



AIII-02

Physical activity among adults in southern Sri Lanka

B. Perera¹, N. Fernando¹ and T. Østbye²

¹Dept. of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka

²Duke University Medical Center, North Carolina, USA

Regular physical activity and exercise can enhance physical and psychological health. We investigated the prevalence of physical activity, association between Body Mass Index (BMI) and physical activity, and possible factors that prevent adults in southern Sri Lanka from being physically active. A representative, community sample of 2044 adults (age 18- 85 years) from the Southern Province was surveyed using an interviewer administered questionnaire. A total of 1129 (55.2%) females and 915 (44.8%) males participated in the study. Twenty one percent of the participants were underweight, 18% were overweight and 4% were obese. About 63% of the subjects reported that they had engaged in some form of rigorous physical activity, intentionally or unintentionally, at least 3 days in the week preceding the survey. Females were more likely than males to be engaged in physical activity (69.5% versus 59.5%, $p < .01$). Almost half of the participants indicated no interest in being physically active on a regular basis. Fifty eight percent of the participants indicated limited time as a barrier to engaging in regular physical activity, and 6.7% indicated lack of a suitable place to exercise as another barrier. No relationship was found between BMI and physical activity. A considerable portion of adults in southern Sri Lanka reports a sedentary life style. Lack of motivation to be engaged in regular physical activity, expressed by a significant proportion of the study participants, may be due to limited knowledge of the health benefits of physical activity, and to a perceived lack of facilities and time for such activities. To be physically active, adults do not require substantial resources: they should be educated about simple physical activities such as walking, and about the health benefits that can accrue.