

# THE IMPACT OF A COMMUNITY BASED EXERCISE PROGRAM ON SOMALI IMMIGRANTS RESIDING IN SUBSIDIZED HOUSING IN MINNESOTA

Berggren K, Gerardi M, Mueller L, Miller JB, Sellheim D

St. Catherine University

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This study was approved by the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board. A Somali interpreter was utilized during the focus groups to ensure full understanding and obtain informed consent from participants.

**BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE:** The Somali immigrant population is a growing demographic in Minnesota. Although immigrants to the United States tend to be healthier upon arrival than the general population, their health deteriorates the longer they reside in the United States, with changes in diet and physical activity as contributing factors. This study explored the effects of a student-led exercise program on Somali immigrants residing in Minnesota.

**SUBJECTS:** Eight female and five male Somali individuals were recruited from an existing exercise program within a subsidized housing complex in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**METHODS AND MATERIALS:** Qualitative data were gathered using audiotaped focus group interviews. A Somali interpreter provided translation services.

**ANALYSES:** Audiotapes were transcribed and data were coded using an inductive approach, with no predefined coding criteria or hypotheses, to generate categories from the raw interview data.

**RESULTS:** Six major themes were identified from the data. These included: physical effects; emotional effects; integration of cultures; barriers and facilitators of participation; differences in physical activity between Somalia and the United States; and transferability of the exercise program. Emotional effects and cultural integration, rather than physical effects of the exercise program were found to be the primary benefit for the participants.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The effects of participation in this student-led exercise program are consistent with findings from existing literature of programs designed for immigrant populations. This study adds to the existing literature by demonstrating the importance of the relationship between participants and group facilitators.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Results and recommendations from this study can be utilized for future exercise programming initiatives with the immigrant Somali community in the United States.