



# Leisure time physical activity of adolescents living in Switzerland: The influence of ethnicity and gender

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## Background

Today, migration is a common and worldwide phenomenon. The United Nations estimate that there are about 214 million international migrants, which corresponds to 3.1 % of the global population (UNO, 2010). Many European nations have become popular countries of immigration during recent decades. With an estimated percentage of 23.2% immigrants, Switzerland is a particularly popular destination. Social integration of immigrants has, therefore, become an important social and political issue in Switzerland. Moreover, the idea that sport promotes social inclusion is popular belief both among sport pedagogues and politicians. As a consequence, the Federal Office of Migration has mandated the Federal Office of Sports in 2009 to found a competence centre to support integration through sport.

## Purposes

This study examines (1) whether differences in leisure time physical activity (LTPA) exist between adolescents with Swiss and ethnic minority background, (2) whether possible differences depend on adolescents' gender, (3) whether ethnicity and gender are differently associated with organized and informal leisure time physical activity (LTPA), (4) whether adolescents with various ethnic background are under- or overrepresented in particular sports, (5) whether ethnicity and gender explain the number of sports adolescents engage in, and (6) whether ethnicity and gender are associated with motives for LTPA.

## Methods

The participants were 1482 students (M = 14.26, SD = 0.85 years) living in an ethnically diverse (see Table 1) urban social context in the North-Western, German-speaking part of Switzerland (754 girls: 728 boys). The students were recruited from six middle schools in the Canton of Basel. Participants completed a self-administered paper-and-pencil survey (45-90 min) in their classrooms.

Table 1. Adolescents' Ethnicity Based on Mother's and Father's Place of Birth

	CH	D, FL, O	W-Europe	SE-Europe	N-Europe	E-Europe	Asia	Africa	N-America	S-America	Oceania
CH	459 (30.4%)	81 (5.5%)	37 (2.5%)	66 (4.5%)	21 (2.1%)	12 (0.8%)	17 (1.2%)	30 (2.0%)	22 (1.5%)	12 (0.8%)	34 (2.3%)
D, FL, O		32 (2.2%)	5 (0.3%)	7 (0.5%)	6 (0.4%)	2 (0.1%)	1 (0.1%)	5 (0.3%)	3 (0.2%)	1 (0.1%)	2 (0.1%)
W-Europe			3 (0.2%)	4 (0.3%)	3 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.1%)	1 (0.1%)	4 (0.3%)	1 (0.1%)	1 (0.0%)
SE-Europe				88 (6.0%)	8 (0.5%)	1 (0.1%)	1 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (0.4%)	1 (0.1%)	9 (0.6%)
N-Europe					369 (25.0%)	2 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.1%)
E-Europe						5 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Asia							14 (0.9%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Africa								54 (3.7%)	4 (0.3%)	1 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)
N-America									7 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
S-America										5 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Oceania											13 (0.9%)
											0 (0.0%)
											0 (0.0%)

Valid N=1478, 4 adolescents with missing values



## Results

The key findings of this study are that after controlling for social and demographic influences adolescents with ethnic minority background reported more LTPA than peers from Swiss or Swiss bicultural families. Nevertheless, the differences were mainly due to the high LTPA levels of boys from South-Western and South-Eastern European families (Figure 1). In contrast, girls from these regions were significantly less active than Swiss girls (both in organized and informal settings). With regard to particular sports, few differences were found between ethnic groups. Moreover, no significant main and gender interaction effects were found regarding the total number of reported sport activities. Finally, LTPA motives depended on adolescents' ethnic background in the sense that friendship and self-actualization were stronger motives among boys from South-Western, South-Eastern and Western European/Non-European countries when compared to girls coming from these regions.

## Discussion

Counter to prior research conducted in the USA and Europe (e.g. Gordon-Larsen, McMurray & Popkin, 1999; Lamprecht, Fischer & Stamm, 2008; Sagatun, Kolle, Anderssen, Thoresen & Sogaard, 2008), ethnic minority adolescents were more engaged in LTPA than Swiss peers. However, our findings support prior investigations, in which male adolescent generally engaged in LTPA at a much higher rate than females, and in which the level of LTP inactivity was particularly pronounced among ethnic minority girls (Sagatun et al., 2008). The fact that – at least among boys – adolescents with ethnic minority background are more active than Swiss or Swiss bicultural youth is a positive finding as some researchers have assumed that discrimination and racism are factors that may cause differences in sport participation and that fear of being exposed to racism could keep ethnic minorities away from sport (De Knop et al., 1995).

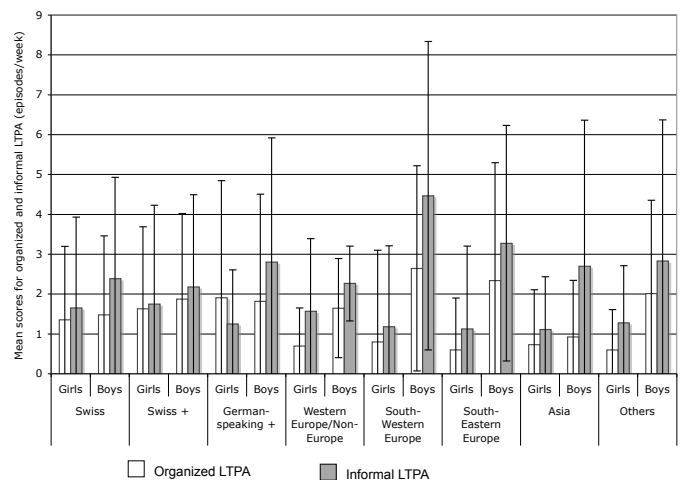


Figure 1. Organized and Informal Leisure Time Physical Activity (LTPA) Across Ethnic Groups and Gender

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