

Specifically, this research seeks to understand the ways women of Middle Eastern and North African origin define and understand the concept of physical activity, as well as their experiences with and perceptions of, physical activity participation. The physical activity experiences of the participant group were explored using focus group interviews and individual written narratives. The collected data was analysed and interpreted through the lens of Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasises the way in which human behaviour is influenced by both individual and environmental factors.

Key findings from the present study revealed that the term 'physical activity' was generally well understood across the participant group. The participants were able to describe physical activity, and provide examples that aligned well with the accepted definition in the literature. Physical activity was associated with a wide range of perceived benefits such as subjective improvements in physical and mental health. Numerous factors that were perceived to motivate and enable physical activity participation were also identified, such as opportunities for social interaction, as well as factors that were perceived to hinder or constrain involvement, including a lack of time and a lack of access to suitable spaces.

Exploring the various influences on physical activity participation, examined through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), established several recommendations and strategies for addressing the physical activity inequities experienced by the target group. In conclusion, this research contributes to the relevant body of literature and provides specific guidance for the promotion of physical activity among Middle Eastern and North African born women living in Australia.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>BMI</b>	Body Mass Index
<b>ACSM</b>	American College of Sports Medicine
<b>AIHW</b>	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
<b>CALD</b>	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
<b>FECCA</b>	Federation of Ethnic Communities Australia
<b>MET</b>	Metabolic Equivalent
<b>NSW</b>	New South Wales
<b>PTSD</b>	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
<b>SCT</b>	Social Cognitive Theory
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>VIC</b>	Victoria
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

***Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)*** – A broad and inclusive descriptor for communities with diverse language, ethnic background, nationality, dress, traditions, food, societal structures, art and religion characteristics (ECCV, 2012, p.1)

***Physical Activity*** – Any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure (WHO, 2010, p.53).

***Sport*** – A human activity involving physical exertion and skill as the primary focus of the activity, with elements of competition where rules and patterns of behaviour governing the activity exist formally through organisations and is generally recognised as a sport (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p.7)

***Exercise*** – A subcategory of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and purposeful in the sense that the improvement or maintenance of one or more components of physical fitness is the objective (Casperson, Powell & Christenson, 1985, p. 128).

***Metabolic Equivalent*** - The amount of oxygen consumed while sitting at rest and is equal to 3.5 ml O<sub>2</sub> per kg body weight x min. The MET concept represents a simple, practical, and easily understood procedure for expressing the energy cost of physical activities as a multiple of the resting metabolic rate (Jette et al, 1990, p.555).

***Health Behaviour*** - Any activity undertaken by an individual, regardless of actual or perceived health status, for the purpose of promoting, protecting or maintaining health,

whether or not such behaviour is objectively effective towards that end (World Health Organisation [WHO], 1988, p. 8).

***Health Promotion*** - Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health (WHO, 1998, p.1).

***Lifestyle*** – Lifestyle is a way of living based on identifiable patterns of behaviour which are determined by the interplay between an individual’s personal characteristics, social interactions, and socioeconomic and environmental living conditions (WHO, 1998, p.16).

***Middle East and North Africa*** – The geographic region encompassing Algeria, Bahrain, Gaza Strip and West Bank, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, Spanish North Africa, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara, Yemen (ABS, 2011).

***Migrant*** – any person who changes his or her country of usual residence (UN, 1998, p. 9)

***Self-Efficacy*** – Judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations (Bandura, 1982, p.122).

***Social Connectedness*** – The sense of belonging and subjective psychological bond that people feel in relation to individuals and groups of others (Haslam et al. 2017, p.1)

*Social Support* - That assistance available to individuals and groups from within communities which can provide a buffer against adverse life events and living conditions, and can provide a positive resource for enhancing the quality of life (WHO, 1998, p.20).

Note: Many of the above definitions were selected at the time the research was being conducted. Though new definitions have evolved for some of the above terms, the specific definitions which shaped this research have been included here.