

Differences in physical activity behavior of 5- to 12-year-old children in Switzerland according to demographic and socio-economic factors

Background:

Physical activity (PA) is an important health factor. Understanding children's PA behavior can be helpful to design effective interventions. The purpose of this study was to show differences in children's physical activity behavior according to demographic and socio-economic factors and to identify groups of children who are particularly inactive.

Methods:

Minutes spent on physical and screen-based activities were measured in 432 children aged between 5 and 12 years (mean age = 9.1) in Switzerland by questionnaire filled out by their parents. Among these children, 139 also completed accelerometer measurements. Children's PA behavior according to sex, age, language spoken at school, language spoken at home, income, parental workload and parental education was evaluated. Differences between subgroups were assessed with Mann-Whitney or Kruskal-Wallis tests.

Results:

Boys and girls of all ages showed greater PA on school days than on weekend days. At all ages boys were more active than girls. Furthermore, objective measures showed differences in PA behavior between the three language regions and age on school days.

Conclusions:

The consistent observation of boy's greater PA underscores the need of special intervention programs for girls of all ages. In addition, intervention programs should include the whole family to increase PA on weekend days.