Common Experiences and Beliefs Among Highly Active, Older Adults

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Common Experiences and Beliefs Among Highly Active, Older Adults

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Summary of Study

Purpose: Identify experiences and beliefs that motivate active, older adults to participate in moderate-high levels of physical activity (PA) using Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a framework.

Methods: Participants were recruited using nominated sampling and a public advertising campaign. Participants were at least 55 years old with International Physical Activity Questionnaire scores categorizing them as moderately-vigorously active. Data was collected using the Motives for Physical Activities Measure – Revised (MPAM-R), Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale – General Measure (BPNSF), and via in-person interviews. A semi-structured interview approach guided discussion and created opportunities to discuss basic psychological needs (as defined by SDT), life satisfaction, and aspects of motivation for physical activity. Interview transcripts were independently coded for the themes noted in Figure 1.

Results: For the BPNSF, all three basic psychological needs showed significantly greater life satisfaction than frustration (p = 0.042 for all three constructs). For the MPAM-R survey, there was no significant difference between any of the five types of motivation (T = 0.261). Upon analysis of interviews, statements that expressed motivation were most common for competence (55), relatedness (33), and interest/enjoyment (27) with the least commonly mentioned motivation types being fitness (13) and appearance (3). Additionally, themes that expressed satisfaction of psychological needs (20) were greater than those for frustration (4) (Fig 1.)

Fig 1. Prevalence of Coded Themes: Exercise Motivation & Psychological Satisfaction

Conclusion: It was shown that motivation stemmed most strongly from competence, interest, and relatedness (Fig 1), and those promoting physical activity within this age group should focus on these domains. Overall, active older adults showed greater satisfaction over frustration with basic psychological needs when measured by the BPNSF (p=0.042). Motivational factors influencing PA varied greatly among participants, but they shared many common beliefs (e.g., high value of PA) and experiences (e.g., free play as children).

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