

The relationship between government quality and individual health production through sport and physical activity

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Introduction

Obesity is a global concern for public health (WHO, 2010). Governments are concerned with public health and have taken various measures to promote participation in healthy behaviour and physical activity, respectively. For example, they try to promote physical activity through spending on sport programs and facilities in order to make sport and physical activity accessible and affordable for all population groups (e.g., Wicker et al., 2009). Such government expenditure has targeted spending occurs at all levels, i.e., the community level (Wicker et al., 2013), regional level (Kokolakakis et al., 2014), and national level (Downward et al., 2014).

Aims of research and resesarch question

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between government quality and individual health production through participation in sport and physical activity. The specific question to be addressed is, 'does the process of government contribute to the promotion of sport and physical activity?'

Data and method

To address this question data about government quality from 21 European countries is combined with individual-level survey data from the Eurobarometer 80.2 ([http://www.gesis.org/index.php?id=8920&tx_eurobarometer_pi1\[vol\]=8920&tx_eurobarometer_pi1\[pos1\]=421](http://www.gesis.org/index.php?id=8920&tx_eurobarometer_pi1[vol]=8920&tx_eurobarometer_pi1[pos1]=421)). Individual health production through sport and physical activity is measured with variables capturing whether an individual's activity level is below, meets, or exceeds the physical activity recommendations of the WHO (2010), the latter of which secures additional health benefits. Physical activity is measure in minutes and intensity levels identified. The data is then recoded to identify activity that meets WHO thresholds. Multilevel models are estimated to account for the ecological structure implied by aggregate policy processes having an impact on individual decisions.

Results

The results of the multi-level models show that both overall government quality and the its constituent dimensions (e.g., control of corruption, political stability, rule of law) have a statistically significant positive effect on the likelihood of individual physical activity with the effect being larger as we move from activity below the guidelines to activity exceeding the guidelines which allows securing additional health benefits. This study contributes to the body of research on the determinants of physical activity by examining the role of government quality – an aspect which has been neglected in previous research – and to the literature examining European social policy.

Discussion

The results of the analysis suggest that the current academic and policy focus on the promotion of sports and physical activity is potentially ignoring a key vehicle by which health emerges in society. The implication is that more open and accountable government can provide the regulatory framework and tolerance required for more effective structural delivery of sport and physical activity in society as well as the environment in which behaviours can change.

References

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