

## PATTERNS OF LIFESTYLE AND REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG PORTUGUESE AND CAPE VERDEANS LIVING IN LISBON, PORTUGAL

M. I. Varela-Silva<sup>1</sup> and O. Vasconcelos<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Michigan–Dearborn, Behavioural Sciences, Dearborn, USA;

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Sport Sciences and Physical Education University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

**Abstract:** *The concept of lifestyle integrates aspects related with nutritional habits, ways of spending free time, material and cultural incentives for an active and healthy way of living, regular physical activity and exercise taking into account several sociocultural variables. Understanding leisure time and play is crucial. It is during periods of leisure that youngsters become themselves. Leisure time is the period when different lifestyles may be experienced, changed and reformulated. Regular leisure activities provide a means of socialisation with their families, their friends and with the society in general. Concomitantly, the self-identity and the social identity are formed based on these factors. Thus, the creation of a good range of habits for an active lifestyle and regular patterns of physical activity in children is the most effective procedure to have a healthier adult population. Furthermore, the health benefits of the regular physical activity during childhood and adolescence may be realised before adulthood. We studied a sample of 177 Portuguese and 188 Cape Verdean children, with a mean age of  $12.04 \pm 0.9$  attending to the same school in Lisbon, Portugal. The Portuguese children live in regular neighbourhoods and the Cape Verdean children live in slums around the Portuguese neighbourhoods. To assess lifestyle, we used the following questionnaires: „The Sociocultural and Physical Activities Inventory” and the „The Movement Activity Inventory” (Renson and VanReusel, 1990). Together, both of the questionnaires document:*

- a) Family and socioeconomic characteristics – age, order of birth, size of the family, gender of the older siblings, socioeconomic status (SES), parent’s professions, parent’s academic levels and type of dwelling;*
- b) Organisation of the daily life – distance between school and home, types of transports used regularly, time spent in and out of home in several activities and habits of sleeping;*
- c) Sport and sociocultural participation – Include the number of the material incentives to play and sport practice, opportunities for informal motor play activities, as well as formal participation in sports, by the children and their parents, both in and out of school.*

*Our results showed that: 1. Both groups play at the same places. The Cape Verdeans play more than the Portuguese does in the backyard of the home. 2. Both groups have similar types of social life, but the Portuguese go more often to the cinema than the Cape Verdeans. 3. There is a higher percentage of boys who attend to sports events, regularly. 4. The Portuguese children play computer games more often than the Cape Verdeans.*

**Keywords:** *Lifestyle; Physical activity; Socioeconomic characteristics; Portuguese and Cape Verdean children.*

### Introduction and theoretical background

The recognition of adolescence as a distinct period of development within the life span dates, at least to XV century, but its present concept is, basically a product of the XX century. One part of this concept is an implicit notion that every culture, in one way or another, incorporates the younger generations in their social network as a way of preserving their own identities.

The basic neuroendocrine mechanisms that underlie adolescence are common to all people. However the cultural meaning for these biological events vary according to different influences of the environment and to several sociocultural contexts, as well (Bogin 1993). One of the reasons that are pointed out for the inclusion of the adolescent stage in the human life cycle is the extended time required ... learn and practice adult economic, social, and sexual behaviour before reproducing (Bogin 1999:216).

These processes of learning are not smooth and Hamburg (1990) notes that the disjunction between social and biological development as well as the erosion of the family and social support networks cause a great deal of stress. The biological development of the individual occurs earlier than his/her social maturation, thus adolescents are often faced with making decisions that will affect their lives in a time when their cognitive development and their social experiences may not allow them to choose the correct path. On the other hand, until a couple of decades ago, many sociocultural groups provided stable links, familiar relationships and cultural guides that offered help and support to the youngsters, even during troubled times. They also provided them social models and mechanisms of coping and adaptation. In our societies today, several indicators, such as migration, the dispersion of families, and the increase of one-parent families, among others, reflect the erosion of social support of the above mentioned networks.

Because of all of these biological and social changes, we need to know in depth the lifestyle and the regular physical activity of our youngsters, in order to act, formal and informally, in the best interests of adolescents (Varela-Silva and Vasconcelos 1997). Understanding leisure time and play is crucial. It is during periods of leisure that youngsters become themselves. The leisure time is the period where different lifestyles may be experienced, changed and reformulated. The regular leisure activities provide a means of socialisation with family, friends and with the society in general. Concomitantly, the self-identity and the social identity are formed, based on these factors. In this study we will approach some of these issues referring the Portuguese and the Cape-Verdean cultures. In spite of the increase in migration from the Cape Verde islands to Portugal during the last two decades, we know close to nothing about the Cape Verdean patterns of lifestyle. There is the need of studying the regular patterns of physical activity and the way the immigrants preserve or lose typical leisure activities from their home country.

Nowadays, Portuguese society has not one single cultural tradition, but rather consists of different cultural and ethnic groups that interact in many and varied ways (Filho 1981). These multiple interactions are likely to alter the biocultural nature of the traditional Portuguese social framework.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of our study is to verify the difference in patterns of lifestyle among Portuguese and Cape Verdean adolescents living in Portugal. Only by this means will we acquire a better and deeper knowledge about these aspects that make possible a more objective and rational educational and political interventions. It is hoped that this study can facilitate decision-making to be more effective, taking into account the specific needs of the groups, and avoid the waste of money and time planning strategies that do not fit the biosocial realities of these populations. Finally, only with further knowledge about these issues, considering these groups, we are we able to maximise their human potential.

## Methodology

### *Sample*

The sample was composed by 177 Portuguese and 188 Portuguese Cape-Verdean subjects of the 5th and 6th grades, with a general mean age of  $12.04 \pm 0.9$  years, from a school placed at the outskirts of Lisbon, close to the slums where the Cape Verdean people live. All the subjects were born in Portugal.

### *Hypothesis*

- The children from the slums have, in principle, more freedom of movement for spontaneous physical activity (Haywood 1993).
- Considering that the majority of the Cape Verdean subjects live in slums, and tend not to have such a bigger parental supervision as their Portuguese counterparts, they may be allowed to use their leisure time in a more free way. Consequently, the Cape Verdeans will show different patterns of lifestyle when compared with the Portuguese boys and girls.

### *Procedures*

The subjects answered to a questionnaire that covered the following aspects of their lifestyle:

1. Type of dwelling – The type of dwelling was categorised according to the official denomination of the Municipality of Amadora. This taxonomy distinguishes “regular dwellings” from “run-down dwellings”. Regular dwellings are defined as the dwellings that according to the way they were built have the only purpose to lodge a family. These dwellings have a predetermined planning and are equipped with basic sanitation, electricity, and suitable system of draining and waste management. Run-down dwellings are defined as buildings without a permanent character, made out of old and used sanitation, electricity and suitable system of draining and waste management.

2. Places where the subjects usually play – Defines the settings for informal motor play activities, such as garden, backyard, schoolyard, street, and friend’s house (Renson and Vanreusel 1990).

3. Distance school-home-school – testing the movement autonomy during transportation to and from school (Renson and Vanreusel 1990).

4. Extra-school sportive activities - active participation in sports is considered an important factor in the patterns of lifestyle of boys and girls. The subjects were asked about their regular participation both in competitive and non-competitive settings (Renson and Vanreusel 1990).

5. Time consumed in several activities out of the school, such as: watching TV, playing computer games, reading, being with friends, listening to music, helping in domestic tasks, and helping parents in their jobs (Renson and Vanreusel 1990).

6. Sociocultural participation in and out of the school (Renson and Vanreusel 1990).

7. Types of games organised spontaneously.

### *Statistical techniques*

1. Descriptive statistics: means and standard deviation.
2. Inferential statistics:
  - t student
  - Analysis of Variance – ANOVA
  - z test of proportions for independent groups
3. Level of confidence for all the results:  $p < .05$ .

## Results and Discussion

### *Type of dwelling*

We verified that 93.9% of the Portuguese subjects live in standard dwellings and 97.6% of the Cape Verdean live in sub-standard places inside the slums (Figure 1). Although housing type is not sufficient to define socioeconomic status (SES), we decided to use this variable as a general indicator of SES.

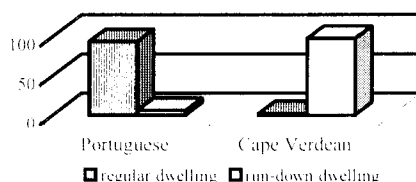


Figure 1: Type of dwelling.

According to Haywood (1993) many studies find that, in general, variations in SES affect a child's education, activity, and parental supervision. These, in turn, are related to differences in motor performance between African-origin and European-origin people. There is an assumption that a more permissive educational rearing, typical from the low social classes, allows more freedom for physical activity and improves motor development during the early stages of growth. Much work is needed to verify or modify this assumption. Indeed, little is known about the influence of SES on motor development and learning. On the one hand, it may be that the characteristic lifestyle of the lowest socioeconomic groups improves motor development for general sports activity. But on the other hand, it is also verified that children from upper SES groups are more advanced in some other areas of motor development, due to the fact of having had better nutrition and general health care.

### *Places where the subjects usually play*

After we verified the living conditions of the children of both of the groups, we found that a similar percentage of both Portuguese and Cape Verdean children play at the same places. No significant differences were found between the two groups, even when we divided them by gender.

Even the number of different types of places that the children use for play did not differ significantly between Portuguese and Cape Verdean samples (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of places where children usually play.

	Mean±SD	t	P
Portuguese	2.43±1.29	.982	NS
Cape Verdean	2.63±1.43		

### *Distance school-home*

The majority of both Portuguese and Cape Verdean children go to school by walking and this fact can be justified by the proximity between their neighbourhoods and the school. However, a higher percentage of Portuguese subjects live less than 1 Km from the

school (Table 2) meaning that the Cape Verdean children must spend more time walking to and from school.

Table 2. Distance school/home.

	Less than 1Km	1-2 Km	2- 5Km	More than 5Km
Portuguese	61.1%	20.0%	11.6%	7.4%
C. Verdean	34.8%	33.7%	23.6%	7.9%
Z	0.03	NS	NS	NS

### ***Extra-school sportive activities (both in competitive and non-competitive settings)***

Considering the sportive activity out of the school curriculum, we verified that both groups have similar results. 47.4% of the Portuguese and 37.1% of the Cape Verdeans has some extra-curricular physical activity. Only, 10.5% of the Portuguese and 9.0% of the Cape Verdean children belong to formal competitive settings and these low values may be attributed to the low mean age of the subjects. Some of the Portuguese children practice swimming (22.1%), while some of the Cape Verdean children practice football (18.0%) (Figure 2).

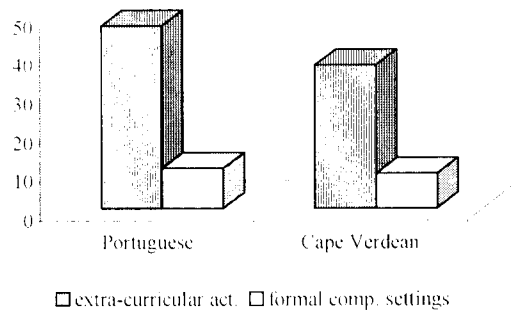


Figure 2: Extra-school sportive activities.

### ***Time consumed in several activities out of the school***

Considering the Table 3, we verify that both groups differ in terms of their time consumed in several activities out of school. Reading and watching TV seem to be the most homogeneous items. The subjects spend basically the same amount of time reading (no statistically significant differences were found in this item) and watching TV (we only verified a greater percentage of Portuguese girls (30%) than the Cape Verdean Portuguese boys (17.6%) who watch TV between 1-2 hours/day. Computers seem to be an activity much more typical from the Portuguese subjects. However, if you considered the gender differences we verify that boys, in general, spend more time than girls in this activity. The Cape Verdeans, both boys and girls, spend, in general a significant greater amount of time with their friends, than the Portuguese. This can be explained by the way that Cape Verdeans build their lodges in the slums. The concept of "enlarged family" works when the Cape Verdeans have to choose the place to build their precarious

habitation. In this sense, they search for neighbourhoods where they can find friends or people from the same island of origin, as they know, in advanced, that they will count with the support of their "Cape Verdean family".

The girls spend more time listening to music and spending time in domestic tasks seems to be, as expected, a task more for girls than for boys.

Finally, a significant higher percentage of Cape Verdean boys help their parents in their professions.

Table 3. Activities out of the school.

	%	Port. male	Port. female	CVP male	CVP female	P
TV	Less 1h	30.1	28.7	27	26.3	
	1-2h	26.8	<b>30</b>	<b>17.6</b>	21	<b>.04</b>
	2-3h	18.2	17.5	15.2	11.5	
	More 3h	24.7	23.7	34.1	35.7	
	Don't do	0	0	5.8	5.2	
Computer	Less 1h	24.7	<b>47.5</b>	35.2	<b>13.6</b>	<b>.0000</b>
	1-2h	<b>23.6</b>	13.7	<b>11.7</b>	12.6	<b>.02</b>
	2-3h	<b>15.0</b>	5	7.0	<b>2.1</b>	<b>.000</b>
	More 3h	<b>19.3</b>	<b>1.25</b>	12.9	5.2	<b>.000</b>
	Don't do	<b>17.2</b>	<b>32.5</b>	32.9	66.3	<b>.000 / .0000</b>
Reading	Less 1h	48.3	52.5	51.7	54.7	
	1-2h	13.9	21.2	16.4	18.9	
	2-3h	5.3	7.5	5.8	4.21	
	More 3h	8.6	6.2	5.8	12.6	
	Don't do	23.6	12.5	20	9.4	
Friends	Less 1h	<b>13.9</b>	8.7	<b>25.8</b>	26.3	<b>.02 / .002</b>
	1-2h	19.3	25	18.8	17.8	
	2-3h	17.2	<b>11.2</b>	10.5	<b>20</b>	<b>.05</b>
	More 3h	35.4	<b>47.5</b>	31.7	<b>22.1</b>	<b>.0000</b>
	Don't do	13.9	7.5	11.7	13.6	
Listening to music	Less 1h	48.3	<b>47.5</b>	37.6	<b>24.2</b>	<b>.0005</b>
	1-2h	25.8	22.5	17.6	27.3	
	2-3h	<b>4.3</b>	10	16.4	<b>16.8</b>	<b>.000</b>
	More 3h	7.5	12.5	11.7	18.9	
	Don't do	13.9	7.5	16.4	12.6	
Domestic tasks	Less 1h	40.8	<b>47.5</b>	48.2	<b>28.4</b>	<b>.0003</b>
	1-2h	11.8	22.5	14.1	26.3	
	2-3h	<b>3.2</b>	8.7	<b>5.8</b>	14.7	<b>.001</b>
	More 3h	1.0	1.2	1.1	13.6	
	Don't do	<b>43.0</b>	<b>20</b>	30.5	16.8	<b>.05 / .02</b>
Helping parents in their profession	Less 1h	19.3	17.5	25.8	17.8	
	1-2h	<b>3.2</b>	3.7	<b>14.2</b>	7.3	<b>.0004</b>
	2-3h	7.5	1.2	5.8	3.1	
	More 3h	3.2	2.5	4.7	7.3	
	Don't do	<b>66.6</b>	75	<b>49.4</b>	64.2	<b>.008</b>

### *Sociocultural participation in and out of the school*

The diversity of cultural and social stimulation is fundamental for the development of the individual, but there is a need of organisations and institutions to regulate this stimulation. Thus, we asked the children about the diversity of their sociocultural participation: inside the school, but as extra-curricular activities, and outside the school. We considered the following possibilities: sport clubs inside the school, sport clubs outside the school, religious groups, cultural clubs inside the school, cultural clubs outside the school, scouts, neighbourhood groups and musical bands. We only found significant differences between both groups in some of these possibilities (Figure 3).

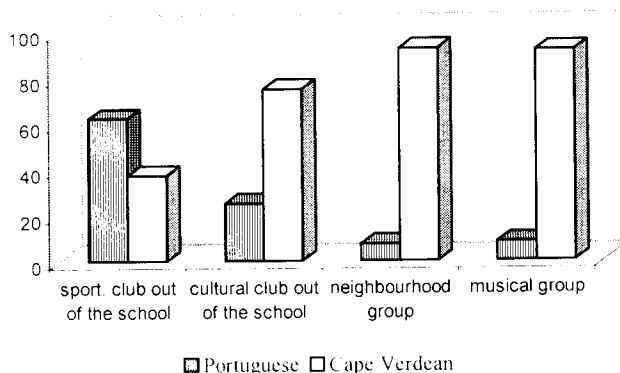


Figure 3: Sociocultural participation.

There is a significantly higher percentage of Portuguese subjects who practice physical activity in clubs out of the school and this finding is easily justified by the differences in the economic status of both groups. However, about the other three possibilities – cultural clubs out of the school, neighbourhood clubs and musical bands – the Cape Verdeans have a much higher participation than the Portuguese. This can be justified by the fact that the municipality of Amadora, and other non-governmental organisations, have been gradually increasing support for several initiatives inside the slums. The municipality and the non-government agencies helped to form some working groups that have been helping to include the Cape Verdeans in the Portuguese society, while at the same time trying to preserve their cultural identity.

### *Types of games organised spontaneously*

Finally, we analysed the diversity and the types of games that children organise spontaneously (Figure 4).

We verified that there are some games played, almost exclusively, according to ethnicity and gender.

It seems that, among these subjects, football is losing its masculine label. Even 33.3% of the Portuguese girls play football, however this percent is significantly lower than the other three groups (Portuguese boys: 85.2%, Cape Verdean boys: 97.7% and Cape Verdean girls: 72.7%).

*Hide and seek* and *tag*) are played by all the groups with no significant differences between them.

The 35 is a typical game from the Cape Verdean girls, who showed the highest percentage of participation (77.3%) differing from the other three sub-groups, among whose we did not find any significant differences (Portuguese boys: 20.4%; Portuguese girls: 31.0% and Cape Verdean boys: 43.2%).

The *pisa-pé* is a “girlie game”, independently of the ethnicity, but *malha*, which is one of the oldest Portuguese typical games, is played predominantly by the Cape Verdian girls.

The *castelo* game is mainly played by Cape Verdeans and *stop* and *mata* seem to be played by all the groups.

Playing *marbles* is a masculine game with no doubt, while *barra do lenço* seems to be played by all the groups with the exception of the Portuguese boys, who may consider this game a kind of “sissy” one.

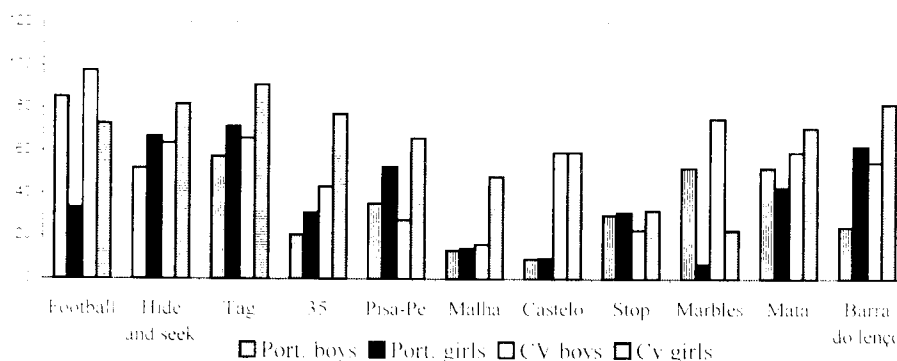


Figure 4: Different games played spontaneously.

We verified that there are some games played, almost exclusively, according to ethnicity and gender.

It seems that, among these subjects, football is loosing its masculine label. Even 33.3% of the Portuguese girls play football, however this percent is significantly lower than the other three groups (Portuguese boys: 85.2%, Cape Verdean boys: 97.7% and Cape Verdean girls: 72.7%).

*Hide and seek* and *tag* are played by all the groups with no significant differences between them.

The 35 is a typical game from the Cape Verdean girls, who showed the highest percentage of participation (77.3%) differing from the other three sub-groups, among whose we did not find any significant differences (Portuguese boys: 20.4%; Portuguese girls: 31.0% and Cape Verdean boys: 43.2%).

The *pisa-pé* is a “girlie game”, independently of the ethnicity, but *malha*, which is one of the oldest Portuguese typical games, is played predominantly by the Cape Verdian girls.

The *castelo* game is mainly played by Cape Verdeans and *stop* and *mata* seem to be played by all the groups.

Playing *marbles* is a masculine game with no doubt, while *barra do lenço* seems to be played by all the groups with the exception of the Portuguese boys, who may consider this game a kind of “sissy” one.



Finally, we examined the diversity of games played by each group and we found significant differences between groups, but within each ethnic group we found no significant differences between boys and girls. (Tables 4 and 5). The Cape Verdeans play a significantly greater number of spontaneous games than the Portuguese.

Table 4. Diversity of games – ANOVA.

	Mean±SD	F	P
Portuguese boys	4.69±2.92	10.985	.0000
Portuguese girls	4.71±2.59		
Cape Verdean boys	6.86±3.64		
Cape Verdean girls	7.59±2.94		

Table 5. Diversity of games – Sheffé's posthoc test.

P. boys	P. boys	P. boys	P. girls	P. girls	CV boys
P. girls	CV boys	CV girls	CV boys	CV girls	CV girls
NS	.007	.000	.01	.000	NS

## Conclusions

1. Both groups play at the same places.
2. The Portuguese children play compute games more often than the Cape Verdeans.
3. The Portuguese children have more time to spend with their friends.
4. The Cape-Verdean children spend more time doing domestic tasks and helping parents in their jobs.
5. The Cape-Verdeans have more possibilities of belonging to cultural groups and music bands.
6. The different types of games are, in general, divided by gender and by ethnicity. However, there are few ones played by both groups.

The differences in the patterns of lifestyle may contribute to a more or less healthy way of living. With this study we verified distinct patterns of spending free time, that reflect different social interactions, mainly caused by the different place of living. Some aspects of the Cape Verdean culture are dragged into the Portuguese schools and act in a synergetic way with the Portuguese culture.

## References

- Bogin, B. (1993) Biocultural Studies of Ethnic Groups. In: G.W. Lasken, C.G.N. Mascie-Taylor (pp.33–61). *Research Strategies in Human Biology. Field and Survey Studies.*: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Bogin, B. (1999) *Patterns of Human Growth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Filho, J.L. (1981) *Cabo-Verde. Subsídios para um Levantamento Cultural*. Plátano Editora, Lisboa
- Hamburg, D.A. (1990). Preparing for life: the critical transition of adolescent. In: R.E. Muuss (Eds) *Adolescent Behavior and Society: A book of readings*, (pp. 5–10). Singapore: McGraw-Hill International Editions.

- Haywood, K. (1993) *Life span motor development*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers.
- Renson, R.; Vanreusel, B. (1990) The sociocultural and physical activity inventories. In: J. Simons, G.P. Beunen, R. Renson, A.L.M. Claessens, B. Vanreusel, J.A.V. Lefevre *Growth and Fitness of Flemish Girls - The Leuven Growth Study*. (pp. 41-45) Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers.
- Varela-Silva, M.L., Vasconcelos, M.O.F. (1997). *Estilo de vida e actividade física habitual em nadadores: estudo comparativo com outros atletas de desportos individuais e colectivos*. Comunicação apresentada no XX Congresso da Associação Portuguesa de Técnicos de Natação. Setúbal.

*Mailing address:* Maria Inês Varela-Silva  
Department of Behavioral Sciences  
University of Michigan-Dearborn  
Dearborn, MI 48128  
USA  
E-mail: inesvs@umd.umich.edu