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A survey exploring characteristics of older people attending lunch clubs in South-West of England

R. Lumley^{1*}, F. Tsofliou^{1*}, J. Lara², Z. Sheppard¹ and C. Clark¹

¹Department of Human Sciences and Public Health, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, Bournemouth University, Bournemouth BH1 3LT, UK and ²Department of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8ST, UK

Lunch Clubs (LCs) have been long considered a valuable community-based service to promote health and wellbeing of older people⁽¹⁾, however people attending LCs are poorly characterised. The aim of this study was to explore the characteristics of those attending lunch clubs in South-West England and the reasons for attendance. Body weight (kg), height (m), hand-grip strength (kg) and waist circumference (WC) (cm) were measured by a trained observer following standard protocols. The length of attendance to LC, transport utilised and distance travelled to the LC was also explored. Participants reported self-rated health status, self-rated physical activity and reasons of attendance via a Likert scale.

Forty older individuals from 5 LCs completed the survey during the day of their LC visit. Characteristics are shown in the table below.

	Men (n = 18)	Women (n = 22)	All subjects (n = 40)
	Mean (Standard deviation)		
Age (years)	82 (SD 7)	83 (SD 9)	82 (SD 8)
BMI (kg/m ²)	30 (SD 5)	28 (SD 4)	27 (SD 4)
Waist circumference (cm)	104 (SD 12)	97 (SD 12)	100 (SD 13)
Grip strength (kg)	23 (SD 5)	14 (SD 5)	18 (SD 6)

Overall, participants were older adults (65 % over 75 years old), overweight, abdominally obese with low hand-grip strength. Self-rated current health was rated as ‘good to very good’ by 68 % of participants; 60 % reported their current health being the same as the previous year, with 23 % reporting an improvement and 18 % declaring worsened health in relation with the previous year. Current self-reported physical activity was rated as ‘moderate’ by 63 %; low physical activity was reported by 28 % of participants. Only 3 % reported an increase in physical activity levels on the previous year with the remainder reporting levels “about the same” or lower (85 % and 12.5 % respectively). Most (65 %) participants lived alone being either widowed (68 %), single (8 %) or divorced (2 %). None of them lived in a care home nor lived solely on benefits; 50 % receive state pension. Word of mouth was the most popular (70 %) route to find out about the LC. 63 % of participants lived within half a mile ratio from the LC; 27 % were travelling over a mile to attend a LC. The most popular means of access to lunch club were getting a lift with a friend or walking to the lunch club (35 % and 35 % of participants respectively). Overall, over 73 % of participants rated that ‘meeting friends’ (92 %); ‘to eat out’ (78 %), ‘to have a hot meal’ (75 %), and ‘for a home cooked style meal’ (73 %) were important reasons to attend lunch clubs. Other factors such as ‘not having to cook’, ‘affordability of a meal’ and ‘the additional activities (bingo, raffles and talks)’ were rated as very important or important by only 45 %, 40 % and 18 % of participants, respectively.

Older adults attending LCs in the South West of England reported good self-rated health, nonetheless they are characterised by high rates of overweight and obesity, abdominal obesity and low muscle strength placing them at risk of sarcopenia and sarcopenic obesity⁽²⁾. These findings suggest the need for lifestyle interventions targeting these health problems.

1. Dwyer P & Hardill I (2011) *Ageing Soc* 31, 243–264.
2. Prado CM, Wells JC, Smith SR *et al.* (2012) *Clin Nutr* 31, 583–601.

*Joint first authors