

Evaluation of an over 60's exercise programme: a mixed methods study

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Global life expectancy is increasing and in the UK there are almost 11 million individuals over the age of 65⁽¹⁾. Ageing has a substantial impact on both physical and mental health of older adults^(2,3,4). However regular exercise has been shown to improve musculoskeletal health, cognitive functioning and overall quality of life in this age group⁽⁵⁾. However, with many older adults living alone there is potential for group-based exercise classes to not only improve physical wellbeing, but also help improve mental health, too. The aim of this investigation was to evaluate quality of life in those adults attending a community-based over 60's exercise class, and explore the role that attending the class had on the physical and mental health.

Participants were sampled from an over 60s exercise class in the North West of the UK. Those meeting entry criteria of being over 60 years of age were eligible for the study. Quality of life was assessed using the EQ-5D-5L questionnaire EQindex and EQ VAS was also calculated. EQindex was compared against age- and sex-matched values⁽⁶⁾. Participants also completed semi-structured interviews that explored their experiences of being part of the group. Data from interviews were analysed using a thematic approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke⁽⁷⁾. All procedures were approved by the Health Research Ethics Committee at Edge Hill University.

From a total of 60 participants, 45 expressed interested in the study with one not meeting the inclusion criteria (aged <60 years). Twenty one participants completed the quality of life assessment and 13 completed the interviews. Mean EQ-VAS for the group was 83.9 ± 18.5 . Mean EQindex was significantly greater in the study participants when compared to age- and sex-matched controls (0.902 ± 0.131 vs. 0.767 ± 0.026 , $p < 0.001$). Five main themes were identified from the interviews: socialisation, exercise for better health, supporting behaviour change, mental health, and convenience. Some participants attended for both exercise and socialisation; P4 stated "I think just exercising with other people [is better] as opposed to doing exercise by yourself". The theme of supporting behavior change was reported by many participants. For some it has impacted their health outside of the class, like P8 who stated "I sleep better, I eat better" implying that attending the class led to important health benefits in their general life. Participants also reported benefits in mental health, too, with one participant stating "rather than being in on your own it's good for your mental health" to attend the class.

We observed an important effect of attending a weekly exercise class on the physical and mental wellbeing of older adults. Greater emphasis should be placed on such activities to promote healthy ageing in communities.

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