Reviewer's report

Title: Pragmatic randomised controlled trial of preferred intensity exercise in women living with depression

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Reviewer: Colleen Keller

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Pragmatic Randomized Controlled Trial of Preferred intensity Exercise in Women Living with Depression

Thank you for letting me review this interesting and important work. The report is cogently presented, well articulated, and includes informative tables. The topic is timely, given the pervasiveness of depression among middle-aged women. The description of ethical procedures used in addressing human subjects was well presented. I do have some comments that, when addressed, might strengthen the report:

1) There is no theoretical rationale for the manualized intervention. The investigators remark that they used a manualized psychosocial support through motivational interviewing and advice on healthy lifestyles around exercise as the intervention, with the primary intervention component preferred intensity. Without a theoretical rationale, the report falls short of a) describing the rationale for the age range, the rationale for including only women, 2) The outcomes, Physiological, psychological, and social well being were not specified to which scales measures which outcome. 3) the intervention mediators were not identified: this leads to problems in the reporting- what part of motivational interviewing and social support was hypothesized to impact self esteem? Why was Becks Inventory selected to measure depression? 4) If the participants were exercised in cohorts of about 5, how did the investigators know that it was intensity that contributed to adherence and not the social interaction of the cohort members?

2) Adherence was measured by attendance> It is unclear what intensity the women DID exercise at, although mean and peak HR was reported, it is unclear how the women actually exercised.. the large SD in the intervention group shows that the prescription might not have been adhered to.

3) The inclusion criteria state those women who were being monitored by or receiving treatment for depression would be included. This raises questions regarding the diagnostic criteria for monitoring or treatment, compounded by the sample description of large variance in medication or/and therapy for depression, variance in the presumed severity of depression among the participants

4) The investigators report that a qualitative study was conducted to show the value of preferred intensity on improved outcomes, but the details of this is lacking and the results do not explain the intervention results, particularly as it is
not explained what intensity the women actually exercised at.
5) The discussion does not related the results to the research to guide the reader how this work impacts the science and moves it forward.

**Level of interest:** An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
'I declare that I have no competing interests'