

Parent Perceptions of a Children's Physical Activity Initiative in a Rural Community

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Katie F. Leslie, PhD

Kristi King, PhD, CHES

Richard Wilson, DHSc, MPH

Patricia Gagne, PhD

V. Faye Jones, MD, PhD, MSPH

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Learning Objectives

- Describe one way to increase community awareness surrounding physical activity.
- Identify three barriers to adult physical activity in rural communities.

Community Background

- A coalition of community leaders and parents in a rural community organized, applied for, and received grant funding to increase physical activity opportunities for all residents.
- A variety of programs conducted in borrowed spaces are offered year-round
- Strategy to first target children



“...the way to get the adults there is to get the kids there...people are hungry to have things for their kids to do, and while we have them we can try to teach them better nutrition and to be physically active.”

Problem

- Rural adults physically inactive
- Parental influence on physical activity frequently studied
- Parent-child “gatekeeper” model
- Gap in knowledge
- Little research in rural populations
- Problems with implementation and adaptation

Purpose of Study

- ... to assess the influence of child participation in physical activity programs on parent physical activity health behaviors within this rural community.
- This study will contribute to limited literature regarding modeling and bidirectional associations between family members in health behaviors.
- This study may inform other community-based physical activity interventions in rural populations.

Research Questions

- **Research Question 1:** Do parents believe the project has influenced their children's physical activity behaviors?
- **Research Question 2:** Has the project influenced adult physical activity behaviors?
- **Research Question 3:** What is the influence on parent physical activity resulting from child participation in project physical activity programs?
- **Research Question 4:** What are the barriers and enabling factors to participation in adult physical activity?

Methodology

Methodology

- This study seeks to explore the influence of child physical activity on parent physical activity in a rural community
- Qualitative study
- Grounded theoretical approach
- Focus groups and individual interviews with parents of child participants as primary data collection method

Results

Sample

- 21 parents
 - Individual interviews (n = 8)
 - 4 focus groups (n = 13)
- Mean age: 39.2 years (range 27 - 50)
- Mean length in community: 19.3 years (range 7 mo – 48 yrs)
- 100% married
- 95% female
- 6 of the participants met the minimum recommendation of 150 minutes per week of moderate-intense physical activity
- 6 participated in project adult programs
- 40 children (range 1 – 22)
- 58% of kids “Frequent Participants”

Family is Central to Community Identity

- Community Support and Shared Parenting

“It’s a very tight-knit community. And it’s not just worries for our own kid; we’re invested in the whole community, everybody else’s kid.”

- Children Vital to Parent Social Connections

“We all have kids... that’s pretty much what brought us together. My world revolves around my children.”

- Selecting and Sacrificing to Live Here

- New residents choose to settle in community over other areas
- Commuting (57%)

Increased Community Priority in Physical Activity

- Program as Catalyst for Change
 - Awareness
 - Normalize Physical Activity for children
- Schools
 - Key partner
 - Family Fitness Nights

“We’ve done Zumba, yoga, I can’t remember all of them... about 40 families participate.”

- Other Events and Programs
 - Investment in parks & trails
 - Adult fitness classes at library
 - CrossFit facility
 - Community 5K run/walks



Children Influence Parent Physical Activity

- Influence of Child Participation

- *“It has made me more active by making her more active.”*

- Practicing and teaching

- *“It’s been good for us as a family because it gives the kids an opportunity to try different things. I’ve never played soccer as a kid, so it gives us a chance, and so as they’re learning something we go home and we kick the soccer ball around.”*

- Self-Reported Parent Parent Physical Limited (29%)

- Family Physical Activity

- Seasonal- bike rides, walks, community races, water sports, outdoor play

- Video game consoles/fitness DVDs

- Bidirectional Influence

- “50/50” initiation

Barriers to Parent Physical Activity

- Few Indoor Spaces for Adult Physical Activity
 - Seasonal/sporadic
 - Expensive
 - Borrowed spaces

“It’s at the library, and in the room at the front. I don’t want people watching me sweat as they go to checkout books.”

- Project adult programs inconsistent and poorly advertised
- Time Constraints
 - Child project participation adds to this
 - Multiple children
- Lack of Childcare
- Need for Family Space

“A place where you can go and actually take your kids with you. They can do their exercise programs while adults are doing their own. They might not be in the same room, but they’re there together.”

Conclusions and Implications

Research Question 1

Do Parents Believe the Project Influenced Their Children's Physical Activity Behaviors?

- Parents reported increased physical activity and personal development in their children as a result of program participation.
- Previous measures revealed improved physical activity levels and health outcomes among child participants.
- Regularity through structured after school programs
- Social benefits
 - “Sport Sampling”
 - Exposure to role models
 - Social integration

Research Question 2

Has the Project Influenced Adult Physical Activity Behaviors?

- The project has brought an increased awareness of the importance of physical activity to the entire community, including adults
 - New facilities and programs
 - Engagement of community stakeholders
 - Investments in community spaces (active living research)
 - New family and adult fitness events and programs
- However, there is still a lack of programming and accessible spaces for adult physical activity, which limits the impact of the program initiatives on parents in the community.

Research Question 3

What is the Influence on Parent Physical Activity Resulting from Child Participation in Programs?

- When children are introduced to new and different sports, they share these experiences and engage parents in these activities.
- Parents support and encourage their children to be physically active, and are eager to engage in joint activities with their children.
- Conducting adult physical activity programs while child activities are taking place may result in higher rates of adult participation in project fitness programs.

Research Question 4

What are the Barriers and Enabling Factors to Participation in Project's Adult Physical Activity Programs?

- Community Level
 - Increased awareness
 - Lack of access to facilities
- Organizational Level
 - Project provides very limited adult physical activity offerings
 - Variable and poorly promoted.
- Interpersonal Level
 - Families exercise and are active together
 - Children lead/initiate
 - Child scheduling conflicts/lack of childcare

Limitations

- Results specific to this community
 - University partnership
 - Focus on family
- Data were self-reported
- Sample
 - Convenience sample
 - Lack of fathers

Conclusions

- This study serves as an important step in addressing gaps in the literature pertaining to interpersonal health behavioral influences between family members.
- Program effects in increasing child physical activity levels have somewhat “trickled-down” to influence physical activity in parents as well due to the close-knit, family-centered social environment specific to this community.
- Barriers to adult physical activity, including a lack of community spaces for families to be physically active together, were identified.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

- Interventions that engage both children and parents in community spaces and opportunities for joint physical activity may be most effective in promoting adult physical activity in rural communities.
- Findings can inform the development of a follow-up quantitative survey to assess the influence of child participation in program on a larger sample of community parents.
- This model could be replicated in other rural and underserved settings.
 - Tracking changes in child health behaviors and health outcomes
 - Parent physical activity levels, BMI, or other quantitative measures assessed at baseline and followed longitudinally

Questions?