

Exercise: It's Not Just Physical

What Was the Question?

Despite widespread recognition of the health benefits associated with exercise, the majority of U.S. adults fails to exercise regularly. To find ways to improve this situation, Annesi, Unruh, Marti, Gorjala, and Tennant (2011) investigated the effect of psychological factors on exercise adherence.

What Was Done?

Over a six-month period, Annesi et al. (2011) analyzed 137 obese, sedentary women. The participants were randomly assigned to either a treatment group ($n = 73$) or control group ($n = 64$). Using social-cognitive theory, the researchers measured both groups' physical self-concept, exercise barriers self-efficacy, mood, and body-area satisfaction. During the six months, both groups had six, one-hour individual meetings with a Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) wellness specialist.

Submissions Welcome!

Readers may send Research Works abstracts to John Todorovich at jtodorovich@uwf.edu.

Submission Requirements

- Abstracts must be of research articles published in refereed HPERD journals within the past year.
- Abstracts should follow the Research Works structure.
- Research results should be applicable to practitioners.
- Also send the full text of the source paper.
- Length should be no more than two double-spaced pages.

The treatment group's meetings followed the "Coach Approach" protocol, consisting of exercise training, goal setting, psychological skills instruction, and a behavioral contract. In addition, the exercise routine was constantly evaluated and updated in order to increase adherence. In contrast, the control group's meetings focused only on exercise instruction and physiological concerns. Both groups received the same nutrition and weight loss information based on the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) guidelines. After six months the researchers retested the participants on the variables of interest and calculated each group's attendance ratio (sessions attended divided by sessions assigned).

What Was Found?

The treatment group had greater exercise adherence compared to the control group, with 49 percent and 31 percent attendance ratios, respectively. Although the treatment group's exercise adherence was significantly greater, both groups still had relatively low participation rates, averaging fewer than two sessions per week. The dropout rate, however, was significantly lower in the treatment group than in the control group. A between-group comparison revealed significant differences between the groups for all psychological factors, except mood. Within-group comparisons showed that the treatment group improved significantly on all psychological factors, while the control group improved only in physical self-concept and body-area satisfaction.

What Does This Study Mean?

Annesi et al.'s (2011) findings suggest that certain psychological fac-

tors influence exercise adherence, especially physical self-concept, exercise barriers self-efficacy, and body-area satisfaction. However, exercise instruction and nutrition information may not be enough to help an obese, sedentary individual to adopt an exercise program successfully. Instead, exercise and health professionals should incorporate psychological skills training (e.g., cognitive restructuring, behavioral contracting, goal setting) to address perceived barriers, increase self-confidence, and enhance feelings of ability. In addition, programs should be flexible and individualized, allowing for changes based on an individual's current level of energy and mood.

The study's low attendance ratio suggests that other factors not addressed by the study may also affect exercise adherence. These factors may be psychological (e.g., poor self-esteem, low motivation), social (e.g., priority conflicts, obesity discrimination), or environmental (e.g., access, transportation). Future research should investigate these potential influences. Physical educators should also consider developing health-related fitness lessons that address the psychological needs of their students, in addition to nutrition and exercise content.

Reference

- Annesi, J. J., Unruh, J. L., Marti, C. N., Gorjala, S., & Tennant, G. (2011). Effects of the Coach Approach intervention on adherence to exercise in obese women: Assessing mediation of social cognitive theory factors. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 82, 99-108.

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