PHYSICAL FITNESS IN RURAL CHILDREN COMPARED WITH URBAN CHILDREN IN NORTH CYPRUS: A NORMATIVE STUDY
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The health-related benefits of physical activity are well known. Participation in physical activity and sport can promote social well-being, as well as physical and mental health, among children and adolescents. While some data indicated that urban children have more body fat than their rural counterparts, other data are in strong disagreement. Contradictory reports have also been published in relation to physical fitness parameters in children living in urban and rural settings. This study aims to investigate the effects of environmental factors on physical fitness in rural and urban children. To reveal the differences between physical fitness in prepubescent children of Turkish Cypriot population 3955 EUROFIT test results of 9-11 years old male junior school children from all 90 schools of five different district (Lefkoşa, Güzelyurt, Magosa, Girne ve Karpaz) of North Cyprus were collected. Lefkoşa, Magosa and Girne can be urban areas, Güzelyurt and Karpaz rural areas. During the study they continued to receive their usual physical education. Subjects were assessed using the EUROFIT TEST (www.coe.int) protocol during February and May 2005 for grades three through five. Trained research assistants administered the tests to groups of twenty to thirty children during morning and evening hours. All measures were conducted on school playgrounds which included a parket playing field, chin-up bar, and gymnasium mats. The EUROFIT test was chosen because of its ease of administration to large numbers of subjects and its choice of reliable and valid fitness measures. Height and weight measurements, test for skinfold thickness, flamingo balance test, plate tapping, sit-and-reach test, standing broad jump, handgrip strength, sit-up test, bend arm hang test, 10m*5 sprint and shuttle run tests were comprising 12 EUROFIT tests. Analysis of obtained points has shown that children with 90th percentile of their test results and above were fit enough to be successfully engaged in sports activities, which vary with age and district, whereas those children with data below 23rd percentile had risk of facing with health problems in the future. Assessment of age differences of test results also indicated different impact of this factor on health and fitness levels of children. The results showed that body mass index and skinfolds thickness were higher in the urban children (p<0.05). In cardiopulmonary and motor fitness, differences were found between groups. In contrast, flexibility and muscle endurance were significantly higher in the rural children. The children living in the urban areas were more inactive and obese, which resulted in a decrease in their flexibility and muscle endurance fitness.

Reference
1) http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_cooperation/sport/sport_for_all/eurofit/eEurofit6.asp

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