

Volunteer-led online group exercise for older adults: a feasibility and acceptability study (ImPACT study)



NIHR | Applied Research Collaboration
Wessex

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Background: Physical activity (PA) is important for healthy ageing. However, physical inactivity remains a significant problem among older adults.

Aims: This study aimed to determine the feasibility and acceptability of implementing online volunteer-led group exercise for older adults attending community social clubs.

Methods: Volunteers were trained to lead group seated strength exercises through Zoom. The primary outcome was the feasibility and acceptability of implementing the intervention. Secondary outcomes included PA levels (CHAMPS questionnaire), physical function (Barthel Index), health-related quality of life (EQ-5D-5L), sarcopenia (SARC-F), and frailty (PRISMA-7) measured at baseline and 6 months. Interviews were conducted with seven volunteers (57-83 years), eight club members (68-82 years), one family member, and four staff members to explore their views on the intervention.

Results: Thirty participants (mean age 77 years) received the intervention and attended 54% (IQR 37-67) of exercise sessions. Two minor adverse events were reported (exacerbation of arthritic joint pain). There was a non-significant increase in light PA of 90 minutes, and individuals meeting recommended PA levels improved from 33.3% at baseline to 43.3% at 6 months. However, no significant changes in secondary outcome measures were noted at 6 months.



Conclusion

It was **feasible** to deliver a **volunteer-led online exercise intervention** that was **safe** and **acceptable to older adults**.

Key findings

- **15 volunteers completed training (mean age 68 years)**
- **9 volunteers delivered 184 exercise sessions across 6 clubs March 2021 to April 2022 (127 online, 57 in-person)**
- **During the COVID pandemic the online exercise provided an outlet for social interaction and movement when older adults were isolated at home**


We do it because we want to help others.... we enjoy it. I'm gonna go back to belonging again, I feel that I'm benefiting from the group. Because again, I feel like I belong to that group..... I get so much out of it. (Volunteer)

'We are not self-conscious when they (volunteers) are around. We have a laugh as well.' (Club Member)

'I've really enjoyed it because it keeps you in touch with people, especially during this COVID..... I still feel as if I'm part of a group.' (Club Member)



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