PHYSICAL FITNESS AND THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STATUS OF 15-YEAR-OLD ADOLESCENTS IN A SEMI-URBAN COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Continuous research with regards to physical activity and physical fitness patterns of children is essential for the development and implementation of health promotion programmes. This study aimed to determine the physical fitness (PF) and physical activity (PA) status of 15-year-old adolescent learners from a low socio-economic, semi-urban community in the North-West province of South Africa, and the relationships between PF, PA and distances the children walked to school. Grade 8 learners of two schools were selected for the study: School 1 (N=252), 116 boys; 136 girls, School 2 (N=66), 21 boys; 45 girls. The testing protocol included fitness tests for aerobic endurance, flexibility and body composition and the PDPAR questionnaire to determine PA levels. The results indicated that the boys and girls in School 1 and boys in School 2 were moderately active, while the girls in School 2 showed a significant lower PA level. Longer commuting distances and higher mean physical fitness values were found in School 1, while more hours of watching television were found among boys and girls (p<0.05) in School 2. Poor strength levels, falling outside the healthy fitness zone, showed negative relationships with aerobic fitness and flexibility. Television viewing time and commuting distances to school appeared to have a moderate influence on the moderate to low PA levels of the total group, and physical activity showed a relationship with higher fitness values. It is recommended that activity intervention strategies must aim to empower adolescents with knowledge and skills to enable them to improve their PA levels and strength.

Key words: Physical fitness; Physical activity; Adolescents; Low socio-economic environment.