Comparison of Peer Mentoring and Student Mentoring in a 35-week Fitness Program for Older Adults

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METHODS

Participants: 31 Males and 29 Females (N = 60)

• Trained by either Peer-Mentors (N = 30) or Student Mentors (N = 30).
• 35-week structured training program with 3 sessions per week.
• Pre- and Post-Training assessments of: upper and lower body strength; upper and lower body flexibility; aerobic endurance; agility; and balance.
• A 20 question self-reported survey assessed: program enjoyment, perceived program benefits, and effectiveness of Peer-Mentors.

RESULTS

• In both SM and PM groups 19 of 30 participants completed the 35-week program (63% retention).
• Survey scores (based on 7-point scale) in both SM and PM group – indicated a high level of program enjoyment and perceived benefit.
  - Effectiveness of Peer-Mentors was similar to Student-Mentors (84% and 91%).
  - Peer-Mentors were positive role models (6.2 ± 1.3: 87.8%).
  - Peer-Mentors influenced exercise adherence (5.6 ± 1.4: 83.6%).
• Peer-Mentors influenced exercise effort (6.1 ± 1.3: 87.3%).
• The experience of being a Peer-Mentor provided enjoyment, motivation, responsibility, and a sense of ownership (6.3 ± 1.1: 90.5%).
• Program produced substantial physical improvements in strength, flexibility, aerobic endurance, agility, and balance (range of improvement: 11.2% - 58.0%).

CONCLUSION

• 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.
• The overall effectiveness of this structured program demonstrates the capacity for improved physical function of older adults.
• Peer-Mentors enhance the overall effectiveness of an exercise program by improving attendance and enjoyment.
• Through positive modeling within the community, Peer-Mentors can represent an organization and actively recruit membership improving the long-term sustainability of the program.
• The responsibility of new participant recruitment and training empowers the Peer-Mentors and instills a sense of program ownership.

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