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An After-School Activity Program (ASAP) for Obese Children and Children at Risk for Low Physical Activity

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ABSTRACT

Application of previous research on determinants of physical activity in children to interventions designed to increase activity is essential. This study fills a void in the gap between theories of children's activity and their implementation into practice. The After-School Activity Program (ASAP) was different than most activity interventions in that it was not school-based and that prescribed exercise was not used. Principles from the Social Cognitive Theory were used in the design of the program. Specifically, emphasis was placed on the modeling of appropriate physical activity, perceived physical self-efficacy, autonomy, enjoyment, and development of an environment conducive to physical activity. In general, we attempted to provide a supportive, noncompetitive environment where the children would develop more confidence related to physical activity.

- **Physical Activity:** Moderate decreases were noted in both the control group and intervention group for objective measures of spontaneous physical activity (i.e., activity performed outside of ASAP). This may indicate a slight effect of ASAP on enhancing physical activity compared to control group participants.
- **Aerobic Capacity:** Moderate increases in maximal treadmill time were seen in participants, while control group changes were small to non-existent. Increases in maximal treadmill time without subsequent increases in maximal heart rate indicate increases in aerobic capacity.
- **Body Composition:** Results do not allow us to conclude that ASAP had any effect on body composition. The effect of participant weight loss goals should be more closely examined in future interventions.
- **Perceived Physical Competence:** Small increases in perceived physical competence were seen in the ASAP participants. Positive changes were noted in boys more so than in girls, indicating that ASAP affected the perceived physical competence of boys more than of girls.
- **HDL Cholesterol:** Small improvements in HDL cholesterol were seen for ASAP participants, while control group participants showed a large decrease in HDL cholesterol.

ASAP was beneficial for the children involved. Providing quality aerobic programming, physical activity leaders, enjoyable activities, and an environment conducive to physical activity facilitated the success of ASAP. Qualitative statements from parents praised the staff, reported increased energy levels

in their children, and expressed interest in enrollment in the program if it was continued. More importantly, the children enjoyed the activities, were excited to attend, felt the staff was fun and nice, and would have liked the program to have lasted longer.

For further information on the AAHPERD Research Grant Program,
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