

Additional File 1 - Interview Guide – Experiences participating in a community-based exercise program from the perspective of people living with HIV: A qualitative study

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am meeting with you to understand your experiences participating in the 4-month community-based exercise program at the YMCA that occurred back in the spring/summer of 2015. While this study follows up on the YMCA program, we are a different team of researchers with different goals. Specifically, we are interested in learning about your current level of exercise and how participation in the YMCA program may have affected your ability to exercise over the long term. We are interested in exploring any factors you found helpful and any factors that limited your ability to participate in the community-based exercise program. We are also interested in exploring any benefits you experienced during and after participating in the program.

Sometimes there is confusion about what the difference is between *exercise* and *physical activity*. For this study, we define exercise as a planned, structured, specific form of activity with the aim of improving or maintaining overall fitness, health, and well-being. On the other hand, physical activity refers to any effortful movement that occurs in your everyday life, such as walking the dog or gardening. For this study, we are interested in the impact of the community-based program on both your level of exercise and your level of physical activity. The findings from the interview will be used to better understand the experience of taking part in a community-based exercise program. Results from this study will help to inform the future development of community-based exercise programs for people living with HIV.

Would you mind if I take notes during the interview?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

- 1. Please think back to when you were involved in the community-based exercise program at the YMCA. Can you describe your experience taking part in the community-based exercise program?**
 - i. How did you come to take part in the programs?
 1. How did you find out about the programs?
 2. What motivated you to decide to take part in the program?
 - ii. What was your physical activity level like *prior* to taking part in the community-based exercise program?
 - iii. Can you describe the nature of your community-based exercise program?
 1. What types of exercise did you do? [type of activity, aerobic / resistive component, group or individual activity]
 2. How often? [frequency]
 3. How intense did you exercise? [intensity]
 4. How long did you exercise? [time]
 5. Where did you do the exercise? [location]
 6. How did you progress your exercise program? [progression]
 7. Can you describe the level of supervision or coaching that you had as part of the program?
 8. How often did you attend (or take part) in the exercise? [adherence]
 9. Did you miss any of the exercise sessions? If so, can you speak to some of the barriers that kept you from going? [e.g. episodic illness, other life stressors, vacation, etc.]
 10. We understand that you set goals before starting the program. What were your goals at the beginning of the program?

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2. Thinking back to when you were involved in the community-based exercise program at the YMCA, what were some of the positive aspects of the community-based exercise program?

- i. Nature of the facility [YMCA, location, hours of operation]
- ii. Coaching staff
- iii. Other members of the facility
- iv. Exercise equipment
- v. Getting into a routine
- vi. Monthly education sessions
- vii. Interacting with other participants in the study

3. What were some of the challenges or drawbacks you experienced with the community-based exercise program?

- i. Nature of the facility [YMCA, location/transportation, hours of operation]
- ii. Coaching staff
- iii. Scheduling
- iv. Exercise equipment
- v. Getting into a routine
- vi. From our research, we know that living with chronic illness is always a fluctuating challenge for people and we are interested in how these challenges affected your participation in the CBE intervention? Fluctuating periods of health (episodic nature)
- vii. Concurrent health conditions (Do you have any other health problems that may have affected your participation?)

[note some of the above may fall into the barriers and facilitators.....]

viii. Do you have any suggestions to change the program to make it better?

1. Would you mind expanding on those ideas?

The next few questions ask about things that may have influenced your experiences taking part in the community-based exercise program and may have influenced your experience with exercise. [objective2]

4. Thinking back to when you were involved in the community-based exercise program, what were some of the factors that influenced your ability to participate in the exercise program?

4a. Were they any management strategies in your day-to-day life you used that influenced your ability to participate in the exercise program? [living strategies] A management strategy is any tool that you use to keep you motivated towards your goals. (if still requiring examples can say: ride system with a friend, social interactions, positive self-talk)

- i. What were your general attitudes or outlook towards exercise during the community-based exercise program?
- ii. Have those attitudes or outlook changed since your involvement in the community-based exercise program? If so can you describe how?
- iii. Did these strategies affect your willingness or ability to participate in the exercise program?
- iv. Examples of living strategies could be:
 1. Seeking social interactions (new personal and professional relationship)
 2. Maintaining a sense of control (this concept may influence their disability)

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1. To re-establish a sense of purpose, redefining base level of health
 2. Re-evaluation of lifestyle (sleep, nutrition, substance use, medication, exercise, financial security)
 3. Achieving healthy life balance
 4. Planning to anticipate the future
 5. Paying attention to numbers (CD4 count, viral load)
3. Having a positive outlook on life
 4. Comparing experiences of others living with HIV
 5. Faith and spiritual beliefs

4b. In some cases, exercise itself could be considered a living strategy (or self-management strategy) for enhancing overall health for people for living with HIV. Do you consider exercise a living strategy for living with HIV?

- i. If yes, can you describe? [e.g. lifestyle, re-establishing purpose in life, maintaining life balance, planning for the future]

4c. Many people living with HIV are now living longer and aging with HIV. Can you comment on how the concept of ageing may have influenced your experience taking part in the community-based exercise program?

- i. Can you explain or give me an example of how this happens?

4d. We are also interested in any similarities or differences experienced by men and women in the program. Do you think that your gender identity influenced your participation in the community-based exercise program in any way?

- i. If so, can you explain how?

4e. Do you mind commenting on how any other health conditions played a role, if any, in influencing the experience with the community-based exercise program? (examples if needed: diabetes, osteoporosis, a heart condition, depression/mental illnesses, etc.)

4f. Describe how the support of others may have influenced your participation in the community-based exercise program?

- i. How did friends or family affect your participation in the program?
- ii. How did the other participants in the study affect your participation in the program?
- iii. How did the fitness supervisors in the study affect your participation in the program?
- iv. Did your health care providers – did they know about your involvement in the community-based program and did they influence your involvement at all? If so, how?

4g. Did you experience any stigma during your involvement in the community-based exercise program? If so can you describe?

- i. If so, did the stigma impact your participation in the program? How?

The aim of the CBE program at the YMCA was to enhance the overall health and reduce health-related challenges experienced by adults living with HIV. [Objective #3]

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5. Did you experience any benefits from participating in the community-based exercise program in relation to your health?

- i. How about physical benefits (e.g. fatigue, pain, weakness)? Cognitive health benefits (e.g. ability to remember things, think clearly)? Mental health benefits (e.g. anxiety, depression)? Impact on social well-being?
- ii. Has your participation in the program affected your day-to-day activities?
 1. How so?
- iii. How has participating in this CBE impacted your experience living with HIV?
- iv. Dealing with the uncertainty or worrying about future health living with HIV?
- v. Some people may experience fluctuating periods of wellness and illness with HIV (known as episodic), is this something that you have experienced? If so, can you explain how the program affected this episodic nature of living with HIV?
[Note: interviewer consider episodic nature of HIV]
- v. Earlier I asked about what your goals were when starting the CBE program. Do you feel as if you achieved those goals? [refer back to question 1, last prompt]

We are interested in the extent to which exercise may become a part of a living strategy for people living with HIV. We are interested in learning about your current level of physical activity (or exercise) and whether the community-based exercise program had any influence on your current activity level in any way or the continuation of exercise of the long-term.

6. What type of physical activity (or exercise) have you been doing since the community-based exercise program ended?

- i. Have you been able to sustain or keep up with your exercise program?
- ii. Describe the nature and different types of exercise that you participate in (such as swimming, biking...etc.) [if not stated]
 1. Do you still go to the YMCA in order to exercise?
 2. If not, where do you exercise?
 3. How intense do you exercise?
 4. How long do you exercise for?
 5. How often do you exercise?
- iii. Have your episodes of illness impacted your ability to maintain this level of physical activity, during or since the community-based exercise program?

6b. Have you experienced any changes in your health status since the community-based exercise program that impacted your ability to continue with exercise?

6c. Has there been anything that has impacted your ability to continue with exercise since the CBE program?

- i. Illness
- ii. Finances- inability to pay for the YMCA membership
- ii. Other factors?

7. Based on what we discussed today, do you see yourself continuing to exercise (or starting back up with exercise if they trailed off) in the future? If so, can you explain?

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Concluding remarks:

Do you have any final thoughts about your experiences taking part in the community-based exercise program at the YMCA? Do you have recommendations when it comes to exercise and people living with HIV?

Thank you for participating in this interview and for your time. The information you gave will help us gain a better understanding of your experiences participating in a community-based exercise program.