



Ghanaian 2014 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth



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Introduction

Obesity and related non-communicable diseases are rising at alarming rates globally, due to reduced physical activity (PA) levels and increased sedentary behaviour resulting from the use of technology for learning, recreation, and occupation.¹⁻³ Yet, research on PA behaviour among children and youth remains scarce in the developing world. Despite the rapidly growing rate of obesity in Ghana,⁴⁻⁶ there is limited evidence on PA levels of children and youth— less is known about community-based practices or government programs that promote physical activity.

The 2014 Ghanaian Physical Activity Report Card (RC) is a maiden effort to establish national-level baseline data on PA behaviour and PA-enabling environments. The evidence presented in this RC is intended to inform future research and interventions towards promoting physical activity among children and youth in Ghana. This RC was inspired by the Active Healthy Kids Canada (AHKC) Report Card, which has been reporting on PA and PA-enabling environments of children and youth in Canada for 10 years, 7 the Healthy Active Kids Kenya Report Card (HAKK), 8, 9 and the Healthy Active Kids South African (HAKSA) Report Cards.¹⁰

The 2014 RC was championed by the Active Lifestyle and Wellness Association of Ghana (ALWAG), with active contribution from its members including Active Healthy Kids-Ghana (AHK-GH), Ghana Physical Activity Network (GPAN) and the Ghana Physical Education & Sport Thinktank (GPESSt).

Methods

- Followed the process used to develop the AHKC, HAKK, HAKSA Report Cards.⁷⁻¹¹
- A team of experts in various disciplines including Physical Education, Public Health, Sports Medicine, PA, and Social Science developed the Ghana RC.
- Evidence from peer-reviewed and grey literature published between 1975 and 2013.
- Secondary or desk research methodology was used.
 - Review and synthesis of existing documents and research pertaining to PA indicators selected in advance by AHKC.^{7, 11}
- Described PA behaviour and enabling environment for nine indicators included in the 2014 Ghanaian RC (see Table 1).
- Each team member independently performed grade assignment based on the proportion of children and youth that were achieving an identified benchmark:
- Criteria— “A” refers to succeeding with 81% to 100% of children and youth; “B” is 61% to 80%; “C” is 41% to 60%, D is 21% to 40%; “F” is 0% to 20%; and “INC” refers to insufficient data to assign a grade.
- Expert judgment was also considered in the assignment of grades, based on quality and quantity of the evidence from the secondary data.
- The principal investigator harmonized the decisions.
- Research team reached consensus on the assigned grade for each indicator.

Results

- 2 RC indicators were not graded:
 - Active Play
 - Family & Peer Support).
- Of the 7 remaining indicators:
 - 5 were assigned grade “D”; 1 was assigned grade “C” & another “B”.
 - (see Table 1)
- Overall physical activity levels: Grade “D”**
 - PA levels ranged between 12 and 34% (WHO PA guidelines).^{1,5,12}
 - Parents and/or siblings assign children daily home chores that involve PA behaviours.
- Organized sports participation: Grade “C”**
 - Based on 3 available documents obtained from the Ghana Education Service (GES)¹³⁻¹⁵
 - No systematic observation data on actual participation in organized sports was available.
 - Systematic observation research on actual participation and surveillance is needed.
- Active transportation: Grade “D”**
 - 36% of urban high school students walked or biked to school¹².
 - No data on rural dwellers.
 - Transporting behaviour among children and youth varied from region to region.
 - More children rode bicycles or walked to/from school in the northern part of the country as compared to the middle and the southern parts of the country.

- Sedentary behaviours: Grade “B”**
 - Many children and youth in Ghana spent no more than 2 hours per day on screen time.
 - This may be due to limited access to devices that promote sedentary behavior.
- School – infrastructure, policies and programs: Grade “D”**
 - Based on 2 available documents on requirements for PE and after-school sports programmes in Ghana.¹⁶⁻¹⁷
 - One requirement for establishing a school is the provision of playing field and quality curriculum to promote physical activity participation.
 - However, no measures in place to ensure quality or accountability.
 - No national policies to guide the conduct of PE and sports in the country.
- Community and the Built Environment - infrastructure, policies, programs, safety: Grade “D”**
 - One study on built environment, using a street level audit in Accra reported environmental barriers to outdoor physical activity.¹⁹ ; absence of sidewalks, poor access to sidewalks or poor conditions of sidewalks.
 - Agencies responsible for ensuring availability of safe community playground and built environment are disconnected, resulting in poor planning and surveillance.
 - Data on infrastructure, policies and programs are nonexistent.
- Government – strategies, policies, investments: Grade “D”**
 - National policies and strategies for the promotion of PA amongst children and youth are nonexistent.
 - Evidence on government investment in increasing PA levels of children and youth is lacking.
 - No data on government investments in promoting PA amongst children and youth.

Discussions and Conclusions

- Overall physical activity levels**
 - Grade “D” for this indicator is not surprising. PE is required in all schools,¹³⁻¹⁶ –rarely enforced.
 - Consistent with the 2012 global PA surveillance report
 - 20% of 13- and 15-year-olds reported getting MVPA.²
- Organized Sports Participation**
 - Organized Sports events only benefit the elite few.
 - Offered on bi-yearly basis.
- Active Transportation**
 - Urban area sidewalks or bikeways unsafe.¹⁹
 - Active transportation (especially walking) may be more prevalent in rural areas.

Table 1: Grades According to Physical Activity Indicator in the 2014 Ghana Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

| Indicator | Grades |
|--|--------|
| Overall Physical Activity Levels | D |
| Organized Sport Participation | C |
| Active Play | INC |
| Active Transportation | D |
| Sedentary Behaviours | B |
| Family and Peers | INC |
| School-infrastructure, policies and programs | D |
| Community and the Built Environment | D |
| Government Strategies and Investments | D |

Discussions and Conclusions (cont.)

- Active Transportation**
 - Urban area sidewalks or bikeways unsafe.¹⁹
 - Active transportation (especially walking) may be more prevalent in rural areas.
- Sedentary behaviours**
 - Many children and youth in Ghana spend no more than 2 hours per day on screen time. This may Due to limited access to devices that promote sedentary behavior.
 - There is a need for national guidelines on screen time and sitting time in Ghana.
- Family and Peers – infrastructure, support, parental/peer behaviours**
 - National data on this indicator is needed to explain how parents and peers influence childhood PA.
- School – infrastructure, policies and programs**
 - Surveillance on frequency, intensity, time and type of activity are needed on the teaching of PE.¹³⁻¹⁵
- Community & the Built Environment - infrastructure, policies, programs, safety**
 - Barriers— absence of sidewalks, poor access to sidewalks or poor conditions of sidewalks.¹⁹
- Government – strategies, policies, investments**
 - There is the need for a policy on school sports and PE
 - National school sports events are held bi-annually.
 - Compliance to syllabi¹³⁻¹⁵ unknown.
- Future Research**
 - There was a paucity of evidence on PA among children and youth.
 - This RC therefore makes a principal call for research in PA focused on children and youth in Ghana.