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Study Regarding the Motives of Children Participation in Sport Activities

Dana Maria CIOCAN[1]*, Alexandra MILON[2], Gabriel MAREŞ[3]

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the participation motives of children from different sports and examine the reasons why they are continuing or quitting the athletic activity. The study was conducted on 66 girls and 31 boys practicing various sports in Bacau. The average age of the participants was 10.5 years. We constructed a questionnaire to identify the children's motivation to practice sports, their maintaining interest in practicing sports and the motives they have to quit or change their sport. The subjects were practicing the following sports: badminton, basketball, handball, tennis, combat sports, swimming, dance, volleyball and track and field. Boys spend more time vigorously exercising and competing in competitive sports than girls. The results of the study show that the girls are oriented toward sports that do not expose or harm their body and prefer individual sports or collaborative sports. It can be concluded that based on the average values of each of the participation motives, "to be appreciated by friends and family" and "to be part of a group of friends" were the most important reasons for the subjects. The motives of dropping out of sports appear to be: lack of positive role models, lack of access, safety and transportation issues, social stigma, decreased quality of experience and cost.

Keywords: children, sport, motivation, participation.

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1. Introduction

It has been shown in many studies that parents play an essential role in children's participation in sports, even choosing for them or directing the children toward certain activities. The distinct value that parents give to sports and competition, the meaning and importance put to success or failure or sportsmanship could be a decisive factor in the children's behavior and their attitude toward physical activity aria and long term commitment to sport. Parental behavior facilitates children's perception of their own competence, modelling their achievement expectations. Thus, parental behavior and attitudes may have consequences in children's specific psychological and cognitive processes in practicing sports, like achievement orientation or how they perceive their own competence and abilities [1].

Studies on parental roles show that parental enjoyment of physical activity is related to parental encouragement and a child's perceived competence and participation in physical and sport activities. Also parental support buffers the adverse stressful effects that children experience, the goal orientations of parent and child are significantly related and parents can play a highly positive or a highly negative role in the youth's athletic experience.

Motivation is defined as all internal motives of conduct, whether born or acquired, conscious or unconscious; it is actually a pulse, internal impulses, energizing or activating and human behavior generally, and in sport performance in particular, for this discussion. According to Golu [17], motivation is "a subjective model of objective causality, causal mental reproduced, accumulated over time, transformed and transferred through learning and education within the internal person" [2]. It fulfills all human mental system a double function: binding the reflex nature of the external world and the internal causal specificity "between stimulus and response builds a system of filters and comparators, which give information to propagate selectively, depending on lines the significance of individual system. Therefore, only resorting to reason we can explain why individuals react differently to one and the same situation, the behavioral response can acquire unusual scale, an insignificant or even absent expression". Referring to the motivation for practicing sports, Epuran M. believes that it is related primarily to the need of movement, and secondarily to self-affirmation [3].

Although the reasons for participation to physical activity are highly complex, one of the most significant factors that stimulate and maintain physical activity participation is motivation [4]. Motivation is a psychological

concept that encourage an individual toward a desired goal and is regarded a psychological force that includes the intention and direction to engage in a certain behavior [5]. Motives have a key role in every aspect of life, in participation to physical activity as well [6] Motivation is a basic element that shapes our everyday behaviors. Understanding the basic reasons that encourage the children to physical activity has been a very essential issue. Participation motivation incorporates the processes of initiation, continuation, and withdrawal from physical activity [7]. For instance, children who perceive themselves as successful at sports have higher future expectations for success in sport than those who perceive themselves as unskilled, which lead to higher motivation and continued participation [8].

Children have different reasons for participating in sport (have fun, improve skills, get exercise, be with and make new friends, compete) boys and girls have similar motives for involvement in sport activities but these may vary in importance.

When looking at why children drop out from sports, one can make some statistical observation about children participation in sport: peak participation of children in sports occurs between the ages of 10 and 13 years, for every 10 children who begin a sport season, 3 to 4 quit before the start of the next season.

Although sport involvement has the potential to enhance psychological wellbeing, studies have suggested that motivation to participate in sports activities declines in childhood and adolescence [3,9,10]. Team-based activities also encourage adolescents to support one another, take on leadership roles, and work together in the pursuit of a common goal, which could ultimately lead to a greater sense of belonging with peers [11] Motivation is a construct (or latent variable), rather than an observable entity, which contributes to the difficulty in accurately measuring it [12] Self-assessment questionnaires are the most commonly used measurement tools in motivation research, identifying over 75 questionnaires on motivation between 1930 and 2005 [9,13]

2. Methods

2.1. Subjects

The research was conducted on a group of children aged 9-11 (boys=31 and girls=66). The subjects were practicing various sports: badminton, basketball, handball, tennis, table tennis, combat sports, swimming, dance, volleyball and track and fields, fencing. Permission to

conduct the study was obtained prior to the investigation from the participants and their parents.

The first stage of the research consisted in selecting the group of subjects. These were children aged 10-11 (boys =31 and girls=66) practicing various sports: badminton, basketball, handball, tennis, table tennis, combat sports, swimming, dance, volleyball and track and fields, fencing.

The children's parents have been informed by the research team about the purpose of the research, its methods, and that every ethical step will be taken as required by any study with human subjects. The parents or the children can pull out of the study at any moment, without any kind of constraints from the research team.

The informed consent has been given by the legal guardians of the children who were going to become subjects of this research.

In order to ensure the understanding of all the items in the questionnaire, they were pre-tested and some of them were adjusted. The questionnaire was applied and the data was collected according to the ethical standards of application and collection of information when using a questionnaire.

Research methods:

The methods that were used for accomplishing this study were the observation method, the investigation method (in order to reveal if and how motivated are the children for the activity they are involved in), the questionnaire method, statistical and graphic method.

Procedures

After obtaining authorization from parents, coaches were called to a meeting in which the questionnaire was explained and delivered, being informed about the voluntary participation and ensuring the confidentiality of data provided.

Results. The group of subjects who participated in our research has the following structure: At the age of start of practicing a sport, a large percentage of the children 46 % started practicing a sport between the ages of 5-7, 25% of the children started practicing a sport after the age of seven, only 15% of the children were first involved in a sport before 5 years and less than 10% had the first participation in a sport organized after the age of 9 years. The first sport that the children have chosen is: 27% swimming, 15% martial arts, and 8.6% basketball. The most important people who can influence participation in a sports activity are: over 70% the parents, while other people (teachers, colleagues and friends) did not score more than 8%.

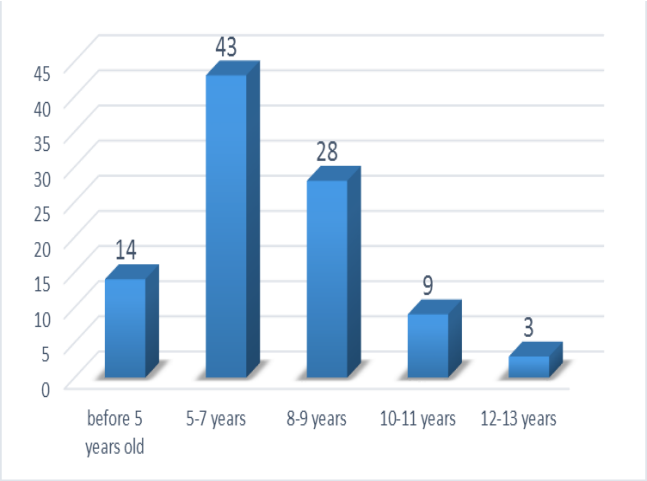


Fig.1 Age of starting practicing sport

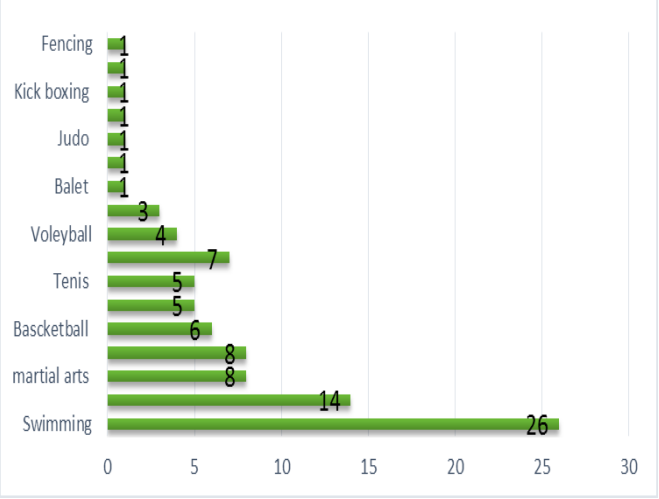


Fig.2 First sport practiced

The first sport that the children have chosen is: 27% swimming, 15% martial arts, and 8.6% basketball. The most important people who can influence participation in a sports activity are over 70% the parents, while other people (teachers, colleagues and friends) did not score more than 8%.

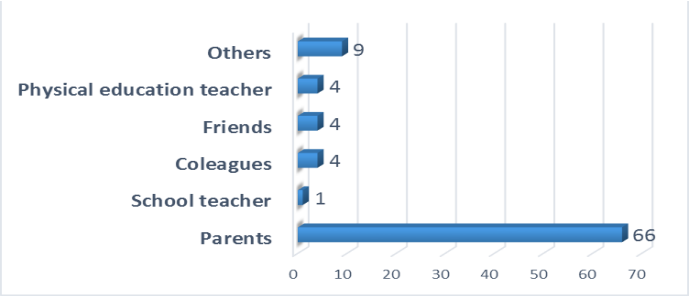


Fig.3 Sport participation influence

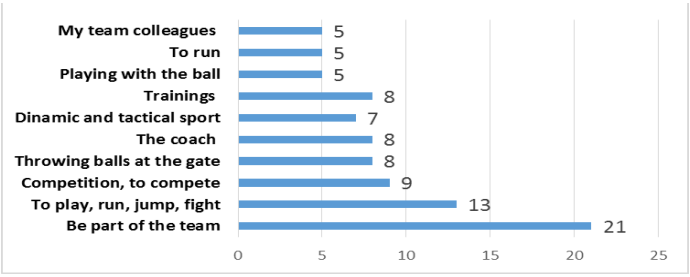


Fig.4 What do you like about your sport?

The most enjoyable aspects highlighted by children in practicing the sport chosen by each are: to be part of a team 22.5%, to play, to jump, to run and to beat 13.9%, to participate in competitions and competitions, to release a shot at the goal, the teacher's way of encouraging children 8.6%. As a result of practicing a sport, the interviewed children gave their opinion about the people from whom they would like to hear positive things and whose admiration they seek, so for 61% of the children it is important for their parents to admire them, 48% of children look for admiration from friends, 22% seek admiration from teachers and colleagues, and 16% just want to be happy.

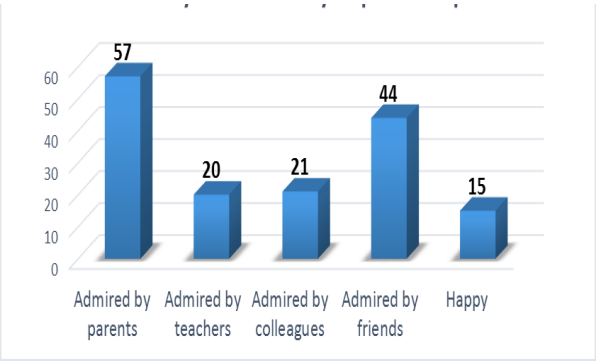


Fig.5 How do you feel when you practice

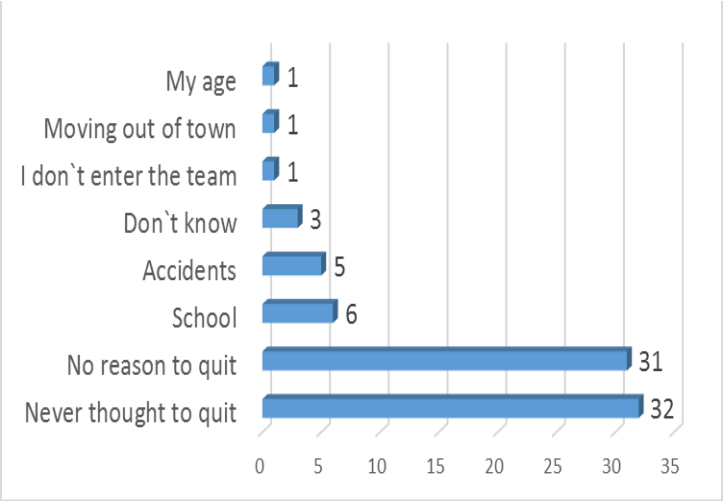


Fig.6 Reasons for dropping out

Investigating the factors that could lead to the abandonment of sports revealed that out of the 80 responses to this item, 32 respondents, representing 40%, never thought to abandon the sport they were practicing. This score reveals a strong intrinsic motivation to continue preparing for competitions without necessarily expecting external rewards. The same tendency has 38.75% of those surveyed, who feel they have no reason to abandon sports training. The number of those leaving the sports training is 17 respondents, the distribution of the factors that could lead to the abandonment of sports is the following: school issues - 6 answers, injuries 5, unpredictable factors - 3, change of living conditions, age- each with one answer.

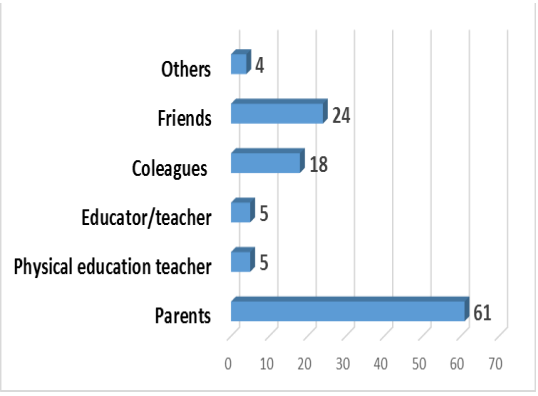


Fig.7 Who supports you to practice sports?

For children involved in a sport professionally, parents' support is very important; thus 45% of those who responded to this item believe that they have this support. In the absence of parental support, this role is taken up by friends (17.7%) and peers (13.3%). Teachers and physical education teachers seem not to be among the supporters of sports, their number being rather low (5 physical education teachers and 5 educators) compared to the 135 answers.

Conclusions

In conclusion we can say that children tend to start practicing sport mostly between ages 5-7, with a small number of them starting before 5 years old and another small group of children joining a sport group after 8 years old. Children at this age are interested in practicing sports to get their parents' and teachers' admiration, to follow their colleagues' actions, to have fun, run, jump and be part of a team.

The motives that could determine children to quit practicing a sport are linked to: school issues - 6 answers, injuries – 5, unpredictable factors - 3, change of living conditions, age - each with one answer.

Discussions

A study developed by Meuris found that personal reasons (sporting pleasure, health and hygiene, physical and intellectual balance, fitness, and having fun) were more important than social reasons (to meet other people, popularity, etc.) for practicing sports [8, 14, 15]. In another study, [16] swimmers aged between 9 and 18 years were inquired about the reasons why they practice their sports [2]. The most frequent answers were: fun, fitness, physical health, improved skills, the "atmosphere" of the team and the challenge. On the other hand, those who had less influence on their participation were: to please parents or best friends, relieve stress, to be popular and to travel. Also Kesend & Murphy (1989) interviewed athletes from the United States, and highlighted the main reasons identified for these athletes to get involved in professional sports. These were: perceived competence (assessment and improvement); intrinsic motivation (fun and wish fulfilment) [17,18].

Acknowledgement

The authors of this paper declare on their own responsibility that the subjects participating in this research have been informed in regards to the volunteer nature of their participation in this study, to their understanding of the received information and of the fact that they can pull out of the research at any moment in time, without any negative repercussions on the subject. This study has followed the ethical standards of a research, and the participants and/or their legal guardians have given their consent to be a part of it.

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