Physical Fitness in the Golden Age: the Application of Peer-Mentoring in a Physical Fitness Program for Older Adults

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ABSTRACT

Background: For older adults, substantial research illustrates the importance of regular physical activity and a physically active lifestyle to maintain functional independence and reduce the risk of injury. Individuals who age successfully and enjoy high-quality later life have an active role in their community and maintain social and community involvement. This innovative program utilized a mentorship model to establish an effective and sustainable program to improve the physical health, fitness, and health-related knowledge of older adults. The Peer-Mentor Program (PMP) was created to increase exercise adherence and physical fitness among older adults.

Methods: The experience of being a Peer-Mentor has a strong influence on exercise adherence of older adults. Peer-Mentors influence exercise adherence, participate in a 30-week physical and educational training program, and were responsible for recruitment of new participants.

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to document the effectiveness of a structured exercise program that utilizes Peer-Mentors as training partners for older adults on recruitment, participation rates, overall retention, and physical fitness improvements.

METHODS

Participants: 29 Males and 26 Females (N = 55)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Height (cm)</th>
<th>Body Mass (kg)</th>
<th>BMI (kg/m²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer-Mentors Males</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70.1 ± 6.0</td>
<td>173.8 ± 6.4</td>
<td>81.9 ± 9.5</td>
<td>27.1 ± 2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-Mentors Females</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>66.1 ± 4.9</td>
<td>161.9 ± 5.0</td>
<td>70.2 ± 7.9</td>
<td>26.8 ± 3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peer-Mentors (N = 28)

- Selected characteristics:
  - General health and a physically active lifestyle.
  - Full commitment to regular participation.
  - Personality characteristics of a motivational leader.

- Participated in a 30-week physical and educational training program.

- Were responsible for recruitment of new participants.

Conclusions

An exercise program that utilizes Peer-Mentors as training partners for older adults has a positive influence on participation rates, overall retention, and physical fitness. Peer-Mentors enhance the overall effectiveness of an exercise program by improving attendance and enjoyment. The responsibility of new participant recruitment and training empowers the Peer-Mentors and instills a sense of program ownership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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