



Original article

# Student and parental perception about physical activity in children and adolescents



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 24 October 2013

Accepted 20 May 2015

### Keywords:

Health  
Sedentary lifestyle  
Adolescent

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This study aimed to investigate the association between physical activity levels of children and adolescents and the perception of their parents or guardians regarding physical activity of their children.

**Method:** A total of 306 subjects, aged eight to eighteen years, living in a city in southern Brazil, participated in the study. The physical activity of schoolchildren was measured using the Physical Activity Questionnaire for Children. The Chi-squared test examined possible associations between the independent and dependent variables. Poisson regression was used to calculate the prevalence ratio and confidence intervals of 95%.

**Results:** The prevalence of schoolchildren who were insufficiently physically active was 86.6%. The incidence of physically active schoolchildren was lower in females. Both the children who perceived themselves as more physically active than their peers and those with guardians who perceived them as active, were more active.

**Conclusions:** Intervention programs to promote physical activity in schoolchildren should consider the perception of the schoolchildren and their parents.

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## Percepción de estudiantes y de los padres acerca de la actividad física habitual en niños y adolescentes

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** Este estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar la asociación entre los niveles de actividad física de niños y adolescentes y la percepción de sus padres o tutores sobre la actividad física de sus hijos.

**Método:** Un total de 306 sujetos, entre ocho y dieciocho años, del sur de Brasil, participaron en el estudio. La actividad física de los escolares se midió a través del Cuestionario de Actividad Física para Niños. La prueba de Chi-cuadrado examinó las posibles asociaciones entre las variables independientes y dependientes. La regresión de Poisson fue utilizada para calcular la razón de prevalencia e intervalos de confianza de 95%.

**Resultados:** La prevalencia de los escolares que estaban insuficientemente físicamente activos fue del 86.6%. La incidencia en de los escolares físicamente activos fue menor en las mujeres. Tanto los niños que

### Palabras clave:

Salud  
Estilo de vida sedentario  
Adolescente

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perciben a sí mismos como más activos físicamente que sus compañeros y los que tienen los padres que los perciben como activos, fueron más activos.

**Conclusiones:** Los programas de intervención para promover la actividad física en escolares deben considerar la percepción de los alumnos y sus padres.

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## Percepção dos estudantes e pais sobre atividade física em crianças e adolescentes

### R E S U M O

#### Palavras-chave:

Saúde

Estilo de vida sedentário

Adolescente

**Introdução:** Este estudo teve como objetivo investigar a associação entre níveis de atividade física de crianças e adolescentes e a percepção de seus pais ou responsáveis quanto à atividade física dos seus filhos.

**Método:** Participaram do estudo um total de 306 indivíduos, com idades entre 8 e 18 anos, de uma cidade do sul do Brasil. A atividade física dos escolares foi mensurada por meio do Questionário de Atividade Física para Crianças. O teste do qui-quadrado analisou as possíveis associações entre as variáveis independentes e dependentes. A regressão de Poisson foi utilizada para calcular a razão de prevalência com um intervalo de confiança de 95%.

**Resultados:** A prevalência de escolares insuficientemente ativos fisicamente foi de 86.6%. A ocorrência de escolares fisicamente ativos foi menor em garotas. Tanto as crianças que se perceberam como mais ativas fisicamente do que os seus colegas, quanto aquelas com pais que as perceberam como ativas, eram mais ativas.

**Conclusão:** Programas de intervenção para promover a atividade física em escolares devem considerar a percepção dos alunos e seus pais.

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## Introduction

The current literature presents that practicing the recommended levels of physical activity is beneficial to muscular fitness, to individuals with diabetes mellitus and for cardiovascular health<sup>1</sup> and individuals who practice more physical activity seem to be less prone to cardiovascular risks and many other diseases that might lead to disability or death.<sup>1,2</sup> Practicing physical activity at the school age is imperative, because it is a factor that contributes to increased physical activity in adulthood,<sup>3</sup> and parents or guardians might have an important role on their children's physical activity.<sup>4–8</sup>

In Brazil, high levels of physical inactivity in children and adolescents were reported in the southern<sup>9</sup> and other regions.<sup>10</sup> Due to this, different types of interventions have been presented and suggested<sup>11,12</sup> in the literature and urgent strategies should aim to increase levels of activity in youth. Social support represents a type of functional interaction between parents and children,<sup>13</sup> and the knowledge of parents or guardians about their children's behavior regarding the practice of physical activity seems to play an important role in the active behavior of children.<sup>14–17</sup>

Previous Brazilian studies investigating children and adolescents influences and determinants for enhancing physical activity practice have focused on school-based programs, socioeconomic variables or neighborhood conditions.<sup>10</sup> There is a lack of studies presenting information regarding parental influences on physical activity levels of their children. The way parents perceive their children's physical activity might encourage them to motivate their children to be more active or make them negligent in this matter, and these mechanisms should be investigated.<sup>8</sup>

Understanding and monitoring these mechanisms, especially the perception of parents and children about their physical activity, will contribute to the development of intervention programs for physical activity and health promotion in the community

according to recommendations in the current literature,<sup>11,18</sup> specifically in Brazil.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the association between physical activity levels of children and adolescents and the perception of their parents or guardians regarding physical activity of their children.

## Method

This study had a cross-sectional design and followed all guidelines and norms that regulate ethics in research in Brazil. The protocols of this study were approved by the local Ethics Committee on Research. The sample was chosen from one public school based in the town of Londrina, in the south of Brazil, with 2239 students enrolled in that school year and no formula was used for the sample size calculation. There were 306 student participants, consisting of 145 males and 161 females with a mean age of 12.8 ( $\pm 1.8$ ) years, and 306 parents or guardians, 72 male and 234 female. Students eligible to compose the sample were enrolled from 3rd grade to 8th grade (9–15 years old).

### Physical activity evaluation

The physical activity of students was measured using the Physical Activity Questionnaire for Children (PAQ-C); its administration and scoring are described elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> A translated and then modified version to exclude physical activities not practiced in Brazil<sup>19</sup> was used in this study. In brief, this instrument investigates the amount of moderate and intense physical activity carried out by children in the seven days prior to completing the questionnaire. It is composed of 13 questions about the practice of sports and games, including physical activities at school and during leisure time, including weekends. Each question has a value of 1–5 and the final score is obtained by averaging the responses, ranging from

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