

Food intake, physical activity and quality of life among children and youth

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Food intake and physical activity have an important impact in the quality of life of children and youth, whose relationship with obesity translates into a public health central problem in developed and developing countries. The health-related quality of life construct implies a relationship with variables such as eating habits and physical activity. Among the multiple variables that determine these behaviours, sociodemographic and anthropometric variables such as gender, age and Body Mass Index (BMI) are highlighted, which are essential in the definition of healthy lifestyle habits promotion strategies. **OBJECTIVES:** The aim of this study is to characterize and relate physical activity (PA), eating behaviour (EB) and quality of life (QL) in children and youth, as well as explore gender, age and BMI influences on these dimensions. **METHODS:** it is a non-experimental study, with 337 children and youth, ages between 8 and 17 years (12.61 ± 2.96), mostly from the rural interior of Portugal. We used a sociodemographic and anthropometric questionnaire, a weekly register table of food intake (lunch and dinner) and the Portuguese version of the Kid-kindl, a quality of life instrument, in data collection. The descriptive and inferential analysis ($p < .05$) were performed in SPSS-IBM 25. **RESULTS:** Lower BMI was associated with better EB ($p < .001$), PA ($p < .05$) and self-esteem ($p < .01$) and worse scores on family subscale of QL. The female gender showed higher fruit intake ($p < .05$). The older group has shown better results in all variables. Physical activity correlated positively with QL ($p < .01$) and EB ($p < .05$). **Conclusions:** it is important to explore other relevant social and family dimensions, to promote intervention programs with parents, school and community, as well as healthy practices policies. We intent that these behaviours become conduct patterns with repercussions in health and quality of life, economy and sustainability. Furthermore, the intervention in these age groups is critical for a longer-term impact in improving healthy life habits.

Keywords: *Food intake, physical activity, quality of life, children/youth*

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