

# Development of a Supervised Exercise Program for Immigrant Women: Feasibility Study of a Practical Intervention in a Physiotherapy Setting

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## Abstract

**Background:** Immigrant women are increasingly experiencing mental and physical health problems and social vulnerability is common among this group. While Denmark is facing growing inequality between Danish women and immigrant women in relation to exercise and health, research on interventions and targeted exercise programs for immigrant women is generally limited despite their increasing relevance.

**Methods:** Employing an exploratory design, this study aimed to test the feasibility of a physiotherapeutic supervised exercise program developed to increase health and wellbeing, and motivate to a healthier lifestyle. An important aspect of the study was involving the women in developing the program. After the completion of baseline focus-group interviews, physical-strength tests, and a questionnaire, there was a 12-week supervised training period based on physiotherapeutic principles. The training was followed up by reinterviewing and retesting the participating women.

## Results

29 women were recruited in the training program in January 2018. 27 of the women attended the baseline testing. Ten women who were baseline tested attended follow-up. Most women were Somali, but there were also women from Bosnia, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The women's average age was 51.1 years. Their mean body mass index was 34. On average, the women had 4.6 children. Among the included ten participants, the attendance rate was 70%. Based on the women's statements from the evaluation, they gained knowledge about their bodies, a healthier lifestyle, and awareness of the importance of active living.

## Conclusion

This study indicates that it is possible to recruit immigrant women and develop an exercise program that motivate and maintain them. This study demonstrated the importance of involving the women in the development of such a program and revealed important factors such as privacy, a local setting, and trust towards physiotherapists, when offering a training program for immigrant women.

## Article Information

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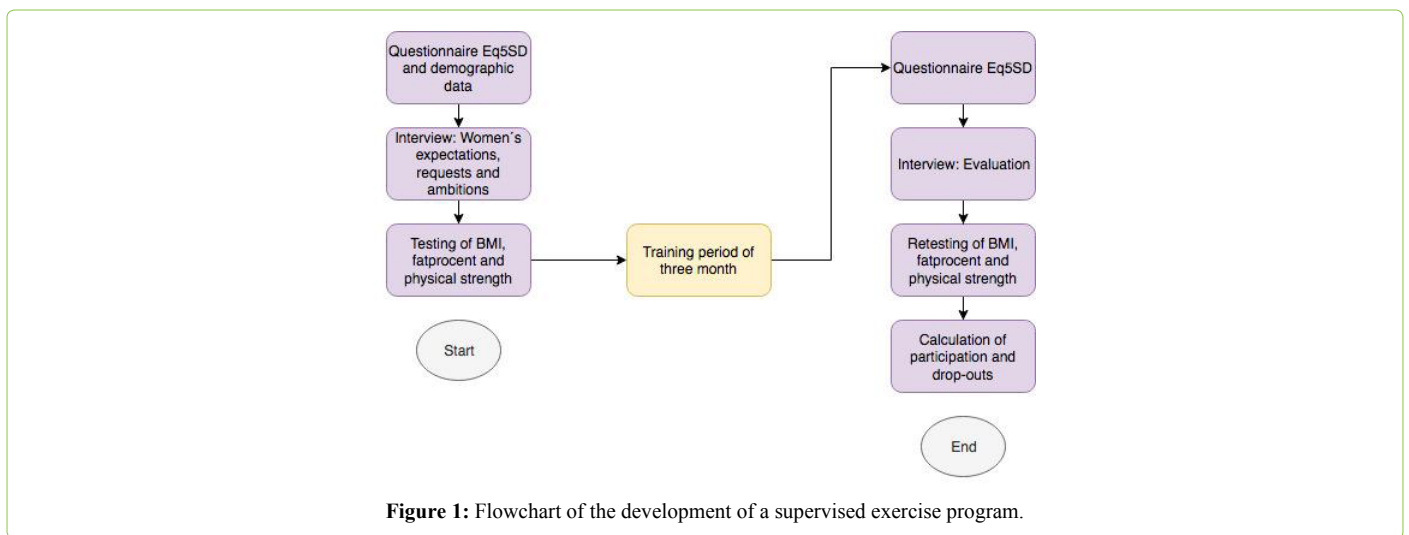
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**Figure 1:** Flowchart of the development of a supervised exercise program.