

The Perspective of Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder Regarding Barriers and Facilitators of Physical Activity Participation

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Background

Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are less physically active compared to their typically developing peers [1-4]. The reasons underlying this physical inactivity behavior remains to be elucidated. Their lack of participation might be due to social and communication impairments and problems in behavioral, sensory and motor domains [5-8]. Research to date mainly focused on parents' perspectives to investigate the barriers and facilitators of physical activity (PA) participation in adolescents with ASD. However, the direct engagement of adolescents with ASD can open novel avenues, which can potentially lead to rich insights that can help to understand their PA behavior and facilitate the design of evidence-based and ASD-specific PA interventions.

Purpose

To explore the perspectives of adolescents with ASD with regard to barriers and facilitators of PA participation in three different PA contexts (i.e., unorganized PA participation, PA participation in a sports club and PA participation during physical education).

Methods

In this qualitative study, adolescents with ASD aged 12-18 years will be included until data saturation is reached. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted. The interview guide is based on the socio-ecological model (SEM).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis with Nvivo 12 software will be conducted. Deductive and inductive content analysis will be used to analyze the data.

Preliminary Results

Preliminary results of 9 participants (5 boys, 14. 9 ± 1 .7 years) were presented. Up to now, participants reported a variety of barriers and facilitators. These barriers and facilitators seem to be situated across all levels of the SEM and can be context specific. The most reported barriers were a lack of motivation, physical complaints and body image issues, negative feelings and thoughts, noise and crowded places. The most reported facilitators were autonomy, a good motivation, positive feelings and thoughts, predictability, social support and pleasure experience.



Preliminary Conclusion

Adolescents with ASD experience a variety of barriers and facilitators with regard to PA participation and these barriers and facilitators can be context specific. Many barriers can be changed, and many facilitators can be taken into account. Results of this ongoing qualitative study may facilitate the design of new evidence-based and ASD-specific PA interventions.

Ethics Approval

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee Research UZ/KU Leuven (s65474).

Informed Consent

All parents and participants give their informed consent and assent.

Competing Interests:

None

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