

Can a short residential group programme with WhatsApp follow-up for women be delivered and kept up well enough to test in a full trial? A feasibility study

Submission date 02/07/2026	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered
Registration date 02/07/2026	Overall study status Completed	☐ Protocol
Last Edited 02/07/2026	Condition category Mental and Behavioural Disorders	☐ Statistical analysis plan
		☐ Results
		☐ Individual participant data
		☒ Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Many short, intensive group programmes feel helpful while they run, but the hard part is keeping the changes going afterwards. This study looked back at a 2019 programme for women that combined a few days of intensive group work (psychological exercises, eating and lifestyle education, and physical activity) with nine weeks of follow-up support sent through WhatsApp. The aim was not to prove the programme works, but to find out whether it can be run smoothly, whether women stay involved, whether the questionnaires can be completed, and whether the WhatsApp follow-up is actually used - so we can decide what to improve before testing the programme properly in a future trial.

Who can participate?

Adult women (aged 18 and over) who wanted to take part in a residential lifestyle programme and could complete questionnaires in Romanian.

What does the study involve?

Everyone took part in the same programme: a five-day residential group course, then nine weeks of weekly WhatsApp prompts (small experiential tasks linked to keeping up healthy habits), with individual written support added from week four. There was no comparison group. Participants filled in questionnaires before the course, just after it, and three months later, covering psychological well-being, eating behaviour, and confidence about exercise. The study also looked at what participants wrote and shared in the WhatsApp follow-up.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Participants could gain from the programme's psychological and lifestyle content and from the follow-up support. The activities carried little risk; women in acute crisis were not enrolled, well-being was monitored, and there was a written procedure for offering help or referral if anyone became distressed. No safety problems occurred.

Where is the study run from?

The University of Bucharest (Romania), with the residential part held at a retreat centre in Sinaia, Romania.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

April 2019 to September 2019. The residential course ran in May 2019, and the final follow-up was in late summer 2019.

Who is funding the study?

The study was investigator-initiated and not externally funded; participants paid for their own attendance at the residential programme.

Who is the main contact?

Dr Ligiana Mihaela Petre, ligiana.petre@fpse.unibuc.ro

Contact information

Type(s)

Public, Scientific, Principal investigator

Contact name

Dr Ligiana Mihaela Petre

Contact details

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, Şoseaua Panduri 90, Sector 5

Bucharest

Romania

050663

+40 213 181 550

ligiana.petre@fpse.unibuc.ro

Additional identifiers

Study information

Scientific Title

Feasibility of a brief intensive residential group lifestyle intervention with WhatsApp aftercare in community-dwelling adult women: a single-group convergent mixed-methods study

Study objectives

The study examined whether a brief intensive residential group programme with WhatsApp aftercare for women could be delivered, retained, and measured well enough to justify a future controlled trial; whether initial aftercare uptake translated into sustained engagement; and which behaviour-maintenance processes the aftercare actually evidenced. No efficacy hypothesis was tested; preliminary change signals were characterised descriptively to inform outcome selection and variance plausibility for a future trial.

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

Approved 27/02/2019, Research Ethics Committee (Comisia de Etică a Cercetării), University of Bucharest (Strada Academiei nr. 14, Sector 5, Bucharest, 010014, Romania; +40 21 313 65 29; cometc@unibuc.ro), ref: Decision No. 12/27.02.2019 (CEC Registration No. 43/27.02.2019)

Primary study design

Interventional

Allocation

N/A: single arm study

Masking

Open (masking not used)

Control

Uncontrolled

Assignment

Single

Purpose

Feasibility/pilot study evaluating delivery, retention, measurement, and digital-aftercare engagement of a lifestyle intervention, in preparation for a future controlled trial

Study type(s)**Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied**

Promotion of psychological well-being and healthy lifestyle behaviours (eating behaviour and physical activity) in community-dwelling adult women

Interventions

Single-arm study; no comparator. All participants received the same two-part intervention. (1) A brief intensive residential group programme delivered over five programme days (approximately 40 hours across 10 sessions) at a residential centre, combining experiential psychological work (humanistic-experiential techniques, including two-chair dialogue and creative-expressive exercises), eating-behaviour psychoeducation, structured physical activity, and body-awareness /psychocorporal work. (2) A subsequent 9-week individual aftercare protocol delivered via WhatsApp: a weekly experiential prompt mapped to a behaviour-maintenance theme (Kwasnicka et al., 2016), a mid-week reminder, and, from Week 4, an individualised asynchronous psychological-assistance message. Prompts were clinician-tailored to each participant's psychological profile. Messages were sent individually (not in a group chat). Assessments were self-report questionnaires at three timepoints (pre-intervention, post-intervention, 3-month follow-up).

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

1. Retention measured using the proportion of admitted participants completing assessment, measured by assessment completion at post-intervention (T2) and 3-month follow-up (T3)

2. Aftercare engagement measured using the proportion of weekly WhatsApp prompts answered in the intended modality at weekly timepoints across the 9-week aftercare period
3. Measurement completion measured using the proportion of expected questionnaire items completed per instrument at baseline (T1), post-intervention (T2) and 3-month follow-up (T3)
4. Recruitment/eligibility yield measured using the number assessed, eligible, and admitted at timepoints during the April-May 2019 intake

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Psychological well-being measured using the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being; within-person mean change with 95% CI, analysed descriptively (no formal hypothesis testing) at baseline (T1), post-intervention (T2) and 3-month follow-up (T3)
2. Emotional overeating measured using the Adult Eating Behaviour Questionnaire, Emotional Overeating subscale; analysed descriptively at baseline (T1), post-intervention (T2) and 3-month follow-up (T3)
3. Exercise self-efficacy measured using adapted exercise-confidence items; analysed descriptively at baseline (T1), post-intervention (T2) and 3-month follow-up (T3)
4. Behaviour-maintenance processes evidenced in aftercare measured using deductive content analysis of WhatsApp responses using Kwasnicka et al.'s (2016) five-theme framework (two independent coders) at weekly timepoints across the 9-week aftercare period

Completion date

10/09/2019

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Female sex
2. Aged 18 years or older
3. No acute psychiatric condition (psychosis, active suicidality, acute substance use disorder)
4. Sufficient Romanian proficiency to complete questionnaires and take part in group activities
5. Written informed consent

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Mixed

Lower age limit

18 Years

Upper age limit

100 Years

Sex

Female

Total final enrolment

18

Key exclusion criteria

1. Current psychiatric crisis requiring immediate clinical intervention
2. Concurrent participation in another structured psychological intervention

Date of first enrolment

06/04/2019

Date of final enrolment

25/04/2019

Locations

Countries of recruitment

Romania

Study participating centre

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences

Şoseaua Panduri 90, Sector 5

Bucharest

Romania

050663

Sponsor information

Organisation

University of Bucharest

ROR

<https://ror.org/02x2v6p15>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Funder Name

Investigator initiated and funded

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The de-identified quantitative datasets generated and/or analysed during the current study will be stored in a publicly available repository (Open Science Framework; DOI to be added on publication) and are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request (Dr Ligiana Mihaela Petre, ligiana.petre@fpse.unibuc.ro). Written informed consent covered assessment data and aftercare responses; data were anonymised before analysis. The qualitative aftercare data (participants' personal text, photographs, and audio) are not expected to be made available, because their sensitive, identifiable nature and the scope of participant consent preclude public deposition.

IPD sharing plan summary

Available on request, Stored in publicly available repository