Results from South Africa’s 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

Catherine E. Draper, Simone A. Tomaz, Susan H. Bassett, Cora Burnett, Candice J. Christie, Colleen Cozett, Monique de Milander, Soezin Krog, Andries Monyeki, Niri Naidoo, Rowena Naidoo, Alessandra Prioreschi, Cheryl Walter, Estelle Watson, and Estelle V. Lambert

Introduction

The 2018 Report Card for South Africa (SA) (Figure 1) presents the latest available evidence relating to physical activity (PA) of SA school-aged children since the 2016 Report Card. The absence of nationally representative data remains a challenge for the compilation of the 2018 grades. However, the findings from regional studies are still highly informative, and continue to provide a platform for advocacy in SA regarding the health and PA of SA children and adolescents.

Methods

A systematic review was conducted using PubMed, Africa Journals Online, and Africa Wide (EBSCOhost). Search dates were from 01/01/2016-12/03/2018, and articles reporting on specified indicators related to SA children between the ages of 5-18 years were included for review. Government documents meeting the inclusion criteria were also included in the review. Papers included in the 2016 Report Card were excluded from the 2018 review. No grey literature was identified that could be included in the 2018 Report Card. Articles were reviewed by members of the scientific advisory group for the SA 2018 Report Card, who all represent academic institutions in SA. A summary of the grades for the specified indicators, including a rationale for each grade are provided in Table 1.

Results and Discussion

It is evident that additional research relating to all the grades listed above would be beneficial, especially for those which remain inconclusive. It is also clear that issues of social justice play a key role in certain indicators, most notably organised sports participation, active transportation, and community and environment. In addition, there remains a gap between policy and implementation. The grade for ‘school’ has been downgraded to a D- (from a D in 2016) in order to bring this to the attention of relevant stakeholders. Sixty-one percent of parents reported being uncomfortable with their child walking to school, but are not necessarily in a position to afford safer alternatives for transportation. To address this, some initiatives to improve the safety of active transport have been trialled in certain regions, including a small number local community initiatives. However, there are

Figure 1 — South Africa’s 2018 Report Card cover.
issues around scalability and sustainability. Furthermore, as technology (especially smart phones and mobile data) becomes more accessible and affordable, screen time may need to become the target of behavioural interventions and best-practice guidelines for children and youth. The findings in this report warrant action and evaluation by the SA government, who should be leading the implementation of systematic strategies, and partnering with researchers and other stakeholders to ensure that policies benefiting the health and well-being of children and adolescents are translated into action.

Conclusion

The findings of the 2018 Report Card for SA indicate that our country is making insufficient progress with regards to the promotion of PA opportunities that are safe and accessible for the greatest number of children and adolescents in SA. There is a need for national surveillance initiatives to provide more accurate data on the indicators included in the Report Card.

References


