

THE PRESENCE OF SPORTS GAMES IN THE LIVES OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT. Leisure time is a precious resource in our busy and stressful lives, and how we spend it can have a significant impact on our physical and mental health. One of the popular ways to make use of leisure time and promote an active lifestyle is through engaging in sports games. This research theme focuses on the observational study of participating in sports games during leisure time, examining their benefits and impact on individuals and society as a whole. Engaging in sports games during leisure time offers a range of physical and mental advantages. Physically, it helps maintain optimal health by improving cardiovascular endurance, muscle strength, and flexibility. The present study included a total of 227 individuals who responded affirmatively to participating in this research and completing the proposed questionnaire, students in the seventh and eighth grades. The results obtained indicate a significant preference for team sports compared to individual sports, highlighting the importance of interaction and collaboration in sports activities. Popular sports games among preadolescents include soccer, basketball, and volleyball, which can be practiced in an accessible manner and in various locations. A significant percentage of preadolescents do not engage in sports activities regularly or dedicate very little time to them, which may indicate a trend towards a sedentary lifestyle. Sustained efforts are needed to increase preadolescents' awareness of the benefits of physical activity and sports games, as well as to promote more active involvement in these activities.

Keywords: *students, gymnasium, sports games*

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REZUMAT. Prezența jocurilor sportive în viața elevilor de gimnaziu. Timpul liber este o resursă prețioasă în viața noastră agitată și stresantă, iar modul în care îl petrecem poate avea un impact semnificativ asupra sănătății noastre fizice și mentale. Una dintre modalitățile populare de a profita de timpul liber și de a promova un stil de viață activ este practicarea jocurilor sportive. Această temă de cercetare se concentrează asupra studiului constatativ al practicării jocurilor sportive în timpul liber, examinând beneficiile și impactul acestora asupra individului și societății în ansamblu. Practicarea jocurilor sportive în timpul liber oferă o serie de avantaje fizice și mentale. Din punct de vedere fizic, aceasta ajută la menținerea unei stări de sănătate optime, îmbunătățind rezistența cardiovasculară, forța musculară și flexibilitatea. În prezenta cercetare a fost cuprins un număr de 227 de persoane care au răspuns afirmativ în a lua parte la această cercetare și a completa chestionarul propus, elevi în clasele a VII-a și a VIII-a. Rezultatele obținute indică o preferință semnificativă pentru jocurile de echipă în comparație cu sporturile individuale, indicând importanța interacțiunii și colaborării în activitățile sportive. Jocurile sportive populare printre preadolescenți includ fotbalul, baschetul și voleiul, care pot fi practicate într-un mod accesibil și în diferite locații. Un procent semnificativ de preadolescenți nu practică activități sportive în mod regulat sau dedică foarte puțin timp acestora, ceea ce poate indica o tendință către un stil de viață sedentar. Este nevoie de eforturi susținute pentru a crește conștientizarea preadolescenților cu privire la beneficiile activității fizice și a jocurilor sportive, precum și pentru a promova o implicare mai activă în aceste activități.

Cuvinte-cheie: *elevi, gimnaziu, jocuri sportive*

INTRODUCTION

According to the specialized literature (Bergeron, 2013; Gould, 2019; Cucui, & Cucui, 2018; Corbin, & Pangrazi, 2015; Cucui, 2019; Tomaka, & Thompson, 2009; Cucui, 2020), engaging in sports games during leisure time offers a range of physical and mental benefits. Physically, it helps maintain optimal health, improving cardiovascular endurance, muscle strength, and flexibility. It also promotes better weight control and prevents numerous conditions such as obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes. On the other hand, the mental benefits of engaging in sports games during leisure time are remarkable. These include stress and anxiety reduction, improved mood, and increased energy levels. Sports can also contribute to the development of social skills, increased self-confidence, and character building.

Sports games provide students with valuable opportunities to learn and practice physical skills necessary for developing and maintaining lifelong physical health. Beyond health benefits, physical education also fosters a type of knowledge and understanding based on rules and respect, promoting social awareness through social interaction.

Through sports games, students learn not only about movement and fitness but also values such as fair play, teamwork, respect for others, and sports discipline. These values help them develop as responsible individuals and contribute to their formation as active members of society.

Besides individual aspects, engaging in sports games during leisure time also has a significant impact on the community and the surrounding environment. These activities encourage social interaction and promote cohesion among people. They can serve as a catalyst for forming friendships and strong interpersonal relationships, as well as for building healthier and more united local communities.

Like art and culture, recreation, leisure, and sports activities play an essential role in communities. Their numerous benefits include improving individual health and well-being, contributing to individual empowerment, and promoting the development of inclusive communities. Recreational, leisure, and sports activities can engage individuals, small groups, teams, or entire communities and are relevant to people of all ages, abilities, and different skill levels. The types of recreational, leisure, and sports activities in which people participate vary greatly depending on the local context and tend to reflect social systems and cultural values (Lucaciu, 2004). Through sports games, individuals learn and develop motor skills, coordination, strength, endurance, and flexibility.

Sports games have a strong social character. They can create a bond between individuals and the community, facilitating social integration, communication, and interaction with others. Organizing sports competitions and community sporting events can promote fair play, respect, and solidarity among participants.

Moreover, engaging in sports games during leisure time can contribute to environmental protection. Activities such as mountain hiking, cycling on natural trails, and canoeing on lakes or rivers provide an opportunity to connect with nature and develop a sense of responsibility and awareness toward the environment.

By practicing physical and sports activities, the goal is to improve individual health while developing motor, social, and cognitive skills, thus contributing to an active and balanced life.

Therefore, this observational study focuses on exploring and gaining a deeper understanding of engaging in sports games during leisure time. By obtaining clear and relevant results, we can promote an active, balanced, and healthy lifestyle for individuals and society as a whole.

OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this observational study is to investigate and analyze the practice of sports games during leisure time, the frequency and duration of their practice, the associated physical and psychological benefits, as well as potential obstacles or barriers encountered in the regular practice of these activities.

METHODS

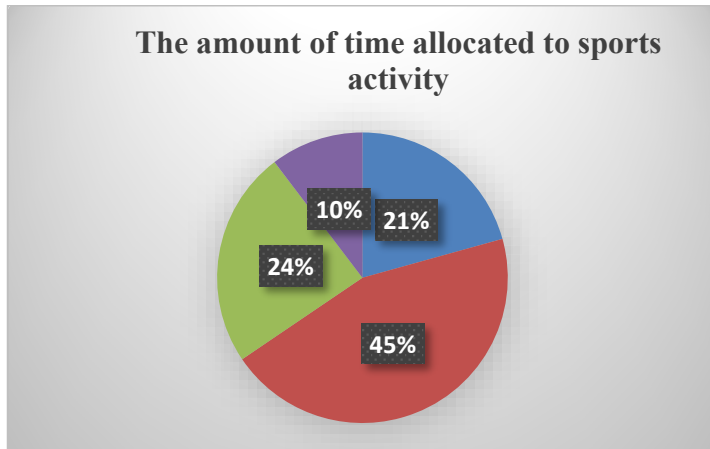
The research activity took place in the Municipality of Târgoviște during the 2022-2023 school year. The sample included 227 seventh and eighth grade students who voluntarily expressed their opinions by completing the proposed questionnaire, which included items to identify practiced sports games, factors influencing participation in sports games during leisure time, and potential barriers or obstacles to their practice.

To construct, organize, and present this research, the following methods were used: the bibliographic study method, the survey-based questionnaire method, the statistical-mathematical method, and the graphical method.

RESULTS

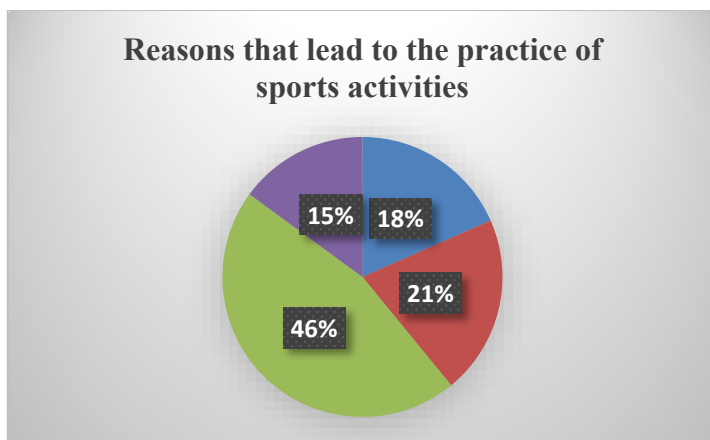
After administering the questionnaires, data were compiled and interpreted. In response to the question, "What sports activities do you prefer in your leisure time?" most of the subjects involved in the research indicated sports games that do not require high costs and can be easily practiced in various locations with minimal sports facilities. Football ranked first, being the most popular sport worldwide, followed by basketball and volleyball. Swimming was the next most practiced and preferred individual activity. Additionally, students mentioned athletics and handball as leisure activities. The wide range of practiced sports games is encouraging and highlights the need for preadolescents to engage in physical activity.

Regarding the weekly time allocation for sports activities, a concerning aspect emerged: 21% of respondents engage in sports games less than once a week, and 45% only once a week. Meanwhile, 24% practice sports activities twice a week, while only 10% engage in such activities three or more times per week.



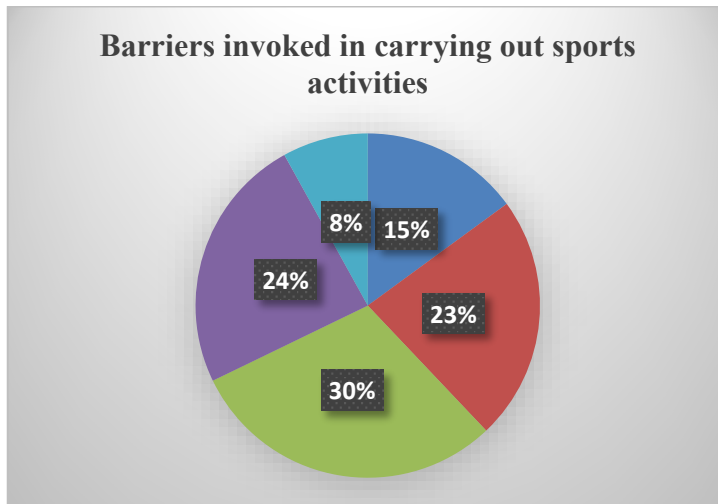
Graph 1: The amount of time allocated to sports activity

When asked, “What factors encourage or facilitate engaging in sports games during leisure time?” 46% of students responded that participating with friends was the main reason for engaging in these activities. This further underscores the importance of sports activities in the lives of preadolescents and adolescents as a regulatory factor for the hormonal changes they experience at this age. Additionally, 18% considered parental guidance as a motivating factor, while 21% cited infrastructure availability as an important reason for practicing sports games. This highlights the need for investments in equipping and upgrading sports facilities in local communities to attract more young people to an active lifestyle. Only 15% of respondents stated that sports games are part of their weekly routine, which is both encouraging and motivating for others.



Graph 2: Reasons that lead to the practice of sports activities

When asked about “the main barriers or difficulties in engaging in sports games during leisure time,” students indicated lack of motivation and the high cost of equipment as the primary obstacles. Additionally, 15% cited a lack of time, which is understandable given that eighth-grade students focus on their final exams. Excess weight accounted for a relatively small percentage (8%), but it remains concerning regarding the physical condition of today’s preadolescents. Furthermore, 30% of surveyed students reported a lack of sports infrastructure as another significant challenge, while 24% cited lack of motivation.



Graph 3: Barriers invoked in carrying out sports activities

DISCUSSIONS

It is essential to focus on educating and raising awareness among preadolescents about the benefits of physical activity and sports games for their overall health and development. This can be achieved by introducing physical education and health programs in local communities, organizing discussions and presentations within school programs, and involving parents and teachers in promoting an active lifestyle.

Offering a variety of sports activities is crucial so that preadolescents can find something that attracts and motivates them. Additionally, sports games that do not require high costs and can be practiced in various locations should be encouraged.

Local authorities should invest in developing and improving sports infrastructure, including setting up sports fields and spaces in parks, schools, and communities, to ensure easier access to appropriate facilities for physical activities.

CONCLUSIONS

The impact of sports games on the leisure time of preadolescents is highlighted by the results obtained, demonstrating the need for effective interventions and programs to promote physical activity and a healthy lifestyle.

Movement and participation in sports activities are important for preadolescents, bringing numerous benefits to their health and physical and social development.

Interaction and collaboration in sports activities are considered more important in team games than in individual ones, according to significant personal preferences. Football, basketball, and volleyball are popular sports among preadolescents, as they are accessible and can be practiced in various locations.

A significant proportion of preadolescents do not engage in sports regularly or dedicate very little time to them, which may indicate a tendency toward a sedentary lifestyle.

Key factors for preadolescents' involvement in physical activities include adequate sports infrastructure and the availability of spaces for these activities.

Some obstacles to practicing sports games include a lack of motivation, expenses for equipment, lack of time, health issues, or excess weight.

Preadolescents need sustained efforts to increase their awareness of the benefits of physical activity and sports games and to become more engaged in these activities.

In promoting physical activity and a healthy lifestyle among preadolescents, the development of sports infrastructure and the creation of appropriate programs and policies at the local level can play an important role.

The conclusions of this study can serve as a foundation for identifying needs and developing appropriate strategies and interventions to promote physical activity and sports participation among preadolescents.

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