

Group or Individual Lifestyle-Integrated Functional Exercise (LiFE)? A Qualitative Analysis of Acceptability

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Abstract

Background: The Lifestyle-integrated Functional Exercise (LiFE) program is an effective but resource-intensive fall prevention program delivered one-to-one in participants' homes. A recently developed group-based LiFE (gLiFE) could enhance large-scale implementability and decrease resource intensity. The aim of this qualitative focus group study is to compare participants' experiences regarding acceptability of gLiFE vs LiFE.

Methods: Programs were delivered in seven group sessions (gLiFE) or seven individual home visits (LiFE) within a multi-center, randomized non-inferiority trial. Four structured focus group discussions (90 – 100 minutes duration; one per format and study site) on content, structure, and subjective effects of gLiFE and LiFE were conducted. Qualitative content analysis using the method of inductive category formation by Mayring was applied for data analysis. Coding was managed using NVivo.

Results: In both formats, participants ($N=30$, 22 women, $n_{\text{gLiFE}}=15$, $n_{\text{LiFE}}=15$, mean age 78.5 ± 6.6 years) were positive about content, structure, and support received by trainers. Participants reflected on advantages of both formats: the social aspects of learning the program in a peer group (gLiFE), and benefits of learning the program at home (LiFE). In gLiFE, some difficulties with the implementation of activities were reported. In both formats, the majority of participants reported positive outcomes and successful implementation of new movement habits.

Conclusion: This is the first study to examine participants' views on and experiences with gLiFE and LiFE, revealing strengths and limitations of both formats that can be used for program refinement. Both formats were highly acceptable to participants, suggesting that gLiFE may have similar potential to be adopted by adults aged 70 years and older compared to LiFE.

Trial registration: ClinicalTrials.gov, NCT03462654. Registered on March 12, 2018.
<https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT03462654>.

Background

Fall incidence in older persons is expected to increase in upcoming years (1). Widely disseminated fall prevention programs for community-dwelling, fall-prone older adults aim to impede falls and their individual and socio-economic consequences.

Most evidence-based fall prevention programs are based on 'structured' group exercises conducted at least once a week (2, 3). These programs often fail long-term effectiveness due to regressive adherence rates (4).

The alternative approach of lifestyle-integrated training (5) aims for higher adherence rates through long-term behavior change. The Lifestyle-integrated Functional Exercise (LiFE) program (6) embeds functional activities into daily life to enhance physical function and activity of older adults aged 70 years and older.

Implementing activities in recurrent opportunities could create new habits (7) which constitute a key mechanism for long-term maintenance of behavior change (8). LiFE has been shown to support participants' adherence (6), but its delivery through seven one-to-one home visits requires considerable time and human resources. This has recently been addressed by Kramer and colleagues (9), who developed a potentially resource-saving group-based LiFE (gLiFE) concept, delivered to 8–12 participants by two trainers in seven group sessions.

Next to evaluating intervention effectiveness, examining participants' views and experiences like intervention acceptability is essential for long-term success (10). Acceptability is related to the perceived appropriateness in terms of anticipated or experiential cognitive-emotional responses to an intervention (11). It is also linked to intervention effectiveness (12) and adherence (11) and thus fundamental for any intervention evaluation. Looking at gLiFE and LiFE, the following aspects potentially influence participants' acceptance of the intervention.

LiFE participants receive the program directly in their home, facilitating identification and testing of suitable daily situations for implementing LiFE. One-to-one delivery allows highly personalized training and closer trainer-participant contact, which could influence participants' exercise behavior and perceptions of the program. A previous qualitative study on a different LiFE approach (13) for older adults 60 to 70 years suggested that trainer support was a strong motivator to carry out the activities. Participants valued the flexibility and personalized nature of the program. In gLiFE, different strategies were implemented to compensate for these missing aspects of individual delivery.

gLiFE participants can potentially benefit from learning the activities in a group. A previous group-based LiFE study (14) suggested that participants valued the support from and interaction within the group. Fellowship and shared experiences with peers have been described as facilitators to maintaining long-term exercise (15). Social support from an exercise group can enhance motivation (16), affective responses, and the benefits of the intervention (17, 18).

Regarding a potential large-scale dissemination of gLiFE, the current study aims to explore how experiences of participation differ between gLiFE and LiFE, and whether both formats are acceptable to the target population of fall-prone older adults, aged 70 years and older.

Methods

Study design and Setting

This qualitative study was conducted as part of the LiFE-is-LiFE trial (19), a 12-month multi-center, single-blinded, randomized non-inferiority trial comparing gLiFE with LiFE regarding fall reduction and cost-effectiveness (ClinicalTrials.gov, NCT03462654) (period: 06/2018 to 08/2020). Participants with a verified fall risk took part in either seven gLiFE or LiFE sessions within eleven weeks, followed by two phone calls. Follow up assessments were performed after six and twelve months.

For the present study, qualitative data collected in four focus group (FG) discussions after the six months follow up assessments (04/2019) were analyzed.

Programs

LiFE aims to reduce fall-related outcomes and promote long-term physical activity in community-dwelling older adults by integrating balance and strength activities into daily routines. gLiFE (9) and LiFE (20) are described elsewhere. Table 1 provides an overview of similarities and differences of both formats.

Table 1

Similarities and differences between LiFE and gLiFE conducted in the LiFE-is-LiFE trial (19)(19)

	LiFE	gLiFE
Brief aim	Improve balance and lower limb strength, increase physical activity, decrease risk of falling, long-term sustainability of the LiFE activities through habit formation and self-empowerment	
What: Materials	<p>Participant's manual, German version (22); Contains descriptions and instructions of LiFE activities; principles of balance and strength training as well as physical activity enhancement; safety instructions when performing the activities; background on balance and strength exercise; assistance and support for changing habits and performing LiFE activities</p> <p>Trainer's manual, German version; one for LiFE, one for gLiFE. Contains all information also included in the participant's manual; additionally: outline of all 7 sessions and 2 phone calls, including text templates, material, preparations, and precautions</p> <p>Workbook; for all participants; used during intervention: Includes information on study procedures, personnel, contacts, and safety instructions; activity planning sheets for balance, strength, and physical activity; activity counter, notes pages; LiFE principles</p> <p>Aids and materials during intervention sessions: Laminated cards, showing LiFE principles and LiFE activities to be used as visual aids during intervention sessions; balls, blankets, sponge rubber, boxes, clipboards, pens, bags, name tags, flipcharts</p>	
What: Procedures	7 home visits by one qualified trainer; 2 phone calls 4 and 10 weeks after last session	7 group sessions (n = 8–12 participants) led by one main and one co-trainer, 2 phone calls 4 and 10 weeks after last session
Who provided	Trainers are sport scientists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists or psychologists. All trainers received a two-day training course on the program background, aims, and components prior to the project start.	
How	One-to-one situation in the participant's home	Group setting with 8–12 participants and two trainers
Where	Two study sites: Heidelberg and Stuttgart (Germany)	
When and how much	7 sessions within 11 weeks: week 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11. Two phone calls 4 and 10 weeks after the last session (i.e. week 15 and 21). Duration of each session: 1-1.5 h	See LiFE Duration of each session: 2-2.5 h
Setting	Intensity and dose are determined by the individuals' activity plans, adherence, and performance level of each activity	
Behavior change	Behavior change theories based on LiFE trainer's manual and participant's manual (20).	Modification of the original behavior change concept using established theories on health behavior, such as the Health Action Process Approach (48, 49) and the Self-Determination Theory (39). Intervention contents of gLiFE were mapped using the Behavior Change Technique (BCT) Taxonomy v1 (50).

(please INSERT Table 1 here)

Trainers teach the participants how to perform the activities (e.g., squat), where (e.g., in the bedroom), and when to implement these into daily routines (e.g., each time when reaching for the floor drawer). New movement habits are created by linking the LiFE activities to specific daily situations based on behavior change concepts (9, 21).

Participants learn how to adapt chosen activities to their lifestyle and how to increase difficulty to ensure progress using LiFE principles (20).

The main difference between programs is the delivery format: group delivery for eight to twelve participants by two trainers (gLiFE) compared to one-to-one delivery in participants' homes (LiFE). In gLiFE, the trainer's role is to teach and facilitate; in LiFE, the trainer teaches and substitutes a training partner. Contents of gLiFE and LiFE are taught in predefined order, but teaching in gLiFE is organized in an interactive manner including group discussions and joint activity practice with peers.

All participants receive the German participant's manual (22) and a workbook, including a modified activity planner (9), and an activity counter to plan and monitor activity performance.

Participants

310 community-dwelling older adults (> 70) were randomized to either gLiFE or LiFE at two study centres in Germany (Network Aging Research, Heidelberg University; Robert-Bosch-Hospital, Stuttgart). For this study, 30 participants (22 women, 8 men; $M_{age}=78.8$; range 70–96 years; $n_{gLiFE}=15$; $n_{LiFE}=15$) were purposively selected (23) from the trial. We included 15 participants ($n_{women}=13$, $n_{men}=2$) who adhered to the program after completion, and 15 participants ($n_{women}=9$, $n_{men}=6$) who indicated lower adherence. Habit strength was used as an indicator for intervention adherence and assessed by the Self-Reported Behavioural Automaticity Index (SRBAI) (24). The SRBAI was measured at 6-month-follow up to identify whether LiFE activities have become habitual. The SRBAI median split (25) was defined as the threshold ($SRBAI \geq 4.49$ = higher behavioral automaticity, $SRBAI \leq 4.49$ = lower behavioral automaticity). Each FG included participants showing higher and lower behavioral automaticity, different ages, and gender to maximize the breadth of information and foster discussion between participants that did and did not successfully implement LiFE. Participant characteristics are summarized in Table 2; they were predominantly female (73%), highly educated, at risk of falling indicated by the Timed Up-and-Go Test (26), and were cognitively healthy according to Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA) (27). Participants were invited via telephone. The recruitment process is shown in Fig. 1 (see Fig. 1).

Table 2
 Characteristics of participants (N = 30)

	Mean (SD) or % (n)		
	Total (N = 30)	gLiFE (N = 15)	LiFE (N = 15)
Age, years	78.8 (6.6)	78.5 (6.1)	79.1 (7.2)
Women	73.3 (22)	73.3 (11)	73.3 (11)
MoCA, score (0–30)	26.0 (1.7)	26.5 (1.8)	25.4 (1.5)
Fall incident baseline	30 (9)	20 (3)	40 (6)
Completed years of education	14.1 (3.8)	14.5 (4.5)	13.7 (3.0)
TUG, sec.	12.7 (3.4)	12.7 (2.7)	12.7 (4.0)
<i>Note.</i> MoCA = Montreal Cognitive Assessment (27); Fall incident = falls in the last six months at baseline measurement; TUG = Timed Up-and-Go Test (26).			

(please INSERT Fig. 1 here)

Data Collection

An interdisciplinary team of exercise scientists, psychologists, and physiotherapists developed a semi-structured interview guide (see Additional file 1) for both formats based on a previous LiFE FG discussion (9).

The interview guide comprised 14 main questions on the programs and their components, the group and individual format, and habit formation processes like action planning or building new movement habits. It was piloted with one LiFE-is-LiFE participant regarding clarity of questions and refined after pilot evaluation.

Two FG discussions were conducted at seminar rooms in each study center, one for gLiFE ($n_{\text{Stuttgart}}=8$, $n_{\text{Heidelberg}}=7$), one for LiFE ($n_{\text{Stuttgart}}=7$, $n_{\text{Heidelberg}}=8$) lasting between 90–100 minutes. At the beginning, the study purpose (evaluation of program acceptability) was explained, and participants gave written informed consent. The moderator facilitated discussions by asking questions with follow-up prompts, probing, encouraging reserved participants to speak, and ensuring that discussions covered the main topics. The moderator (main author, physiotherapist, and external researcher) and co-moderators (team members) were not involved in follow-up assessments and intervention delivery. Co-moderators took notes and kept time. Two of the co-moderators who took part in the program development stayed silent during discussions. FGs were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim in German, according to transcription guidelines by Kuckartz (28).

Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (29) was performed using inductive category formation. Coding was managed using NVivo 12 (QRS International, Australia). To explore acceptability, inductive categories were formed to identify participants' experiences with program features like content, delivery, and implementation of both LiFE formats. All FG discussions were defined as the unit of analysis and the manifest content was analyzed. First, the main author formulated a category definition as a selection criterion to determine the relevant material from the text, and a level of abstraction, which defines how general or specific categories must be formulated (29). Based on this, text were coded line-by-line and a category was constructed every time an element of the text matched the category definition (see Table 3). The interview guide shaped the formation of initial categories. After 50% of the text, categories and coding rules were revised, then two authors (LR, FK) independently coded the text. Main categories were formulated and discussed. In case of disagreement a third researcher (SL) was consulted. Finally, categories were organized into overarching themes and contents were contrasted by group (gLiFE vs LiFE). Three authors (LR, FK, SL) agreed on the final category framework.

Table 3
Example of inductive category formation

Coding unit	Keywords	Category	Main category
Group is more intense	Motivation because of group	Format of the program	
Group pressure is helpful			

Results

Qualitative Content Analysis

Five overarching themes were identified: Program overall, trainer support, content of the program, format of the program, changing behavior. The results are illustrated by quotes, translated from German to English. Participants are identified by group, gender, and age (e.g., gF73 = gLiFE, female, 73 years; oM80 = original LiFE, male, 80 years).

Program overall

In both formats, participants were positive about the overall program: *"The LiFE-program is great and I enjoyed it"* (gF73); *"It seemed [...] very well structured"* (oM78). Most participants understood and liked the concept of lifestyle-integrated exercise and valued the focus on independent exercising: *"Doing my own thing at home alone, not having to join any sports clubs or groups, that is exactly the right thing for me"* (oM80).

Trainer support

Participants in both formats felt individually supported by the trainers

and described how trainers *“really responded to the individual’s situation [...]”* (gF77). For gLiFE participants it was important not to feel pressured when they were incapable of performing an exercise, *“when one couldn’t do one of the activities, you could say it. [...] good, that one has free choice”* (gF72).

LiFE FGs discussed personality traits of their trainers (e.g., how cheerful they were), which did not come up in gLiFE discussions.

Content of the program

Structure and materials. Participants from both formats liked the *“whole structure”* (gF84) of sessions and the *“well balanced and instructive”* (gM82) combination of theory and practice. One gLiFE participant specified that the repetition of activities from the last sessions was helpful: *“It really gets stuck in your mind; you don’t hear it just once [...] it was repeated before adding something new”* (gF80).

In both formats, participants valued the manual as a helpful tool *“especially at the time when the trainer is not there anymore”* (oM74).

Activities. gLiFE and LiFE participants indicated strong preferences for activities *“that can be successfully implemented in everyday tasks”* (oM80). Participants of both formats talked about activities which were difficult to perform or which they perceived as *“not natural”* (gF73) or *“silly”* (oM80), like *“stepping over objects backwards”* (gF91).

gLiFE participants reported that they consider safety aspects when practicing at home: *“I always make sure, when practicing [...], that I am close to the wall”* (gF82). LiFE participants did not make specific statements on safety.

Only gLiFE participants suggested to add more activities, like *“some kind of coordination”* (gF84) or to practice more complex movements like *“getting out of a bathtub”* (gF82).

Intensity and duration. Participants had different opinions on program intensity, with most being satisfied. Few expressed that the intensity *“was slightly too little”* (oF80) compared to similar exercise programs. Some participants wished for more practice time during sessions, as well as increased difficulty or more challenging exercises, for example *“strength could be a little bit more [challenging], to guarantee stability”* (oM83).

Format of the program

Group format. When asked about their thoughts on the other format, gLiFE and LiFE participants addressed advantages of group exercising. gLiFE participants reported that the group enhanced their motivation: *“[...] it wakes your ambition. [...] you want to keep up with the others”* (gF88). A good atmosphere in their groups motivated and encouraged them: *“[...] in the group it is, I think, a bit funny from time to time. You encourage each other”* (gF88). Not all gLiFE participants had the same experience in their group: Few participants *“never felt a sense of companionship”* (gF84) although they *“[...] would have liked to experience some team spirit, to have an exchange”* (gF84).

Several gLiFE participants described the exchange and comparison with peers as “*comforting*” (gF91) because they “*all face difficulties with walking and climbing stairs, and they are all troubled by their knee pain*” (gF91).

LiFE FGs discussed “group pressure” and peer exchange as positive effects of exercise groups, based on previous experiences or preconceptions: “*The group pressure, [...] yields more than fumbling around alone with the trainer*” (oM74). Some said they would have preferred “*being part of a group of like-minded people*” (oF96), and to have an exchange with peers.

Individual format. LiFE participants reported that “*the advantage of him [trainer] being in my home was that we could choose situations together in which it [activities] can be implemented*” (oM80). LiFE participants appreciated the flexibility of home visits (e.g., individual scheduling, no travel time).

gLiFE participants suggested that receiving one home visit in addition to the group sessions “*to have one’s attention directly drawn to where in the house, when in the household, you could do this*” would be “*an enhancement*” (gF84).

Changing Behavior

Forming habits. Participants from all FGs identified opportunities to integrate activities into daily routines, and some activities became habitual: “[...] *it’s like learning a new language. In the beginning you’re studying two, three hours every day and then [...] you just use them without thinking*” (oM78). gLiFE and LiFE participants described activities being connected to situational, object-related, or activity-based cues: “*It did indeed remind me, when in a certain course of action, AHA!, now you could integrate this*” (gF84).

Planning actions. One gLiFE participant described that the activity planning helped her: “*It [activity planner] was really good to get started [...] because it provides an incentive [...] to actually do it*” (gW70). Some LiFE participants found the activity planner tedious and “*too silly*” (oM80). One LiFE participant specifically stated she “*would like to do it [activity] spontaneously [...] only when it comes to my mind I do it*” (oF82).

Outcome experiences. The majority of gLiFE and LiFE participants shared positive outcome experiences, like improvements in physical functions (“*Since I walk the stairs so often, [...] my knee became better*”, gF70) or a more active daily life (“*I use the car less often*”, oF74). Few participants reported that LiFE “*took away the fear of falling*” (oF92).

Confidence in doing. gLiFE and LiFE participants were confident about their capability of performing the activities and saw practicing LiFE as their responsibility: “*If I don’t have the discipline myself, then another meeting is not going to help me [...]*” (oF72). Some LiFE participants anticipated that their exercise routine might fade without regular home visits over time.

Discussion

This study is the first qualitative study comparing and describing participants' experiences of gLiFE and LiFE to identify whether both programs are acceptable to community-dwelling older adults at risk of falling.

Participants found both LiFE programs acceptable, indicating that both formats are suited for the target group. LiFE's main aim was well received and understood by gLiFE and LiFE participants. These results underline findings from previous LiFE feasibility studies delivered one-to-one (6, 13) or in a group (9, 14, 30), further supporting that LiFE can be seen as a promising alternative to structured fall prevention programs (5), also in a group setting.

In both formats, trainers' support played an important role for participants' impression of the programs. Previous studies highlighted professional help and motivating support of an exercise specialist as an important factor for older adults' exercise attendance (31). The personalized trainers' response in gLiFE and LiFE indicates that gLiFE also offers opportunities for individual support. Our findings are in line with a previous study of LiFE showing that individual content adaptation is indispensable to enhance exercise adherence (32). Only LiFE participants addressed trainers' personality traits, suggesting that individual training and personal exchange strengthens the trainer-participant relationship in LiFE compared to gLiFE. gLiFE participants appreciated that they never felt pressured by trainers when they were incapable to perform some LiFE activities during group sessions. This is in line with research showing that a trainer's controlling coaching style can decrease participants' autonomous motivation (33). Trainers that reaffirm participants in their own decision-making and respect their individual capabilities are an important factor for needs satisfaction and motivation in gLiFE.

The structure of gLiFE and LiFE were well received, particularly the repetition of learned activities at the beginning of each group session. This indicates that the structural modifications developed for gLiFE (9) were appropriate. As in previous LiFE studies (9, 34) participants perceived the LiFE manual as a helpful tool for corrections which highlights usefulness of a manual in both groups.

In both formats, participants preferred activities that were easy to integrate in daily life. The importance of activities being achievable and integrable into daily life activities has been highlighted before (34). Specific LiFE activities were perceived as too artificial or difficult to perform. This finding has already been described by Boulton, Weber (13). Assessing which and why certain activities are not feasible and increasing autonomy might be essential. Indeed, previous qualitative evaluations of LiFE showed that integrating participants' ideas may be important to foster long-term adherence (13).

gLiFE participants stated that they took care of their safety while practicing LiFE at home, so gLiFE seems to sufficiently convey important safety aspects of home exercise. We can only speculate why LiFE participants did not discuss safety aspects: maybe these were considered less important or handled more naturally without participants actively reflecting on them, because they learn and practice LiFE directly in their home setting.

The overall satisfaction with gLiFE's and LiFE's intensity indicates that the perceived effort to participate (i.e., physical and cognitive requirements) was generally appropriate. Few participants of both formats felt not challenged enough by the activities after some time. The principle on upgrading the difficulty of activities might have been insufficiently conveyed by the trainers so that participants did not fully understand that they should adapt activity intensity. On the other hand, it could be that participants preferred to practice in their "comfort zone" instead of putting themselves into instable or exhaustive situations to challenge themselves. Revising the theoretical unit on upgrading should be considered for future studies to ensure participants' awareness of the importance of gradual intensity progression (35). The nature of lifestyle-integrated exercise (small activity bouts throughout the day) might feel less challenging compared to exercising for a set period of time.

Participants of both formats named various benefits when asked about their thoughts on learning LiFE in groups (e.g., being more motivated due to social comparison or social support), which is in line with studies that emphasize the importance of peer contact in fostering positive physical activity experiences among older adults (36, 37). Studies demonstrate that when people do exercise in groups, especially when participants experience cohesion, adherence levels (17) or outcomes like functional balance (38) improve significantly compared to exercising alone. As argued in the Self-Determination Theory (39), social contextual events like peer feedback can foster feelings of competence and enhance intrinsic motivation. Low motivation has been identified as a cause for adults not to adhere to home-based activities (16). Based on our findings, the social aspects of the group as a motivating factor could be considered an advantage of gLiFE over LiFE. Nonetheless, not all gLiFE participants experienced group cohesiveness. Previous studies showed that task and social cohesion (individual attraction towards the group task and the group members) are related to older adults' exercise adherence (40). We suggest that the facilitation of group processes in gLiFE should be refined to foster group cohesion. Increasing the feeling of being understood by the trainers could be achieved by employing trainers which are nearly the same age as participants. This has been found effective in other settings like diabetes care (41).

LiFE participants were satisfied about receiving individual training at home. This supports previous research (42) pointing at older adults' preference for home-based activities and/or exercise alone and highlights the importance of individual preferences for exercise settings. gLiFE could be a good compromise as it combines group-based teaching with independent home-based training.

A single home visit to support implementation of activities was suggested as a possible improvement to gLiFE by participants. Adding one single home visit to gLiFE would reduce its' assumed low-cost delivery and hence financial feasibility and large-scale implementability from a stakeholder perspective. Although some gLiFE participants had difficulties finding the right daily cue during group sessions, results suggest that the principle of tying LiFE activities to different situational cues to create new movement habits was understood by most participants. This supports study findings of group-based (14) and individual LiFE (13). The fact that not being in the home environment could cause difficulties in action planning was addressed in the design of gLiFE by including compensational strategies, like group discussions to

collect participants' suggestions for possible situations to implement activities (9). In the future, more guidance and direct suggestions from trainers should be offered for action planning if needed.

Participants from both LiFE formats spoke about perceiving positive program effects, like more activity in daily life and improvements in mobility and function. Perceived effectiveness has been described as one relevant property of acceptability (11). Positive outcome experiences were found to increase satisfaction, which increased the likelihood of a sustained exercise routine (43).

gLiFE and LiFE participants were confident to perform the activities and to maintain the exercise routine. Since perception of self-efficacy was found to be crucial for the acceptability of an intervention (11), our findings demonstrate that both formats were able to support participants in building the confidence to sustainably engage in LiFE.

Strengths And Limitations

Qualitative methods play a valuable role in exploring participants' experiences of study participation. Their use is increasingly recognized as best practice in the development (44) and evaluation (45) of complex interventions. The study sample represents the target group of the original LiFE program (6), is based on clear inclusion criteria from the LiFE-is-LiFE trial (Jansen et al., 2018), and captured varying experiences with the program.

Some limitations need be addressed. Though women were overrepresented in this study, this sampling bias can be explained both by a higher participation rate of women in the trial and a predominant female demographic in older age groups (> 80) (46). Although free conversation about topics that were relevant to participants was encouraged, the discussion of life experiences or circumstances outside the program that may have influenced the individual's attitudes towards the programs may have fallen short. As participants lived in the same areas, we could not avoid that some of them were familiar with each other. Social desirability in the group situation could have prompted less honest answers or created a consensus in the group about exercise behaviors or opinions on the program (47).

Conclusions

This is the first study to explore participants' views on and experiences with gLiFE and LiFE, which are essential factors for the programs' long-term success (10). Assessing acceptability is a fundamental component of intervention evaluation because of its linkage to intervention effectiveness (12) and adherence (11). The identified strengths and limitations of both programs from the participants' perspective could be helpful for program refinement and complement quantitative findings in later stages of the program evaluation. Future studies should focus on possible solutions to the identified limitations, for example the revision of the strategies used in gLiFE to help participants find situations for the implementation of LiFE activities.

In summary, our study showed that fall prone older adults perceived participation in gLiFE and LiFE as beneficial and that both formats were well accepted. Hence, gLiFE and LiFE could be appropriate for implementation within public health initiatives. Whether gLiFE has non-inferior or superior effectiveness as compared to LiFE is currently examined (19).

Abbreviations

BCT Behavior Change Technique

FG Focus group

gLiFE group-based Lifestyle-integrated Functional Exercise

LiFE Lifestyle-integrated Functional Exercise

MoCA Montreal Cognitive Assessment

SRBAI Self-Reported Behavioural Automaticity Index

TUG Timed Up-and-Go Test

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical approval for the LiFE-is-LiFE trial was obtained from the Ethic Review Board of the Faculty of Behavioral and Cultural Studies at Heidelberg University (study site Heidelberg, document number Schwe2017 2/1-1), and from the Ethic Review Board of the University Hospital and Faculty of Medicine in Tübingen (study site Stuttgart, document number 723/2017BO2) which are both followed the policy and mandates of the Declaration of Helsinki. For the LiFE-is-LiFE trial as well as for the focus group study, all participants proved written informed consent.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

The data used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Authors' contributions

LR, FK, SL, CPJ, CN, ML, MS: development of the semi-structured interview guide for the gLiFE and LiFE focus groups. LR, FK, SL, CPJ, CN: study organization. MS, CB: development of the grand proposal for the LiFE-is-LiFE trial. LR, FK, SL: conduction of focus group interviews. LR: data transcription. LR, FK, SL: data analysis. LR, FK: draft of manuscript. LR, FK, SL, CPJ, CN, ML, CB, LC, MS: critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Figures

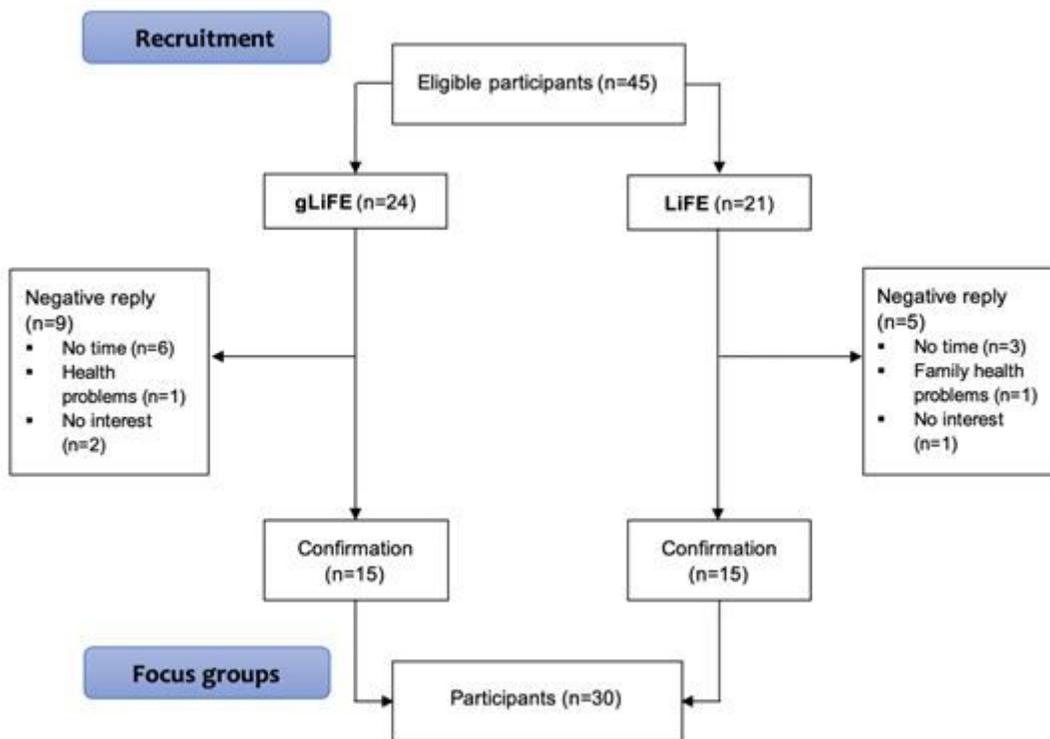


Figure 1

Recruitment process

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