Section: SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
Abstract: SSH-07

Assessment of physical activity and development in early childhood: A systematic review and public health implications

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INTRODUCTION: Physical activity contributes to the motor and cognitive development of children aged 0 to 5 years and is also associated with the prevention of chronic diseases in adulthood. However, the persistent gap in conceptual definitions, assessment instruments, and analytical methods compromises data comparability and the effectiveness of interventions, limiting scientific findings. Within the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS), the formulation of public policies and the integration of health promotion strategies depend on the identification of assessment instruments that ensure validity and reliability in data measurement. **METHOD**: A systematic review was conducted based on PRISMA guidelines, with searches performed in the PubMed, Scielo, and UpToDate databases using indexed terms. The scope included studies analyzing the association between development and physical activity measured through assessment instruments and scales in children aged 0–5 years. Findings were structured according to the socioecological model. Studies evaluating children with morbidities and other age groups were excluded. A critical analysis and synthesis of the main available scientific evidence were performed. **RESULTS**: Twenty-three articles published within the last 10 years were included, classified at the individual, interpersonal, and environmental levels. Results indicate that parental support and safe environments act as cross-cutting determinants of physical activity. However, the lack of standardization in measurement instruments still limits results and correlations, highlighting an important methodological gap. **DISCUSSION**: The identification of 23 studies demonstrates that physical activity in childhood is a phenomenon influenced by multifactorial aspects. The presented data corroborate existing literature, reinforcing the need for intersectoral interventions, while also emphasizing the necessity of robust assessment instruments. Within the SUS context, results indicate that the promotion of physical activity should be integrated into Primary Health Care. **CONCLUSION**: The findings represent a preliminary stage of a broader study aimed at testing instruments and scales to assess the impact of physical activity on child development. The topic may contribute to public policies and guide health promotion actions within the School Health Program (PSE–SUS).

KEYWORDS: Child development; Health promotion; Health policy; Validation study; Unified Health System.

ABCS Health Sci. 2026;51(Suppl.):e0261023
https://doi.org/10.7322/2026comuabc51.ssh07