

MAMYAND DAD IN THE CHOICE OF SPORT

MARINELLA COCO - RITA NICOTRA - LINO GURRISI - VALENTINA PERCIAVALLE*

University of Catania - Dottorato di Ricerca in "Scienze Motorie" - (Head: Prof. V. Perciavalle)

*University of Palermo - Dottorato di Ricerca in "Scienze delle Attività Motorie" - (Head: Prof. G. Zummo)

[Papà e mamma nella scelta dello sport]

SUMMARY

The engagement in regular physical activity during childhood is hypothesized to reduce the health risks associated with inactivity and benefit health both during childhood and adulthood. Family members, especially parents, play an important role in the development of children's health conducts.

In the present study we wanted to study the role of father and mother in the choice of sport by their preadolescent sons.

We administered to a sample of 1,168 children (598 boys and 570 girls), randomly selected in maternal and elementary schools of eastern Sicily (mean age: 6.8 years \pm 2.3 S.D.), a questionnaire, realized ad hoc, structured to analyze whether the child practiced a sport and, in case of affirmative answer, the social institution (family, school, friends, etc.) responsible for the choice of the practiced sport.

We observed that a regular sport activity was carried out by a significant fraction of the sample, i.e. 503 out of 598 boys (88.6%) and 464 out of 570 girls (81.4%).

Out of these children, a similar proportion of boys (73%) and girls (78%) were influenced by parents in the choice of the practiced sport, but with a significant difference of gender.

In fact, whereas 42% of boys were influenced in the choice by the father, 69% of girls were influenced by the mother.

Key words: Childhood, sport, choice, parents

RIASSUNTO

Si ritiene che la pratica dell'educazione fisica nell'infanzia e nell'adolescenza riduca i rischi per la salute collegati all'inattività. I membri della famiglia, in particolare i genitori, giocano un ruolo importante nello sviluppo dei comportamenti relativi alla salute dei bambini.

Nel presente studio abbiamo voluto analizzare il ruolo del padre e della madre nella scelta dello sport praticato da giovani preadolescenti.

Abbiamo somministrato a 1.168 bambini (598 maschi e 570 femmine), scelti a caso in scuole materne e elementari della Sicilia orientale (età media 6,8 anni \pm 2,3 S.D.) un questionario, realizzato ad hoc, strutturato per analizzare se il bambino praticava uno sport e, in caso affermativo, qual'era l'istituzione sociale (famiglia, scuola, amici, ecc) responsabile della scelta dello sport praticato.

Abbiamo osservato che una elevata percentuale di bambini praticava uno sport con regolarità, cioè 503 su 598 bambini (88,6%) e 464 su 570 bambine (81,4%). Di questi bambini, una proporzione simile di maschi (73%) e femmine (78%) erano stati influenzati dai genitori, ma con un'importante differenza di genere. Infatti, mentre il 42% dei maschi era stato influenzato dal padre, ben il 69% delle femmine era stato influenzato dalla madre.

Parole chiave: Infanzia, sport, scelta, genitori

Introduction

Physical activity is considered an integral component of a healthy lifestyle; in fact, the active participation in sport and exercise has beneficial social and psychological effects, such as increased social acceptance, and elevated self-esteem and feelings of well-being (Martinsen & Stephens, 1994).

The engagement in regular physical activity during childhood is hypothesized to reduce the health risks associated with inactivity and benefit health both during childhood and adulthood.

Therefore, increasing the proportion of children and adolescents who engage in regular physical activity continues to be a public health priority.

Previous research has identified parental social support and modeling as important influences on child and adolescent physical activity (Strauss et al., 2001; Springer, Kelder & Hoelscher, 2006). During childhood and adolescence, families critically influence their children's health behaviors, including physical activity (Davison, Cutting & Birch, 2003; Trost et al., 2003). Parents model deportments for their children, engage in activities with them, monitor their children's conducts, and provide support and encouragement that can result in behavioral change and positive health outcomes (Bettinger et al., 2004; Sieverding et al., 2005). Family members, especially parents, play an important role in the development of children's health conducts.

Parents can influence their children's health behaviors through a variety of mechanisms; these include genetics, direct modeling, rewarding desirable conducts and punishing or ignoring undesirable deportments, establishing or eliminating barriers, providing resources to perform the behavior, and employing authoritative parenting procedures to help the child develop self-control skills.

Parental support for physical activity has been identified as a key correlate of children's physical activity conduct.

Importantly, a comprehensive understanding of how parents influence their children's physical activity behavior is needed to inform the development of effective family-based physical activity interventions. (Sallis, Owen & Fotheringham, 2000). In particular, we wanted to study the role of father and mother in the choice of sport by their preadolescent sons.

Methods

We administered to a sample of 1,168 children (598 boys and 570 girls), randomly selected in maternal and elementary schools of eastern Sicily (mean age: 6.8 years \pm 2.3 S.D.), a questionnaire, realized ad hoc, structured to analyze whether the child practiced a sport and, in case of affirmative answer, the social institution (family, school, friends, etc.) responsible for the choice of the practiced sport. Informed consent forms was obtained by children' parents before the questionnaire administration.

Results

We observed that a regular sport activity was carried out by a significant fraction of the sample, i.e. 503 out of 598 boys (88.6%) and 464 out of 570 girls (81.4%). As can be seen in Figure 1, out of these children, a similar proportion of boys (73%) and girls (78%) were influenced by parents in the choice of the practiced sport, but with a significant difference of gender. In fact, whereas 42% of boys were influenced in the choice by the father, 69% of girls were influenced by the mother (chi-square test: $p < 0.001$).

Discussion

The role of educational agencies in the choice of sport is an important aspect of the personality's structuralization of the child.

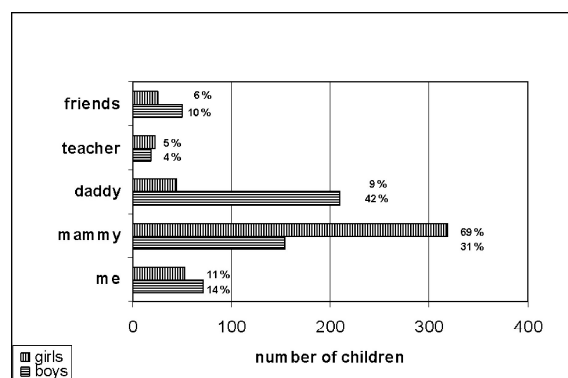


Fig. 1: Number and percentage of boys and girls that were influenced in the choice of sport by themselves, mammy, daddy, teachers or friends. As can be seen, the higher role is covered by parents, with a very strong role of the mother for the daughters and a strong role, but at a lesser degree, of the father for the sons. This difference of gender resulted statistically significant (chi-square test: $p < 0.001$).

The present study demonstrates that, at least in Sicily, the family remain hitherto the strongest social structure for orientating the choices of the sons. It is very interesting the observation of the strong role of the mother in the addressing of daughters toward the sport.

We observed that the father, although is the most important responsible in the choice of the son's sportive discipline, has not a similar weight.

However, the mechanisms of parental influence remain understudied and poorly understood (Taylor et al., 1994; Prochaska et al., 2002). According to Baranowski (1997), parents can influence their children's health behaviors through a variety of mechanisms.

These include genetics, direct modeling, rewarding desirable behaviors and punishing or ignoring undesirable behaviors, establishing or eliminating barriers, providing resources to perform the behavior, and employing authoritative parenting procedures to help the child develop self-control skills.

Importantly, a comprehensive understanding of how parents influence their children's physical activity behavior is needed to inform the development of effective family-based physical activity interventions (Sallis et al., 2000; Baranowski et al., 1998).

Future physical activity interventions targeted at children should include and evaluate this differences of gender to increase parents' capacity to provide instrumental and motivational support for physical activity.

References

- 1) Baranowski T., Anderson C., Carmack C. *Mediating variable framework in physical activity interventions. How are we doing? How might we do better?* Am J Prev Med 1998; 15: 266–97.
- 2) Baranowski T. *Families and health actions. In: Gochman DS, ed. Handbook of health behavior research I: personal and social determinants.* New York: Plenum Press, 1997; 179–206.
- 3) Bettinger, J., Celentano, D., Curriero, F., Adler, N., Millstein, S. & Ellen, J. (2004). *Does parental involvement predict new sexually transmitted diseases in female adolescents?* Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med., 158, 666–670.
- 4) Davison, K., Cutting, T. & Birch, L. (2003). *Parents' activity-related parenting practices predict girls' physical activity.* Med. Sci. Sports Exerc., 35, 1589–1595.
- 5) Martinsen, E. W., & Stephens, T. (1994). *Exercise and mental health in clinical and free living populations.* In R. K. Dishman (Ed.), *Advances in exercise adherence* (pp. 52–72). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- 6) Prochaska JJ, Rodgers MW, Sallis JF. *Association of parent and peer support with adolescent physical activity.* Res Q Exerc Sport 2002; 73: 206–10.
- 7) Sallis, J.F., Owen, N. & Fotheringham, M.J. (2000). *Behavioral epidemiology: a systematic framework to classify phases of research on health promotion and disease prevention.* Ann. Behav. Med., 22, 294–298.
- 8) Sieverding, J., Adler, N., Witt, S. & Ellen, J. (2005). *The influence of parental monitoring on adolescent sexual initiation.* Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med., 159, 724–729.
- 9) Springer, A., Kelder, S. & Hoelscher, D. (2006). *Social support, physical activity and sedentary behavior among 6th grade girls: a cross-sectional study.* Int. J. Behav. Nutr. Phys. Act., 3, 8.
- 10) Strauss, R., Rodzilsky, D., Burack, G. & Colin, M. (2001). *Psychosocial correlates of physical activity in healthy children.* Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med., 155, 897–902.
- 11) Taylor WC, Baranowski T, Sallis JF. *Family determinants of childhood physical activity: a social cognitive model. In: Dishman RK, ed. Advances in exercise adherence.* Champaign IL: Human Kinetics, 1994; 319–42.
- 12) Trost, S., Sallis, J., Pate, R., Freedson, P., Taylor, W. & Dowda, M. (2003). *Evaluating a model of parental influence on youth physical activity.* Am. J. Prev. Med., 25, 277–282.

Request reprints from:

Dott. ssa MARINELLA COCO
 Università degli Studi di Catania
 Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiologiche
 Viale Andrea Doria, 6
 95125 Catania
 (Italy)