



Executive Summary: Attitudinal Research Study

Introduction

The overall purpose of the Champlain Healthy School-aged Children Initiative Attitudinal Research Study (2007) was to assess the eating and physical activity patterns of school-aged children and their families in the Champlain District.

The results provide a parent-reported profile of the activity and eating habits of school-aged children as well as information on parent perceptions of their child's health and of the facilities available in their community that support physical activity.

The survey was conducted by CCI Research (formerly Compustat Consultants Inc) on behalf of the Champlain Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Network (CCPN).

Methodology

The target population for this research was parents and primary caregivers of children aged 4-12 years living in the five regions comprising the Champlain District, namely: the united counties of Prescott & Russell; the united counties of Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry; the united counties of Leeds, Grenville & Lanark; Renfrew County & District; and the City of Ottawa.

The telephone survey was administered in June 2007, with a total of 1940 completed surveys (400 in each of Ottawa, Renfrew County & District and Leeds, Grenville & Lanark, and 370 in each of Prescott & Russell and Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry).

A random sampling methodology and use of translation to accommodate preferred language of choice was implemented. Samples for each region were established to allow for margins of error of approximately +/-5%, assuming a random and representative sample. Overall results were then weighted to reflect the relative populations in each region.

Of the 1940 respondents, 1890 completed the survey in English and 50 completed the survey in French.

Overview of Results

The overall results provide a general view of parents who believe that their children have adequate physical activity levels, good eating habits, and are at about the right weight.

However, data from Statistics Canada and other national sources indicate that these results are **not** consistent with other measures of child activity and weight. Many children are not meeting the recommended guidelines for physical activity and healthy eating.

Survey Highlights (weighted by region)

Physical Activity

- **When asked how physically active they consider their child to be, nine out of ten parents considered their child to be 'active' (34%) or 'very active' (56%).**
- Almost two-thirds of parents (63%) considered themselves to be 'active' or 'very active'.

- Two-thirds of parents (68%) indicated that, outside of school hours, their child is active more than five days of the week, while one-quarter (25%) reported their child is active between three and five days of the week.
- Almost all parents identified that their child had played outdoors (99%) or had been involved in family outings such as walking hiking or biking (94%). Fewer children had participated in other recreational/physical activities (87%) or participated in a team sport (71%).
- **About one-quarter (24%) of children in the Champlain District spend an average of two or more hours per day in front of a video screen (TV, video, internet).**

Eating Behaviour

- Four out of five parents (82%) considered their child to have ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ eating habits.
- Almost three out of five parents (59%) reported that their child consumes 3-5 servings of fruit and vegetables daily. **One-quarter (25%) of parents report their child consumes 2 or less servings of fruit and vegetables daily.**
- Almost all parents (94%) reported that their child eats breakfast more than 5 times per week.
- About half of parents (52%) reported having food for supper prepared outside the home once or twice a week.
- Half of parents (49%) reported that their child eats fast foods once or twice or more per week.
- One-third of parents (37%) reported that their child eats supper in front of the TV once or twice a week or more.
- **About two-thirds of parents (63%) reported that their child consumes one to three or more cans, bottles, or cups of soft drinks, sport drinks, or fruit flavoured drinks that are not 100% juice, per week.**
- About one-third of parents (35%) agreed or strongly agreed that their child influences their purchase of unhealthy foods.

Health and Weight Perception

- **The large majority of parents (83%) felt their child was ‘about the right weight’. 7% of parents felt their child was overweight. Almost no one (0.2%) felt their child was obese.**
- In judging the health of their child’s weight, almost half of parents (45%) said they used information from a doctor or other health care professional or said they used a combination of height and weight.
- Three-quarters of parents (76%) indicated they were ‘not very’ or ‘not at all concerned’ about their child’s weight.
- Half of parents (51%) indicated they were ‘somewhat’ or ‘very concerned’ about the risk of their child developing a chronic illness such as heart disease or diabetes.
- Almost nine out of ten parents (87%) reported they feel they have ‘some influence’ or ‘a great deal of influence’ over their child’s weight.
- Almost nine out of ten parents (88%) reported their child has either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ self-esteem.

Other

- In the Champlain District the most prevalent and most used resource for physical activity is parks and outdoor recreation areas (96%). Least prevalent and relatively least used is other fitness facilities such as gyms, sports clubs, etc (68%).

- 48% of parents identified the media, including the internet, TV, or radio, as their primary source of necessary information, knowledge and skills needed to promote healthy eating and physical activity within their family.

Conclusion

The results of our Parental Attitudinal Study suggest the existence of parental perceptions of children’s physical activity and eating behaviours which are not consistent with other measures of child activity and weight. Parents surveyed do not appear to understand/ have knowledge of current recommendations for physical activity and healthy eating behaviours in children.

These are consistent with findings of other parent perception studies, such as the Dietitians of Canada and Kraft Canada Inc. study conducted in spring 2005. The resulting *Speaking of Food and Healthy Living* report (available at http://www.dietitians.ca/news/downloads/SFHL_Report_English_2005.pdf) identified a significant gap between parents’ perception and reality when it came to the weight, physical activity, and eating behaviours of their children.

Publication (in press)

Adamo, K., Papadakis, S., Dojeji, L., Turnau, M., Simmons, L., Parameswaran, M., Cunningham, J., Pipe, A., and R. Reid. Using path analysis to understand parents’ perceptions of their children’s weight, physical activity and eating habits in the Champlain District of Ontario. *Pediatrics & Child Health* (in press).

SUMMARY

Key Survey Findings vs. Other Measures of Child Activity, Eating Behaviours & Weight

The Perception in Champlain...	The Reality...
When asked how physically active they consider their child to be, nine out of ten parents considered their child to be ‘active’ (34%) or ‘very active’ (56%).	87% of children and youth are not meeting the recommended 90 minutes of physical activity a day. (<i>Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2009</i>)
About one-quarter (24%) of children spend an average of two or more hours per day in front of a video screen (TV, video, internet).	Only 10% of Canadian youth are meeting the guideline for screen time of <2 hours per day, and many get close to 6 hours per day. (<i>Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2009</i>)
One-quarter (25%) of parents report their child consumes 2 or less servings of fruit and vegetables daily.	Only one in eight (13%) children in Ontario is eating five or more servings of fruit and vegetables daily. (<i>Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, 2009</i>)
About two-thirds of parents (63%) reported that their child consumes one to three or more cans, bottles, or cups of soft drinks, sport drinks, or fruit flavoured drinks that are not 100% juice, per week.	Approximately one-third of Ontario students in Grades 4 to 8 consume soft drinks daily. (<i>Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health School Nutrition Workgroup Steering Committee – Call to Action, 2004</i>)
The large majority of parents (83%) felt their child was ‘about the right weight’. 7% of parents felt their child was overweight. Almost no one (0.2%) felt their child was obese.	Among children aged 2 to 17 years, the current rate of overweight and obesity in Ontario is 28%. (<i>Shields M. Measured Obesity. Overweight Canadian children and adolescents. Statistics Canada. Cat no 82-620-MWE2005001</i>)

DEMOGRAPHICS

Weighted by region

Respondents

Gender	%
Male	25%
Female	75%
Age	%
19 – 24	1%
25 – 34	21%
35 – 44	59%
45 – 54	16%
> 55	1%
Education	%
High school or less	18%
Some post-secondary	15%
Completed post-secondary	69%
Household Income Before Taxes	%
Under \$20,000	5%
\$20,000 to less than \$40,000	11%
\$40,000 to less than \$60,000	13%
\$60,000 to less than \$80,000	15%
\$80,000 to less than \$100,000	15%
\$100,000 to less than \$120,000	10%
\$120,000 or more	19%
Don't know	3%
Refused	11%
Region	%
City of Ottawa	64%
Renfrew & District	8%
United counties of Leeds, Grenville & Lanark	13%
United counties of Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry	9%
United counties of Prescott & Russell	6%

Children

Gender	%
Male	49%
Female	51%
Age	%
4 – 6	36%
7 – 9	30%
10 – 12	34%