

Motivating Factors Influencing Elderly Engagement in Physical Activities During COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This study explores the key motivating factors for elderly individuals to exercise, focusing on positive health outcomes. The highest motivating factor identified is positive health, with a mean value of 4.05, reflecting its impact on improving quality of life. Regular physical activity enhances overall well-being, increasing energy levels, mood, and cognitive function, motivating continued participation. Additionally, exercise reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis, further incentivizing elderly individuals to stay active. Enhanced functional ability, pain management, and social connections are also significant motivators. Exercise helps maintain muscle strength, flexibility, and balance, is crucial for daily living independence, and alleviates pain from conditions like arthritis. Social interactions through group activities combat loneliness while achieving fitness goals fosters a sense of accomplishment. Conversely, social recognition is considered the least motivating factor due to intrinsic motivation, individual preferences, privacy concerns, health-related goals, and age-related changes. Elderly individuals often prioritize personal health improvements over external validation, preferring solitary activities or private settings. Their primary focus is on managing or preventing chronic conditions and maintaining independence. While social recognition may aid adherence in group settings, interventions should cater to individual needs and motivations. In summary, emphasizing the numerous benefits of physical activity, healthcare professionals and caregivers can encourage elderly individuals to adopt and sustain an active lifestyle by focusing on intrinsic motivators and personalized support.

Keywords: elderly, health conditions, motivating factors, physical activities, social recognition

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which began to spread in December 2019, reached Korea on 20 January 2020 and had spread across the country by 23 February 2020. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted daily routines, particularly among the elderly, a demographic highly vulnerable to the virus. Amidst lockdowns and social distancing measures, maintaining physical activity became challenging yet crucial for physical and mental health. Consequently, in almost all countries, nonessential government and private services were closed, and efforts to keep people at home intensified (Pombo et al., 2020). Restricting activities due to confinement measures will negatively affect the health of older individuals moving forward (Spence et al., 2021). This study aims to explore the key factors motivating elderly individuals to engage in physical activities during the pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

The study surveyed elderly participants to identify their primary motivations for maintaining physical activity during COVID-19. Participants rated various factors on a scale, and the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) were calculated for each factor to determine its significance and variability among the population.

FINDINGS

The analysis revealed six primary motivating factors with high and moderate levels of influence.

Revitalization (High, $M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.91$). This factor emerged as the most significant motivator. Elderly individuals engaged in physical activities primarily to feel revitalized and energized. Physical activity and exercise are terms that describe different concepts; however, their meanings are often confused and used interchangeably (Caspersen et al., 1985). The benefits of physical activity and exercise in the older adult population are indisputable. Physical activity in older adults helps them to not only properly respond to negative changes related to aging by maintaining and improving physical abilities (Hollmann et al., 2007).

Strength and Endurance (High, $M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.96$). Maintaining and improving strength and endurance was another major motivation, highlighting the importance of physical fitness in this age group. Older adults are motivated to participate in physical activities during the COVID-19 pandemic primarily by the desire to maintain and improve their health, with walking being the most common activity (Justine et al., 2022).

Nimbleness (High, $M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.07$). The desire to maintain agility and flexibility ranked highly, indicating a focus on functional mobility.

Enjoyment (Moderate, $M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.03$). Enjoyment derived from physical activities was a moderate motivator, suggesting that pleasure and fun play a role in sustaining engagement. A sense of purpose, health benefits, enjoyment, and the social context of exercise were primary motivators for elderly individuals to engage in physical activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Zsófia et al., 2023). The motivation to exercise was linked to improved quality of life, highlighting the importance of purpose-driven activities (Herlina, 2022).

Challenge (Moderate, $M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.04$). The aspect of challenge and overcoming obstacles was also a moderate motivator, pointing to the psychological benefits of physical activities.

Stress Management (Moderate, $M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.07$). Engaging in physical activities for stress relief and mental well-being was another moderate factor, emphasizing the holistic benefits of exercise. Intrinsic motivation and external encouragement from family and friends significantly influenced elderly individuals to participate in physical activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Herlina, 2022). A study found that older adults who maintained their sense of purpose through social connections and acts of service reported better mental health outcomes during the pandemic (Habib et al., 2022). Conversely, those who experienced a decline in their sense of purpose, particularly from reduced physical activity, faced greater mental health challenges (Watanabe et al., 2024).

Other motivating factors, including appearance, competition, weight management, affiliation, and social recognition, were found to be at a moderate level. The overall level of motivating factors among the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic was moderate ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.08$). Social connection, real-time support, and individual and environmental factors were primary motivators influencing elderly individuals to participate in physical activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mehrabi et al., 2022).

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the elderly prioritize physical activities that enhance their vitality, physical fitness, and functional mobility. The moderate influence of enjoyment, challenge, and stress management suggests that these factors also play crucial roles but are secondary to the primary motivators. Diverse motivations for physical activity among older adults included knowledge and resources, social connection, and the need for supervision and safety to enable adherence during the pandemic (Samira et al., 2024). The moderate levels of other factors highlight a balanced approach to physical activity, where appearance and social aspects are considered but not prioritized.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the motivating factors for physical activity among the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic provides valuable insights for developing targeted interventions. Programs aiming to increase physical activity in this demographic should focus on enhancing revitalization, strength, and endurance, while also incorporating elements of enjoyment, challenge, and stress management to sustain long-term engagement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of these motivating factors on physical activity adherence among the elderly post-pandemic. Additionally, investigating the role of external support systems and environmental factors could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to effectively promote physical activity in this population.

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