

Physical Activity Patterns and Status of Adolescent Learners from Low and Middle Socio-Economic Status Communities in Kwazulu-Natal Province

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Abstract : A sedentary lifestyle and insufficient physical activity (PA) increases the risk of developing chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Knowing the PA levels and patterns of adolescents from different socio-economic backgrounds is important to direct programs at schools and in communities to prevent NCDs risk factors, which can have long-term effects on the health of the adolescents. The study aimed to investigate adolescent PA levels, patterns, and influencing factors (age, gender, socio-economic status). The 353 participants (203 females and 150 males) from eight low socio-economic (LSES) and middle socio-economic (MSES) public secondary schools completed a Physical Activity Questionnaire for Adolescents (PAQ-A). The PAQ-A is a seven day recall instrument that assesses general estimates of PA levels and patterns for high school learners in Grades 9-12 and provides a summary of physical activity scores derived from seven items, each scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The seven items were PA during spare time and five domains (during physical education, lunch break, after school, in the evenings, on the weekend) and selecting one statement that described participant's physical activity behaviour. The PA Levels ($\bar{x}=2.61$, $SD=.74$) were below the international PA cut-off points of $\bar{x}=2.75$. Physical education (PE) showed the highest PA score ($\bar{x}=3.05$, $SD=1.21$) and lunch break showed the lowest PA score ($\bar{x}=2.09$, $SD=1.14$). Positive correlations occurred between PA levels and SES ($r=.122$, $p=0.022$), and PA and gender ($r=.223$, $p=0.0001$). LSES participant's PA score was significantly lower ($\bar{x}=2.52$; $SD=.73$) than those from MSES ($\bar{x}=2.70$; $SD=.74$, $p=0.022$). Adolescents from low and middle socio-economic status communities are not sufficiently active. Their average PA score of 2.61 is below the PAQ-A global criterion referenced cut-off points of 2.75, which is considered sufficiently physically active for adolescents to ensure both short- and long-term health benefits. As adolescents are not sufficiently active, collaborative school and community PA programs need to be implemented to supplement physical education in order to prevent short- and long-term health problems.

Keywords : adolescents, health promotion, physical activity, physical education

Conference Title : ICPAES 2019 : International Conference on Physical Activity and Exercise Sciences

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : September 25-26, 2019