

THE DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMME ON SELF-PERCEPTION IN OVERWEIGHT CHILDREN: A PILOT STUDY

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Abstract

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Background

The number of overweight children in The Netherlands has doubled in the past 30 years. The prevalence of overweight in children and youth (2-21 years) is 14%. For children and youth with a Turkish or Moroccan background the prevalence of overweight is about 30%.

The programme, called WIJS (Dutch for "What is Your Style"), is a 1-year after-school programme aimed at overweight children aged 8-12 years. The WIJS programme consists of group sessions of 60-min of activity-based exercise, dietary education, and lifestyle counselling 2 days per week for 20 weeks. The counselling component includes positive communication and goal setting. After the first 20 weeks, children reduce their group sessions to 1 day per week for the next 20 weeks. Students of various disciplines participate in the planning and organisation of the WIJS programme. In this combination of practice with education sport management students learn to manage a sport product in the public segment and develop their coaching and performance skills, and knowledge of exercise and nutrition.

This study evaluates the impact of the WIJS programme on body mass index, measures of self-perception and health behaviours in overweight children. The pilot study was financed by the Municipal Health Service and two health insurance companies.

Methods

Children completed a questionnaire that evaluated self-perception and dietary habits and physical activity. The questionnaire included the following self-perception domains: scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioural conduct, and global self-worth. Body mass index was derived using anthropometric measurements and overweight was defined using age- and sex-specific criteria. Outcomes were assessed at baseline (January 2011) and will be assessed at the end of the programme (June 2011). Measurements were also conducted in twelve control children who did not take part in the WIJS group sessions.

Results

Twenty-three children (9-12 years) started in the WIJS programme in January 2011. Three children had normal weights, 10 children were overweight, and 10 children were obese. Most children had a Turkish or Moroccan background. Self-perception: scores on athletic competence and physical appearance were in general lower than Dutch norms. Health behaviours: more than half of the children indicated that they did not eat daily breakfast; half of the children consumed 3 sweet drinks or more per day; half of the children spent 3 hours or more per day on sedentary activities (TV viewing, computers, video games).

The follow-up results from this study will show if it is possible to improve self-perception and reduce overweight in children. Hopefully the pilot study will provide new insights into the further development of the WIJS programme.

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