STUDIA UBB EDUCATIO ARTIS GYMN., LXIII, 2, 2018, pp. 23 - 33
(RECOMMENDED CITATION)
DOI:10.24193/subbeag.63(2).11

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY SPORTS ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT. Physical activity and sports participation have significant benefits for physical and mental well-being, an emerging literature examines the impact of sports participation on subjective well-being. Identifying the existing literature gap regarding sport attending's relationship with subjective well-being, this study will examine whether sport attending also have significant and positive effects on individuals' life satisfaction. This study seeks to establish a relationship between sports participation and subjective well-being by distinguishing active and non-active participation. Subjective well-being was measured through life satisfaction in a sample of 1,017 active and non-active participants in a local Marathon event. Individuals who actively participated in the Marathon event reported higher life satisfaction compared to non-active participants. Education and frequency of participation were found to be significant mediation factors of the sports participation - subjective well-being relationship, with more educated and more frequent participants reporting higher life satisfaction. Engagement in community sports activities upgrades subjective well-being, and the power of this relationship is affected by specific demographic variables.

Keywords: *Subjective well-being, Sport participation, Sport attending, Local sport events, Leisure, Community sports*

Introduction

Subjective well-being is an umbrella term of different life evaluations that individuals make. It comprises people's long-term levels of pleasant affect, lack of unpleasant affect, and life satisfaction, displaying relatively high levels of situational and temporal consistency (Diener, 1994). According to Diener et al.

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(1999), subjective well-being is a global measure of people's well-being that takes into account mood and emotions, as well as life satisfaction in selected life domains, including work, family, leisure/health, finances, self and social relationships. Of course, significant differences exist among different persons, as individuals place different emphasis on these domains (De Neve & Cooper, 1998). Subjective measures of well-being have become an area of interest as they are frequently used complementary to traditional economic measures in order to assess societal progress. Based on existing literature, significant steps forward have been made so as to understand both its ascendants and consequences.

Literature Review

Broad terms, all possible influences of subjective well-being include income, personal characteristics, socially developed features, types of spending time, attitudes towards life, self and others, relationships, and the wider economic, social and political environment (Dolan et al., 2008). For example, it has been documented that subjective well-being is higher at the younger and older age points, representing a U-shaped relationship (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008), as well as in married individuals (Verbakel, 2012).In accordance, it has been suggested that increasing income is related to increased life satisfaction up to a certain level, and then this positive impact diminishes (Sacks et al., 2010), as well as than being unemployed significantly decreases subjective well-being (Lelkes, 2006). Besides demographic characteristics, several other correlates of subjective well-being have been highlighted by the empirical literature, such as physical and mental health (Steptoe et al., 2015), leisure and engagement in social activities (Newman et al., 2014), social cohesion (Dehley & Dragolov, 2016), and environmental quality (Eiffe et al., 2016).

Among these factors, physical activity and sports have been suggested to contribute significantly to subjective well-being. In general terms, there is abundant evidence that engaging in sports and exercise has a positive impact on both physical and mental health. Physical activity has the potential of upgrading mental well-being and life quality through enhanced self-esteem, improved mood and reduced anxiety (Fox, 1999). Empirical evidence suggests that sports and exercise have a preventive and therapeutic impact on mental well-being, reducing the risk of depression and anxiety (Walsh, 2011). Accordingly, there is robust scientific evidence regarding the positive relationship between physical activity and physical health, as exercise and sports decrease the risk of illness (Meyers, 2008). Moreover, it has been documented that physical activity influences all dimensions of subjective well-

being, contributing to mental health trough maintenance of an active life, mental alertness, stress reduction, positive attitudes towards life and development of social relationships (Stathi et al., 2002). In older adults, Ku et al. (2007) found that physical activity is essential for the physical, psychological, developmental and other elements of subjective well-being. Especially for health issues, there is a large number of researches highlighting all the possible benefits that someone can gain by actively participating in any kind of physical activity.Coenders et al. (2017) argue that the direct connection between sport participation and personal health (subjective health in particular) as stated on the majority of existing literature stands as it is. They also believe that possible health benefits of sport-participation are rather persistent, and are not explained by alternative factors in their research.

Although the positive impact of physical activity on the social, emotional and other dimensions of well-being has been well-established, a limited number studies have highlighted the relationship between taking part in a sport activity as a member of a sport community and subjective well-being. Becchetti et al. (2008) found that relational goods, including sports participation individually and collectively, have a significant and positive effect on self-reported life satisfaction, while gender, age and education of participants play an important role, as the impact of sociability on happiness is stronger for women, older and less educated individuals. Wheatley & Bickerton (2017), who found that engagement in arts, culture and sports has a positive effect on subjective well-being, adopted a similar approach. Moreover, frequency of engagement is important only for sports as regular participation in sports activities only was found to have a positive impact on well-being. This assumption is also suggested by Kavetsos (2011), who showed that self-reported happiness increases with frequency of participation is sports activities.

The positive effects of sports activities on subjective well-being has also been verified by Lechner (2009), particularly for men, and by Rasciute & Downward (2010), who proved that physical activity, including sports participation and active travel through walking and cycling, has a positive impact on self-reported health and well-being. Moreover, it has been suggested that greater levels of subjective well-being are accomplished if one allows for the social interaction nature of sports. In particular, Downward & Rasciute (2011) examined 67 sports activities and found that sports participation increases subjective well-being of individuals in greater extent in the case of sports that require social interactions, such as team sports and sports undertaken with a partner (eg. racquet sports). In a sample of disabled individuals, Lee & Park (2010) established a positive relationship between sports participation and life satisfaction, despite the level of disability.

In the general population, Pawlowski et al. (2011) explored the age-specific effects of physical activity and sports participation on subjective well-being in 19 European countries, confirming that engagement in physical activity generally contributes positively to the subjective well-being of individuals on a European level, although significant age-specific differences exist, as with increasing age, people seem to be on average less happy and less active. Pawlowski et al. (2011) suggested that proximity to sports facilities is important for establishing a relationship between sports participation and subjective well-being, an assumption also confirmed by Huang & Humphreys (2012), who investigated the relationship between sports participation and self-reported happiness in the US, indicating that individuals living in a county with greater access to sports facilities are more likely to participate in a physical activity and report higher life satisfaction, with men appearing to benefit more than women from participation.

For example, Kavetsos &Sazymanski (2008), based on a multinational survey, concluded that hosting a sport event leads to a short-term "feel-good" effect, and recently, Kawakami et al. (2017) found that subjective happiness of elders without a specific team to support significantly increased after watching a professional baseball game. This study adds to this literature by providing further evidence on the relationship between active and passive sports engangement and subjective well-being, using data of participants in a Marathon event. Researchers have broadly used running events when it comes to sport participation and well-being issues as they offer a big variety of participants as well as engagement in many different levels. In one of these researches, Zhou and Kaplanidou (2017), explored the social capital building among participants, finding strong evidences that bonding capital as well as bridging and linking capital is well developed in events of this type.

Materials and Methods

Aim of the study

The present study aims to identify the relationship between subjective well-being and the frequency of engagement in sport events on individuals that are passively or actively engaged in sport events. Additionally, the demographic profile of participants on subjective well-being is investigated.

Research tool

The questionnaire was based on two widespread methods to measure life satisfaction. Positive and negative effect schedule (PANAS method), as well as the Life Satisfaction Approach. The final result was a combination of these

two methods, adjusted on the specific running event.Firstly, the questionnaire included4questions aimed at clarifying the socio-demographic characteristics of the study sample. More specifically, gender, age, marital status and educational status of participants were identified. Participants' level of engagement in sports events was identified by a 5-point Likert (1: Very rarely to 5: Very frequently). Also, the level of subjective well-being of the participants was determined through a 10-point numeric scale (1-Not at all satisfied to 10-Absolutely satisfied), referring to the level of life satisfaction.

Study sample

Convenience sampling method was employed in order to collect the research sample. The total sample consists two sub-samples of individuals that run(actively engaged individuals) the 10th International Marathon "MEGAS ALEXANDROS" in Thessaloniki and more specifically the 5,000m Course of Health and Dynamic Walking and individuals that attended the specific sport event as spectators (non-actively engaged individuals). The total sample of the survey reaches the 1017 individuals, while the two subsamples of the actively and passively engaged respondents consist of 514 and 503 individuals respectively.

Statistical tools

The results of the survey are presented by combining the use of both descriptive and inductive statistics. More specifically, with regard to the descriptive statistics tools used, they include the presentation of the frequencies and the relative frequencies of the respondents' answers, while for the presentation of the results of the answers identified by the Likert scales mean and standard deviation were used. In addition, the Pearson linear correlation coefficient was usedin order to identify the relationship between subjective well-being and the frequency of engagement in sport events, while independent samples t-test and One-Way ANOVA test were used in order to conduct comparisons on the mean scores of subjective well-being based on the type of engagement and socio-demographic characteristics.

Results and Discussion

Percentages of men and women who run in the half-marathon were 53.1% and 46.9%, respectively, while in the non-active sample, respective percentages were 45.9% and 54.1%. Active participants were mostly between 18 and 45 years old (74.1% of the total sub-sample), 10.6% were from 45 to

55, 10.4% up to 18 years, 4.3% between 56 and 65 and 0.8% over 65 years. In addition, in the non-active sub-sample, 71.3% were aged between 18 and 45, 11.6% between 45 and 55, 10.6% up to 18, 5.6% from 56 to 65, and only 1.0% was aged over 65. 60.4% of non-active and 49.6% of active participants were single, while the corresponding percentages of married individuals for the two sub-samples were 25.8% and 33.9%, respectively. The percentages of separated, divorced, widowed or cohabiting individuals were significant lower. Furthermore, 31.7% and 28.6% of passively and actively engaged individuals were secondary education graduates, 12.8% and 10.3%, respectively, were technical school graduates, while 32.9% of the sports event spectators hold a university degree, with the corresponding percentage of the runners in the half marathon being 34.7%. Moreover, the percentage of the runnerswho hold a Master or Phd is relatively higher in comparison to spectators (22.3% and 14.8% respectively).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics and degree of engagement in sport activities

		Passive engagement		**Active engagement**	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Sex	Male	231	45.9%	272	53.1%
	Female	272	54.1%	240	46.9%
Age	<18	53	10.6%	53	10.4%
	18-25	174	34.7%	133	26.0%
	26-35	109	21.7%	135	26.4%
	36-45	75	14.9%	110	21.5%
	45-55	58	11.6%	54	10.6%
	56-65	28	5.6%	22	4.3%
	>65	5	1.0%	4	0.8%
Marital status	Single	302	60.4%	255	49.6%
	Married	129	25.8%	174	33.9%
	Separated	22	4.4%	21	4.1%
	Divorced	16	3.2%	15	2.9%
	Widowed	10	2.0%	10	1.9%
	Cohabiting	21	4.2%	39	7.6%
Educational level	Secondary education	158	31.7%	144	28.6%
	Technical school	64	12.8%	52	10.3%
	University degree	164	32.9%	175	34.7%
	Master	61	12.2%	92	18.3%
	Phd	13	2.6%	20	4.0%
	Other	39	7.8%	21	4.2%
		M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
Degree of engagement		3.24	1.19	3.26	1.25

Finally, regarding the level of engagement in sport activities for active and non-active participants, this was identified as quite high, with the corresponding mean scores being equal to 3.26 and 3.24, respectively (SD = 1.25 and 1.19).

Considering the impact of the basic socio-demographic characteristics of the two sub-sampleson the life satisfaction level, statistically significant differences in the mean scores were identified only in reference to the educational status of the individuals that were actively engaged inthe sports event ($p<0.001$). Specifically, individuals of higher education, and especially Master and Phd graduates, reported higher subjective well-being score compared with university, technical school and secondary education graduates.

Table 2. Differences of subjective well-being score based on demographic characteristics

		Passive engagement			**Active engagement**		
		M	**SD**	**p**	**M**	**SD**	**p**
Sex	Male	7.26	1.49	0.778	7.32	1.37	0.081
	Female	7.22	1.36		7.52	1.21	
Age	<18	7.11	1.76		7.23	1.44	
	18-25	7.26	1.44		7.35	1.46	
	26-35	7.01	1.49		7.59	1.08	
	36-45	7.41	1.13	0.417	7.41	1.23	0.534
	45-55	7.31	1.44		7.43	1.22	
	56-65	7.57	0.88		7.14	1.64	
	>65	7.20	1.64		7.25	0.96	
Marital status	Single	7.15	1.48		7.35	1.33	
	Married	7.50	1.11		7.52	1.23	
	Separated	7.18	2.13	0.254	7.10	1.87	0.295
	Divorced	6.94	1.48		7.67	0.72	
	Widowed	7.10	1.37		6.80	1.69	
	Cohabiting	7.29	1.27		7.53	1.06	
Educational level	Secondary education	7.05	1.53		7.12	1.47	
	Technical school	7.25	1.55		7.08	1.40	
	University degree	7.33	1.32	0.178	7.51	1.21	<0.001
	Master	7.38	1.08		7.72	0.99	
	Phd	7.92	1.04		8.20	0.89	
	Other	7.08	1.66		7.29	1.45	

Recommendations

Physical activity and engagement in sports have been identified as significant factors contributing to mental and physical well-being, but yet, participation in community sports activities in reference to subjective well-being is understudied. This paper adds new empirical evidence to this matter and contributes to our understanding of the possible positive sports experience. In particular, by measuring subjective well-being through self-reported satisfaction with life, this study revealed significant differences between active and non-active sports engagement's impact on subjective well-being, taking also into account different demographic characteristics. By examining the life satisfaction levels of a sample of both active and non-active participants in a Marathon event, three important suggestions can be made.

Conclusion

First, the study revealed that life satisfaction levels are quite high among both active and non-active participants, indicating that sports engagement and collective physical activity positively contributes to subjective well-being. Indeed, there is empirical evidence suggesting that although physical activity improves mental and physical health (Stathi et al., 2002; Meyers, 2008; Walsh, 2011), allowing for the social interaction nature of sports through collective participation leads to greater levels of life satisfaction (Downward & Rasciute, 2011). Moreover, this study found that life satisfaction is greater for active participants in comparison to non-active ones, suggesting that being more actively engaged in sports activities has greater influence on well-being, as more engagement means greater social interaction as well as greater levels of physical activity. Besides, attending once a sports event has a short-term orientation, in contrast to the long-term nature of subjective well-being (Kawakami et al., 2017).

Second, present findings suggest that the relationship between engagement in sports activities in the community and subjective well-being is not affected by the demographic profile of the active and non-active participants. No statistically significant differences were found in terms of gender, age and family status, although there is empirical evidence that men may benefit more than women by participating in sports activities as regards their well-being (Lechner, 2009; Huang & Humphreys, 2012; Ruseski et al., 2014), as well as that age is a contributing factor in self-reported life satisfaction levels when sports engagement is taken into account (Pawlowski et al., 2011; Ruseski et al., 2014).

The only demographic factor that was found to have a positive relationship with subjective well-being for active participants in this study was education, with individuals of higher educational levels reporting higher life satisfaction, in contrast to Becchetti et al. (2008) findings, who documented the impact of sociability stemming from sports participation on well-being, is stronger for less educated individuals. Education may be a mediating factor in this case due to the possibility that more educated individuals place more importance to extensive social networks and value more the benefits of togetherness stemming from sports activities in the community. Further investigation is required to address the impact of demographic characteristics and access to sports facilities on life satisfaction and subjective well-being.

The above-mentioned findings might have a significant value for future managerial implications among governmental institutes or local policy offices. The outcomes of this study show a clear and positive relationship between sport participation/sport attending and subjective well-being and this relationship is yet to be explored in the future. Taking under mind that service environment and event quality are highly connected with event loyalty, a strong bridge between local individuals and consistent participating can be build. (Alexandris et al., 2017)

Disclosure statement

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respectto the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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