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ReBOOT Schools: Equity and Physical Activity across Canada

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Abstract

Background: Physical inactivity is a leading health concern, contributing to worse outcomes (Gaetano, 2016). Children spend around 50% of their waking hours at school (Fox et al., 2004), which makes the school environment the primary opportunity to engage in physical activity (PA). Physical inactivity can be a greater concern for vulnerable and marginalized populations that face unique barriers to PA engagement (Belcher et al., 2010; Longmuir & Bar-Or, 2000; Smyth & Anderson, 2000). The purpose of this cross-sectional study was to examine differences in engagement and perceptions of PA based on factors of marginalization.
Methodology: We recruited 91 children from grades 4 to 8 from four schools in different Canadian provinces (British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Quebec). All children completed the Physical Activity Questionnaire for Older Children or Adolescents based on their age (Kowalski et al., 2004). Additionally, 9 questions measured children's perception of PA on a 4-point Likert scale. This project received ethical approval from the University of Regina and respective school divisions' approval. For analysis, a MANCOVA evaluated the differences in PA engagement and perceptions between genders, ethnicities, and children identifying with an impairment, with age as a covariate (for ethnicity and impairment analysis, groups were split by gender). Another MANCOVA was used to compare differences between locations with gender and age as covariates.
Results & Conclusion: For location, children in Manitoba (n=38) engaged in less PA than in Nova Scotia (n=8; p=.04) and British Columbia (n=14; p=.001). For gender differences, boys (n=46) reported higher engagement in PA (p=.014), were more likely to feel included (p=.048), and liked being physically active more than girls (n=42; p=.013). There were no differences between gender fluid children (n=3; p>.05). Regarding children with impairments, boys with impairments (n=5) engaged in less PA (p=.009) and had a more difficult time getting to physical activities (p=.013) than boys without impairments (n=33). There were no differences between girls with (n=7) and without impairments (n=36). Finally, there were no differences between children of different ethnicities (p>.05). However, when comparing children identifying as white to racialized children; racialized boys (n=33) felt they were worse at various physical activities (i.e., dance and games) than white boys (n=13). In conclusion, we found differences between PA engagement and perceptions for different locations, genders and impairments. Examining differences between factors that can lead to marginalization can help us better create equitable PA programming in schools.

Keywords: children; physical activity; person with impairments; ethnicity; gender

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