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Barriers to Exercise and Nutrition for Special Olympics Athletes

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Introduction

Problem

• People with intellectual disability (ID) have higher rates of obesity.
• Special Olympics Vermont (SOVT) athletes compete in sports events throughout the year.
• Athletes may lose fitness between seasons.
• Their nutrition habits remain unknown.
• Barriers to exercise and nutrition remain unknown.

Goal

• We were tasked with designing a successful exercise and nutrition program for SOVT athletes.

Methods

To make recommendations on how to design a successful exercise and nutrition program for SOVT athletes, we needed data on:

• Habits
• Awareness
• Barriers
• Motivating factors

Solution

• We conducted an interview-based survey of 59 SOVT athletes.
• Participants were ≥18 years old and recruited at a state-wide soccer tournament.
• IRB-approved protocol required verbal consent.
• BMI was calculated from height and weight.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (yr)</th>
<th>BMI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females (n=23)</td>
<td>31 ± 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males (n=36)</td>
<td>27 ± 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Eating healthy makes me who I am.” - Special Olympics Vermont athlete

Discussion

• Limitations include small sample size and selection bias.
• Even in our sample of soccer athletes, 70% had BMIs that fell within the overweight or obese ranges.
• Lifestyle interventions should be based upon reported barriers and strengths—not county income or population size, which did not correlate with BMI.

Not a Problem

✓ Access to primary care
✓ Adaptive equipment
✓ Someone to help with eating healthy

Problem!

✓ Feeling included
✓ Time with teammates
✓ Healthy meal
✓ Exercise
✓ Information
✓ Transportation
✓ Someone to help with exercise

Recommendations

SOVT Program

• Inclusion
  • Family
  • Team
• Accessibility
  • Home
  • Information
• Lifestyle changes
  • Simple modifications
• Motivation
  • Incentives

Future Research

• Inclusion
• Community
• Accessibility
• Transportation
• Motivation

“If SOVT developed a plan, would you want to try it?”

97% Yes!

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