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Physical activity and health status among undergraduate students of school of therapeutic sciences at University of the Witwatersrand

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Physical inactivity is a known risk factor for many non-communicable diseases. The increasing prevalence of low physical activity level among young adults, particularly university students, is an important public health concern. University students have been found to have poor physical activity habits, and its effect on their health status has been a focus of many studies. However, relatively few studies have objectively assessed the physical activity levels of university students and its relationship with their health status and anthropometric indices. The aim of this study was to evaluate the physical activity level and health status among university students.

Methodology: This study was a cross-sectional descriptive study. Physical activity levels were measured using the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) and a pedometer to measure the number of steps for a period of 7 days. Blood pressure and anthropometric indices (height, weight, waist circumference, hip circumference and BMI) were measured. Health status was identified using the Medical Outcome Study Short Form - 12 Health Survey. Descriptive statistics of averages were used to summarize the data and multivariate linear regression was used to determine the predictors of physical activity. Data was analyzed using Stata IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0

Results: A total of 242 undergraduate students from the School of Therapeutic Sciences participated in this study. Physical activity level was low in 22.5% and 48.5% of the population using the IPAQ and the pedometer respectively. The average score of the IPAQ and the number of steps was 3855 and 6057 respectively. Predictors of physical activity using the pedometer in this population were age, department of study, health status and waist to hip ratio for number of steps. These predictors had low Beta coefficient values, thereby suggesting that physical activity is weakly dependent on demographics, blood pressure, health status and anthropometric indices Using the multivariate linear regression (stepwise method), physical component summary and social functioning dimensions of health status were predictors of IPAQ scores ($p<0.05$).

Conclusion: Participants walked less than the recommended average number of steps per day (10,000 steps) which showed that the students are less active than standard recommendations.

Health status was a significant predictor of physical activity using both the IPAQ and the number of steps. This implies that the work schedule of the students, age as well as the health status of the students is a significant predictor of the number of steps taken per day.

Keywords: Physical activity, health status, undergraduates