

Level of physical activity and body image in Portuguese and French students, 1st year of Physiotherapy

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Introduction:

Adolescents have a physiological need to move, therefore physical activity should be encouraged at an early age. In young adults, there are also various physical and psychological transformations. Associated with these transformations, there is a will to fit in the patterns of society's beauty and, sometimes, a consequent bodily dissatisfaction. Thus, it is necessary to encourage physical activity, for its benefits.

Objectives:

To characterize the level of physical activity and body image perception in Portuguese and French students of the 1st year of Physiotherapy, and to verify if there is a relationship between this perception and physical activity, body mass index, and body composition.

Methods:

A cross-sectional analytical study, with a sample of 59 participants. A questionnaire was applied for characterization the sample, the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) to quantify the level of physical activity of the students and the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) to evaluate the perception of body image were applied. Subsequently, anthropometric measurements were performed with the aid of the stadiometer and the bioimpedance balance. In this last instrument, weight (kg), body fat (%), muscle mass (kg), water in the body (%), bone mass (kg) and visceral fat were evaluated. Data were analysed using the IBM SPSS 23.0, with a significance level of 0.05.

Results:

There were statistically significant differences between nationality and physical activity in METS ($p = 0.037$). The level of physical activity was not related to the perception of body image, however, this revealed an association with body composition, particularly fat mass, in the Portuguese ($p = 0.002$) and in the French ($p = 0.016$).

Conclusions:

It is concluded that French students have a higher level of activity than the Portuguese, but this is not related to body perception. On the other hand, body perception reveals to be associated to the individual's body composition.