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Leisure sports activities impact on adults personal development and quality of life

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Abstract

Physical inactivity, with its whole suite of morbid effects was identified as one of the most serious dangers threatening the health of the citizens in modern society. To combat this danger, both Public Authorities and Civil Society carry out to promote Physical Activity and Sports as the main means of combating the sedentary lifestyle and increase the quality of life. Present paper enrolls in this public effort, trying to determine the leisure time budget of the investigated adults, their favorite recreational activities, the extent to which physical activity and sport can be found among those activities and the perception on the psycho-emotional and social benefits of Leisure Sports activity.

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1. Introduction

A multitude of studies and researches conducted in recent years in different areas highlights, in addition to many other issues, that a sedentary lifestyle causes obesity, poor body posture, a weak tone of the Core Muscles, increased Body Mass Index and fat tissue, vertebral deformity, lack of mobility and flexibility, stiffness, muscular atrophy, disorders of cardio-vascular function, anxiety, etc.

Physical inactivity, along with other factors (smoking, unbalanced diet), are constant elements of modern life, inherently leading to a rapid increase in the number of people suffering from diabetes, cardiovascular disease or obesity (Bocu & colab., 2001). However, these diseases can be largely prevented. The preventive measures recommended by WHO are moderate physical activities for 30 minutes a day, quitting smoking and healthy eating.

Confronting sedentary lifestyle has become a governmental problem in some countries. Thus, in some developed countries a new lifestyle is promoted by providing the public facilities for encouraging the development of population's fitness levels: creating safe routes for running, cycling, creating parks or green areas for leisure

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development, laws to punish smocking in public places, promoting outdoor movement in schools, communities, etc..

On the other hand, besides the physiological benefits, physical activity and sports do have benefic effects on the psychological and social areas, more precisely in terms of inter-personal communication and socializing.

Contemporary social psychology considers socialization achievement across the whole individual's personality, particularly at his interpersonal relationships and group behaviour, as a social development of human being. Sports create the premises for developing an environment recognized as favourable to socialization and communication.

The socializing and communicational effect of physical activities and sports generates a multitude of positive effects on several categories of beneficiaries. Socialization through sport signifies the extent to which attitudes, values, skills and rules learned in sports is transferred and manifested in other social spheres.

Physical education and sports are considered as means of influencing the formation of human character and the honesty, modesty, courage and teamwork (Brettschneider & Naul, 2004). Individuals acquire the ability to adjust the attitudes, habits and rules achieved through sports in other activities in different fields, such as professional or social environment.

Leisure sports are strongly connected to the Quality of Life, taking into consideration Hornquist (1989) definition that includes in this Concept "the satisfaction of human needs in the following areas: physic, psychic, social, material, structural and professional". At least four of these areas (physic, psychic, social and professional) can benefit from leisure sports activities, directly or indirectly.

In this context we enroll our approach, trying to contribute to a better understanding of issues related to the public perception of Leisure Time Sports among Romanian adults.

2. Method

2.1. Purpose

The purpose of the study was to investigate issues related to the practice of leisure sports activities among Romanian adults, and the public perception about their benefits for personal development and raising the quality of life.

2.2. Assumptions:

- We assumed that, although it is widely agreed that due to our day's busy schedule, free time budget is limited, physical activities and sports do have their places among adults concerns.
- We also assumed that adults are aware of the fact that, in addition to the other well known benefits, leisure sports activities also bring earnings at emotional and psychological level, and they are an active factor for personal and social development and raising the quality of life.

2.3. The subjects

The study was conducted on a sample of 120 students of "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, V and VI year, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry.

2.4. Research methods

The research was conducted using the *Survey Method* based on an *questionnaire*, containing 11 items regarding: 1). Free time budget; 2). Preferences for leisure activities; 3). If they practice Leisure Sports; 4). Organizational environment where they practice Leisure Sports; 5). Why they don't practice, if so; 6). Well-being after Sports; 7). Effects of Sports upon Self Image and Self Esteem; 8). Socialization and Integration through Sports; 9) Sports

effects on improving interpersonal communication; 10). Opinion about improvement of physical and esthetical parameters as a result of practicing Leisure Sports; 11). Which are those parameters.

3. Results and discussions:

3.1. Spare time (*"How much spare time do you have an average day?"*)

When asked about average daily spare time, the most common response was 3-4 hours / day (50.8%), followed by response 1-2 hours / day (40.0%). Taken together, the two responses totalize more than 90%, allowing us to appreciate that most subjects interviewed have spare time between 1 and 4 hours per day. Percentage of respondents that have more than 4 hours per day of spare time is too small (6.7%) to be considered significant in relation to the first two response options. A percentage of 2.5% say they don't have spare time at all.

3.2. Preferences for leisure activities (*"What kind of recreation do you prefer?"*)

At this question the number of responses is higher than the total number subjects, due to the existence of multiple responses (six possible).

According to the percentage distribution, the responses can be grouped as follows: In first place among student preferences emerges (24.1%) the option for leisure sitting in front of a screen (TV / internet).

Follows a group of three options with a close frequency: Leisure sports (18.3%), Entertainment/ Movies / Concerts (17.7%) and Recreation in nature (16.7%).

On the last places between the preferences of medical students were mentioned Reading (13.2%) - still relatively close to group number two - and Attending Clubs, located at appreciable difference from the other options (9.6%).

Although option ranked No. 1, (i.e. TV / Internet) confirms a general trend of sedentary lifestyle, the fact that physical activity and sports were mentioned in second place, with a generous percentage, entitle us to believe that our department's efforts towards accustoming students leisure sports activity and sport have paid off.

We note the relatively small percentage of those who have expressed interest in Clubs, which confirms the view that medical students are generally more serious and less "fashionable" than average young people today. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that the other option of last class (Reading) registered almost 10% more than Clubs, approaching the upper group.

3.3. Leisure Sports (*"Do you practice sports in your spare time?"*)

More than half (57.5%) of respondents answered "yes" at this question, while 42.5% responded "no." It must be mentioned that the percentage of those who responded positively to the question is higher than those who opted for Leisure Sports as recreational activities (47.5%), confirming the optimistic conclusion from the previous point, namely that despite the limited spare time budget, most of the medical students realize the need to exercise for a healthy and balanced life. On the other hand, the percentage of those who don't practice leisure sports is still very high.

3.4. The organisational environment (*"Where / how you do sports?"*)

At this question answered only those who chose "Yes" at the previous question. It is noted here that most subjects choose to do Leisure Sports in a non-organizational form, either alone (17.5%) or with a group of friends (23.3%). Only 18.3% of students practice organized sports activities in leisure time (in a Gym or at a Sports Club).

3.5. *Why not participate in sports in your spare time?*

Those subjects who reported no leisure sports (42,5%) were asked to justify their choice. The most common response was "I don't have enough spare time" (15.8%), followed by "Convenience"(12.5%) and "I don't have where / with whom" (10.8%). Last, but still with a quite significant percentage (4.2%) was the answer "Not interested".

3.6. *Well-being ("How do leisure sports influence the "well-being"?)*

It is noted that almost all students, even those "sedentary" recognize the positive influence of exercise upon "well-being". Thus, 71.7% opines that sports influences well-being broadly, and 18.3% think that influence is moderate. A percentage of 7.5% responded "to a small extent" and 2.5% believe that it has no influence.

3.7. *Self image (How much the practice of physical exercise can improve self-image? ")*

Most of the students surveyed considered that leisure sport activities can be an opportunity to improve self-image as a result of psycho-emotional influences that exceeding their limits or winning against race partners can have upon them. Thus the overall percentages of 94.2% of those who recognize the positive influence, over two thirds (64.2%) believe the level of influence is major. It is noted small percentage (5.8%) of those who see no influence of physical activity on self-image. This is important if we recall that the 42.5% of subjects who don't practice sports in their spare time, also answered this question.

3.8. *Socialization and integration (Do you think leisure sport can be an active factor in socialization and integration in social and professional life? ")*

The vast majority of students (87.5%) recognizes sport's valences toward socialization and group integration. The psychological benefits derived from the sporting group are logically transferred in social and professional life.

3.9. *Sports effects on improving interpersonal communication ("Do Leisure Sports create the context for interpersonal communication?")*

For 97.2% of the subjects Leisure Sports creates an opportunity for communication. Of these, 39.4% declared communication with the teacher or the Gym instructor, 43.7% communicate with other students and 14.1% declared they communicate with other people after Sports. It should be noted that few subjects reported a single line of communication, most of them giving multiple answers to this question. Only 2.8% of subjects said they don't communicate when they practice sports.

3.10. *Opinion about improvement of physical and esthetical parameters as a result of practicing Leisure Sports ("As a result of practicing Leisure sports did you noticed improvement of physical and aesthetics parameters?")*

All subjects declared that after practicing Leisure Sports they saw an improvement of physical an aesthetic parameters.

3.11. *Which parameters have been improved*

The parameters most frequently mentioned were General Resistance (23.3%) and Body Attitude (21.7%). Follows a group of three parameters with close frequencies: Strength, Mobility (15.5% each) and Flexibility (14.0%). In last place, with 10.1% was mentioned Movement's Elegance.

4. Conclusions

Almost all adults surveyed (97.5%) said they have free time. Percentage who declare an average free time of 3-4 hours per day is mostly (50.8%), but a very close percentage (40.0%) declared an average of only 1-2 hours and another 2.5% said they have no free time.

Between leisure preferences, physical activity and sport ranks second, after "TV / Internet", and is cited before the options' shows / movies / concerts and recreation in nature.

More than half (57.5%) of respondents said they practice sports activities during their free time.

From the foregoing it can be concluded that although time off budget of adults is quite limited, their concerns largely include physical activities and sports. This confirms our first assumption.

Almost all adults, even those "sedentary" recognize the positive influence of exercise on "well-being" of the body. Only 2.5% believe that it has no influence.

Most of the surveyed subjects considered that Leisure Sport activities can be an opportunity to improve Self Image and Self Esteem.

The vast majority of subjects (87.5%) admit the valences of Sports towards Socialization, and Group Integration.

All subjects declared that after practicing Leisure Sports saw an improvement of physical and aesthetic parameters.

The parameters most frequently mentioned were: General Resistance (23.3%) and Body Attitude (21.7%). Follows a group of three parameters with close frequencies: Strength, Mobility (15.5%) and Flexibility (14.0%). In last place, with 10.1% mentioned Movement's Elegance.

For 97.2% of subjects Leisure Sports creates an opportunity for communication. Of these, 39.4% said they communicate with the teacher or the Gym instructor, 43.7% communicate with other students and 14.1% declare they communicate with other people, after practice. It should be noted that few subjects reported a single line of communication, most giving multiple answers to this question. Only 2.8% of subjects say they don't communicate when they come to the gym.

Regarding Leisure Sports role as an active factor of socialization and integration, 88.2% of subjects had a positive perception, while 11.8% do not perceive this valence of physical activity.

In conclusion, it appears that the vast majority of research subjects, whether or not practice sports activities in leisure time, they recognize that Sports is an active factor in improving Self Image, Socialization and Integration in social and professional life. This confirms the second assumption of the study.

Therefore we can conclude that Leisure Sports activities has a major impact on adults personal and social development and in raising the quality of life, and can be widely recommended as one of the most profitable and rewording ways to spend free time.

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