

A-09: Physical activity in Sri Lankan adults

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Moderate Physical Activity (PA) (intensity >5.5 specific metabolic units, METS) lasting more than 40 min per week has been shown to reduce coronary risk. Data on PA levels of Sri Lankans are inadequate. The objective of this study was to determine the self reported levels of intensity and duration of PA in a defined population.

Four rural and 2 urban Gramasevaka Divisions were randomly selected from the Yatinuwara Divisional Secretariat Division. Using electoral lists, 300 adults (125 males), 150 rural adults and 150 urban adults were randomly selected for the study. They were 20-70 years of age. PA was assessed for the preceding week retrospectively by personal interview utilizing a structured questionnaire. Subjects rated their occupational and leisure time PA on a scale of 0-3. METS were assigned for each type of activity according to the reported intensity levels. (No breathlessness and no sweating = 3 METS, breathlessness and no sweating = 5 METS, breathlessness and lot of sweating = 7.5 METS).

30% of males and 3% of females were engaged in an occupation and 27% of males and 44% of females took part in household chores that were involved with PA intense enough to reduce coronary risk (pounding, grinding and carrying water). Only 5% men (all <30years) were engaged in other leisure time PA such as sports (cycling, elle, cricket, jogging, volley-ball, football and swimming, ruggar). Among females 40% did gardening and this was the only leisure time physical activity. Overall 39% men and 47% of females participated in PA at work or at leisure time intense enough to provide coronary protection.

Participation in aerobic exercise falls off dramatically as people get older. As the amount of PA related to manual occupations and household chores are reduced through mechanization, leisure time PA would have to provide the major opportunity for exercise promotion for all social groups.