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Physical activity promotion by healthy life centers in Western Province, Sri Lanka

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Background: Healthy Life Centers (HLCs) in Sri Lanka provide health guidance, screening, basic treatments, referral, and follow up for major chronic non-communicable diseases, focusing on people between the ages of 35-65 years. Physical activity promotion is one of its objectives. Utility of physical activity promotion programmes at HLCs is an under researched area.

Objective: The primary aim of this study was to explore perspectives of healthcare providers on current interventions used to promote physical activity in HLCs.

Method: A qualitative phenomenological study was conducted at eight selected HLCs in Western province. Study sample was recruited using quota sampling method. Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with six medical officers and seven nursing officers involved in physical activity promotion. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Data analysis was conducted using framework analysis method. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo.

Results: “Strengths of current interventions” and “suggestions for future improvements” were two main themes identified. Healthcare providers perceived, willingness of the participants, improving awareness and motivation on physical activity, better health outcomes after interventions, utilization of limited resources, providing free service for an economically disadvantaged population group, security provided by a government institute and social empowerment as strengths of current interventions. Implementing strategies to increase number of participants, improving male participation, empowering staff with better training, developing suitable indoor areas at HLCs to conduct exercise programmes and providing exercise instruments were described as necessary future improvements.

Conclusion: Healthcare providers perceived that the current interventions at HLCs have appreciable strengths in promoting physical activity among people with risk of non-communicable diseases. Also, they highlighted the necessity for further improvements of these programmes to promote them among the targeted population.