

Exercise for mental health on campus: A randomized controlled trial comparing individualized and group-based programs

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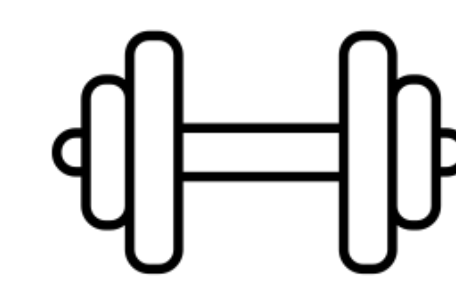
1 A collaborative implementation approach



The Mental Health and Physical Activity Research Center



Health and Wellness Services



Sport and Rec - Fitness & Performance

2 Introduction & purpose

- Research focused on **enhancing the provision and accessibility** of structured and tailored **exercise programs for student mental health is needed**^{1,2}
- The purpose of **this randomized controlled trial (RCT) study** is to: (1) assess the **immediate** (post-intervention, 6 weeks) and **follow-up** (4 weeks after post-intervention) maintenance effects of **1:1 exercise** and **group-based exercise** in comparison to a **10-week waitlist control** in supporting primary and secondary outcomes; and (2) **grounded in process evaluation recommendations**,³ explore contextual implementation factors (e.g., reach, adherence)
- **Primary outcomes** = immediate change in symptoms of poor mental health (anxiety, depression, psychological distress, psychological well-being)
- **Secondary outcomes** = follow-up change in symptoms of poor mental health as well as the immediate and follow-up change in social well-being outcomes (social connectedness, social support), and exercise behaviour

3 Methods and project progress

- A **3-arm parallel RCT** adhering to CONSORT guidelines⁴ and SPIRIT recommendations⁵
- **Eligibility criteria:** (a) post-secondary student; (b) physically inactive; and (3) experiencing 'poor', 'fair', or 'good' mental health in the past month
- **Intervention** - 1:1 exercise delivery or group-based exercise delivery
 - **6-week program** consisting of weekly 1-h sessions: (1) **30 min of behaviour change coaching**; and (2) **30 min of exercise training**
- Data collection and analysis in progress
- Data collection for 58 students randomized to group ($n = 19$), individual ($n = 18$), or wait-list control ($n = 21$) has been completed. Target sample size = 93 students

4 Knowledge-user and student testimonials

Prior to the program, I had **little energy** and found it **hard to be active regularly**. Throughout the program, I **gained motivation and practical skills** on how to **tailor exercises** to make it **fun and safe** for myself

- Student program participant

As a coach...I've seen **physical activity as a method** to handle **stress** and **manage mental health**. It's been helpful to my **development as a coach** but also as a **student trying to manage my own mental and physical health**, and I believe this program is an **excellent opportunity** for learning and improving health

- Program coach (and student)

The program ... it is viewed as **part of our stepped care model** and a reliable **evidence-based resource** to support students' wellbeing

- Health and Wellness Knowledge user

The program provides a **benchmark example of collaboration** between curricular and co-curricular programs.... It has also allowed **dozens of student staff in Fitness and Performance** to gain **practical experience and knowledge** in working at the **intersection of mental health and wellness** that will make them **unique candidates for leadership roles after graduation**

- Sport and Rec knowledge user

5 Implications for research and practice

Practical

- Implications for expanding the range of evidence-based interventions available on post-secondary campuses, focused on exercise will be offered
- Results will contribute to informing collaborative implementation approaches for delivering structured and tailored exercise programs for mental health – can help to foster the development of liaison programs and collaborative partnerships⁶

Theoretical

- Implications for exploring theoretically informed mechanisms (e.g., social cohesion, quality of social networks) that may explain the benefits of group delivery in comparison to 1:1 delivery will be provided⁷

Methodological

- Results will help to inform methodological processes for improving implementation fidelity and positive program experiences
- Considerations for the feasibility (e.g., adherence, satisfaction) of 1:1 delivery compared to group-based delivery will be provided

6 References



KPE @ U of T.
How we move.

