



fuse

The Centre for Translational
Research in Public Health

The Invisible Gap

Exploring Physical Activity Intentions and Behaviours in Pregnant
and Postpartum Women from Affluent and Deprived
Neighbourhoods of the North-East

Dr Murali Subramanian

NIHR PHIRST Fusion Research Associate

Newcastle University



Physical Activity & Pregnancy

- Physical activity during and after pregnancy supports maternal health, including reducing risks of gestational diabetes and improving mood and sleep quality.
- It also aids in weight management, strengthens muscles for labour, and promotes long-term health benefits for both mother and child.
- Socioeconomic disparities significantly impact physical activity levels, with lower-income and minority groups often experiencing less access to facilities, resources, and safe environments for exercise.
- Addressing these disparities is crucial for promoting equitable health outcomes, as socioeconomic factors influence opportunities for regular physical activity, which is essential for overall well-being.

Bump2Buggy – Background & Objectives

- The initial aim was to design, pilot, and implement a physical activity intervention for already active women to maintain their activity levels during pregnancy and postpartum - Sport England core funding
- COVID-19 disrupted face-to-face meetings and implementation of the intervention.
- Research objectives were modified, and focus shifted to understanding the effectiveness of physical activity interventions and the needs of both active and inactive women during pregnancy and postpartum from different socioeconomic backgrounds.
- A toolkit with resources and a custom infographic was developed.

Methodology & Research Questions

- Mixed-methods systematic review – What PA intervention works and what doesn't in this population?
- Qualitative Focus Groups – What are the previous experiences and what are the expectations?
- Mixed-methods systematic review – What PA intervention works among the target population living in deprived neighbourhoods?
- Qualitative Interviews – What are the PA experiences among the target population living in areas of high deprivation?

Findings from Qualitative Studies

- Women from deprived neighbourhoods face significant barriers, including discomfort in accessing private gyms/fitness centres used by affluent communities. They prefer separate locations or timings where they feel more comfortable.
- Most women from lower socioeconomic statuses rely on public fitness venues provided by local authorities rather than private facilities to maintain their physical activity levels.
- The socio-ecological model helped frame the findings, emphasising how individual, social, and environmental factors influence physical activity behaviours among pregnant and postpartum women.
- The qualitative studies highlighted the importance of understanding women's perceptions and beliefs about physical activity, shaped by their unique socio-economic and cultural contexts.

Findings from Systematic Reviews

- The systematic reviews summarised empirical evidence on the effectiveness and components of physical activity interventions aimed at maintaining and increasing activity levels among pregnant and postpartum women.
- One review focused on interventions promoting physical activity in pregnant and postpartum women from deprived communities, identifying key implementation aspects and the need for tailored approaches.
- Both reviews identified gaps in current research, suggesting areas for future studies and providing a framework for designing evidence-based physical activity interventions.
- The reviews underscored the importance of using robust, systematic evidence to inform policy and practice, advocating for interventions that are adaptable to different socio-economic contexts to enhance their effectiveness and reach.

Recommendations Focussed on Socioecological Factors

- Women living in deprived areas are disproportionately affected by socioecological factors that impact their ability to engage in physical activity (PA) during pregnancy.
- Applying a socioecological perspective helped identify novel solutions to structural barriers, focusing on social, financial, and broader environmental factors.

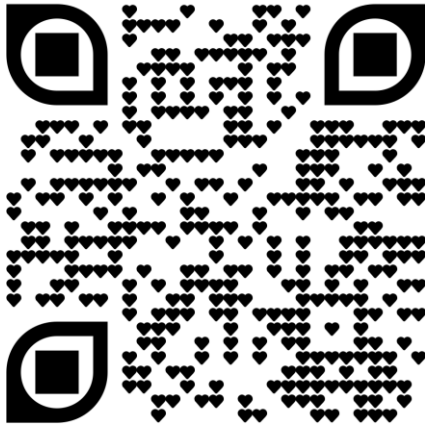
- Family and Social Support
 - Engage family and friends, especially partners, in supporting women's PA.
 - Emphasise the role of social networks in motivating and facilitating PA.
- Financial Accessibility
 - Design programmes that do not impose additional financial burdens on women and their families.
 - Ensure high-quality programmes are available, even if offered for free, to avoid stigma and maintain dignity.
- Program Design and Implementation
 - Offer flexible and varied PA options to cater to individual preferences and schedules.
 - Incorporate goal setting, monitoring, and personalised advice to keep women motivated and engaged in PA.
- Community-Based Solutions
 - Utilise accessible community venues for PA that cater to women of similar socioeconomic statuses.
 - Maintain and improve local infrastructure to provide safe and accessible PA venues.
- Trust and Safety
 - Involve key workers who understand and are trusted by the local community to enhance the safety and accessibility of PA venues.
 - Build trust between PA providers and participants through consistent and supportive interactions.



fuse

The Centre for Translational
Research in Public Health

Tool Kit!



DESIGNING A PA INTERVENTION FOR PREGNANT AND POSTPARTUM WOMEN FROM DEPRIVED NEIGHBOURHOODS

Choose the right Venue



BE CLOSE...
DELIVER THE INTERVENTION PREFERABLY IN A
NEARBY VENUE

BE AMONG THEM...
THEY VALUE DELIVERING THE INTERVENTION
IN A VENUE THAT DOES NOT INTIMIDATE THEM

Include family

HAVE SESSIONS WHERE THEY
COULD BRING THEIR PARTNERS,
FRIENDS & NEWBORNS



Be Creative & Make it Social



HAVE OCCASIONAL PARTIES/EVENTS IN THE SAME VENUE
CREATE SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS
ENCOURAGE PRE AND POST-SESSION MEETS

Watch what you charge

ACTIVITIES THAT ARE PROVIDED COMPLETELY FREE OF
CHARGE ARE OFTEN VIEWED AS BEING OF POOR QUALITY

COMPARE LOCALLY AVAILABLE RATES AND CHARGE
ACCORDINGLY OR USE 'PAY WHAT YOU CAN' APPROACH



What to Include ?

START SLOW AND INCREASE GRADUALLY
ADAPT, CHANGE (INCREASE/DECREASE) AS PER INDIVIDUAL CAPABILITY
AIM FOR AT LEAST 150 MINS/WEEK OF MODERATE-INTENSITY ACTIVITY
MIX OF ENDURANCE, STRENGTH, BALANCE & FLEXIBILITY ACTIVITIES



DESIGNING A PA INTERVENTION FOR ALREADY ACTIVE PREGNANT AND POSTPARTUM WOMEN

Choose the right Venue



BE CLOSE...
PREFERABLY A COMMUNITY
CENTRE/GYM THAT MOST OF THE
PARTICIPANTS HAVE ALREADY
ACCESSED

Include family

HAVE SESSIONS WHERE THEY
COULD BRING THEIR PARTNERS,
FRIENDS & NEWBORNS



Be Creative & Make it Social



HAVE OCCASIONAL PARTIES/EVENTS IN THE SAME VENUE
CREATE SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS
ENCOURAGE PRE AND POST-SESSION MEETS

Charge Accordingly

COMPARE LOCALLY AVAILABLE RATE
AND CHARGE ACCORDINGLY OR ADOPT
THE 'PAY WHAT YOU CAN' APPROACH



What to Include ?

HAVE ACTIVITIES SIMILAR TO PRE-PREGNANCY
DON'T FORGET TO INCLUDE FEW NEWER ACTIVITIES
AIM FOR AT LEAST 150 MINS/WEEK OF MODERATE-INTENSITY ACTIVITY
MIX OF ENDURANCE, STRENGTH, BALANCE & FLEXIBILITY ACTIVITIES





The Centre for Translational
Research in Public Health

THANK YOU

Murali.Perumbakkam-Subramanian@newcastle.ac.uk

This study/project is authored by a member (or members) of Fuse, the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health (www.fuse.ac.uk). Fuse is a Public Health Research Centre of Excellence funded by the six universities in the North East and North Cumbria of Durham, Cumbria, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the funders. The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the work.

