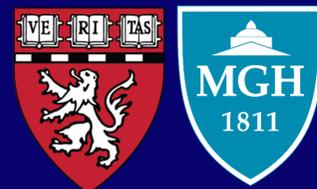


Exploring the role of family members on increasing physical activity in persons with schizophrenia



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Introduction

Individuals with serious mental illness (SMI), such as schizophrenia have an increased risk of premature death (10-20 years) mostly due to cardiovascular and respiratory disease associated with modifiable risk factors such as smoking tobacco.^{1,3} Although the increased levels of disease burden are complex and multifactorial, individuals with SMI are on average less physically active than the general population,⁴ and this may also contribute to early mortality.

Given lower levels of social connection correlates with low levels of physical activity,⁴ exercising with family members could be a valuable strategy.² However, not much is known about the potential for family members of individuals with schizophrenia to help increase physical activity levels of the person with schizophrenia. Family members are often the primary supports for individuals with schizophrenia and could play an important role.

We sought to:

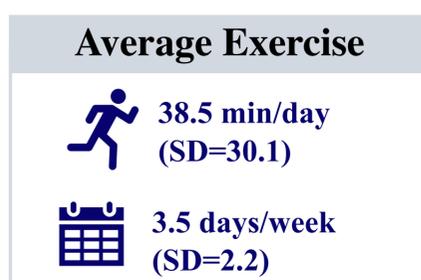
1. Understand family members' exercise patterns,
2. Understand their challenges to exercising with their loved ones, and
3. Understand their interest in interventions that would promote exercising together.

Methods

A survey was administered to family members (n=33) of individuals with schizophrenia at Massachusetts General Hospital's Schizophrenia Education Day. The survey consisted of 29 questions intended to assess family members' attitudes towards the mental health care system and research, as well as their own health, and their perspectives on what could benefit their family member with schizophrenia's health. A subset of these questions related to health were analyzed and are reported on here.

Results

Family members reported exercising on average 38.5 min/day and 3.5 days/week. Family members also reported an interest in increasing their rate of exercise.



Question	Answer: "Yes"	Answer: "No"	Did not respond
Would you be interested in exercising more than you currently are?	79%	6%	15%
Are you currently exercising with your family member?	12%	79%	9%

Family members reported: low motivation (24%) and inadequate time (24%) as the primary barriers to exercising with their family member with schizophrenia (See Figure 1). Few (12%) were currently exercising with their family member with schizophrenia, although the majority (67%) reported that they would be interested in participating in a free exercise program with their family member led by a personal trainer and offered in a gym (55%) or outdoors (55%) (See Figures 2 and 3).

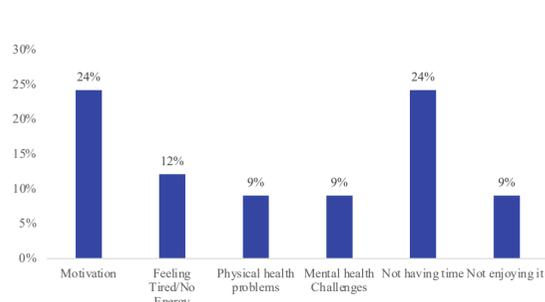


Figure 1. Barriers to exercising with a family member with schizophrenia (n=28)

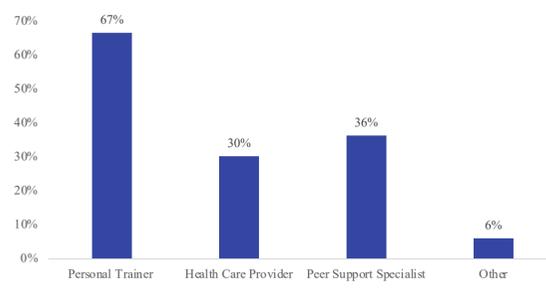


Figure 2. "I would be interested in participating in an exercise program with my family member led by ..." (n=26)

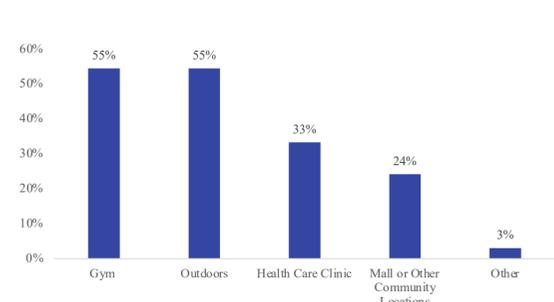


Figure 3. "I would be interested in participating in an exercise program with my family member at ..." (n=25)

Conclusion

Family members could potentially play a key role in supporting and increasing the physical activity of their loved ones with schizophrenia. Results show that there is an overall disposition in family members to increase their physical activity levels and that they are interested in participating in free exercise programs with their family members with schizophrenia. Identified roadblocks include low motivation and not having enough time and future research could test the effect of a family support model for exercise that includes strategies for overcoming these barriers. More research is needed to determine whether and how individuals with schizophrenia would be interested in participating in exercise together with their family members.

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