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## A study to improve physical fitness among school going children in Western India

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**Background:** At present there are significant disparities in the gender distribution in India with a clear preponderance for males. At this juncture the government is taking all steps to improve the scenario. But the fact remains that there are very few initiatives being implemented to make the girl child stronger and healthier. Physical activity is important for everybody, including all teenagers, but especially for girls who are generally less active than boys in the same age. As teens juggle the transition from primary school to high school there are other pressures that come with it: socially, at home, and at school. Issues such as body image, the onset of menstruation, and general feelings of insecurity about the changing body can surface in these years. Physical activity sometimes takes a back seat to other priorities. However, physical activity is an important part of health and wellbeing, and girls should remain active as they grow up.

**Purpose:** This project is a part of a broader initiative aiming at developing physical fitness among school going girls of Vallabh Vidyanagar and Anand, Gujarat, India

**Methods:** 103 participants in the age group of 11 to 13 years were selected from Anandalaya School, SSR Vidya Mandir, St. Mary's School, G J Sharda School and recruited for the study. Consent was taken from the parents before commencing the intervention. The participants were screened for any cardiac, pulmonary or orthopedic problems and then recruited in the study. Outcome measures included Rockport one mile walk test and Vo2 max. Physical activity questionnaire for adolescents was administered to know the baseline physical activity level of participants. Participants were assessed prior to intervention. Structured exercise program was administered for one month. The tailor made intervention program included jogging, skipping, DBE and *Suryanamaskar* was executed by physical training teachers at the school. Participants were asked to play any outdoor sports of their choice for a minimum of 30 minutes. Checklist for the exercise program for each student was maintained to check the adherence. Participants were re-assessed after the completion of intervention.

**Results:** Paired 't' test was used to analyze the data. Significant improvement was shown in terms of Vo2max and duration taken to complete Rockport one mile walk test.

**Conclusion:** Structured exercise program improved the physical fitness among the girl children.

**Implications:** The benefit of regularly participating in sports and physical activity is unequivocal. The implications are: 1. The health benefits are both physical and psychological; 2. The skills generated through sport - time management, focus, organization, goal setting, teamwork are transferable to other areas of their lives; 3. Sport can also build bridges and bring divergent communities together; 4. Sport is an investment in the overall economic, cultural and social health of our nations, and world. Hence, physical education in the form of exercises should be a part of every school curriculum to increase the chances of healthy living.

### Biography

Harihara Prakash R is the Principal and Professor of K M Patel Institute of Physiotherapy, India. He has 18 years of professional experience in Clinical as well as Academics. He is a Doctorate in Physical Therapy from National University of Medical Sciences, Spain. He was awarded with Rashtriya Vidhya Saraswathi Puraskar for his excellent contribution in academics. He was former Dean, Faculty of Physiotherapy at Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Punjab. He is a reviewer for some international journals. He is also in the panel of NAAC. He has obtained various skills by certification in the field of Neurology, Osteopathy and Manual Therapy from various countries. He has published and presented research papers in various national and international conferences.

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