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Impact of a Novel After School Program: Smart Fit Girls

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BACKGROUND

- Less than 10% of adolescents meet the recommended levels of physical activity1
- Individuals who are highly physically active are more likely to have a greater self-esteem, better body image, and increased physical activity self-efficacy 2,3,4,5
- Having a high self-esteem has been shown to lead to many positive outcomes, including improved social relationships, occupational success, and academic achievement 6,7
- Self-esteem levels drop substantially during adolescent years 8
- Similarly, Body dissatisfaction increases throughout adolescent years, which may be attributed to weight gain seen as a result of puberty 9
- Mothers are the primary agent by which young girls learn about their body and body image, 10, therefore more research is needed to better understand the relationship between mental and physical health in mothers and daughters

PURPOSE

To explore the efficacy of Smart Fit Girls (SFG) and to examine how physical activity and mother/daughter relationships affects young girls’ physical and emotional health.

METHODS

- Eight mother/daughter pairs participated in this study; girls were 10-13 years old, in good academic standing, and were not involved in school athletics at the time
- Girls participated in SFG: A 10 week after school program that taught participants about weight training and ways to improve their body image and self-esteem
- Both cohorts completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults at the beginning and end of the program
- General linear models and paired t-tests were used to assess statistical significance

PRELIMINARY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- The improvements in mothers’ Body Image and Self-Esteem were surprising and will be further assessed during the follow up qualitative component (i.e. focus groups with the mothers)
- For mothers, post Self-Esteem (SE) was significantly greater than pre SE (p = 0.00). Two possible explanations include a possible domino effect (i.e. girls report back to their mothers what they learn at SFG) or response shift-bias; this unique finding needs to be further studied
- In both cohorts, no significant differences existed for Body-Esteem Attribution, however it was assessed during the follow up qualitative component (i.e. focus groups with the mothers)
- Significant increases in body esteem suggest that Smart Fit Girls is successfully providing the participants with the tools and knowledge to improve the way they view their bodies. Implications include healthier young girls who are more likely to be successful in life as an adult

References:
9. Clarke, L. H., & Griffin, M. . (2007). Becoming and being gendered through the body: Older women, their mothers and body ima ge.