

Australian adolescents' perceived school-based barriers and facilitators to engagement in physical activity

JN Rachele¹, TF Cuddihy^{1,2}, TL Washington¹, SM McPhail^{3,4}

¹Queensland University of Technology, School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences and Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation, Brisbane

²Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, School of Health Sciences, Melbourne

³Queensland University of Technology, School of Public Health and Social Work and Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation, Brisbane

⁴Queensland Health, Centre for Functioning and Health Research, Brisbane

Objective

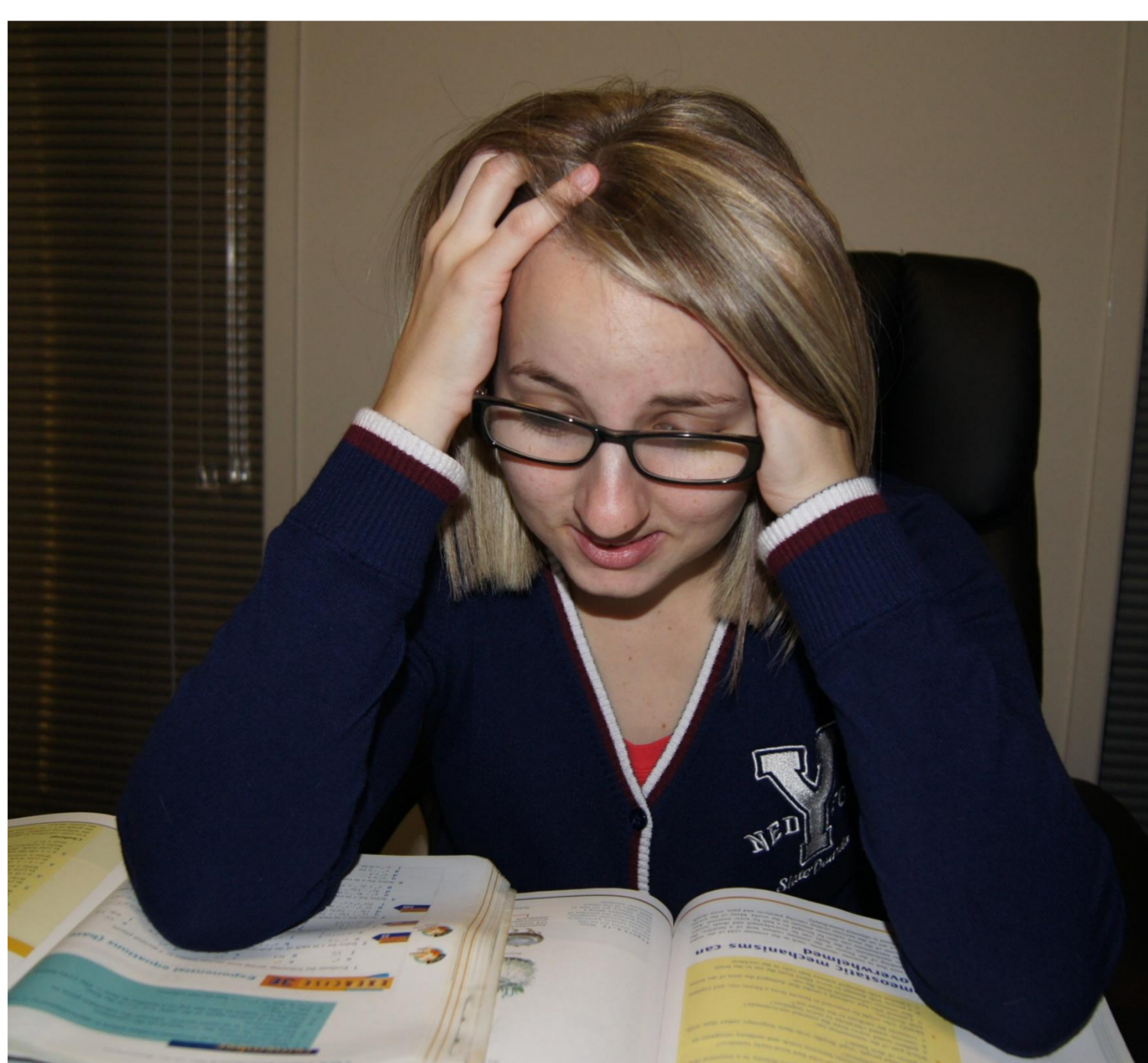
School-aged youth spend a significant amount of time either in transit to and from school, or within school settings performing a range of varying learning-based activities. Adolescent physical activity has also been shown to increase the likelihood of maintaining physical activity throughout adulthood. The purpose of this study is to investigate adolescents' perceived school-based barriers and facilitators to engagement in physical activity.

Methods

One-hundred and twenty four participants (38 males and 86 females) were recruited from two non-denominational same-sex private schools, in Brisbane, Australia. The mean age and standard deviation (SD) was 13.83 (0.56) and 14.40 (2.33) for males and females respectively. Participants responded to a series questions regarding perceived barriers and facilitators to engagement in physical activity. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and frequency distributions, and qualitative data with thematic analysis.

Results

A total of 121 (97.6%) participants had complete data sets and were included in the analysis. School timetable (44.6%), homework (81.8%), and assessment (81.0%) were identified as the most prominent perceived factors, increasing the difficulty of physical activity engagement. Physical Education classes (71.9%) and school sport programs (80.2%) were identified as the most prominent perceived factors that facilitate engagement in physical activity. There was no significant gender effect.



Perceived Barrier	N (%)
Homework	99 (81.8%)
Assessment	98 (81.0%)
Timetable	54 (44.6%)

Perceived Facilitator	N (%)
School sport programs	97 (80.2%)
Physical education	87 (71.9%)

Conclusion

Each of the identified factors perceived by adolescent's as either barriers or facilitators to engagement in physical activity may be addressed by administrators at a school and government policy level. These may include strategies such as; increasing the assigned hours to physical education classes, providing additional extra-curricular sporting opportunities, and reviewing the time allocated to homework and assessment items. This may provide a simpler, low-cost solution to increasing youth physical activity, as opposed to contemporary higher-cost strategies utilising increased staff commitment, mass media, provision of equipment and counsellors and other health professionals.