Hip Hop = Healthy: participant perceptions of an innovative physical activity intervention for adolescent health

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Introduction: Obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the Australian adult population and there is an emergence of obesity related diseases in children that were previously considered exclusive to the adult population. Behaviours associated with eating and physical activity are largely established in adolescence and continue throughout adulthood. Hence, it is imperative to target adolescents with physical activity interventions to improve their physical fitness and overall health and, in turn, prevent the onset of lifestyle diseases. However, adolescents are, at best, a difficult population to engage in activities outside their own particular interests.

Method: HYPE - an innovative physical activity intervention utilising street dance to improve physical activity levels, raise self esteem, and promote social connectedness was conducted in nine schools with over 270 participants aged between 12 and 18 years. 84 participants completed an 8-item questionnaire using both open and closed ended questions that operationalised a broad conception of health encompassing physical, social and mental wellbeing. Analysis was quantitative and qualitative in nature.

Results: Results suggest street dance is a viable and appealing medium of physical activity for adolescents. Participants enjoyed partaking in street dance classes and reported physical, mental, and social health benefits. Findings of particular interest relate to participant perceptions of improved self esteem and social connectedness as these are acknowledged as factors impacting adolescent health and wellbeing.

Conclusion: Consistent with the health promotion tenet of “starting from where the community is at” the findings support the need to use innovative physical activity interventions that engage adolescents in activities they enjoy, such as street dance.