

Boise State University

**ScholarWorks**

---

2023 Undergraduate Research Showcase

Undergraduate Research and Scholarship  
Showcases

---

4-21-2023

## **Attraction and Adherence of Senior Adults to Exercise Programs**

Susan Copple

*Boise State University*

—

---

## Attraction and Adherence of Senior Adults to Exercise Programs

### Abstract

Older adults commonly hope to remain healthy and live independently until death. Lack of regular, sustained physical exercise results in a decline in physical functioning, impacting the elderly's ability to perform activities needed for daily living. Previous research explored factors leading to attraction and adherence to senior exercise programs; however, few studies prioritize them. This study's purpose was to better understand, via a prioritized list, what attracts and promotes adherence to physical exercise programs at the Treasure Valley (Boise, Idaho) YMCA. Study data collected will improve the YMCA's ability to engage with seniors and better serve and improve community health.

# Attraction and Adherence of Senior Adults to Exercise Programs

SUSAN COPPLE, Faculty Sponsor: MARY PRITCHARD

## INTRODUCTION

Physical inactivity of elderly results in a decline in physical functioning, impacting their ability to carry out activities for daily living and live independently. This worldwide issue has serious health, societal and economic consequences. Physical inactivity is the leading cause of death for senior adults (Booth et al., 2000).

## PURPOSE

This study aimed better understand the most important factors via a prioritized list in attracting the elderly and promoting adherence to physical exercise programs at the Treasure Valley YMCA. Additionally, we explored if motivations to join and stay in exercise programs differed between those who currently attend and those who do not. An improved understanding of these two areas will benefit organizations in creating targeted and effective strategies to address the significant issue of inactivity of the elderly.

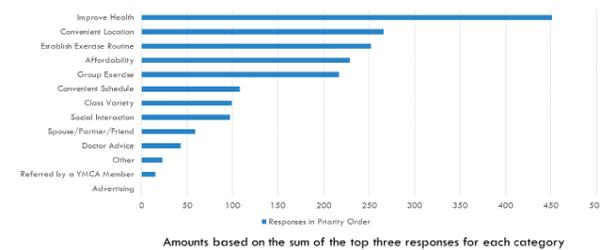
## METHOD

All 12,295 Treasure Valley YMCA members 60 years and older were in the study scope. Of that population, 1304 individuals completed a Qualtrics online survey. Survey participants were grouped into the following age categories:

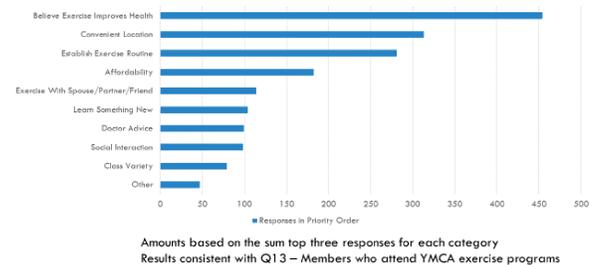
- 60-69, 70-79, 80-89, and 90-99. Question topics included:
- Demographics
  - Class attendance
  - Attraction and adherence to exercise classes (prioritized)
  - Open ended e.g., What classes should the YMCA add?

Figures 1 and 2

### WHAT FACTORS ATTRACTED YOU TO ATTEND YMCA EXERCISE PROGRAMS?



### FOR MEMBERS WHO DO NOT CURRENTLY ATTEND EXERCISE PROGRAMS AT THE YMCA, WHAT FACTORS WOULD ATTRACT THEM TO PARTICIPATE?

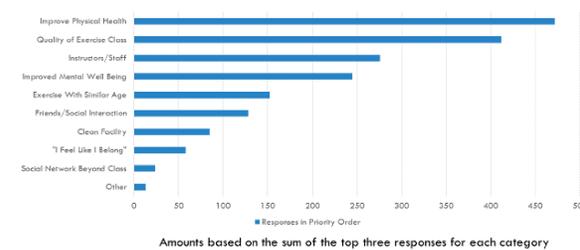


## RESULTS: Attraction

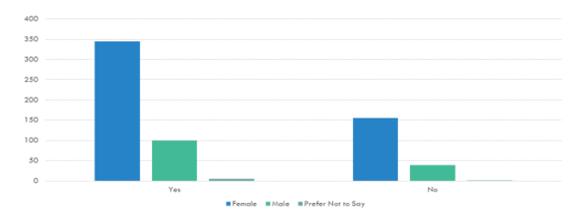
For those currently attending exercise programs, the primary drivers (in priority order) were to improve their health, availability of a convenient location, establish an exercise routine, affordability, and opportunity to exercise with others. Health improvement was 41% higher than the next priority item, a convenient location. For those not currently attending, the factors that would attract them to participate are nearly identical. The fifth priority for those who currently attend is to participate in group exercise, while for those not currently attending is the opportunity to exercise with a spouse, partner, or friend. (Figures 1 and 2)

Figures 3 and 4

### WHAT FACTORS CAUSE YOU TO KEEP RETURNING TO EXERCISE PROGRAMS AT THE YMCA?



### PRIOR TO JOINING THE YMCA, WERE YOU CONSISTENTLY INVOLVED IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES?



## RESULTS: Adherence

In priority order, the factors which keep members adhering to an exercise program are a belief that exercise will improve physical health, high-quality exercise classes, instructors/staff, improved mental well-being, and the ability to exercise with people of a similar age. The top priority was also health improvement. Of the 1304 individuals surveyed, 449 (34%) were consistently involved in physical activities prior, whereas 195 (15%) were not. The remaining 660 participants did not respond. We found that 65% of those who attended YMCA exercise classes had also exercised consistently in the past (Figures 3 and 4)

## CONCLUSION

Our results suggested that the primary reason individuals were attracted to and adhered to a YMCA exercise program was to improve their physical health. From that point, the next four prioritized factors diverge. Attraction priorities centered around the facility and logistical factors and an opportunity to exercise in a group setting. Rounding out the top five attraction priorities was a personal desire to establish an exercise routine. Adherence factors beyond a desire to improve health outcomes were personal (improved mental health) and/or involved internal organizational aspects, such as the quality of the classes and the opportunity and exercise with others of a similar age.

This study also suggests that those who have exercised in the past were much more likely to attend YMCA exercise classes. This is consistent with other research that noted attraction factors such as past success from exercise programs (Muse, 2005) and the individual's belief that they possess the capability to exercise (Franco et al., 2015) might motivate seniors to attend an exercise class.