Measures for enhancing participation in physical exercise and sports by the elderly in Eldoret West district, Kenya

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(Received: 25 August 2011; Revision Accepted: 18 September 2011)

Abstract

Physical activity is beneficial for the physical and mental health of the elderly by helping to prevent occurrence of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, falls, cognitive decline, dementia, and depression. However, information on the participation of elderly in exercise in Kenya is lacking. This study sought to explore measures for enhancing participation in exercise and sports by the elderly in Eldoret West district. The study utilized cross-sectional survey research design. Data were collected among the elderly people aged 50 years and above in Eldoret West district. The instruments of data collection were interviews, questionnaires and focused group discussions. The sample size selected for the study was 260 elderly from an estimated population of 2600 in Eldoret West district. These respondents were sampled through snowballing techniques. The data collected were analyzed by descriptive statistics employing frequency distributions, chi-square tests and correlation analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 16.0). The elderly agreed that their main reasons for engaging in exercises were: presence of finances to pay, encouragements from the family members, and high levels of education among other things. It was further established that the elderly engaged in exercises to become alert, to increase confidence, to maintain health and as a way of passing time. Finally, it was established that the elders lacked time, money; space among other things that should be availed to enhance participation in exercises. They however agreed that they need to be provided with opportunities and facilities and moral support for them to participate in exercises. This study demonstrated that measures for enhancing participation in exercise and sports among the elderly in Kenya seem inadequate and ineffective, perhaps leading to low participation in exercises. It is thus recommended that local authorities, in collaboration with the ministry of Youth and Sports, take up responsibility for the funding and designing of the exercises for elderly people in Kenya as well as providing the adequate facilities and equipment for their successful implementation.

Keywords: Exercise, sports, elderly, participation, Kenya.

How to cite this article:
Introduction

An exercise prescription for the elderly should be based on a pragmatic strategy that makes therapeutic exercise both sustainable and safe (Heath, Hopkins, Murrah, Hoeger & Rhodes, 2011). Therefore, the exercise should have motivational elements and knowledge of achievable benefits. The elderly should be mobilized to participate in exercise but should involved physicians who should assess their capabilities and help develop corresponding exercises that will motivate the elderly to participate (Gorman, 2000).

Some authors have argued that to enhance participations of the elderly, exercise for the elderly must not be performed at high intensity for therapeutic benefits (Kasch, Boyer, Van Camp, McGregory & Wallace, 2008). However, it is further noted that the level of exertion must be observed by both elders and care givers so as to assess initial intensity to avoid exhaustion which is a negative reinforcement to exercise (Becker, 2005). Safety concerns associated with other diseases and conditions commonly encountered when prescribing physical exercise for the elderly should also be considered to avoid adverse health implications among the elderly (Buchner, David, Maryland & Morrison, 1998).

According to Evans (1999), several ways must be put in place to enhance elders’ participation in exercise. This include making it fun by adding music and movements to exercise environment through linking exercise to other pleasurable or positive events such as favourite radio or television show, pre-bath activity. Another measure is to make exercise social by promoting exercise in groups, whenever possible create virtual groups using video tapes (Becker, 2005). Exercise for the elderly must be made a priority as a measure of enhancing their participation (Evans, 1999).

In Kenya, the government has realized the importance of the elderly in the society and has started few programmes to incorporate them in the society through elderly care initiatives including the minimum pay for the elderly and provision of food for the elderly (Mwaniki, 2001; Owino & McGregory, 2006; Bilner, 2009). When some of these programmes for the elderly were enacted, the government realized that physical activity which covers a variety of activities; including exercises are required by the elderly in the country. However, the government maintained its lack of funds to execute all the social welfare programmes among the elderly. Therefore, the elderly in Kenya may choose to participate in regular exercise voluntarily through their own initiatives and through the use of personal resources. A study in Kenya (Gombe, 2003) suggested that middle-aged people continue to engage in health promotion programmes including walking or jogging and found evidence that this helped to prevent lifestyle related problems such as being bed-ridden or suffering from depression, or acute social withdrawal. The elderly in Kenya having recognized
the importance of regular exercises have resorted to pursue exercise on their own, or through information gained from their relatives or government initiatives (Owino & McGregor, 2006). However, traditionally only non vigorous sports such as golf, bowling and ajua in the African traditional sports have been considered appropriate for older adults in Kenya (Okello, 2005). If the older adults cycled or jogged, they tended to do so in a leisurely fashion. However, since the 1980s the prejudices accompanying these traditional myths have been broke down quite rapidly (Jacobsen & Morris, 2007) and subsequently accompanying changes that have resulted in the elderly in Kenya taking up and engaging in active exercise. However, measures to enhance their participation are lacking.

Facilities to enhance elderly participation are found scattered all over major towns in Kenya including Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Eldoret among others (Muoki, 2010). In Eldoret, facilities for physical exercise are relatively numerous because they are meant for the sportsmen and sportswomen in the town. There are also a few facilities dedicated to the children and elderly in the town including at the Save our Soul (SOS) village in the periphery of the Eldoret town (Personal Communication, Olga, SOS), which is rarely used by the elders for their exercises as well as facilities at the various sports club in Eldoret town. Such state of affair exposes the impediments to the participation in physical exercise among the elderly in Eldoret.

In view of the lack of exercise facilities for the elderly in Eldoret West, and an underlying problem that discourage the elderly from actively participating in the physical exercise, this study sought to explore measures for enhancing participation in exercise and sports by the elderly in Eldoret West district. The research question framed was: what measures can be used to enhance participation of the elderly in Eldoret West district in exercise and sports? It is expected that findings from this study would be useful for scholars researching in the area of the elderly in relation to their participation in physical activities in Eldoret West by providing the missing information on strategies that can be used to enhance their participation in exercise and sporting activities.

Methodology

Research design

The study used survey design as a method of collecting information. Survey studies usually use descriptive statistical methods to summarize data and get description of responses from questions (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). It was thought appropriate to utilised this method of research, as it considered attitudes, experiences, perspectives and opinions about physical exercises involved in by the elderly. Descriptive research is a process of collecting data in order to answer
questions concerning the current status of the participants in the study and it determines and reports the way things are; it also describes such things as behaviour attitudes, values and characteristics (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Target population

The target population comprised males and females aged 50 years and above within Eldoret West district. Eldoret West district has a total population of 2600 people over 50 years both male and female (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics Eldoret Office, 2009).

Sample and sampling procedure

Random sampling technique was used to provide a true representation of the elderly population in Eldoret West district. A sample size of 260 elders was drawn and interviewed as this was representative enough of the entire population. This is 10% of the population (2600) (Kothari, 2004).

Instrumentation

The study used a self administered questionnaire as a tool for collecting data. Primary data obtained using questionnaires and interviews. Interviews were found appropriate because some of the respondents were illiterate and might have provided incorrect answers as they were unable to fill the questionnaires on their own. The study also used focused group discussions enabling the researcher access more respondents and it was less costly.

Pilot study

A pilot study involving 12 elderly people was conducted in Soy Division of Eldoret West district, for the purpose of pre-testing the instrument. The questionnaires were subjected to content validity test before the pilot study to check whether the instrument measures what it was intended to measure (Kombo & Tramp, 2006).

Data collection procedures

The research instruments were personally delivered to respondents by the research team who were trained in handling respondents and the questionnaires. A total of 260 questionnaires were delivered. The questionnaire had both open and closed ended questions. The contents of the questionnaires were verbally explained in the local languages to the respondents for easier comprehension and understanding before filling the questionnaires.
Ethical considerations

Some ethical considerations when dealing with the elderly included, maintaining confidentiality whereby questionnaires did not bear the names of the respondents, instead were coded. An assurance was made to respondents that the information obtained was purely for research purposes. The study received ethical approval from the research committee of Kenyatta University, Kenya.

Data analysis and presentation

The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Data analysis were done using SPSS version 16.0. Chi-square test was used to compare the differences between categorical frequencies. Spearman correlations were used to analyze strengths of cross-tabulated significant relationships. Apart from Chi-square test, percentage rank score was used to compare the response to variables under study. All data was analyzed at a level of 95% or $\alpha = 0.05$ and degree of freedom depending on the particular case as was determined. The findings were presented in tables, charts, percentages, means and central tendencies.

Results and Discussion

The aim of the present study was to determine the measures undertaken to enhance the elderly in participation in physical exercises in Eldoret West district. Participants were first asked to rate the physical exercise programmes among the elderly in the area (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Importance of exercise programmes rated among the elderly in Eldoret West District](image-url)
Most of the participants rated physical exercise programmes to be very low while large proportion of the respondents believed that the programmes were of moderate importance while the least number of respondents rated the programmes highly. The participants stated that to enhance participation in physical exercises by the elderly, time, money, space among other things should be provided for the elderly in concurrence with study by Balde, Figueras, Hawlins and Miller, 2003. Heath et al. (2011), highlighted that for the elderly to effectively participate in exercises, there should be a pragmatic strategy that makes therapeutic exercise both sustainable and safe with an element of motivation and knowledge of achievable benefits. Some authors have argued that to enhance participation of the elderly, exercise for the elderly must not be performed at high intensity for therapeutic benefits (Kasch et al., 2008).

The participants’ opinions were also sought on several issues concerning measures to enhance physical exercises among the elderly as presented in Table 1. Most of the respondents believed that to enhance the elderly participation in exercises, many aspects such as time, money, space among other things should be provided for the elderly. Others preferred government intervention through provision of opportunities while most of the respondents preferred government to provide facilities as well as the intervention of the communities to provide moral support for the projects.

**Table 1: Participants’ opinions concerning measures to enhance physical exercises among the elderly**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinions</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More time, space and money should be provided for exercise programmes for the elderly</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government provide opportunities for the elderly to participate in exercises</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>83.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government provide facilities for the elderly to participate in exercises</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The community around you would encourage/approve exercise for the aged</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More emphasis should be laid on education, awareness, facilities provision for the elderly</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was further noted that the level of exertion must be observed by both the elderly and care givers so as to assess initial intensity to avoid exhaustion which is a negative reinforcement to physical exercise (Becker, 2005). Safety concerns associated with other diseases and conditions commonly encountered among the elderly when prescribing exercise for them should also be considered to avoid adverse health implications among the elderly (Buchner et al., 1998). The elderly also wanted the physical exercise to be social by promoting exercise in groups whenever possible. According to Evans (1999), exercise for the elderly must be made a priority as a measure of enhancing their participation. Gorman (2000) maintains that the elderly should be mobilized to participate in physical exercise,
but should involve physicians who should assess their capabilities and help develop corresponding exercises that will motivate the elderly to participate.

The participation of a limited number of elderly constitutes the main limitation, and the present findings cannot be generalized to the entire Kenyan elderly population. Additionally, elderly males and females were not segregated and not tested, leaving the area open for future research. Researchers, therefore, may need to examine the views of a larger sample of participants, including both males and females, from different geographic areas, socioeconomic status, etc. Additionally, the use of focus group discussion with the elders may have generated unnecessary information that was meant to solicit for sympathy than to provide real problem of the elderly. The scope of the study may not allow for generalizations as it was only conducted within Eldoret West district.

**Conclusion**

The elderly maintained that their main reasons for engaging in physical exercises were: presence of finance to pay, encouragements from the family members, and high levels of education among other things. It was further established that the elderly engaged in physical exercises to become alert, to increase confidence, to maintain health and as a way of passing time. The elders stated that to enhance their participation in exercises, time, money, space among other things should be in place for them. Yet, others preferred government interventions through provision of opportunities while most of the elders preferred government to provide facilities as well as the intervention of the communities to provide moral support for the established projects aimed at enhancing the elderly participation level in exercise and sports.

Based on the above findings, local authorities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Sports responsible for the funding and designing of physical exercise for the elderly people in Kenya, should provide the necessary equipment for their successful implementation. Further, the programmes designed for the elderly should be constantly reviewed, in order to cover the needs and interests of the participants, according to their respective residence. In this regards, it is essential to provide the opportunity for the elderly to invest meaningfully in their free time, socialize with friends and overall, enhance their mood and health.

**References**


Measures for enhancing participation in physical exercise and sports


