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Lifting More Than Weights: Implementing the Strength After Breast Cancer Program across Appalachia

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Cancer-related fatigue (CRF) is a prevalent and debilitating symptom experienced by breast cancer survivors, significantly impairing quality of life (QoL). CRF treatment requires a comprehensive approach due to its multifactorial nature. Exercise is an effective treatment for CRF, but it is unclear how socioeconomic status (SES) influences survivors' participation and retention in exercise programs. Lower-SES is associated with greater fatigue severity, and lower participation in structured exercise programs remains low among Appalachians. We examine how SES affects adherence to the Strength After Breast Cancer (SABC) program, addressing CRF management across SES.

This ongoing mixed-methods study includes adult non-metastatic breast cancer survivors who are 1-3 years post-diagnosis. Participants will be dichotomized into Lower- and Higher-SES groups and will engage in a 3-month SABC program. Participants complete 1-4 supervised sessions and continue the program unsupervised twice weekly. The SABC workout packet is used for reference, and logs are completed to track adherence. Primary outcomes include dropout rate and adherence, with allostatic load as a potential moderator. Measures of fatigue severity, physical performance, exercise self-efficacy, and QoL are collected at baseline and 3 months. Semi-structured interviews are completed at follow-up to examine accessibility, acceptability, outcome expectations, and self-efficacy related to adherence.

Two participants are enrolled, with a goal of 60 total (30 Lower-SES; 30 Higher-SES).

The feasibility criterion is $\leq 20\%$ dropout. Lower-SES is expected to have higher dropout and lower adherence compared to Higher-SES. High allostatic load is expected to reduce adherence, regardless of SES. Lower-SES reports barriers (financial, geographic constraints, limited support, lower confidence), whereas Higher-SES reports facilitators (better access, financial flexibility, stronger support, higher confidence) to adherence.

We aim to advance our understanding of how SES affects participation and retention in exercise programs among individuals with CRF. Findings will support implementing larger-scale oncology exercise programs for underserved and Appalachian cancer survivors.

Keywords

Strength After Breast Cancer, cancer-related fatigue, exercise adherence, socioeconomic status

Conflict of Interest & Ethical Approval

yes

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yes

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