

Lack of motivation, equipment main barriers for exercise for boys

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A lack of equipment and venues - and a lack of motivation even if those were available - are the main barriers to physical activity for adolescent boys, according to recently published research from a Michigan State University nursing researcher.

A study of sixth-grade boys' attitudes led by Lorraine Robbins from MSU's College of Nursing suggests an after-school physical activity program could help overcome the decrease in exercise typically seen in this age group.

Robbins' research, published in the *Journal of School Nursing*, identified the benefits of and barriers to physical activity and suggested ways to increase exercise. A racially diverse set of sixth-grade boys from two public middle schools were brought together in seven focus groups.

"Recent data show less than 12 percent of boys at this age are reaching federal recommendations for physical activity," Robbins said. "There is an urgent need to intervene as soon as boys reach middle school to help prevent long-term health problems."

So, what is preventing boys from reaching federal benchmarks, which call for one hour of exercise daily? Robbins found the most prominent personal barrier was lack of motivation, and environmental barriers included lack of equipment at schools and few neighborhood options with small yards and parks in disrepair.

Another sentiment expressed by many boys in the study, she said, was they preferred playing computer or video games or watching TV rather than exercising. As for the benefits of physical activity, the most prominent reasons identified by study participants were related to maintaining an average body weight and good physical health, specifically in regard to improving personal appearance.

Robbins and her research team focused on sixth-grade boys because obesity is more prevalent in adolescent boys than girls.

"Although boys are more active, only a small percentage engages in 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day," Robbins said. "A lot of boys in both single- and dual-working parent homes care for themselves after school while their parents are at work. Many have limited opportunities for physical activity that are safe, accessible and affordable; this type of situation can lead to unhealthy eating habits."

One idea for increasing exercise discussed as part of the study focused on creating school-based programs, held after school from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Most study participants indicated they would be willing to attend, though they also noted the need to involve parents to ensure regular attendance. Participants also agreed they did not want girls or older boys involved in the program.

"Clearly, to reach [boys](#) at this age, we need to offer physical activities that are fun and appealing, providing a viable alternative to the sedentary activities they enjoy now," Robbins said. "In addition, at this age group, it is critical to have someone serving as a source of help or motivation."

She added that because of their professional credibility and direct access, school nurses are in a key position to assume a leadership role in increasing physical activity.

"School nurses can work with principals, classroom teachers, physical education teachers and the school board to raise awareness about the need for and details of effective programs," Robbins said. "Innovative strategies are needed to enhance nurses' visibility as resources in helping students achieve [physical activity](#) recommendations."

Provided by Michigan State University

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