



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Influence of school health promotion on the life habits of schoolchildren[☆]



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Health promotion;
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Abstract

Introduction: In recent decades, attention has been directed at global theories that attempt to prevent childhood obesity by exposing them to healthy environments. The aim of this study was to analyse the influence of health-promoting environments in primary schools in Logroño (La Rioja, Spain) on the habits of school children.

Methods: The directors of the 31 primary schools in the city completed a questionnaire which examined the health promotion activities of their schools. In addition, anthropometric measurements, adherence to the Mediterranean diet, and sedentary and physical activity habits were recorded from a representative sample of 329 schoolchildren in the sixth year of primary education (11–12 year-olds).

Results: The majority of schools had developed nutritional and/or physical activity programs (77.4% and 61.3%, respectively); however, teachers had generally not received specific training in that area. Guidelines regarding healthy habits were not formally included in the School Educational Project. Physical activity, which was greater amongst boys ($P < .001$), was mostly promoted after school hours. The major influences on school children's physical activity and dietary habits of the children were training of teachers, existence of guidelines, and access to sports grounds ($P < .05$).

Conclusions: Although further research is required, this study shows that certain modifiable aspects in the organisational or school environment can influence the habits of school children at a fundamental stage of their development.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

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¿Influye la promoción de la salud escolar en los hábitos de los alumnos?**Resumen**

Introducción: En las últimas décadas, han cobrado importancia las teorías globales que tratan de prevenir la obesidad mediante ambientes favorecedores de opciones saludables. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar la influencia de los entornos promotores de la salud de las escuelas de Logroño (La Rioja, España) sobre los hábitos de sus escolares.

Métodos: La promoción de la salud de las 31 escuelas de la ciudad fue valorada mediante un cuestionario que completaron los directivos de cada centro. Por otro lado, se valoraron variables individuales de una muestra representativa de 329 escolares de sexto curso de Educación Primaria (11–12 años) de las citadas escuelas: medidas antropométricas, adhesión a la dieta mediterránea y hábitos sedentarios y de práctica física.

Resultados: La mayoría de los centros desarrollaba programas de nutrición y/o actividad física (el 77,4 y el 61,3%, respectivamente), aunque, en general, su profesorado no recibía formación al respecto. Las directrices para favorecer hábitos saludables no solían recogerse en el Proyecto Educativo de Centro y la actividad física, cuyo nivel fue mayor en los chicos ($p < 0,001$), era promovida principalmente tras el horario escolar. A pesar de ello, la formación del profesorado, la concreción de directrices y el acceso a las pistas polideportivas influyeron positivamente sobre los hábitos de práctica física y alimentación de los escolares ($p < 0,05$).

Conclusiones: Aunque más investigación es necesaria, nuestro estudio demostró que aspectos como la formación y la coordinación de los maestros o la presencia de pistas deportivas podrían conllevar beneficios sobre los hábitos de los alumnos en una etapa fundamental para la consolidación de los mismos.

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Introduction

The World Health Organization estimates that 35 million children in developing countries and 8 million in developed countries have overweight or obesity, although in relative terms the percentages are higher in developed countries.¹ Childhood obesity requires an interdisciplinary approach addressing the current eating habits and physical activity of our youth.

It has been demonstrated that in children and adolescents physical activity reduces blood cholesterol and lipid levels, hypertension, the risk of metabolic syndrome, overweight and obesity, injuries and symptoms of depression,² and also improves different aspects of mental and social health.³ Unfortunately, the level of physical activity in children and adolescents has declined in recent years.⁴ Meanwhile, a healthy diet has been associated with an increased probability of being active and a decreased probability of sedentary behaviour and obesity.⁵

While many efforts have been made to improve the eating habits and increase the level of physical activity of the younger population, the impact of these efforts on their body composition is not clear.⁶ As a result, new intervention models have been developed with the purpose of providing healthy environments.⁷ In the case of children and adolescents, the school, which has a continuous and intensive contact with them, plays a key role in the environment where they develop, and thus should promote healthy habits.⁸ The World Health Organization is aware of this fact, and has established a series of recommendations,

chief of which are: developing academic curricula that promote physical activity and a healthy diet, managing the food service environments, improving facilities and access to these facilities to promote physical activity, and providing in-service training for school staff.⁹ In Spain, the SESPAS report,¹⁰ which is aimed at the prevention of obesity, also emphasises the importance of intervening in the school setting.

Research on these new models of intervention based on healthy environments has increased significantly, especially in recent years¹¹; however, these studies usually focus on neighbourhood environments as opposed to school settings. Therefore, the aim of our study was to analyse the eating habits and levels of physical activity of schoolchildren. Our secondary goal was to analyse the levels of physical activity of schoolchildren based on their sex.

Methods**Participants**

We designed a cross-sectional study that assessed, on one hand, individual variables related to the students and, on the other, variables related to their school environment. Thus, there were two populations under study:

When it came to the schoolchildren, we obtained a representative sample of students enrolled in the sixth year of primary education (age, 11.7 ± 0.4 years) in the city of Logroño. We randomly selected 372 students from the 31

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