

Physical Activity as a Path to Recovery: A Qualitative Evaluation of a Residential Motivational Intervention

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Introduction: Existing research on physical activity (PA) interventions for individuals undergoing Alcohol and other Drugs (AOD) treatment has yielded inconsistent outcomes regarding their influence on substance use, mental health, and physical health [1–4]. A consistently identified barrier to PA engagement within this population is low motivation, which significantly limits the efficacy of interventions designed to initiate and sustain PA participation [4–6]. In the present study we investigated the perceived effectiveness, feasibility, and acceptability of a co-designed motivational group intervention aimed at enhancing PA motivation among residents of a AOD treatment facility in Western Australia.

Methods: Adopting a qualitative design, we conducted semi-structured interviews, framed within a constructivist epistemology and a relativist ontology, to explore participants' subjective experiences of the motivational group intervention. We interviewed a total of 15 individuals, comprising 10 intervention participants and five stakeholders from the treatment facility. Subsequently, we analysed the data using an inductive reflexive thematic analysis approach [7].

Results: We generated five central themes from the interviews: (1) *Fostering Autonomous Motivation and Positive Change* captures participants' perceptions that the intervention enhanced their motivation for PA, (2) *Self-Monitoring Increased Motivation* emphasises the positive influence of the intervention's self-monitoring strategies, (3) *Meaningful and Motivating Content* highlights specific aspects of the intervention that contributed to increased PA motivation, (4) *Collective Support Through Connection* reflects how social support fostered feelings of relatedness and strengthened motivation for PA, (5) *Amplifying Impact Through Facilitator Collaboration* illustrates how collaboration among facilitators positively influenced PA motivation among participants through relatedness and competence support.

Discussions and Conclusions: Overall, participants perceived the intervention as feasible, acceptable, and effective in enhancing autonomous motivation for PA. Future research should use these findings to refine intervention strategies to support the maintenance of PA motivation and facilitate long-term behavioural change among individuals with AOD issues.

Implications for Practice or Policy: With broader implementation and uptake, PA interventions have the potential to reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, among individuals with AOD issues [8,9]. This, in turn, could contribute to improved quality of life and reduced healthcare costs.

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