The questionnaire technique is still the most popular way to assess physical activity, although objective tools gain more popularity. The paper-and-pencil questionnaires have several advantages: low cost, non-invasive, calculation of energy expenditure, and the ability to be modified in order to suit the population of interest. Finally, most of the questionnaires reach acceptable reliability. However, there are some limitations: not applicable in children, expensive because of staff costs, and underestimation of low intensity activities. Next, validity of questionnaires is difficult to establish because of the absence of an inexpensive criterion. The advantages of paper-and-pencil questionnaires are equally valid for computerised questionnaires. However, specific advantages are attributed to computer questionnaires. They enable the researcher to administer the questionnaire to a large number of subjects simultaneously. Development of the software permits skipping of unnecessary questions, depending on the subjects’ answers. Consequently, administration time without calculation errors will be shorter. Only hitting the wrong key by the subject can affect response correctness. Omitting questions or answers by subjects will be detected by the software, resulting in an instruction message on the screen. There is evidence that subjects are more honest in reporting undesirable behaviour to a computer instead of a paper or a researcher. Operational costs (staff, paper work, ) are minimal once the software has been developed. The questionnaires can be easily adapted according to the needs of the researcher, without a complete change of the nature of the questionnaire (translation in other languages, removal of words or signs). Finally, multimedia tools can assist in the comprehension of the questions. Till now, little is known about the effect that transferring existing questionnaires to computer questionnaires has on the reliability and validity. However, the few studies published until now give evidence that computerised questionnaires show comparable reliability and validity as paper-and-pencil questionnaires do (McMurray et al., 1998; Ridley et al., 2001; Philippaerts et al., 2006; Matton et al., 2007).

References

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