



# New Parents, Physical Activity and Mental Health

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# PhD

## POLICY-BASED CASE STUDY OF LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC PARTICIPATION LEGACY IN A NON- HOST CITY: BIRMINGHAM

Semi-structured interviews pre- (2012) and post (2013) London 2012 to investigate the legacy experiences of those delivering sport in Birmingham prior to, and soon after, the Games.



POLICY



IMPLEMENTATI  
ON



SOCIOLOGY

# Current

## NEW PARENTS, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

**Research Aims:** Develop knowledge about physical activity through transitions into parenthood and physical activity for self-care for any perinatal mental health problems.

**Methods:** Online qualitative survey for parents in the UK of children under 4 years.

218 parents completed the survey (186 new Mums, 32 new Dads).



TRANSITIONS INTO  
PARENTHOOD



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND  
MENTAL HEALTH

# WHY?

Sports active families produce sports active children (Haycock and Smith, 2014)



PARENTS AND PA?



- 1 in 5 new mums - perinatal mental illness
- Increasing evidence among fathers
- Both often hidden and underreported (MMHA, 2022)

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR SELF CARE?



# BACKGROUND LITERATURE

## PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH

- Parental mental illness brings increased risk of child morbidity and mortality (Howard and Khalifeh, 2020).
- Supporting parental mental health can improve their ability to bond with their baby and create secure attachments, which is vital for infant mental health. This can also reduce public spending supporting children later in life (Parent Infant Foundation, 2022).
- New fathers in the perinatal period: negative feelings about the pregnancy, role restrictions, fear of childbirth and feelings of incompetence in infant care as factors that contribute to paternal stress. Higher levels of stress in new fathers contributed to anxiety, depression, psychological distress and fatigue (Philpott et al., 2017).

## SPORT, PA AND MH

- Broader evidence of sport/PA interventions for MH (Wilcock et al., 2021; Smith, Kinnafock and Rogers, 2022).
- Some evidence of exercise programmes with supplemental activity for PND (Brown et al., 2017; Saligheh et al., 2017).

## PARENTAL PA

- BARRIERS: being tired, lack of time, childcare duties, physical limitations, weather, lack of motivation, lack of support, work, money, depression, feelings of guilt (Cramp and Bray, 2011; Mailey et al., 2014).
- ENABLERS: Support, active with children/during their activities, being a role model for children, making time/prioritizing benefits to health/family (Mailey et al., 2014).

# HOW?



QUALITATIVE  
ONLINE SURVEY



SOCIAL MEDIA,  
NATIONAL AND  
LOCAL CHARITIES



REFLEXIVE  
THEMATIC  
ANALYSIS



WRITE UP AND KE

# KEY

# FINDINGS

## CHANGING FAMILY DYNAMICS

Physical activity, mental health and the body as relational and processual (Atkinson, 2012).

Complex and changing interdependencies in family relations (Goudsblom, 1977).

IDENTITY &  
HABITUS

CHILDREN  
PRESENT:  
ENABLING AND  
CONSTRAINING

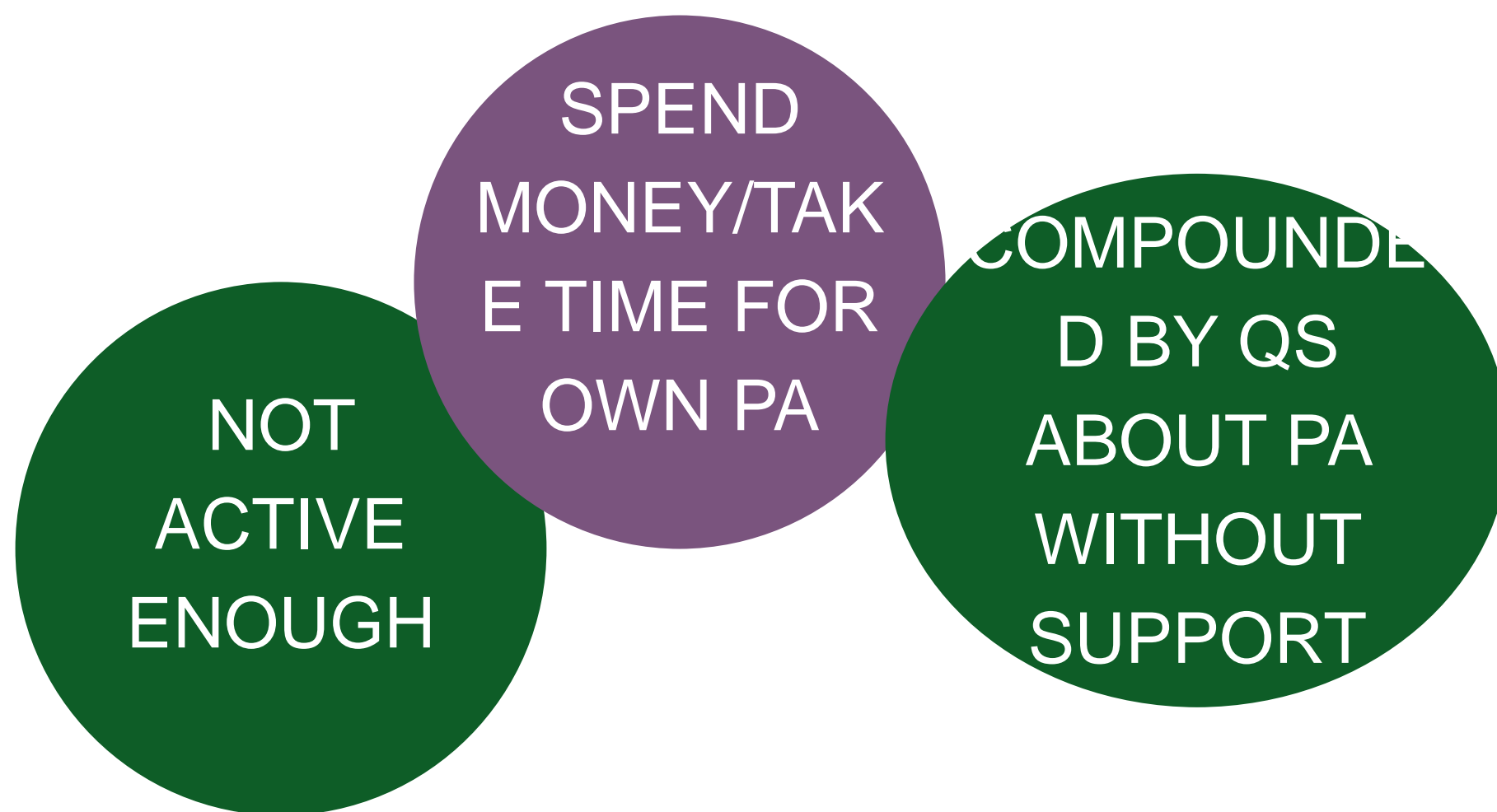
CHANGES  
OVER TIME

89.4% OF  
RESPONDENTS  
WANTED TO  
BE MORE  
ACTIVE

# KEY

# FINDINGS

GUILT AS A CENTRAL GUIDING EMOTION



'I do much less now than I ever did before. I don't feel good about it'

'I feel positive afterwards but can feel very disappointed with myself when I don't manage to exercise'  
'As a new mum, being told you need to exercise for your mental health or to "bounce back" whilst a guilted, doesn't like feeling like I'm not provided with the opportunity to do so. help if things get huge, with with the daughter too'

'Cost is also a barrier as I don't feel like I should spend money on myself if it isn't a family activity'



# KEY

# FINDINGS

RECONNECTING THROUGH FAMILY LEISURE

New Parents often modify activity:  
- More efficient  
- Individual  
- Family walks  
- Support from spouse/network for childcare

PEER SUPPORT

BOND WITH CHILDREN

FRESH AIR

ENTERTAIN CHILDREN

FUN

SOCIAL

FREE

SUPPORT FROM SOMEONE WITH GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF POSTNATAL BODIES

CONNECT WITH NATURE

FLEXIBLE COMMITMENT

Reasons for activity/what they want from opportunities:


# WHAT ELSE?

Support or self-care for diagnosed or possible undiagnosed mental illness in the perinatal period



MUMS

- CBT
- Counselling
- Medication
- Meditation
- Journaling



DADS

- Exercise
- Listen to Music

**'We cannot fully understand and address the welfare of women, children and societies, if we do not understand the welfare of men'** (Tarrant, Way and Ladlow, 2023, p.1).

# CONCLUSIO

## NEW PARENTS, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Transitions into parenthood and modifications to PA can be isolating.
- PA as a site for social connection and peer support for new Dads.
- PA/broader family leisure offer as a site for intervention through building family bonds through fun and enjoyment.



BROADER OFFER FOR PA, MH AND FAMILY-BASED  
LEISURE

# SO WHAT...?



BROADER OFFER  
TRYING NEW  
THINGS



WHOLE FAMILY  
APPROACHES



EVALUATION

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think?

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