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Is team sport the key to getting everybody active, every day? A systematic review of physical activity interventions aimed at increasing girls’ participation in team sport

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INTRODUCTION

Global physical inactivity is now the fourth leading cause of death [1]. Recommended guidelines state that children and adolescents need to accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) on most days of the week [2], but it is estimated that only 21% of boys and 16% of girls in England meet these recommendations. Team sport has the potential to increase physical activity level; however, studies show that gender-based factors can influence girls’ participation in team sport. Furthermore, evidence for the effectiveness of interventions promoting team sport among girls is limited. This systematic review aimed to answer the research question:

What is the evidence for the effectiveness of team sport interventions aimed at secondary school aged girls (aged 11-18 years) on team sport participation and wider physical activity outcomes?

METHODS

Electronic databases and grey literature were systematically searched for studies of interventions targeting team sport participation among girls in the UK. The keywords used referred to the participant (adolescent girls), intervention and outcome (team sport) variables of interest. Results were exported to RefWorks. Duplicates removed and eligible studies identified. Extracted data included: participant details, such as sample size and age; components of the intervention; outcomes assessed; and each study was quality appraised. Due to heterogeneity across studies, results were presented narratively.

Four studies met the Inclusion criteria and were of appropriate quality.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

TABLE 1. Characteristics of included studies

| Study | Intervention Details | Participants | Outcomes of Interest |
|-------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 1     | Evaluation (3) (Girls vs Boys) | 11-16 year olds, females, Scotland, school-based setting | Quantitative: self-reported survey of a cohort of girls pre and post intervention; qualitative: focus group discussions with 'disengaged' girls in four case study schools. |
| 2     | Girls on the Move | 11-16 year olds, females, Scotland, school-based setting | Quantitative: self-reported survey of a cohort of girls pre and post intervention; qualitative: focus group discussions with project managers, coaches, and participants. |

TABLE 2. Components of the individual interventions

| Component | Description |
|-----------|-------------|
| Evaluation of Girls on the Move Programme | Qualitative: • Surveys; • Focus group discussions; • Interviews; • Consultation with local and national stakeholders. |

**FINDINGS:** Outcomes that were reported on can be seen in Table 3. Five studies were included in the review. Three studies reported on the effectiveness of girls-only interventions, with the remaining two studies reporting on interventions that involved both males and females. The findings from these studies were combined due to the limited number of studies.

**IMPACT:** Despite the limited number of studies, the findings from the systematic review are significant. The results suggest that girls-only interventions can be effective in promoting team sport participation among adolescent girls.

CONCLUSIONS

This review presented a narrative assessment of four studies of physical activity interventions, with a specific focus on secondary school aged girls’ participation in team sport and other related health outcomes. The findings of the review suggest that further research should focus on tailoring the interventions to meet the specific needs of girls. Furthermore, the evaluation of rigorous, high quality interventions designed to promote team sport among adolescent girls is recommended for future interventions.

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