

Research explores why students choose to run

May 21 2018, by Amy Mcsweeny



Credit: University of Plymouth

As thousands of runners take on Plymouth's half marathon, researchers from the University of Plymouth Occupational Therapy team have analysed what makes students engage with running.

Led by undergraduates and academics, the study identified a variety of themes that gave the pastime 'meaning' for students, from enjoying the [natural surroundings](#), to perceived benefits in health and [body image](#).

The research showed that pain post-exercise was one of the main reasons

for choosing not to continue, but having the exercise incorporated as part of a structure or routine were more likely to make someone go.

In addition, the study maintained that running provided positive post-run feelings and helped participants to minimise stress and anxiety.

Focusing specifically on university students who identified as regular runners, the research was conducted in light of government reports highlighting the increase in [mental health problems](#) among students in higher education.

Existing research highlights how physical activity can elicit positive health and wellbeing so, by identifying the factors behind their decisions, the team hopes to understand why students may or may not engage with running long-term.

The study was part of a third-year research project and will be submitted for publication in future.

A team of staff and students from the Occupational Therapy programme is also running the Plymouth half marathon.

Rosi Raine, Lecturer in Occupational Therapy at the University of Plymouth, said:

"It was very interesting to see the multi-layered factors that influence and inhibit sustained engagement in running. While the meaning of running varied depending on the person, it's interesting that this study further supports the idea that physical exercise promotes positive mental health and wellbeing.

"The population size for this study was quite small, so we want to conduct further research to understand the full reasons behind someone's

engagement with running. But even at this early stage, we hope to be able to add to the literature available around sustained engagement in running for [university students](#), as very little detail currently exists."

Provided by University of Plymouth

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