

Texas Obesity Research Center

Physical Activity among Mexicans and Mexican Americans in an Ecologic Systems Framework

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To operationalize the Ecologic Model of Physical Activity (EMPA) in an environmental and cultural context born in Mexico, but broadly adopted by Mexican Americans in the USA. **Methods:** Participant observation occurred over an immersive, ten month period in Jalisco, Baja California South, and the Distrito Federal, Mexico. Numerous meetings with researchers, school personnel, state health departments, and residents helped define environmental factors, cultural values, and the political context of Mexico. The EMPA was adapted to include examples from physical activity resources, health care settings and behavioral interventions. **Results:** Mexico is a middle income country leapfrogging from traditional physical activities born from work and culturally specific recreation to technological advancements and acceptance of westernized recreational activities leading to lower rates of physical activity. Micro-level environments such as parks and plazas are unique settings in which PA occurs. Meso- and Exo-level environmental factors are the dynamic social and physical linkages such as culturally driven communication and transportation styles between micro-level environments. These linkages connect events from one micro-level environment to events in another either via direct or indirect pathways. Macro-level environmental factors like the health care system and political changes impact large numbers of the population across many micro-level environments. Forces of change such as technological innovation impact all levels in unpredictable ways. These environmental factors directly and indirectly impact on PA. **Conclusions:** Mexico is a dynamic country undergoing technological advancements leading to acceptance of westernized recreational activities and lower rates of physical activity (PA). It is important to uniquely consider the

environmental and cultural context when operationalizing the EMPA to aid PA promotion efforts in Mexico and among Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

KEY WORDS: Physical Activity, Ecologic Models, Mexicans