

Reasons to Enrol and Adhere to Free Community-based Structured Physical Activity Programme – a qualitative exploration

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INTRODUCTION

Healthcare providers often advise patients to do more physical activities for its various health benefits, but what happen once they agree to join a programme?

In 2015, our research team offered free 10-week structured physical-activity (PA) programmes to 56 community dwellers aged ≥50 years at high risk of DM. Each programme comprised twenty 90-minutes classes of combined muscle-strengthening and aerobic exercises instructed by a certified fitness trainer at a conveniently located community gym. Unexpectedly, significant dropout (77%) was observed towards the end of each programme.

This study investigated the facilitators and barriers of the attendees to enrol and adhere to the PA programme.

RESULTS

34 attendees (60.7%) participated in the focus group interviews. 3 main themes emerged, including **perceived benefits of the PA programme, interpersonal relationship, and programme design.**

- ✓ **Free course, motivation to improve health and develop exercise habit** facilitated enrolment in the PA programmes.
- ✓ **Positive attributes (active and enthusiastic) of instructors, social connectedness and support** were regarded as the most important enablers for participants to be continually involved.
- ✗ **Lack of improvement in health and issues with programme design including unclear objectives, and content being too simple and repetitive** were reported as barriers for some participants to continue.
- Some participants suggested **more personalised training with additional supports like online videos and free health assessment** to improve adherence.

Improve Health: "I hope that exercise can improve my blood glucose level as our blood glucose level is above normal."

Develop exercise habit: "Though I don't like exercising, I need to train my body as I am getting old, the PA program was like a regular exercise program, motivating me to exercise..."

Free course: "Money is one of my consideration, as I am in retirement, I don't have income."

Unclear objectives: "The objectives of the PA program were not clear, was it used for fitness training or helping us to nurture the exercise habit? I felt confused about this..."

Too Simple & repetitive contents: "The contents of the PA program were too simple and repetitive, even ladies were bored... The contents should be varied and with different levels..."

Perceived benefits of the PA programme

Interpersonal relationship

Programme design

Positive attributes of instructors: "The coach in our class was good. He was willing to answer all my questions...if you forgot or did it wrong, he would then immediately remind you"

Social connectedness and support: "...learners talked with and knew each other, and this could increase my motivation to participate in the classes."

Additional supports – free health assessment: "It will be great if pre-course and post-course health assessments are provided, these can let us know the health changes and you will know the effectiveness of the PA program."

Additional supports – online videos: "I do workout with online videos nowadays. If I didn't perform the part well, I can play it back and try until success before going to next exercise."

METHODS

A qualitative study using focus group interviews to explore the attendees' expectations, experiences, facilitators and barriers encountered in the PA programmes was conducted in 2018. **Suggestions to improve the programme** were also invited. All 56 PA programme attendees were recruited to participate in one of the 8 focus group interviews, which lasted for 30-60 minutes with 3-5 subjects per group.

Number	Question
1	What did you think of the exercise program we offered?
2	What were your expectations of the class? How did you think about the equipment, class environment, travel distance and timing of session?
3	How would you describe your experience of the class? How did you think about the instructor?
4	What made you continue with the exercise program?
5	What would make you not wish to continue with the exercise program?
6	Is there anything we could change which might have helped you stay on?
7	Did you suffer from any negative experiences during the exercise program or as a result of it?

Table 1 - Interview questions

CONCLUSION

- Our results demonstrated that **perceived health benefits, engaging instructors and peer support** facilitated enrolment and adherence to PA programme, while **programme inefficiency** contributed to non-adherence.
- Future PA programme should **indicate clear objectives**, be **designed with different levels of difficulty**, and **select instructors with an enthusiastic character**. Pre-post assessment and supplementary online material may help.

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