



ADA COMPLIANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY OF FITNESS FACILITIES IN WESTERN WISCONSIN



University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

Katie J. Edwards, Kristi L. Finco, Sadie E. Foss, Marquell J. Johnson, Ph.D., Jenna L. Snyder, Hannah Y. Stoelzle

ABSTRACT

Objectives To examine the accessibility of fitness facilities in Western Wisconsin. **Method** Direct observation and physical measurements were taken during on-site visits to 16 fitness facilities in Western Wisconsin. During the on-site visits, 14 structural domains were used to examine facility compliance with Title III of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). An online survey was also given to owners/managers and employees to examine professional knowledge, education, training, and facility policy related to ADA compliance and accessibility. **Results** No facility was 100% compliant within each of the 14 structural domains. Of the 14 structural domains, customer service desk / materials (84.4%), path of travel (71.9%), and drinking fountains (58.3%) were the most in compliance with ADA. The least compliant structural domains were exercise equipment (60.4%), accessibility around the exercise equipment (56.2%), and exterior doors (55.2%). Survey responses indicated that 93% of the owner/managers and employees do not participate in continuing education opportunities relating to accessibility and services for individuals with disabilities. **Conclusions** There is a strong need to increase the accessibility of fitness centers in Western Wisconsin. There are structural and psychosocial barriers that continue to inhibit individuals with disability from participating in physical activity.

Keywords: Americans with Disability Act (ADA)/Title III, Physical Activity, Awareness, Environmental Barriers, Fitness Facility

INTRODUCTION

- In the United States there is an estimated 40-50 million people who have a disability. More specifically, 14% of Wisconsin's population has a disability. This number is expected to rise in the next few decades because of the "baby boomers" who will reach retirement.
- Individuals with disability are often confronted with barriers that prohibit them from participating in regular physical activity. Such barriers include environmental barriers, practices, social attitudes, employee knowledge, or facility policies.
- Title III of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) reinforces and protects the rights of individuals with disabilities from discrimination. One of the mandates of this act is to address the accessibility of public facilities for all people.
- The purpose of this study was to examine the ADA compliance and accessibility of fitness facilities in Western Wisconsin.

METHODS

- 36 fitness facilities were identified via internet search engines as well as local phone directories to participate in study.
- A fitness facility was defined as a facility open to both genders; offers opportunity to use both cardiovascular and resistance training equipment. The facility also incorporates one or more of the following services or programs; personal training, aquatics, and fitness classes.
- A formal letter describing the study was sent to each of the 36 facilities. Of the 36 eligible facilities, 44% (16 facilities) voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

- Direct observations and physical measurements were taken during on-site visits to the participating fitness facilities during regular business hours.
- A modified version of the "Checklist for Assessment of Accessibility of Physical Fitness Facilities" was used for this portion of the study. The revised 70-item measure was specific to ADA requirements for building accessibility and examined 14 structural categories.
- To examine the psycho-social domains role in facility accessibility, a 10-item online survey was developed. The questions were specific to professional knowledge, education, training, and facility policy.
- The survey was sent via email to each participating facility's manager and to at least one lead/independent personal trainer employed by the facility.

RESULTS

Figure 1. Percentage of Structural Compliance

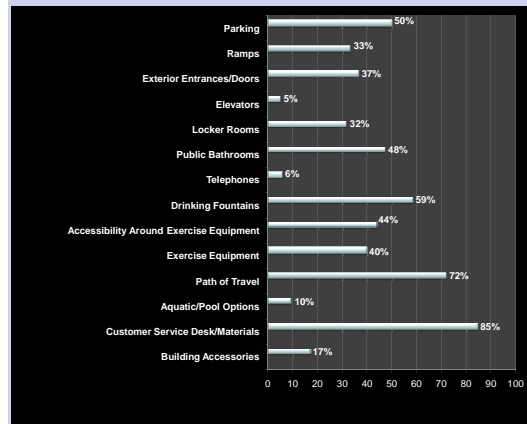
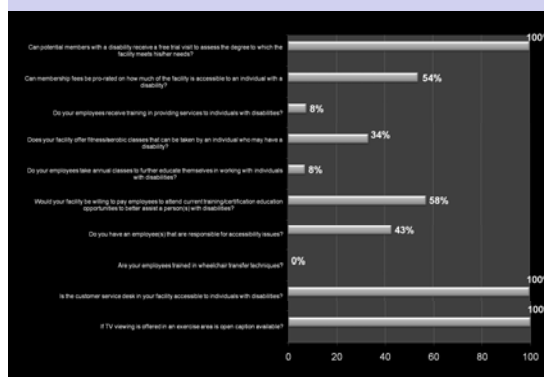


Figure 2. Percentages Related to Online Questionnaire



- None of the participating fitness facilities were 100% ADA compliant.
- Of the 14 structural domains, customer service desk / materials (84.4%), path of travel (71.9%), and drinking fountains (58.3%) were the most in compliance with ADA. The least compliant structural domains were exercise equipment (60.4%), accessibility around the exercise equipment (56.2%), and exterior doors (55.2%).
- Survey responses indicated that 93% of the owner/managers and employees do not participate in continuing education opportunities relating to accessibility and services for individuals with disabilities.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

- No fitness facility in Western Wisconsin was found to be 100% ADA compliant.
- The results are similar to previous published studies in North Texas, Western Oregon, and Kansas City, that found participating facilities not in 100% ADA compliance.
- Our study as well as previous research suggests that Title III ADA compliance is a major concern nationally. Efforts need to be made to raise the awareness of ADA compliance in fitness facilities across the U.S.
- Improving Title III ADA compliance in fitness facilities could potentially allow for greater facility access to individuals with disabilities.
- Increasing owner/manager and employee/trainer knowledge and awareness of disability related issues could potentially lead to increase participation among this population.
- Increased owner/manager and employee/trainer knowledge and awareness of disability related issues may also lead to increase revenue as more people gain access to the services these facilities provide.



SELECTED REFERENCES

Cardinal BJ, Spaziani MD. ADA Compliance and the Accessibility of Physical Activity Facilities in Western Oregon. *American Journal of Health Promotion*. 2003; 17(3): 197-201.

Rimmer, JH et al. Physical Activity Participation Among Persons with Disabilities: Barriers and Facilitators. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2004; 26 (5): 419 – 425.

Rimmer JH. Promoting Inclusive Physical Activity Communities for People with Disabilities. *President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Research Digest*. 2008; 9(2):1-8.