An Activity Tracker and Its Accompanying App as a Motivator for Increased Exercise and Better Sleeping Habits for Youths in Need of Social Care: Field Study

# Details

## Year

2018

## DOI

10.2196/mhealth.9286

## Issued

2019

## Language

English

## Volume

6

## Issue

12

## Authors

Rönkkö K.

## Type

Journal article

## Journal

JMIR mHealth and uHealth

## Publisher

JMIR Publications Inc.

## Topics

## Sample

8 vulnerable youths aged 17 to 18 years living in a Swedish municipality’s care and accommodation home and 12 staff.

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Other

## Other Stakeholder Implication

Social workers

# Abstract

Background: The number of mobile self-tracking devices connected to the Web has exploded in today’s society. With these wearable activity trackers related to Web 2.0 apps and social media have come new ways of monitoring, measuring, representing, and sharing experiences of the human body. New opportunities related to health and new areas of implementation for professionals have appeared, and one identified area that can benefit from mobile health technologies is social work.

Objective: There are still only a small number of papers reporting the results from studying wearable activity trackers and accompanying apps in the context of agency-based social work. This study aimed to contribute to the identified shortage by presenting results from a research project framed by the following overarching question: What effects will the studied youths in need of social care experience in relation to exercise and sleep as the result of using a wearable activity tracker and its accompanying app?

Methods: A field study framed by action research was performed. The study concerned vulnerable youths living in a Swedish municipality’s care and accommodation home that tried out an activity tracker and its accompanying app.

Results: The results from the study confirm previously published research results reporting that instant graphical feedback, sharing information, and being part of a social community can have a positive impact on lifestyle changes. In addition, this study’s main results are that (1) the most important factor for positive health-related lifestyle changes was the establishment of personal long-term goals and (2) professional social workers found the studied technology to function as a valuable counseling tool, opening up avenues for lifestyle talks that otherwise were hard to undertake.

Conclusions: This study demonstrates how an activity tracker and its accompanying app can open up a topic for discussion regarding how vulnerable youths can achieve digital support for changing unhealthy lifestyle patterns, and it shows that the technology might be a valuable counseling tool for professionals in social work.

# Outcome

"The results from the study confirm previously published research results reporting that instant graphical feedback, sharing information, and being part of a social community can have a positive impact on lifestyle changes. In addition, this study’s main results are that (1) the most important factor for positive health-related lifestyle changes was the establishment of personal long-term goals and (2) professional social workers found the studied technology to function as a valuable counseling tool, opening up avenues for lifestyle talks that otherwise were hard to undertake.... In summary, increased personal awareness, support from social workers, and friendly competition all supported the establishment of health goals for the youths. Although both instant graphical feedback and sharing information through friendly competition had a positive impact, these were not influential beyond the moment and social context. Although this was a short study, having long-term goals was found to be the most powerful factor for influencing the youths to keep on using the app during the study." (Authors, in Abstract Conclusions)