



Physical Literacy Among Frontline Employees (Education, Childcare, Social Services Public/Environmental Health, Retail, Transportation, and Postal) During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

Physical Literacy (PL) consists of the domains: affective, physical, cognitive, and behavioral (IPLA, 2014). PL is an inclusive concept to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities (PA). PL represents a unique conceptualization of PA that may be fostered through a range of movement experiences across different settings, which are important for maintaining health. However, little is known about how frontline workers who served so many practiced personal self-care and how that was related to physical literacy.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to explore self-care and PL among frontline employees in the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODS

A qualitative study using the *Self-care During COVID-19 Questionnaire* was conducted online via Qualtrics from September 2022 to January 2023. The questionnaire consisted of 21 open-ended and demographic questions including the following questions, which are the focus of this poster:

“How have you taken care of yourself during the COVID-19 pandemic?”

“How have you taken care of your physical health during the COVID-19 pandemic?”

Data from 48 respondents were exported from Qualtrics into Excel for analysis including preparing data, in vivo coding, developing categories and viewing responses through the lens of physical literacy.

RESULTS

Age

20-29 (9), 30-39 (6), 40-49 (5), 50-59 (15), 60+ (10)

Gender

F (33) M (12), No answer (3)

Race

White (31), Black or African American (7), Hispanic or Latino (4), Native American or American Indian (4), Asian/Pacific Islander (1), Other (1), Prefer not to answer (1)

PL DOMAINS AND ASSOCIATED TERMS/DESCRIPTIONS

PL Domains	Terms/Descriptions Expressed By Participants for Each Domain	
	Affective	Motivated, confident, enjoyment, integral, important
	Physical -Enhanced Physical	Physical competence with some type of PA Competence with a wide range of activities and settings
	Cognitive	Deeper understanding of health benefits from PA (e.g., stress reduction, improved mood)
	Behavioral	Long-term, day-to-day/regular basis, lifestyle changes

Note: the terms or descriptions expressed are aligned with the definition of each domain as defined by IPLA (2014). Most participants exhibited traits of multiple domains.

Affective – Motivation and Confidence

One participant expressed motivation and confidence regarding experiences with PA during the pandemic.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“Towards the end blood work showing pre-diabetic motivated me to work out and lose weight “
“Yes, I believe I have done more to care for myself than I did before the pandemic started. I take the day when I’m not feeling well instead of trying to push through. “

Physical Competence

Participants expressed physical competence regarding experiences with physical activity and taking physical actions to protect health.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“Hiking, cycling, taking walks in the woods. When able to take the time to do those things.”
“Eating right and getting exercise when I can.”
“I have tried to add stretching and walking to my day when time permits. I have tried to eat healthier, although the money is not always there for groceries. I have tried to take time off for appointments, when allowed.”

Cognitive – Knowledge and Understanding

Some participants expressed knowledge and understanding regarding physical activity benefits experienced during the pandemic.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“Followed all the mandatory orders, read a lot, took some course work, research more about the pandemic & stayed informed on how to stay mentally, emotional & physically sane through all of this.”
“Mindful of surroundings, avoiding groups, wearing a mask indoors, especially when traveling, washing my hands more, social distancing, getting vaccines and boosters including flu vaccine
Trying to follow health guidelines, but not always clear or unsure of who to listen to and trust”
“Challenging, but try to work on a work-life balance, taking care of medical issues, healthier choices, mindfulness”

Behavioral – Long-term Engagement in Lifestyle Changes

Some participants expressed behavioral characteristics related to physical issues as a lifestyle or long-term process, involving day-to-day discipline.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“Tried to maintain a healthy lifestyle through eating healthy, exercise and getting plenty of rest. I have tried to reduce exposure through social distancing, wearing a mask, washing my hands and avoiding crowds and restaurants.”
“Being active every day, even just 10-30 minutes of physical activity.”

No Domain

Some participants exhibited no affective, physical, cognitive, or behavioral traits related to physical experiences during the pandemic.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“I didn’t- I was drinking a lot with friends and once we all got COVID because we weren’t careful”
“I didn’t have the time or energy to take care of myself during the pandemic. It was all about getting through to the next day. It wasn’t until most of the pandemic was over that I realized how bad things had gotten and was able to mentally and physically make the changes I needed to get back to being healthy.”

DISCUSSION

Frontline workers in this study included Education, Childcare, Social Services Public/Environmental Health, Retail, Transportation, and Postal employees who were not able to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding the four domains of PL, most participants discussed some type of physical competence. However, in addition to participation in physical activity, comments also referenced important steps to physically protecting oneself like using masks, social distancing, and getting vaccines. The frontline participants were much more focused protection than other research participants that were able to work from home.

The experiences of participants varied based on personal and professional situations. Based on the results, some respondents may have been motivated, while having physical competency and cognitive knowledge or understanding, but were not implementing PA into a daily routine by setting PA as a lifestyle priority. Again, this may have been related to serving as a frontline employee. Therefore, understanding a respondent’s status in a particular domain may inform ways to improve overall PL.

For respondents not fitting into any of the domains, these individuals revealed not partaking in PA and provided explanations related to time, being tired and job demands.

Future research could further define physical literacy outside of the realm of physical activity where physical actions to protect health are needed but are not related to exercise or movement. In order to keep our frontline employees healthy, more research and attention to self-care and physical literacy among employees who cannot work from home could play an important role in health promotion during times of emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic.

REFERENCES

International Physical Literacy Association (IPLA) (2014). Definition of Physical Literacy. Canada’s Physical Literacy Consensus Statement: The Elements of Physical Literacy.

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