

Results from Ethiopia's 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

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Introduction

Physical activity is crucial for all ages including children and youth. For children, types of physical activity include active play, walking or biking, exercising, recreational activities, school based activities, etc. Children and youth aged from 5-17 years old are advised to participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic activities daily. Not fitting this guideline is considered children and youths are physically inactive.¹⁻⁴ Data are limited on physical activity for children and youth in Ethiopia. Thus, this paper aimed to summarize the results of the Ethiopia's 2018 Report Card on physical activity for children and youth. The report card was graded based on the latest available evidence.

Methods

Initially, the country report card team members were identified based on their expertise on physical activity. Team members collected data from December 2017 to April 2018. Children and youth aged from 5-17 years were included in the report card. Data were collected and searched on respective government sectors websites, Google scholar and World Health Organization (WHO) HINARI database. The 10 core indicators (Overall Physical Activity, Organized Sport and Physical Activity, Active Play, Active Transportation, Sedentary Behaviors, Physical Fitness, Family and Peers, School, Community and Environment, and Government), study populations' age group and country name were used as keywords for searching strategies. A review of literatures, policy documents and experts interview were made following Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance (AHKGA) guidance. The country Sport policy document was used in the report card development.⁵ Where data for an indicator was unavailable, a grade was assigned using phone-based interviews with a panel of experts. Then, average estimation was taken to grade the report card.

Results and Discussion

Even though evidence was limited, major efforts were made to develop Ethiopia's first Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth (see Figure 1). The grade for each indicator and its rationale are shown on Table 1. Only the physical fitness indicator received an incomplete grade. This is due to difficulty to

get or estimate the fitness data in the country. All other indicators were graded using available data and/or expert estimation. Active play indicator scored the highest grade among the 10 core indicators.

Our result showed that there is low physical activity participation among children and youth in Ethiopia. Our findings aligned with different evidences that revealed the pandemic of physical inactivity across the world.⁶ Evidence showed that childhood obesity and physical inactivity are on rapid rise that push children and youth for greater risk of non-communicable diseases later in life. This is mainly due to unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and sedentary behaviour. The screen-based technologies such as smart-phone, computer, play games, Television and others are discouraging children & youth to move.^{7,8} Thus, major tasks are expected from researchers, families, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil societies and private sectors to increase children and youth's physical activity levels. Since this report card was assessed subjectively some limitations can be recognized.

Conclusion

This paper revealed evidence of policy and practice gaps regarding physical activity for children and youth. Thus, it is suggested that investigators prioritize physical activity research, policy and practice for children and youth in Ethiopia.



Figure 1 — Ethiopia's 2018 Report Card Cover.

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Table 1 Grades and rationales for Ethiopia's 2018 Report Card

Indicator	Grade	Rationale
Overall Physical Activity	D	Majority of Ethiopian children and youth take part in home chores and light work every day for family help. Our team estimated that about 28% of children and youth (17% urban & 39% rural) meet 60 minutes moderate physical activity every day.
Organized Sport Participation	C	Almost 50% of children and youth are participating in school athletics, handball, volleyball and football competitions at all levels for several times in a year.
Active Play	B	Experts estimated that 71% of children and youth involved in active play for a minimum of 2 hours a day before, during and after school.
Active Transportation	C	Approximately 48% of children and youth (31% in urban and 65% rural) are walking to and from school.
Sedentary Behaviours	F	About 13% of children and youth spend on screen time such as mobile game, play station and TV views for no more than 2 hours per day.
Physical Fitness	INC	There is no adequate information in the country to assign a grade for this indicator.
Family and Peers	F	Approximately 14% of children and youth are encouraged and get support from their family members like buying bike, handball or football for their child to move.
School	D	Our team estimated that 32% of schools in the country have access of infrastructures like sport field, outdoor playground, multi-purpose spaces for physical activity.
Community and Environment	F	Approximately 8% of children and youth live in environment that have inevitable infrastructure like sidewalks to engage in physical activity.
Government	D	Policy exists regarding physical activity in the country's non-communicable diseases (NCDs) agenda. However, it is not implemented yet.

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