

Physical activity of children from a small rural town, South Africa

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Introduction: Physical activity plays an integral role in the normal physical, mental, social and cognitive development of children. One of the main reasons for overweight children in low- and middle-income countries like South Africa is inactivity. This study's aim was to describe the physical activity measured in boys and girls from section 21, quintile 5 pre-primary and primary schools in a small rural South African town and to compare it with recommended international physical activity levels.

Method: Seventy-eight rural children, representing Caucasian and black African children, divided into three age groups, were issued a piezoelectric pedometer for seven complete days. Pedometer data obtained were total steps, aerobic steps, aerobic walking time, calories and distance. Steps per day were compared with international levels. Correlation statistics examined the association between physical activity and adiposity.

Results: Boys in the age groups 9–11 and 12–14 years are statistically more active than girls of the same age ($p = 0.005$ and 0.045 respectively). Although girls' physical activity levels tend to decrease with age, their aerobic activity levels increase with age. This group of rural children's physical activity levels are far lower than the recommended international normative levels. No correlation was found between physical activity and adiposity.

Conclusion: The pedometer data indicated that gender and age influence the activity of children. This group of rural children's physical activity is far less than international normative levels. Nine to 11-year-old boys are the most active boys, and girls of 12–14 years old are the most aerobic active girls in this study, therefore the authors concluded that, to increase physical activity, the age group 9–11 may be the ideal age to focus on for gender-specific intervention programmes.

Keywords: children, descriptive study, pedometer, physical activity, steps per day, South Africa

South African–Cuban Medical Collaboration: students' perceptions of training and perceived competence in clinical skills at a South African institution

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Background: The South African–Cuban Medical Collaboration programme aims to alleviate the critical shortage of practitioners in local South African rural settings. The students who return from Cuban-based facilities in their fourth year experience difficulty, especially in clinical settings, upon joining the MB ChB final-year student programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Attempts to support their skills acquisition for local practice have led to an investigation of their prior clinical skills exposures, the curricular context and exposures in Cuba in which skills had been acquired, and students' perceptions of their competence in clinical skills.

Methods: This descriptive, cross-sectional study explored the clinical experiences of the 2013 cohort of students. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through questionnaires that explored the curricular approach and setting of clinical skills training in Cuba, the students' exposure to clinical skills and their perceptions of their competence at performing these skills.

Results: Students experienced the Cuban curriculum as didactic and lecture intensive as opposed to the systematic, problem-based curriculum offered in South Africa. Clinical training in Cuba occurs in hospital wards while local students first train in a clinical skills laboratory prior to hospital exposures. The majority of students self-reported a lack of clinical exposure to 35 of an overall 75 core-skills list as identified by the undergraduate UKZN curriculum. In addition, they reported an inability to perform 71 of the 75 (95%) skills independently.

Conclusion: This study has highlighted a mismatch between the focus and scope of clinical training offered to students studying in Cuba and those at a South African institution.

Keywords: clinical skills, competence, Cuba, medical education, South Africa