

ASSESSMENT OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF SOME FILIPINO SCHOOLCHILDREN, AGED 9-12 YEARS IN SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN METRO MANILA*

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Background: Physical inactivity has been recognized as a cardiovascular disease risk factor. In the Philippines, there is an emerging problem of overnutrition, overweight and obesity among children as revealed in the results of the 2003 National Nutrition Survey. One of the major reasons stated for the development of obesity was sedentary lifestyle. There is a need to reappraise the physical activity (PA) of schoolchildren as an initial step in formulating guidelines for prevention programs and recommendations for an effective physical education program in schools. To date there are a few studies on PA assessment among Filipino schoolchildren. **Objective:** To determine the PA of schoolchildren, aged 9-12 years, enrolled in private and public schools. **Methods:** A questionnaire, adapted from *Kowalski et al*, to assess the levels of PA (i.e. inactive, moderately active, and active) on a Physical Education (PE) day, non-PE day and on a weekend, was tested for validity and reliability. Using a scoring system, patterned after Pate's PA record, the classification of scores used was as follows: 1-7, less active; 8-14, moderately active; and >14, active. Using stratified cluster sampling, with the type of school (private and public) as the first stratum and the grade levels (Grade 4, 5, and 6) as the second stratum, all the children from a randomly selected section for every grade level in four schools were included in the study. The supervised, self-administered questionnaire was accomplished by 840 schoolchildren, with almost equal distribution from the three grade levels. **Results:** There were more students in the public schools (460) than in the private schools (380) and more female (525) than male students (315). In both gender groups, majority of the children were classified as moderately active and less active in terms of PA level. The proportion of active children was less than 5% in both gender groups, with males being better off than females. The proportion of less active male children was higher in the older than younger age group. There were younger female children who were more active than their older counterparts. The chi-square test of association between levels of physical activity and age groups for each gender was not significant. The mean scores of 7.61 and 7.24 among younger children, and scores of 7.06 and 6.74 among older children, respectively, showed that PA of the children was classified as less active. When data were presented by age level, a moderately active male group (9 years old) was singled out, while the rest of the age groups were less active. Based on age group, comparison of PA between gender groups was not significant. Over all, a significantly higher score was noted among male than female children. Most common activities performed by the children were basketball, walking for exercise, jogging, running, playing tag, hide and seek, and dancing among others. Dancing was the most common PA preferred by male and female children during PE days. For non-PE days, basketball for boys and dancing for girls were the most preferred activities. On weekends, basketball and walking for exercise were the most common PAs for boys and girls, respectively. In general, the proportion of children was more sedentary during weekdays than weekends, engaging in activities such as watching TV, VCD/DVD, and playing video games. About half (49%) watched TV for three to four times a day during weekends. **Conclusion:** It has been shown that schoolchildren, aged 9-12 years, are physically less active, suggesting the need to formulate programs that will enhance participation in regular physical activity, an important component of a healthy lifestyle.

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