

Physical activity participation among adult refugees living in the United States: A narrative review

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Purpose: Explore themes regarding barriers to physical activity (PA) and identify successful community-based interventions that have been implemented to improve refugee PA. Key components from these programs can be utilized by physical therapists (PTs) to facilitate PA among refugees living in the United States (US).

Description: A literature search was performed using the following electronic databases: Academic Search Premier, CINAHL, MEDline, Pubmed, Google Scholar. Search results identified 23 articles that specifically addressed refugee PA in the US.

Summary of use: Eight themes regarding barriers to successful integration of PA were identified: lack of familiarity with formal exercise,¹⁻¹¹ lack of social support,^{1,2,5,7,10,11} fear,^{1,5,6,9,10} intrinsic factors,^{1,4,8,12,13} environmental factors,^{5,6,14,15,18,19} resources,^{5,6,8-10,14-16} culture,^{1-3,5-8,11,12,14,19} and lifestyle changes after resettlement.^{6,8,10,11,17-19} Other barriers included lack of time,^{1,12,13,19} competing priorities,^{6,8,10,12,19} and feeling overwhelmed by exercise options.¹⁰ Reduced PA among refugees is not due to a lack of knowledge or motivation. Many refugees value health and well-being and are aware of exercise benefits.^{14,16-18} Barriers are shared across various populations despite country of origin. Five main characteristics of successful PA interventions were education,^{4,6,8,10,12,13,19} culturally-relevant programs,^{4,9,12,14,18,19} social support including groups,^{3,4,6-8,12,15,19} motivation,^{8,10,12,19} and access to free, low cost PA programs.^{8,13,18} Based on these commonalities, general principles can be developed to create a community framework for interventions.

Importance to members: PTs have a unique position for promoting active, healthy lifestyles in individuals and the community. PTs need to be aware of identified barriers and successful interventions to effectively help refugees incorporate physical activity into their lifestyle, improving their health outcomes and quality of life.

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