

1 **Title:** The relationship between multisite peripheral joint pain and physical activity levels in older
2 adults: a cross-sectional survey

3 **Running title:** Relationship between multisite joint pain and physical activity

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10 **Acknowledgments:**

11 The lead author (RS) was funded by a Keele University ACORN studentship. The funder had no
12 involvement in the design, collection, analysis, writing or publishing of this paper. This work was
13 supported by a National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Programme Grant (RP-PG-0407-10386).

14 This research was also funded by the Arthritis Research UK Centre in Primary Care grant (Grant
15 Number 18139). KD and ELH are part funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)
16 Applied Research Centre (ARC) West Midlands. KD was also part funded by an NIHR Knowledge
17 Mobilisation Research Fellowship (KMRF-2014-03-002) and is an NIHR Senior Investigator. ELH is
18 part funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Applied Research Centre (ARC)
19 West Midlands. JQ is part funded by a NIHR Clinical Research Network West Midlands, Research
20 Scholar Fellowship. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and not
21 necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR, HEE or the Department of Health and Social Care.

22 **Conflict of interest:**

23 All the authors have no conflict of interest to report.

24 **Author contribution:**

1 The study's research question, study design and analysis plan were conceived by as part of RDS PhD
2 thesis with ELH, KSD and GMH. Data cleaning and analysis were conducted equally by ML, RDS and
3 JGQ. Interpretation of findings were contributed by all authors, all authors also contributed to the
4 preparation of this manuscript.

5 **Abstract**

6 *Introduction*

7 Research on levels of physical activity (PA) in those with peripheral joint pain have only focused on
8 single sites, in the knee or hips. This study investigated the levels of PA in adults with single-site and
9 multisite peripheral joint pain compared to adults with no joint pain.

10 *Methods*

11 Analysis of a cross-sectional population survey mailed to adults aged ≥ 45 years ($n=28,443$) was
12 conducted. Respondents reported any peripheral joint pain in the last 12 months in either the hands,
13 hips, knees or feet; PA levels were self-reported using the short telephone activity rating scale. The
14 association between PA levels, peripheral joint pain and outcomes of health status (physical and
15 mental component scores, PCS and MCS, using SF-12) pain intensity (10-point scale) and health-
16 related quality of life (HRQoL) (EQ-5D) were investigated using analysis of variance and ordinal
17 regressions.

18 *Results*

19 Compared to those with no joint pain, all pain groups reported lower levels of PA: joint pain in one
20 site (OR=0.91, 0.83-0.99 95%CI); two sites (0.74, 0.67-0.81), three sites (0.65, 0.59-0.72) and four
21 sites (0.47, 0.42-0.53). Across all joint pain groups, levels of PA were associated with pain intensity,
22 physical health status, mental health status and HRQoL.

23 *Discussion*

1 Adults with more sites of peripheral joint pain were more likely to report lower levels of PA. Those
2 with more sites of pain and lower levels of PA reported poorer outcomes. Health care providers
3 should be aware that those with multisite joint pain are most likely to have low levels of PA.

4 **Keywords:** Physical activity, multisite peripheral joint pain, cross-sectional survey.

5 **Background**

6 Peripheral joint pain is common among adults aged 45 years and over within the UK with around
7 79% of all adults experiencing some joint pain in the hands, hips, knees and feet (Finney, Dziedzic,
8 Lewis, & Healey, 2017). In adults aged 45 years and over, osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common
9 cause of peripheral joint pain (Felson, 2009). OA is a clinical syndrome of joint pain causing varying
10 degrees of limitation in physical function and reduced quality of life (National Institute of Health and
11 Care Excellence (NICE), 2014). Physical activity (PA) is recommended as a core treatment for all
12 adults with OA in the hands, hips, knees and feet, regardless of age, other co-existing health
13 conditions, level of pain or disability (NICE, 2014). To date, research on levels of PA in those with
14 peripheral joint pain have only focused on single joint sites such as the knee (Daugaard et al., 2018;
15 Glaviano, Baellow, & Saliba, 2017; Herbolzheimer et al., 2016; Sliepen, Mauricio, Lipperts, Grimm, &
16 Rosenbaum, 2018; Thoma et al., 2018; White et al., 2013) or the hip (De Groot, Bussmann, Stam, &
17 Verhaar, 2008; Holsgaard-Larsen & Roos, 2012) which were associated with lower levels of physical
18 activity compared to similar aged general populations adults. In addition to the clinical benefits that
19 therapeutic exercise has on outcomes for adults with OA (Uthman et al., 2013), levels of PA during
20 daily living are important as low levels of PA are associated with higher levels of pain intensity
21 symptoms and poorer physical functioning (Shim, Park, Kim, Kyung, & Shin, 2018; Stubbs, Hurley, &
22 Smith, 2015; Thoma et al., 2018; Timmermans et al., 2019).

23 Pain in multiple sites across all the body is common, a survey of Swedish adults aged 65 years and
24 over showed 38% reported two or more areas of pain on their body compared to only 12% that
25 reported pain in only one area (Dragioti, Larsson, Bernfort, Levin, & Gerdle, 2017). Adults with a

1 higher number of painful sites commonly report lower general well-being, lower self-reported
2 physical and mental health, more pain frequency, pain severity and increase risk of falls (Dragioti et
3 al., 2017; Finney, Dziedzic, Lewis, & Healey, 2017; Lacey et al., 2014; Welsh, Clarson, Mallen, &
4 McBeth, 2019). Despite over half of adults aged 45 years and over reporting multisite peripheral
5 joint pain in the hands, hips, knees and feet (Finney et al., 2017), there has been limited
6 investigation into PA levels in adults with multisite peripheral joint pain. Despite the emphasis on the
7 importance of regular PA in the management of joint pain, uptake of exercise as a treatment for
8 their pain appears to be underutilised, with predominate reliance on pharmacological treatment
9 (Healey et al. 2018). In adults with at least two sites of joint pain, only 30% participate in exercise as
10 treatment compared to 95% that report regular use of at least one analgesic medications (Raja et al.,
11 2016). There has been no study to date investigating the levels of PA in those with multisite joint
12 pain and the relationships between multisite peripheral joint pain, levels of PA and joint pain
13 symptoms or health outcomes.

14 The clinical guidelines that recommend PA as a core treatment for OA acknowledged many adults
15 will have OA in multiple sites (NICE, 2014). Currently, it is unclear what the uptake of PA is in UK
16 adults with multisite peripheral joint pain. The aim of this study was to determine levels of PA in
17 those with single-site and multisite peripheral joint pain (pain in two or more sites of the hands,
18 hips, knees or feet) compared to similar aged adults with no reported joint pain.

19

20

21 **Methods**

22 *Design and participants*

23 Secondary analysis was conducted of the cross-sectional population postal survey which was part of
24 the 'Managing Osteoarthritis in Consultations' MOSAICS study (Dziedzic et al., 2014). This study was

1 reported in accordance with the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in
2 Epidemiology (STROBE) guidelines for cross-sectional studies (Von Elm et al., 2007). The survey was
3 mailed to 28,443 adults aged 45 years and over, registered at eight participating general practices in
4 the West Midlands and North West of England between May 2011 and April 2012. General practice
5 characteristics varied in terms of: number of registered patients; number of clinical staff; practice
6 location (which included both urban and rural settings); and levels of local area deprivation. General
7 practitioners had an opportunity to screen and exclude ineligible participants for example those
8 unable to provide informed consent or had a recent family bereavement (Dziedzic et al., 2014).
9 Those flagged as excluded from research in that practice were excluded and those contacting the
10 research team indicating they did not wish to take part in the study were not contacted again. The
11 postal survey was mailed in a two-stage mailing process. The first stage included a letter of invitation
12 sent to participants and information about the MOSAICS study, and the survey. After two weeks,
13 non-responders were sent a reminder survey and letter. The study was approved by the North West
14 Midlands 1 Research Ethics Committee, Cheshire, UK, as part of the MOSAICS study (ISRCTN
15 number: ISRCTN06984617) (Dziedzic et al., 2014).

16 *Data collection*

17 The population survey collected participants' demographic information (age, gender, self-reported
18 height and weight), area deprivation for participants' postcode was measured in quintiles using the
19 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (Noble, Wright, Smith, & Dibben, 2006). The survey included
20 items asking participants if they experienced '*any pain in the last year in or around the hands, hips,*
21 *knees or feet?*' Participants were asked to score the average level of pain intensity on a 0-10
22 numerical rating scale in correspondence to each painful peripheral joint. Level of PA was measured
23 using the Short Telephone Activity Rating (STAR) scale (Matthews et al., 2005). The STAR
24 questionnaire is a short 3-item questionnaire, which measures frequency and duration of moderate
25 and vigorous activity. The STAR questionnaire categorises respondents into three levels of PA;

1 inactive (no moderate- or vigorous- intensity activity in a normal week), somewhat active (some
2 moderate- or vigorous- intensity, but insufficient amounts to recommended levels) and active to
3 recommended levels (moderate intensity for 5 d·wk⁻¹ and 30 min·d⁻¹ (5 30) or vigorous intensity for
4 3 d·wk⁻¹ and 20 min·d⁻¹) (Haskell et al., 2007). The STAR has demonstrated test-retest reliability and
5 construct validity in relation to objective activity monitoring in general adult populations (Matthews
6 et al., 2005). Those that did not complete the STAR in the population survey were excluded from this
7 analysis. Other measures in the survey included general health status measured using the SF-12 in
8 the physical component scale (PCS) and mental component scale (MCS)(Ware Jr, Kosinski, & Keller,
9 1996) and health-related quality of life (HRQoL) using the EQ-5D 3L (EuroQoL, 1990).

10 *Statistical analysis*

11 Descriptive statistics were used in stratified data by the number of joint pain sites; those with no
12 joint pain, single site joint pain, joint pain in any two sites, any three sites or all four sites, displaying
13 participants' demographic data and reported outcomes. Proportions or means and standard
14 deviations (SD) were calculated for each participants' demographic data or reported outcome. In
15 participants with more than one pain site, average pain intensity was calculated as a mean score
16 across the different sites of joint pain (Finney et al., 2015). Mean difference in demographics and
17 reported outcomes between groups were tested using an unadjusted one-way ANOVA, and linear
18 trends were tested using linear contrasts. The association between the number of joint pain sites
19 (those with no reported joint pain taken as the reference group) and levels of PA was investigated
20 using proportional odds ordinal regression model. Adjustments for potential confounding were
21 made in covariates: age, gender, deprivation score and BMI were used in the ordinal regression
22 models that compared levels of PA between joint pain groups.

23 In those with self-reported joint pain, we compared the general health status (PCS and MCS), HRQoL
24 and average pain intensity across the levels of PA within each number of joint pain sites using
25 unadjusted one-way ANOVA. Linear trends between levels of PA within each joint pain group were

1 tested using linear contrasts. All analyses were conducted using STATA v14.1. An alpha level of 5%
2 was used.

3

4 **Results**

5 The MOSAICS population survey was sent to 28,443 eligible adults, 15,083 (53%) returned the
6 survey, of those 14,796 (98%) completed the STAR questionnaire and were included in this study.
7 There were 11,777 (79%) responders that reported peripheral joint pain (**figure 1**). **Table 1** shows
8 the characteristics and self-reported levels of PA of the responders that returned the survey and
9 completed the STAR questionnaire. Single site peripheral joint pain was most commonly reported
10 (31%), followed by two-site (30%), three-site (21%), and four-site peripheral joint pain being
11 reported the least (18%). In those reporting any peripheral joint pain; 8,101 (69%) reported multisite
12 peripheral joint pain. Overall, as the number of reported sites of peripheral joint pain increased so
13 did age, BMI and average pain intensity. Physical and mental health status and HRQoL worsened as
14 the number of reported site peripheral joint pain increased. Participants who reported peripheral
15 joint pain in three or four sites were more likely to live in areas of higher deprivation compared to
16 those who reported no peripheral joint pain.

17 *Self-reported levels of physical activity*

18 Responders with no peripheral joint pain reported being the most active compared to those
19 reporting peripheral joint pain. Those with more sites of joint pain were less likely to be categorized
20 as “active” with odd ratios ranging from OR=0.91 (0.83-0.99, 95%CI) for one site of joint pain to
21 OR=0.47 (0.42-0.53, 95%CI) for those with all four sites of joint pain (**table 1**). When examining levels
22 of PA in those with single site joint pain, only those with pain in the hips reported a significantly
23 lower levels of PA compared to those with no reported joint pain (OR=0.82, 0.70-0.96 95%CI) (**table**
24 **2**).

1 Average joint pain intensity was lower in those reporting higher levels of PA for each of the joint pain
2 groups (**table 3**). Those with four-sites of joint pain and scored as inactive reported the highest
3 average pain intensity across all joint pain groups (6.4 ± 2.1) and those with one-site of joint pain
4 scored as active reported the lowest average pain intensity (3.2 ± 2.1). Linear trends for average pain
5 intensity and PA levels were observed within all groups of joint pain (**table 3**). The same patterns
6 were shown for PCS, MCS and HRQoL with higher scores for those that reported higher levels of PA
7 across all single and multisite joint pain groups (**table 3**).

8 **Discussion**

9 *Main findings*

10 This study investigated the self-report levels of PA in those with and without multisite peripheral
11 joint pain. Overall, levels of PA tended to be highest among those who reported no peripheral joint
12 pain. Those with fewer sites of joint pain were more likely to be categorised as “active” compared to
13 those with more sites of joint pain. Self-report levels of physical inactivity ranged from 10.2% in
14 those with no joint pain to 22.9% in joint pain with all four sites. When comparing location of pain in
15 those with single-site peripheral joint pain to those with no joint pain, only those experiencing hip
16 pain were significantly less likely to be more physically active, although non-significant trends
17 towards lower levels of PA were observed among the other pain sites. This suggests that while hip
18 pain could be associated with lower levels of PA, location of different sites of joint pain were not
19 significantly related to different levels of PA. Although only a subgroup of the study’ responders
20 were used to explore the relation between levels of PA and different locations of single site joint
21 pain. There were associations between pain intensity and levels of PA within those reporting one,
22 two, three and four sites of peripheral joint pain. Adults with more pain sites were less active and
23 had poorer physical health, mental health, HRQoL and higher average pain intensity. For example,
24 those with four sites of joint pain that reported as physically active had lower average pain intensity
25 scores compared to those with three sites scoring somewhat active and inactive.

1 *Comparison with other studies*

2 While this is the only study to-date that has explored different levels of PA in multisite joint pain,
3 some of the findings from this study show similarities with other studies exploring multisite pain and
4 clinical outcomes. Similar to our findings, other studies have shown multisite joint pain to be
5 associated with more pain intensity, lower well-being and poorer health status (Dragiotti et al., 2017;
6 Finney et al., 2017).

7 Self-report levels of PA in our study showed a similar pattern with other studies comparing those
8 with joint pain or OA to general populations; those with peripheral joint pain reporting lower overall
9 levels of PA compared to those with no reported pain. However, the sample in this study appeared
10 to have reported higher levels of PA compared to other studies measuring PA in adults with knee or
11 hip OA (Herbolsheimer et al., 2016; Shim et al., 2018; Thoma et al., 2018; Timmermans et al., 2019).
12 Within those with one to four sites of peripheral joint pain; 10-23% reported as inactive, and 36-53%
13 reported as active compared to other studies in knee OA where objectively measured levels of
14 inactivity were 61% and 25% were active (Sliepen et al., 2018).

15 *Strengths and limitations of the study*

16 There are a number of strengths and limitations of this study. The strengths included the large
17 survey sample size allowing for adequate precision in reporting estimates across multiple groups (for
18 example measuring the association between levels of PA and number of joint pain sites). When
19 measuring for possible relationships between PA, different levels of single-multisite peripheral joint
20 pain and health-related outcomes, the risk of confounding was reduced by adjusting for age, gender
21 and BMI; and the general practices participating in this survey were selected to be generally
22 representative of the UK adult population as a whole (Dziedzic et al., 2014).

23 Limitations included the use of the STAR questionnaire, which had been closely related to objective
24 measures of PA in adults (Matthew et al., 2005), had not been validated in older adults with joint

1 pain and so may have overestimated true levels of PA in this study sample. This is likely, as other
2 self-report measures have been shown to overestimate levels of PA in adults with peripheral joint
3 pain when compared to objective measures. This could be the case for the STAR questionnaire and
4 any self-report measures of PA in OA may also be influenced by social desirability bias, recall bias or
5 over- and underestimation of activities (Casartelli, Bolszak, Impellizzeri, & Maffiuletti, 2015; Healey
6 et al., 2020). As our study measured multisite peripheral joint pain, pain intensity for multiple sites
7 were measured for each individual site, we approached this with mean values as the most
8 representative of an individuals' global experience of joint pain, compared to taking the highest
9 value of pain intensity (Finney et al., 2017). Finally, we are unable to infer causation from this cross-
10 sectional study due to a lack of temporal data. Despite these limitations, the main findings of this
11 study are supported by other related studies and remain relevant (Dragioti et al., 2017; Finney et al.,
12 2017; Sliepen et al., 2018).

13 *Implications for research and clinical practice*

14 The findings from this study suggest that multisite joint pain is common and those with it are at high
15 risk of having lower levels of PA. People with multisite joint pain attributed to OA are an important
16 group to target to increase PA levels and improve general health. However, the presence of multisite
17 pain may also be an important barrier to regular PA and further studies could investigate this
18 relationship over time and explore how best to tailor future PA interventions to increase PA levels
19 for multisite peripheral joint pain. This is important given the lack of evidence around the
20 management of multisite peripheral joint pain (Finney et al., 2016). A positive clinical message that
21 emerges from our study is that despite high levels of pain intensity and multisite pain many adults
22 did remain active and qualitative research learning *how* this sub-group does so may provide insight
23 to help tailor interventions for others with multisite joint pain.

24 *Conclusion*

1 Peripheral joint pain is common among adults aged 45 years and over, with the majority of those
2 having pain in more than one site. Those with peripheral joint pain are more likely to be less
3 physically active compared to adults with no reported joint pain and those with more sites of joint
4 pain the most likely to be less physically active. Health providers need to be aware of the clinical
5 benefits of PA for those with peripheral joint pain in outcomes such as pain intensity, physical
6 health, mental health and HRQoL, but adults with multisite joint pain would potentially benefit more
7 given observed inequality for health related outcomes given their low PA levels.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics of demographic and reported outcomes across different joint pain groups

	No joint pain (n=3019)	Joint pain in one site (n=3676)	Joint pain in two sites (n=3522)	Joint pain in three sites (n=2656)	Joint pain in four sites (n=1923)	Difference between group	Linear trend
Age, mean (SD)	62.3 (11.2)	63.0 (11.1)	63.7 (11.0)	64.7 (11.1)	66.2 (10.9)	F=45.3 p<0.001	F=175.4 p<0.001
BMI Kg.m², mean (SD)	24.5 (7.5)	25.3 (7.2)	25.9 (8.0)	26.1 (9.0)	26.5 (9.9)	F=26.0 p<0.001	F=98.1 p<0.001
IMD quintile, n (%)							
1 (most affluent)	969 (32.1)	1230 (33.5)	1099 (31.2)	726 (27.3)	451 (23.5)		
2	882 (29.2)	1029 (28.0)	1003 (28.5)	805 (30.3)	520 (27.0)		
3	623 (20.6)	763 (20.8)	710 (20.2)	533 (20.1)	442 (23.0)		
4	333 (11.0)	416 (11.3)	418 (11.9)	341 (12.8)	279 (14.5)		
5 (most deprived)	212 (7.0)	238 (6.5)	292 (8.3)	251 (9.5)	231 (12.0)		
Adjusted OR (95%CI)		0.96 (0.88-1.05)	1.07 (0.99-1.17)	1.23 (1.12-1.36)	1.58 (1.43-1.76)		
Average pain intensity, mean (SD)	NA	3.5 (2.3)	3.9 (2.1)	4.4 (2.1)	5.2 (2.2)	F=280.0 p<0.001	F=821.8 p<0.001
Health status, mean (SD)							
PCS	50.8 (12.6)	47.6 (13.3)	43.9 (13.6)	39.3 (14.5)	33.7 (14.3)	F=606.8 p<0.001	F=292.1 p<0.001
MCS	51.3 (12.8)	50.4 (12.9)	49.0 (13.0)	46.9 (14.0)	43.9 (14.9)	F=117.7 p<0.001	F=442.9 p<0.001
EQ-5D, mean (SD)	0.91 (0.16)	0.83 (0.19)	0.74 (0.22)	0.65 (0.28)	0.52 (0.33)	F=150.5 p<0.001	F=469.3 p<0.001
Level of PA, n (%)							
Inactive	307 (10.2)	356 (9.7)	437 (12.4)	400 (15.1)	440 (22.9)		
Somewhat active	1100 (36.4)	1501 (40.8)	1552 (44.0)	1190 (44.8)	838 (43.6)		
Active	1612 (53.4)	1819 (49.5)	1533 (43.5)	1066 (40.1)	645 (33.5)		
Adjusted OR (95%CI)		0.91 (0.83-0.99)	0.74 (0.67-0.81)	0.65 (0.59-0.72)	0.47 (0.42-0.53)		

Key: Values in **bold** represent statistical significance $p < 0.05$. SD=standard deviation, BMI= body mass index, IMD=indices of multiple deprivation, OR=odd ratio, PCS=physical component score, MCS=mental component score, EQ-5D= EuroQol 5-dimensions, PA= physical activity.

Table 2. Levels of self-reported physical activity in participants that reported no peripheral joint pain or a single peripheral joint pain by site.

	Inactive, n (%)	Somewhat active, n (%)	Active, n (%)	Adjusted OR (95%CI)
No peripheral joint pain (n=3019)	307 (10.2)	1100 (36.4)	1612 (53.4)	
Hip pain only (n=724)	94 (13.0)	283 (39.1)	347 (47.9)	0.82 (0.70-0.96)
Knee pain only (n=1471)	130 (8.8)	610 (41.5)	731 (49.7)	0.91 (0.81-1.02)
Hand pain only (n=798)	63 (7.9)	334 (41.9)	401 (50.3)	0.97 (0.84-1.12)
Foot pain only (n=683)	69 (10.1)	274 (40.1)	340 (49.8)	0.89 (0.77-1.06)

Key: Values in **bold** represent statistical significance $p < 0.05$. OR=odd ratio.

Table 3. Pain intensity, health status and quality of life across levels of physical activity within different joint pain groups.

	Inactive	Somewhat active	Active	Difference between group	Linear trend
Pain intensity, mean (SD)					
One site	4.4 (2.7)	3.6 (2.3)	3.2 (2.1)	F=41.4, p<0.001	F=415.6, p<0.001
Two sites	4.7 (2.3)	4.1 (2.1)	3.6 (1.9)	F=54.4, p<0.001	F=448.8, p<0.001
Three sites	5.5 (2.3)	4.5 (2.0)	3.9 (1.9)	F=93.7, p<0.001	F=722.1, p<0.001
Four sites	6.4 (2.1)	5.1 (2.0)	4.4 (2.0)	F=131.9, p<0.001	F=252.9, p<0.001
Health status PCS, mean (SD)					
No joint pain	41.6 (16.9)	49.8 (13.1)	53.3 (10.1)	F=127.3, p<0.001	F=235.2, p<0.001
One site	37.4 (16.2)	46.4 (13.2)	50.5 (11.5)	F=169.3, p<0.001	F=313.1, p<0.001
Two sites	33.6 (15.7)	42.5 (13.2)	48.3 (11.3)	F=240.9, p<0.001	F=471.0, p<0.001
Three sites	27.7 (14.2)	38.4 (13.6)	44.8 (12.5)	F=243.3, p<0.001	F=471.2, p<0.001
Four sites	24.4 (11.7)	33.6 (12.9)	40.2 (14.2)	F=190.1, p<0.001	F=375.1, p<0.001
Health status MCS, mean (SD)					
No joint pain	46.2 (16.2)	50.2 (13.5)	52.9 (11.2)	F=42.8, p<0.001	F=84.5, p<0.001
One site	46.0 (15.8)	49.5 (12.8)	51.9 (12.1)	F=37.1, p<0.001	F=73.0, p<0.001
Two sites	43.4 (13.1)	48.4 (13.1)	51.3 (11.5)	F=66.3, p<0.001	F=128.4, p<0.001
Three sites	39.8 (16.4)	46.0 (13.8)	50.4 (12.1)	F=93.0, p<0.001	F=183.4, p<0.001
Four sites	37.4 (15.2)	44.4 (13.9)	47.6 (14.6)	F=66.7, p<0.001	F=125.7, p<0.001
EQ-5D, mean (SD)					
No joint pain	0.79 (0.27)	0.90 (0.14)	0.94 (0.11)	F=127.5, p<0.001	F=246.3, p<0.001
One site	0.69 (0.27)	0.81 (0.19)	0.87 (0.15)	F=140.9, p<0.001	F=263.6, p<0.001
Two sites	0.57 (0.30)	0.73 (0.22)	0.81 (0.17)	F=213.5, p<0.001	F=408.6, p<0.001
Three sites	0.38 (0.35)	0.64 (0.25)	0.75 (0.19)	F=298.7, p<0.001	F=596.6, p<0.001
Four sites	0.25 (0.34)	0.54 (0.30)	0.67 (0.22)	F=267.2, p<0.001	F=526.8, p<0.001

Key: Values in **bold** represent statistical significance $p<0.05$. SD=standard deviation, PCS=physical component score, MCS=mental component score, EQ-5D=

EuroQol 5-dimensions.

Figure 1. Flowchart of responses to the MOSAICS population survey

