Thriving with Social Support in the Physical Activity Setting

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Support from others, especially those we know, can significantly influence our participation in physical activity as well as our pursuit of goals. In a model that is starting to receive attention in the physical activity context, Feeney and Collins (2015) describe how social support can help someone strive toward goals. This model has received little attention in the physical activity context. Further, there is limited research exploring how such social support from a known person is different from communicating with either a stranger about the same goal. This research study aims to examine the relationship between the support one receives from others and their physical activity goals, and how this association impacts their emotions and overall well-being. Participants ($N=100$) will be randomly assigned to one of three conditions: receiving support from a familiar person, an unknown person, or no person (self-reflection). The outcomes we are examining include affect, goal progress, physical activity, and overall well-being. Participants and their partner (if assigned) will complete a questionnaire assessing the physical activity goal, perceptions of support, affect, and well-being. During an 8-10-minute period, individuals will discuss with their familiar or unknown partner or complete a self-reflection on their physical activity goals. Then a second questionnaire will be completed asking about the perceptions of their goals, affect, and social support. A follow-up online questionnaire will be completed in 3 weeks and 6 months. This study is just starting data collection. It is anticipated that support from a familiar person will provide the most motivation and assistance in achieving the goal. In contrast, support from a stranger may only offer a temporary motivation boost. Those without a support person are expected to face difficulties in committing to the physical activity goal as they lack someone to discuss their progress with.

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