

Physical Activity in Pacific Adolescent Girls with a Physical Disability

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Abstract : While adolescence can be a challenging time, it may also be a time of opportunity. Whereas adolescents with a physical disability negotiate the adolescent developmental stage with similar issues to able-bodied adolescents, they additionally may encounter developmental problems which may impede their adulthood. In part due to the restricted opportunities disabled adolescents experience, they may experience difficulty with mastering this developmental stage. As is well documented, health and wellbeing are positively associated with participating in physical activity. However, the little research available suggested that Pacific adolescents generally are participating in less physical activity than adolescents of other ethnic groups. **Objective/Study:** The main aim of the study (from a larger mixed method study), was to explore physical activity participation in Pacific adolescent girls with a physical disability in relation to their physiological and psychological wellbeing. The qualitative descriptive study comprised of seven interviews with Pacific adolescent girls and their mothers in a family setting and also included the providers of services to Pacific girls with a physical disability. Including the providers of disability services allowed the researchers to identity a further understanding into challenges of participation for the Pacific adolescent girls and their families while the girls were attempting to participate in physical activity. The purpose of the talanoa (face-to-face interviews that were deemed informal) was to identify partaking and factors influencing participation in physical activity, whilst listening to the voices of the participants. The stories revealed the multitude of factors that influenced physical activity for the Pacific girls with a physical disability. **Results:** Findings from the qualitative descriptive study found that through physical activity, the Pacific adolescent girls with a physical disability experienced benefits from participation. The findings suggested that these girls wanted to participate in physical activity and clearly indicated the physical activities they preferred. Amongst the physiological and psychological benefits of the Pacific adolescents engaging in physical activity, the adolescents were able to develop positive social relationships, experience autonomy, and generally, their self-worth improved while building confidence. Nevertheless, the adolescents experienced a multitude of factors impeding their engagement in physical activity including cultural stigmas. Their participation was influenced by the interplay of a range of gender, cultural, age-related (adolescence) and socio-economic factors alongside policy and structurally related constraints. **Conclusion:** Physical activity has the potential to improve the general physiological and psychological health of all adolescents. It should be prioritised particularly in vulnerable populations where they may have limited access. As the Pacific adolescents with a physical activity are dependent on their families for physical activity participation, it is imperative the family be included and consulted. To increase participation, and reduce sedentary behaviours, factors influencing both participation and non-participation need to be considered.

Keywords : Pacific adolescent girls, physical activity, physical disability, qualitative descriptive study

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