

Scientists identify three 'types' of triathletes

January 9 2013

The popularity of triathlon - competitive athletic events involving running, cycling and swimming - is on the rise. Knowing who trains for and takes part in such events is important for sports managers, event organisers and others. Now, researchers in Germany have pinned down triathlon participants to three types of people: serious pursuiter (SPs), sport lovers (SLs), and social triathletes (STs).

Writing in the *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, Pamela Wicker now at the German Sport University Cologne and colleagues there and at the University of Duisburg-Essen find that the SPs are those who train hard and play hard for events, focusing and dedicating themselves to triathlon as their only sport. The SLs take part in triathlon but are also keen on other sports too such as football and tennis. The last group the STs are heavily involved in triathlon but see it not only as a sporting activity but as a chance to socialise and make friends.

Triathlon events provide competitions of different length: sprint, standard, middle, and long distance races. Triathlon distances are usually split as follows - sprint distance (500 to 750 m swim, 20 km bike ride, 5 km run), standard/Olympic distance (1 to 1.5 km swim, 40 km bike, 10 km run), middle distance/half Ironman (2.1 km swim, 90 km bike, 21.1 km run), and long distance/Ironman (3.8 km swim, 180 km bike, 42 km run).

The team carried out an [online survey](#) of almost 800 triathletes and categorised them by age, gender, years of participation, time of practice,

and expenditure. Of course, the team concedes that anyone wishing to take part in such a survey would present some self-selection bias in that only those particularly interested in triathlon would likely be willing to complete such a survey.

The survey revealed that one in five respondents were female and the average age of about 37 years, most were educated at least to university entry level and are relatively affluent, spending about one month's equivalent income on participation in triathlon.

While the SPs, the serious pursuiteders, were not very interested in any leisure activities outside of triathlon, this was not the case for the SLs, the sport lovers and the STs, the socialisers. The latter two groups were very interested in other sports and activities. "These clusters support the notion that, although [triathlon](#) is a time-consuming and challenging sport, some groups of triathletes are still interested in other sports and have a social life," the team concludes.

More information: "Who takes part in triathlon? An application of lifestyle segmentation to triathlon participants" in *Int. J. Sport Management and Marketing*, vol 12, pp 1-24

Provided by Inderscience Publishers

Citation: Scientists identify three 'types' of triathletes (2013, January 9) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-01-scientists-triathletes.html>

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