

Social supports and barriers for older adults not currently participating in group physical activity



REFERENCE

Morrison, Lindsay, McDonough, Meghan H., Hewson, Jennifer, Toohey, Ann, Din, Cari, & Kenny, Sarah J. (2023). Social Supports and Barriers for Older Adults Not Participating in Group Physical Activity. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.2022-0156>.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1 Are there social barriers that older adults experience that prevent or limit group physical activity participation?
- 2 What social supports do older adults experience that enable participation in group PA?
- 3 How do social support and social barriers affect older adults' physical literacy experiences?

METHODS

Participants:

38 Inactive older adults aged 56 to 91 (mean age = 70.9)

Data Collection:

Interviews (online or by telephone)

Data Analysis:

Interpretive Description



THEORIES USED

- 1) **Age-Friendly Cities Model:** societal and policy level framework designed to help communities be accessible and inclusive of all older adults.
- 2) **Physical Literacy:** conceptualizes older adults' physical activity experiences and is defined as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to participate in lifelong physical activity.
- 3) **Social Support Theory:** strengths-based approach to social support examining specific supportive behaviours and their functions.

RESULTS

Social Expectations and Initial Experiences

1) Groups cannot meet everyone's expectations or interests.

- Group activities require a degree of compromise with other members' interests and priorities

2) Groups are intimidating to join

- Breaking into established groups is challenging
- Uneasy when approaching unfamiliar people

3) Need for inclusive programming

- Lack of representation leading to programs feeling non-inclusive
- Want for older-adult specific programming

Social Processes Within Groups

1) Model physical activity

- Motivation and inspiration through modeled positive physical activity behaviours

2) Share information and suggest physical activity opportunities

- Appreciation of shared information about programs and opportunities
- Sharing information to help improved skills

3) Encouragement and genuine interest

- Seen as supportive, especially from close others whose perspective they cared about
- Issues with overbearing personalities left participants feeling annoyed or left out

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- **Many older adults are apprehensive towards new or physical activity experiences:**
 - Physical activity groups are somewhat constrained to the abilities and interests of those who attend. Compromise can be necessary to participate in groups.
 - Intimidation and social awkwardness can be barriers to joining a program.
 - There is a desire for classes to be more inclusive (e.g., age and skill appropriate classes)
- **Social support requires individual consideration**
 - Supporting older adults to experience physical activities safely may promote confidence and encourage physical activity engagement
 - Support can become a barrier when given inappropriately



For more information on this study and the Relationships and Exercise Lab, contact Dr. Meghan McDonough at meghan.mcdonough@ucalgary.ca