

Physical activity and subjective well-being in Health Sciences first-year students

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ABSTRACT

It is evident that physical activity implies several health benefits and is considered a fundamental component for improving quality of life and well-being. The main objective of the study was to identify the relationship between students who maintain a regular physical activity practice and how this aspect contributes to their well-being, namely life satisfaction and affections. A total of 177 students of both genders, aged between 18 and 30 years, enrolled in the first year of Health Sciences College degrees participated in this research. The data collection instrument used was a questionnaire, with the Positive and Negative Affective Scale (PANAS) and the Satisfaction with Life (SWLS). In addition to descriptive statistics, the Mann-Whitney test was used to compare groups (83 practitioners and 94 non-practitioners). Results showed that students, who maintain practicing PA with the entrance in College had more favourable values in well-being with significant differences in terms of their satisfaction with life ($p=0.04$) and positive affections ($p=0.01$). We conclude that students from Health Sciences College degrees who maintain a constant physical activity practice present better results in the analysed variables in relation to those who stopped practicing after they start attending the first year of College. **Keywords:** Students; Life satisfaction; Affections; Physical activity; Well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

The practice of physical activity (PA) positively influences self-image and body satisfaction (Silva, 2014). Individuals with higher levels of mental well-being and health perception are more capable and motivated to be more active in their daily lives. Batista (2009) identifies the sense of well-being or satisfaction with life intimately linked to how the individual can cope and absorb the occurrence of episodes during his life. Subjective well-being is defined as experiencing a high level of positive affect and low level of negative affect, as well as, a high degree of satisfaction with life (Ryan & Deci, 2007). Higher life satisfaction seems to be related to positive functioning indicators and lower satisfaction with life has been associated with greater depressive symptoms, interpersonal rejection and aggressive behaviours (Halbrook, 2012). Subjective well-being has been associated with a hedonic view of well-being that integrates dimensions of affection and satisfaction with life. It aims to understand the affective dimension (positive and negative affects) and the cognitive dimension (satisfaction with life) of the subjective evaluation that the subject makes of himself and his life (Lopes, 2012). The main objective of the study was to identify the relationship between students who maintain a regular physical activity practice and how this aspect contributes to their well-being, namely life satisfaction and affections.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants

A number of 177 first-year students enrolled in Health School Sciences in Portuguese Universities, with ages between 18 and 30 (20.20 ± 3.04 years old). They were divided into 2 groups (83 practitioners of PA and 94 non-practitioners).

Measures

For data collecting purposes and according to what was intended to be evaluated, two scales were used: the PANAS-Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988), a self-report questionnaire that consists of two scales to measure positive and negative effects, where each item is rated on a 5-point scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) and; the LSC-Life Satisfaction Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985).) used to evaluate life satisfaction as a cognitive construct. This scale has 5 items and consists of indicating, through a 7-point Likert scale, that varies between Totally Disagree (1) and Absolutely Agree (7) the degree of satisfaction according to each item.

Procedures

Before starting data collection, subjects were informed about the scope and objectives of our study, as well as, the confidentiality of the individual data and results of the tests performed. Subjects participated freely in the study, giving their signed informed consent. The questionnaires were self-filled in our presence and returned at the same time, making them give it to us when they were completed. After questionnaires were processed, they were destroyed. This study was approved by the faculty Ethics Committee.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics are presented and the comparison between the practice and non-practice groups was assessed by the Mann-Whitney test.

RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and significance values from variables comparison by Mann-Whitney Test

	α Cronbach	Mean \pm SD	Practitioners Mean \pm SD	Non-practitioners Mean \pm SD	Sig.
Satisfaction with life	.89	4.97 \pm 1.07	5.15 \pm 1.01	4.81 \pm 1.09	0.04*
Positive Affections	.87	2.93 \pm 0.61	3.11 \pm 0.61	2.76 \pm 0.56	0.01**
Negative Affections	.82	2.08 \pm 0.62	2.11 \pm 0.63	2.04 \pm 0.61	0.58

Students who maintained the practice of PA through the first year in College had significantly higher values in life satisfaction ($P=0.04$) and in production of positive affections ($P=0.01$); however, no significant differences were observed for negative affections.

DISCUSSION

Well-being consists of a cognitive component, such as satisfaction with life, and an affective component (Marconcin, Alves, Dias & Fonseca, 2010). Individuals, who achieve high levels of subjective well-being have a high satisfaction with life and moments of positive affection and with few moments of negative affection (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Rodriguez, 2009). In this study, students who practiced PA during the first year of College had higher levels of well-being compared to non-practitioners, as they obtained higher values of satisfaction with life and positive affections, as studied in Batista, Jimenez Castuera, Petrica, Serrano, Honório, Paulo and Mendes (2016). However, regarding negative effects, there were no significant differences corroborating the studies of Zanon and Hutz (2010) and Marconcin, Alves, Dias and Fonseca (2010).

CONCLUSIONS

We conclude that first-year students from Health Sciences who maintain a constant physical activity practice present better results in the analysed variables in relation to those who stopped practicing after they start attending the first year of college, being able to use this as a preventive and prophylactic measure as future health professionals.

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