

Promotion of an active lifestyle among children with hearing deficiencies - presentation of an educational program

Promovarea unui stil de viață activ în rândul elevilor cu deficiențe de auz - prezentarea unui program educațional

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Abstract

Background. Promotion of an active lifestyle has important short-term and long-term effects on the health and well-being of children. The World Health Organization recommends a minimum of 1 hour of physical activity every day for children and adolescents.

Aims. The objective of this paper is the presentation of the activities developed in the school year 2016-2017 in order to stimulate an active lifestyle among school children with hearing deficiencies from Romania.

Methods. The activities are part of a comprehensive program for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle - nutrition, involvement in physical activity, smoking prevention - among children with hearing disabilities, which was implemented in two schools from Cluj-Napoca and Sibiu in the school year 2016-2017.

Results. The educational activities targeted both children and their parents. In order to stimulate the involvement of school children in physical activity, they participated in one lesson which presented several issues related to the importance of physical activity, types of physical activities, and examples of exercises they might perform at school or at home in order to be involved in at least one hour of physical activity every day. The lesson used a special video which was created using sign language for people with hearing deficiencies, books with cartoons for children, posters. Moreover, children were encouraged to participate in different physical activities and sport competitions developed at school and out of school. Parents were informed about the educational messages transmitted to children and the way they could help their children through the receipt of letters and newsletters and informative materials found on the web page of the program.

Conclusions. The paper presented the program and offered recommendations for future activities for active lifestyle promotion among children with hearing deficiencies from Romania.

Keywords: physical activity, children with hearing deficiencies.

Rezumat

Premize. Promovarea unui stil de viață sănătos are importante efecte pe termen scurt și termen lung asupra sănătății și stării de bine a copiilor. Organizația Mondială a Sănătății recomandă cel puțin o oră de activitate fizică în fiecare zi, pentru copii și adolescenți.

Obiective. Obiectivul acestui articol este prezentarea activităților realizate în anul școlar 2016-2017, pentru stimularea unui stil de viață activ în rândul elevilor cu deficiențe de auz din România.

Metode. Activitățile sunt parte componentă a unui program de promovare a unui stil de viață sănătos - nutriție, activitate fizică, prevenirea fumatului - în rândul copiilor cu deficiențe de auz, care a fost implementat în anul școlar 2016-2017 în 2 școli din Cluj-Napoca și Sibiu.

Rezultate. Activitățile educaționale s-au adresat copiilor, cât și părinților. Pentru stimularea participării copiilor în activități fizice, aceștia au participat la o lecție care a prezentat diferite aspecte privind importanța activității fizice, tipurile de activități fizice și exemple de exerciții fizice pe care le pot face la școală sau acasă, pentru o oră de activitate fizică în fiecare zi. Lecția a utilizat materiale video, create special pentru grupul țintă folosind limbajul mimico-gestual, cărți cu desene pentru copii, postere. De asemenea, copiii au fost încurajați să participe la activități fizice și competiții sportive realizate la școală sau în afara școlii. Părinții au fost informați despre mesajele educaționale transmise copiilor și asupra modului în care îi pot ajuta prin scrisori, buletine informative și materiale afișate pe pagina web a proiectului.

Concluzii. Articolul prezintă programul educațional și face recomandări pentru viitoare activități de promovare a unui stil de viață activ, în rândul copiilor cu deficiențe de auz din România.

Cuvinte cheie: activitate fizică, copii cu deficiențe de auz.

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Introduction

Physical activity plays an important role in the prevention of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, different forms of cancer, as well as in the management of body weight, prevention of depression and promotion of well-being (***, 2002; Newton et al., 2008; ***, 2010; Lotrean et al., 2011). The physical activity of children and adolescents has short-term and long-term effects on their development and health. Moreover, the habits developed during this period of time have a high chance to continue into adulthood, being very important at this age for building attitudes, skills and actions that promote an active lifestyle (Currie et al., 2008; ***, 2010; Lotrean et al., 2011).

The World Health Organization recommends a minimum of 1 hour of physical activity every day for children and adolescents (***, 2010). Nevertheless, studies from several countries underline the fact that there are varying proportions of children and adolescents who do not respect this recommendation, while promoting an active lifestyle among groups such as children and adolescents with hearing deficiencies is an important challenge (***, 2002; ***, 2010; ***, 2006; Candeias et al., 2010; Lotrean et al., 2011). The health behavior of school aged children was assessed by means of questionnaires regarding the involvement in physical activity of children aged 11, 13 and 15 from several European countries, including Romania. It appeared that in 2014, the proportions of Romanian children fulfilling the recommendations for participation in physical activity were: among 11-year-old children, 39% for boys and 23% for girls (European mean 30% and 21%, respectively), among 13-year-old children, 28% for boys and 16% for girls (European mean 29% and 15%, respectively), and among 15-year-old children, 21% for boys and 11% for girls (European mean 21% and 11%, respectively) (Inchley, 2016).

Several studies underline the need to develop appropriate health education activities for people with hearing deficiencies (Munoz-Baell et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2012; Sadler et al., 2001).

With respect to promotion of an active lifestyle among Romanian children and adolescents, here are several examples (Lotrean, 2015); (1); (2); (3):

a) School based sport activities, competitions and educational programs

There are mandatory curricular hours of sport education for primary, secondary and high school students, while schools and county school inspectorates organize a number of sport activities and competitions.

Health education is also performed in schools, but it is not mandatory, depending on the school directorate and teachers and the possibility to cooperate with several governmental and non-governmental organizations in order to promote a healthy lifestyle, including promotion of appropriate physical activity and sedentary behavior prevention. One example is the program "I do live healthy, too" ("Si eu traiesc sanatos") (2).

b) Mass-media awareness campaigns

There are short messages on TV regarding the importance of performing a minimum of 30 minutes

of physical activity every day, but no comprehensive mass-media campaigns focusing on building motivation and commitment are in place for promotion of an active lifestyle.

c) Health information, education and counseling for some groups of adults

Health professionals are entitled to perform education and counseling with regard to active lifestyle promotion among different groups of patients, but the extent of putting this into place is not documented in Romania. Overloading of the medical staff with clinical activities seriously limits their availability for counseling their patients regarding healthy lifestyle promotion.

d) Technical measures

- Development of sport facilities in parks from different cities, but this is generally found in big cities in Romania

- Building and improving the infrastructure of sport facilities in both urban and rural areas, but there are still gaps between different regions and areas of the country, with rural areas lagging behind urban areas

- Walking facilities in the cities, while in some cities a bicycle line system is in the process of being developed, which is still in the beginning phase.

Hypothesis

It is very important to develop, implement and evaluate messages and activities which promote appropriate involvement in physical activity among different groups of children and adolescents, as an important component of health promotion among these. This paper focuses on developing and implementing activities for active lifestyle promotion among children with hearing deficiencies in Romania. The paper aims to answer the challenges posed by the type of materials and activities that could be developed and implemented in order to shape the knowledge, attitudes, motivation and behavior of children with hearing deficiencies in Romania with regard to their involvement in physical activity, a subject that has been understudied until now.

Material and methods

a) *Period and place of the research*

The activities for the promotion of physical activities are part of a comprehensive program for promotion of a healthy lifestyle - nutrition, involvement in physical activity, smoking prevention - among children with hearing disabilities from Romania. It was implemented in the school year 2016-2017 in 2 schools for children with hearing deficiencies from Cluj-Napoca and Sibiu.

b) *Subjects and groups*

The program was implemented among school children with hearing deficiencies, grades I-VIII, in two schools from Cluj-Napoca and Sibiu. These schools accommodate pupils with hearing deficiencies from the North-Western region of Romania, who spend in school all their time during weekdays and go home for weekends (sometimes) and holidays.

c) *Tests applied*

The paper presented a program for active lifestyle promotion among school children with hearing deficiencies

from Romania and offered recommendations for future activities in the field.

Results

Activities for children with hearing deficiencies

The educational activities targeted both children and their parents.

The activities for children included one lesson, which was aimed at stimulating involvement of school children in physical activity.

The themes presented in the lesson comprised issues related to the importance of physical activity, types of physical activities, and examples of exercises they might perform at school or at home in order to be involved in at least one hour of physical activity every day.

Since a big challenge encountered during activities for children with hearing deficiencies is the creation of educational materials they can understand and find attractive, the lesson used a special video which was created using sign language for people with hearing deficiencies, books with cartoons for children, posters (Fig. 1).

The lesson had the following structure:

- Video presentation using sign language for people with hearing deficiencies
- Activities performed by children alone or in groups
- Video presentation
- Activities performed by children alone or in groups, including performance of several physical activities indicated in the video.

The video included explanations about the importance and the way of performing several types of physical activity. All the explanations were presented by a medical doctor and translated into sign language for people with hearing deficiencies by an adolescent, and were illustrated with pictures. Moreover, the video incorporated several demonstrations of different types of physical exercise that could be performed at school or at home, as well as indications for performing several activities promoting an active lifestyle among pupils. The main message was the necessity of performing one hour of physical activity every day, and the video also offered examples and recommendations aimed at helping pupils to monitor their physical activity (including the use of pedometers) and to build confidence and skills needed for this.

Books for children were also used, synthesizing the main messages transmitted by the video and presenting activities children should perform during the lesson (e.g. activities for analyzing the physical activities performed in the last days, performing physical exercise based on the models presented in the video), as well as suggestions for future activities in order to have an active lifestyle.

Moreover, children were encouraged to participate in different physical activities and sport competitions organized at school and out of school. One example is the participation of pupils from the School for children with hearing deficiencies in Cluj-Napoca in a sport competition organized in May 2017, which involved children both with and without hearing impairment from Cluj-Napoca, as a way to increase their commitment to and appreciation of an active lifestyle.

Activities for parents of children with hearing deficiencies

Parents were informed about the educational messages transmitted to children and the way they could help their children through the receipt of letters and newsletters and informative materials found on the web page of the program. They were informed about the main message of the program regarding the necessity for children to perform at least one hour of physical activity every day and the ways to stimulate this.

At least one hour of physical activity every day!



Fig. 1 – Poster for promoting physical activity

Discussions

National plans for health promotion and chronic disease prevention should comprise actions and strategies for promotion of a healthy lifestyle, including appropriate physical activity among different population groups (***, 2010; ***, 2009). There are several ways to promote an active lifestyle. These should start with a correct evaluation of the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of different population groups with regard to involvement in physical activity, and continue with educational measures (e.g. educational programs and sport competitions at school, mass-media campaigns), as well as legislative and technical measures (e.g. appropriate infrastructure and equipment for performing sport), allowing and encouraging involvement in physical activity (***, 2010; Lotrean & Mejia-Torres, 2011; ***, 2011; ***, 2009).

The strength of active lifestyle promotion in Romania relies on the presence of several measures and activities performed at different levels in order to promote physical activity, the existence of different bodies responsible for physical activity and health promotion, the cooperation between different governmental and non-governmental organizations. Weaknesses and threats are represented by the fact that many times, educational programs and activities are performed only in some settings and for limited periods of time, while different logistic and funding constraints are noticed in several situations and technical measures are implemented unequally in rural and urban areas.

This paper focuses on educational activities developed for children with hearing deficiencies in Romania for the promotion of physical activity. They are part of a compre-

hensive program for healthy lifestyle promotion among this target group.

The results presented by the paper have two main strengths. First, they present a program aiming to impact upon the awareness, knowledge and skills of both children with hearing deficiencies and their parents with regard to an active lifestyle. These types of activities might have important short-term and long-term consequences on their health, social development and well-being.

Second, the program allowed the development of easy-to-use educational materials using images and sign language for children with hearing deficiencies. The program, its structure and materials represent important resources that might be used in activities for healthy lifestyle promotion among children with hearing deficiencies from different regions of Romania.

Hence, there are two main recommendations for future activities in this field. First, the continuation and dissemination of the program among children with hearing deficiencies from different regions of Romania would be very important and, due to the structure and educational materials that were created, this is also feasible. Second, future in-school and out-of-school activities should be developed in order to maintain and enhance the potential of the program to cultivate a culture and skills promoting an active lifestyle.

Conclusions

1. The paper presents the development and implementation of activities targeting active lifestyle promotion among children with hearing deficiencies from two cities of Romania, in order to build confidence and skills in children with regard to performance of physical activity for at least one hour daily.

2. Educational materials were developed, which included video materials using sign language for people with hearing deficiencies, books with clear messages and drawings for children, which are resources that might also be useful in the future.

3. It is necessary to further intensify the efforts for active lifestyle promotion among children with hearing deficiencies from Romania, building on the existing infrastructure, networking and educational materials.

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