

ARTICLE REVIEWED

A Comparison of Activity Levels of Girls in Single-Gender and Mixed-Gender Physical Education

Wallace, L., Buchan, D., & Sculthorpe, N. (2020). A comparison of activity levels of girls in single-gender and mixed-gender physical education. *European Physical Education Review*, 26(1), 231-240.

THE PROBLEM:

Research indicates that physical activity patterns in youth carry over into adulthood. Alarming, 81% of 11-17 year olds fail to meet the recommended 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) guidelines. Additionally, girls participate in less physical activity when compared to boys. Therefore, girls may be more prone to developing future health problems.

As it relates to physical education, middle school and high school students spend 40.5% of the lesson in MVPA. Furthermore, girls have also been known to increase their MVPA levels when boys are not present. Therefore, single-sex physical education classes may increase physical activity levels among girls.



Research Summary:

In the west of Scotland, a total of 120, 12-15 year old girls participated in this study. All girls wore an accelerometer during two basketball lessons (one week apart). All participants had undergone a series of basketball lessons prior to this study and were familiar with the rules and skill requirements. Lessons were 30 minutes in length with 20 minutes dedicated to actual game time. For privacy purposes, the gym was sectioned off by a wall-to-wall curtain with girls on one side and boys on the other. At the end of the study, all participants were provided with a questionnaire that asked them about their lesson preferences and whether girls preferred to have single-gender, mixed-gender, or no preference physical education classes.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, girls spent more time in MVPA when participating in a same-sex physical education class, than when participating in a mixed-gender physical education class. Girls also spent less time in light physical activity and more time in vigorous physical activity in the single-gender physical education class. When surveyed following the same-sex physical education lessons, 55% of girls claimed that they favored single-gender activities and 25% of girls stated that they were likely to put in less physical effort around boys due to embarrassment, intimidation, lack of confidence, male dominance, and perceived competence.

Key Takeaway:

This study demonstrates that girls may be unaware of the effect that boys have on them and their physical activity levels in mixed-gender physical education. Physical education teachers may want to consider separating their mixed-gender physical education classes into single-sex ones to see if there is an increase in physical activity levels among female students.