INTRODUCTION

• Individuals with an autism spectrum disorder (IWASD) are, in general, not physically active at the frequency and intensity recommended for optimal health.

• Researchers suggest this is in part because of sensory, motor, and social challenges (Pan & Frey, 2006; Obrusnikova & Cavalier, 2011).

• Previous research on physical inactivity in this population has not focused on direct responses from IWASD and their caregivers across an entire state or large geographical area.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to collect responses from one state’s residents with ASD and their caregivers regarding participation, or lack thereof, in physical activities by IWASD.

METHODS

Survey Design: Cross-sectional survey design presented through anonymous web-based survey.

Participants: 57 IWASD; 82 caregivers of IWASD.

Information collected:
• Demographic information
• Specific ASD diagnosis
• Type, frequency, mode, and duration of physical activities
• Sources of encouragement related to physical activity
• Challenges to participation in physical activities
• Nature of physical activity related to daily living routines

RESULTS

• Reported barriers to physical activity centered on sensory challenges consistent with characteristics of ASD, such as bright lighting, loud noise, and difficulty in understanding social situations.

• Individual challenges to physical activity included: medical co-morbidities, lack of motivation, and awareness of deficit when compared to peers.

• IWASD identified a preference for and desired ability to engage in physical activities that:
  • Do not require a great deal of physical coordination
  • Could be engaged in as an individual or group
  • Do not require social skills
  • Could be sustained for periods long enough to be of benefit

• IWASD expressed strong desire to increase physical activity participation, even in group settings.

CONCLUSIONS

• These results provide novel insights into the challenges of physical activity for IWASD in one state.

• These results demonstrate that IWASD possess a definite interest in increasing activity levels.

• Most of the desired activities seem to fit well with the diagnosis, with the exception of IWASD reporting a desire for more physical activity in group settings.

REFERENCES
