

## People's experiences of using outdoor gym equipment in parks

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Studies show that parks provide people with the opportunity to participate in physical activity<sup>1–3</sup> and encourage social interactions.<sup>4,5</sup> However, there are few studies on the role of outdoor gym equipment on physical activity and social interactions, despite the increasing trend of installing gym equipment in parks in Australia and overseas.<sup>6,7</sup> This study aims to determine people's experiences of using outdoor gym equipment in relation to physical activity and social interactions.

A convenience sample of gym equipment users and non-users at Lang Park in Wollongong, New South Wales (NSW), were approached to complete a face-to-face questionnaire. Descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS version 19.0.

Out of 56 park users invited to participate, 54 agreed (96.4% response rate). The majority (72.2%) of participants were aged between 18 and 44; 31 were females (57.4%) and 23 were males (42.6%). Over half of the participants (57.4%) had used the outdoor gym equipment with the majority of users (71.0%) stating they visit the park more often since the equipment was installed. Fifty-eight per cent of gym equipment users reported using the equipment at least once per week. Most gym equipment users (64.5%) said they socialise with others while using or waiting to use the equipment, and 67.8% stated they occasionally use the equipment with a family member or friend.

Our findings show that the installation of outdoor gym equipment increased park visits, which is a similar result to a study in the United States.<sup>7</sup> As outdoor gym equipment provides users with the opportunity to improve cardiorespiratory fitness and muscle strength, the installation of gym equipment in parks could have the potential to assist in redressing low rates of physical activity<sup>8</sup> and strength training<sup>9</sup> in NSW. Similar to the findings of Chow (2013),<sup>6</sup> we found that outdoor gym equipment encouraged social interactions among gym equipment users. Study limitations included the small sample size and non-random selection of participants.

The installation of gym equipment in a park is a promising initiative in making physical activity accessible and affordable, encouraging social interaction and increasing utilisation of the park. Our findings provide some feedback for councils on the benefits of installing gym equipment in parks. Councils through their role in the development of the built environment, particularly recreational facilities within parks, can contribute to the promotion of healthier communities. Further research is needed with a larger representative sample, including gym equipment non-users.

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