

## Walking for Fitness: A Case Study on the Experiences, Challenges, and Perceived Benefits from Regular Walking Exercise of Young Adult

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### ABSTRACT

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The COVID-19 outbreak, declared as a global health emergency, consequently led to lockdowns and community quarantines that have restricted people's opportunity for physical activity. Evidence have shown that physical inactivity increases the risk of many communicable diseases such as coronary heart disease and metabolic disorders (Booth et al., 2012). Moreover, sedentary lifestyle induces worse, continuous, and progressive consequences to health. The World Health Organization recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week, or a combination of both. Walking is one of the most popular physical activities. The reasons why it appeals to the population is because it is accessible to all, requires little skill and has low risk of injury. Walking can be performed in various speeds, in groups or alone, and without the need for special equipment. This research explores the experiences of young adults on their walking exercise with the consideration of the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. It aims to determine and understand the challenges and perceived benefits of young adults in performing regular walking exercise. This research was an in-depth case study conducted in Tanza Cavite, Philippines, where a few residents practice regular walking exercises, among others. This study mainly focused on the experiences and perspectives of the participants towards walking exercise. Criterion sampling was used, and semi-structured interviews were employed for data collection. Individual experiences of the respondents were explained and analyzed to further understand the effects of regular walking exercise.

### Keywords:

Covid-19; Perceived Benefits; sedentary lifestyle; lockdown; community quarantine

### 1. INTRODUCTION

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization characterized the Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern. Isolations, lockdowns, and contact restrictions were placed. Schools were closed, leisure time activities cancelled, and social contacts were limited (Fergert et al., 2020). During the current crisis, the health of the population is not only dependent on the pathogen, but also on the behavior of every single person. Among other areas of life, people's opportunities for physical activity have been severely restricted.

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Pieces of evidence have shown that physical inactivity increases the risk of many communicable diseases such as coronary heart disease and metabolic disorders (Booth et al., 2012). Moreover, sedentary lifestyle induces worse, continuous, and progressive consequences to health. Globally, it has become one of the major problems of the health care system (Troost et al., 2014). According to the World Health Organization, 31% of individuals 15 years or older are physically inactive and approximately 3.2 million deaths per year are attributed to this unhealthy lifestyle behavior (2020). In addition, Ding et al. reported that deaths attributed to physical inactivity cost \$13.7 billion in productivity losses and resulted in 13.4 million disability-adjusted life-years globally (2016). These data do not take into consideration the circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, thus the problem about lack of physical activity in this time is more than justified.

Chronic diseases are one of the most common causes of death in the modern era and physical inactivity is the primary cause of chronic diseases (Booth et al., 2012). One way to prevent or delay chronic diseases is by being physically active. Physical activity has a strong impact on

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both physical and mental health. It strengthens the immune system, prevents disease, and helps reduce stress. Especially during times when national regulations were placed, physical activity increases psychological well-being (Fruhauf et al., 2020). Numerous studies have shown the positive impact of exercise on current mood, mental well-being, and the prevention of mental health conditions (Blumenthal et al., 2007; Cooney et al., 2013).

The World Health Organization recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week, or a combination of both. Walking is one of the most popular physical activities. The reasons why it appeals to the population is because it is accessible to all, requires little skill and has low risk of injury. Walking can be performed in various speeds, in groups or alone, and without the need for special equipment (Murphy et al., 2007)

Researchers found that the energy used for moderate-intensity walking and vigorous-intensity running resulted in similar reductions in risk for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and heart disease over a six-year period study by the National Walker's Health Study as cited in Steinhilber, 2018. Similarly, a study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine stated that people who joined a walking program showed significant improvements in blood pressure, slowing of heart rate, reduction of body fat and body weight, reduced cholesterol, and improved depression scores (Hanson and Jones, 2014). This shows that walking could be a promising intervention to certain diseases and a proactive health-promoting activity. While there are notable physical benefits of walking, mental boosts can also be

obtained from adding daily walks in one's routine. A Stanford University experiment demonstrates that walking improves creative ideation. The study puts into observation how the effect is not only due to increased stimulation of moving through an environment but is rather due to walking itself (Opezzo and Schwartz, 2014). Whether outdoors or on a treadmill, walking opens a free flow of ideas and increases creativity. According to Miller and Krizan (2016), just 12 minutes of walking resulted in an increase in vigor, attentiveness, and self-confidence versus the same amount of time spent sitting. Walking also has beneficial effects on sleep quality. A study by Fang and Boros (2020) examined healthy adults aged 19 to 36-years old who participated in a pedometer based aerobic intervention. The authors concluded that daily walking exercises have significant effects on facilitating sleep quality and components.

This research explores the experiences of young adults on their walking exercise with the consideration of the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. Walking has always been underrated, yet one of the most effective fitness exercises. Hence, it is significant to learn the challenges, benefits, and general walking practices of young adults in the

contemporary setup.

### Specific Objectives

The study aims to determine the benefits of regular walking exercise. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Identify the amount of time young adults spend in walking exercises.
2. Determine the challenges encountered in the current societal setup that hinders regular walking exercise; and
3. Explore and explain the health benefits of regular walking exercise as perceived by young adults.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This research was an in-depth case study conducted in Tanza Cavite where several residents practice regular walking exercise, among others. This study mainly focused on the individual experiences and perspectives of the participants towards walking exercise.

This study employed a criterion sampling to fulfill the objectives of the research. The criteria included the age of 18 to 25 years old, male, and female residents of Tanza Cavite province, who regularly practices walking exercise. Informed consent was written and signed in agreement by the chosen participants

The researcher conducted an in-depth, semi-structured interview to obtain the data for this case study. Considering the possible risk of contacting COVID-19, the interview was carried out through phone and internet calls. The interviews lasted for 45 to 60 minutes. Responses from the interview were analyzed and reported in the results and discussion section of this paper.

The research instrument is a self-constructed and semi-structured interview (see Appendix section). The interview guide is composed of three parts, in which the first set of questions ask about the participants' demographic characteristics, including their age and sex. The next part pertains to the general practices of the participants when doing walking exercises. It asks about how often the participants walk, for how long, how far the approximated distance of the walk is, and the pace of their walk. The second part of the interview includes questions about the challenges and barriers that they have encountered while walking. To further understand these variables, a table was presented to the participants, in Likert scale, in which they would agree or disagree to some of the factors presented. Eleven statements were included comprising of environmental barriers - bad weather, poor walking facilities, lack of interesting places in close proximity, fear of injury and traffic safety, being a victim of possible crimes, and psychosocial barriers - risk of contacting a disease, existing health problems, lack of time, lack of energy and motivation, lack of interest in walking and lack of walking companion. The participants were further probed on the reasons why they agreed or disagreed to the items given to them. The last part of the interview is about the

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perceived benefits of walking to the participants. They were asked to identify the improvements that they have gained from regular walking, as well their motivations in performing the activity. They were also given a list of statements where they were to agree or disagree if it is applicable to them. The list includes 12 items including psychological benefits - sense of achievement, relaxation, improved mood, improved alertness and concentration, improved sleeping patterns, opportunities for social activity, improved cognition and memory, and physiological benefits - improved body shape, decreased body weight, increased exercise capacity, decreased risk of diseases, and strengthens the immune system. Lastly, the participants were asked to elaborate their answers as to why they agree or disagree with some of the statements

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results are presented in three sections. The first provides the demographic information and the general practice of their walking exercise. The second section, on the other hand, identifies the factors that hinder the participants on their walking exercise. The third section will explore the perceived benefits of the participants from their regular walking exercise. For a more conventional way of presenting the results, the three participants will be grouped into three and named as P1, P2, and P3.

#### **3.1 General Practice of Walking**

The participants are composed of two males and one female, aged 18 to 25 years old, and all started walking since, or a few months into the COVID-19 lockdown was enforced in the country last 2020. All the participants perform their walking exercise outdoors-in their village or near their house. On the length of their walking exercise, P1 and P3 claimed that they walk four to five times a week, while P2 walks three to four times a week. P2 and P3 walk for 30 to 45 minutes every session, while P1 said that the duration of her walk depends on the schedule and the weather. The approximated distance travelled by P1 is around 1 to 2 kilometers, while P2 and P3 said that they cover around 2 kilometers. In the approximated 2 kilometers of moderate pace walking by P2, they claimed that they make around 4000 steps, while P3 said that he makes 3500 steps. P1, on the other hand, only perform slow-paced walks because of asthma. She did not take note of the number of steps made during her walking exercise sessions.

Literature states that just 30 minutes of walking every day is already beneficial for an individual's health (Harvard Health Publishing, 2021). This does not have to be vigorous or done for long period to improve one's health. In 2007, a study found that even a low level of exercise - around 75 minutes per week - significantly improved the fitness levels of inactive women when compared to a non-exercising group.

When comparing the walking speed by age, it was generalized that walking speed significantly decreases as people's age increases. Moreover, men walk faster than women on average, with the speeds between the sexes being most similar when people are in their 20s. The difference could possibly be because many older adults don't get the recommended amount of physical activity (Cronkleton, 2019).

#### **3.2 Challenges Affecting Regular Walking Exercise**

The responses gathered when asked if the participants walk alone, with companion, or with a group, P1 and P3 said that they walk with a group. P1 and P3 basically claimed that walking with a group motivates them to perform the exercise. P2, on the other hand, said that he only walks alone in accordance with the COVID-19 protocols about social distancing. Moreover, the ideal walking time of the participants was also asked. P1 and P3 answered that they walk on late afternoons when the sun is already setting, and when it is not too hot outside to perform such exercise, whereas P3's ideal time is either 6AM or 5PM.

Challenges encountered by participants during their walking exercises were identified. P1 and P3 both said that bad weather- rainy days- and lack of motivation hinders them from walking. P1 further explained that she only walks when her siblings ask to walk with her. P2 identified work (or time constraint), errands, rainy weather, and occasional COVID-19 anxiety as they encountered challenges in performing their walking exercise. To explore deeper in determining the possible hindrances in performing walking exercise today, the participants were asked to determine the possible barriers to their walking exercises from the factors provided by the researcher. The factors were environmental barriers (bad weather, poor walking facilities, lack of interesting places in proximity, fear of injury and traffic safety, and being a possible crime victim) and psychosocial barriers (risk and anxiety of contacting a disease, existing health problems, lack of time, lack of energy or motivation, lack of interest, and lack of walking companion). P1 agreed on bad weather, risk of contacting a disease, existing health problems, and lack of energy or motivation as the barriers on her walking exercise. P2, on the other hand, identified every factor identified by the researcher except the lack of walking companion. They also did not agree or disagree on lack of interesting place in proximity and existing health problems. P3 included bad weather, poor walking facilities as environmental barriers, and everything in the psychosocial barriers except the lack of time as hindrances in walking. P2 and P3 said that their identified

barriers from factors provided by the researcher are real life challenges, and that these barriers are experienced to be true hindrances. P1's existing health problem- asthma- and the risk of contacting a disease, especially COVID-19 are the major barriers. Their lack of motivation or energy is also a

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hindrance because they prefer to lay in bed and stream Netflix some days.

### 3.3 Perceived Benefits of Young Adults in Performing Regular Walking Exercise

The participants were also asked about the perceived benefits of their regular walking exercise. P1 said that beyond the physical benefits, walking has been beneficial to her mental health, and that it improves her mood and productivity level. P2 also claimed that he became more productive, happy, and having less worry after walking. He also said that walking makes his physical appearance leaner as he loses weight, while, P3 said that walking makes him less lethargic. When asked about their feelings after performing their walking exercise, P1 said that being stuck inside the house due to the COVID-19 pandemic made her appreciate the beauty of greeneries and to breathe fresh air. She also claimed that walking contributes to the relaxation and healthiness of her body. P2 said that he feels quite happy and with less worries after walking, while P3 said that he feels tired, yet satisfied. The participants were also determined to walk regularly. P1 claimed that she does not actually walk to lose weight, but to have sense of achievement and avoid being lanky, and to improve her mood, while P2 and P3 have the same motivation of fitness. To further understand the perceived benefits of regular walking exercise, the participants were asked to choose from

the psychological benefits (sense of achievement, relaxation, improved mood, improved alertness and concentration, improved sleeping patterns, opportunities for social activity, improved cognition and memory) and physiological benefits (improved body shape, decreased body weight, increased exercise capacity, decreased risk of diseases, strengthening of the immune system) provided by the researchers. P1 only agreed that sense of achievement, relaxation, improved mood, opportunities for social activity, increased exercise capacity, and immune system improvement are their perceived benefits of their regular walking exercise. P2, on the other hand, identified everything on the list of psychological and physiological benefits except the opportunity for social activity as their perceived benefits of walking. P3, agreed on almost everything from the list, and claimed that he neither agreed nor disagreed on improved alertness concentration, improved cognition and memory, and decreased body weight as benefits of his walking exercise. P2 and P3 explained that the benefits that they have identified are based on the changes they have noticed in their body, while P1 said that since they walk with their parents and siblings, walking has become a form of social activity that somehow strengthen their bonds. They also claimed that their slow walking pace improves by adding more distance to cover in their exercise to continually boost their immune system- that has become evident when they noticed that they rarely catch common colds nowadays. P1 also said that she

did not see losing weight or getting in shape as one of the benefits of regular walking to her body because she thinks that there are other exercises that will yield more success in that endeavor.

The obtained responses from the participants varied significantly from the challenges that hindered them to the perceived benefits of walking exercise. P1, 25 years old, largely view her regular walking exercise to boost her immunity, improve her mood and productivity, and to bond with her family- which could be the primary reason why she sees lack of motivation and companion as a major hindrance to her walking exercise. P2, is a 25-year-old male, identified several challenges that revolve around his schedule, the weather, and COVID-19 concerns. However, he keeps track of his walking exercise as he sees it as a fitness process. Among the three participants of the study, only P2 claimed that he prefers to walk alone. P3 is another 25-year-old male, also has the same motivation to get fit. They experienced all the physiological benefits from the choices provided by the researcher, except for the improved body shape. Improved mood, stronger immune system, and mental and psychological health benefits are the shared perceived benefits of the three participants.

There have been numerous advantages that can be gained through walking. The participants of this study mentioned a range of benefits, from reduced risk of many diseases to social advantages and improvements in mental health. Scientific studies also prove these claims. A research that involves large observational studies published in *The Current Opinion in Cardiology* asserted that walking plays a key role in the primary and secondary prevention of cardiovascular diseases (Murtagh et al., 2010). The study consistently showed associations between walking and cardiovascular disease endpoints over long periods of follow-up. Similarly, a study by Omura and colleagues (2019) concluded that promoting walking may be a way to help adults avoid inactivity and encourage an active lifestyle for cardiovascular disease prevention and management.

Walking has been found to be particularly good for people's bones as it is a weight-bearing activity which forces individuals to work against gravity. Moreover, some studies have shown that walking can make weight loss more effective in an experiment done in participants who were overweight or obese and following a calorie-restricted diet (Kleist et al., 2017). It also helped in improving HDL cholesterol levels and lower non-HDL levels. A study by Wang and Xu (2017) further stated that walking not only has a positive effect on individuals with dyslipidemia but can also improve lipids profile.

Aside from the physiological health benefits, results of the current study also highlighted the psychological advantages that can be gained through walking. As stated in Sharma et al., (2006) lifestyle modification is significant in individuals with mental illness. Aerobic exercises including

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walking have been proven to reduce anxiety and depression. These improvements in mood are proposed to be caused by exercise-induced increase in blood circulation to the brain. Other hypotheses to help explain these beneficial effects include distraction, self-efficacy, and social interaction.

### 4. CONCLUSION

Despite the current pandemic situation, young adults still perform their walking exercises outdoors either early in the morning or late in the afternoon- when it is not too hot outside. They cover around 2 kilometers with approximately 3,500 to 4,000 steps in 30 minutes. The common barriers of young adults in performing their walking exercises are the bad weather, time constraints, lack of motivation, and sometimes, and the risk of contacting COVID-19. However, even with these challenges, they still practice walking outdoors. They see it as an opportunity for social activity, or even a therapeutic alone-time. Walking regularly entails promising health improvements. Some of these benefits were identified by the participants as well from the physical fitness to psychological and mental improvement. Improved mood and mental health and processes, stronger immune system, and capacity to do exercises, decreased weight and leaner body shape, and a way to socialize and witness the outdoor sceneries after months of being locked at home are the highlighted benefits of walking exercises.

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[promotion/physical-activity.](#)

## APPENDIX

### Walking for Fitness: A Case Study on the Experiences, Challenges, and Perceived Benefits from Regular Walking Exercise of Young Adult

#### I. Demographics

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. Length of Walking

1. When did you start practicing regular walking?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Where do you usually walk? (Is it outdoors or indoors?)

\_\_\_\_\_

3. How many days in a week do you usually walk? What is the usual duration of the exercise?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. How far is the approximated distance of your walk?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you keep track of the number of steps when you walk? If so, how many steps are the usual result of your exercise?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Can you describe the pace of your walking exercise? (Slow, moderate, fast/light, moderate, vigorous)

\_\_\_\_\_

#### III. Factors Influencing Walking Exercise

1. Do you walk alone, with companion, or with a group? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your ideal time of the day to walk? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What are the challenges that you have encountered in performing your walking exercise?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. How much do you disagree or agree that the following are barriers to your walking exercise:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>A. Environmental Barriers</b>					
<b>Bad weather</b>					
<b>Poor walking facilities (sidewalk, quality, crossings)</b>					

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Lack of interesting places in close proximity					
Fear of injury and traffic safety					
Being a victim of possible crimes					
<b>B. Psychosocial Barriers</b>					
Risk of contacting a disease					
Existing health problems					
Lack of time					
Lack of energy or motivation					
Lack of interest in walking					
Lack of walking companion					

5. Can you further explain the reason/s why you agreed on some variables?

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6. Can you further explain the reason/s why you disagreed on some variables?

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7. Are there any other challenges that made your walking exercise difficult?

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**IV. Perceived Benefits of Walking**

1. Can you identify the improvements or benefits that you have gained from walking regularly?

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2. What do you feel after performing your walking exercise?

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3. What are your motivations in walking regularly?

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4. How much do you disagree or agree that the following benefits of regular walking apply to you:

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>A. Psychological Benefits</b>					
<b>Sense of achievement</b>					
<b>Relaxation</b>					
<b>Improved mood</b>					
<b>Improved alertness and concentration</b>					

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<b>Improved sleeping patterns</b>					
<b>Opportunities for social activity</b>					
<b>Improved cognition and memory</b>					
<b>B. Physiological Benefits</b>					
<b>Improved body shape</b>					
<b>Decreased body weight</b>					
<b>Increased exercise capacity</b>					
<b>Decreased risk of diseases</b>					
<b>Strengthens the immune systems</b>					

5. Can you further explain the reason/s why you agreed on some variables?

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6. Can you further explain the reason/s why you disagreed on some variables?

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7. Aside from the items that were mentioned in the table, are there any other positive outcomes that you have gained from walking?

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