

THE EFFECTS OF SPORTS PARTICIPATION ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, QUALITY OF LIFE AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN KOSOVO

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Abstract

From the literature we find numerous studies that have analyzed the impact of sport activities on school success. The findings are generally inconsistent. Some studies find weak, moderate correlations, or no impact at all. The aim of this study is to understand the relationship between participating in sport activities with quality of life, self-esteem and school success among youth in Kosovo. It is a quantitative cross-sectional study. The participants were 126 respondents, aged 14-19 years (Mage = 16.75, SD = .88) recruited online, from two high schools of Pristina. Participants completed Global Quality of Life Scale and Rosenberg Self-esteem scale as well as questions related to their sports activities and self-reported average of school grades. 34.9% participants declared that several times a week and 18.3% every day perform sports activities; while 36.5% spend an average of 3 hours or more per week in these sports activities. Companionship and health benefits are the main motivators of involvement in sports activities. Young people believe that sports activities have a positive effect on physical health, mental health and general well-being. A significant negative correlation was found between the hours spent in sports activities and success ($r = -.217$; $p = .020$), but there was no significant correlation with the quality of life and self-esteem. A significant positive correlation was found between the frequency of sports activities and quality of life ($r = .235$; $p = .011$), but there is no significant correlation with success and self-esteem. Other studies more focused on this issue can shed more light on these reports, especially on the possibility of interaction of other factors related to school success.

Keywords: sport activities, school, achievement, self-esteem, quality of life, Kosovo.

Introduction

Physical activity refers to any body movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure (WHO, 2020). It includes all activities, of any intensity, performed at any time of the day or night. This includes both exercise and casual activity integrated into daily routines.

School achievement is a construct in the field of education that is characterized depending on theoretical views and assessment methods. In the literature, this concept also has approximate descriptions, such as academic performance, academic achievements, school success, etc. This concept of school achievements in the narrowest version is understood as the level of success shown in school tasks and the ability to carry out school tasks according to educational goals. From the literature review (Steinmayr et al., 2014; Spinath, 2012), it is understood that academic performance depends on many different factors such as students' cognitive abilities, emotional intelligence, socio-economic status, school environments, home environments, curriculum and learning materials.

Self-esteem has arguably become one of the most studied issues in the social sciences (Mruck, 2006). Self-esteem refers to the subjective sense of worth or overall personal worth. Life satisfaction reflects an individual's overall assessment of their well-being and satisfaction with life as a whole (APA, 2018). From the literature we find numerous studies that have analyzed

the impact of sports activities on school success. Findings are generally inconsistent. Some studies find weak, moderate correlations or no effect at all. The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between participation in sports activities with quality of life, self-esteem and school success among young people in Kosovo. This study starts from the research question of what is the relationship between participation in sports and academic achievement, quality of life, and self-esteem in young people? The research hypotheses suggest that participation in sports has a positive and statistically significant impact on academic achievement, contributes to a higher quality of life, and is associated with greater self-esteem among youth.

Literature review

Physical activity and school success

The World Health Organization updated its guidelines in 2020, recommending that children and adolescents engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day (Chaput et al., 2020). According to Chaput et al. (2020) WHO has found that physical activity is critical for mental health outcomes (eg, depressive symptoms, self-esteem, anxiety symptoms, ADHD); for cognitive outcomes (eg, academic performance, executive function), while categorizing it as important for behaviors in general and especially prosocial behaviors (eg, conduct problems, peer relationships, social inclusion). Rodriguez et al. (2020) in a systematic review found that physical activity and physical fitness are positively associated with adolescent academic achievement and this association in more than 80% of studies was considered strong. Teferi (2020) in his review showed that there was a significant relationship between the level of physical fitness and academic achievement and higher academic achievement was associated with higher levels of physical fitness. Álvarez-Bueno et al. (2017) find that physical activity, specifically physical education, improves classroom behaviors and benefits several aspects of academic achievement, particularly math-related skills, reading, and composite scores in youth. A review of Owen et al. (2022) found that sports participation during school hours was more beneficial for academic performance compared to participation in sports outside of school hours. Barbosa et al. (2020) in an umbrella review find that overall, systematic reviews reported small positive or mixed associations between physical activity and academic achievement. From meta-analyses, it was observed that physical activity had zero or small to moderate positive effects on academic achievement (Barbosa et al., 2020). In this umbrella review, Barbosa et al (2020) also found that chronic physical activity showed a moderate positive effect on academic achievement and acute physical activity showed no benefit. Barbosa et al. (2020) Physical activity appears not to be detrimental to the academic achievement of school-age children and adolescents and, in fact, may be beneficial. Even Tanner (2017) reports that Studies regarding the general effects of physical activity included positive and negative correlations with academic success; however, most studies lacked the depth necessary to draw any definite conclusions about the relationship. But, Visier-Alfonso et al. (2022) among others posit that cognition, mental well-being, and exercise-related behaviors play some role in mediating the relationship between physical activity and academic physicals.

Physical activity and psychological well-being

Based on Donnelly et al. (2023) previous research has shown that physical activity is related to other constructs such as mental well-being and health. Murphy et al. (2020) finds that there is a relationship between engagement in sports and well-being. Tsambalis (2022) finds that there is strong evidence that PA is important for children's psychological well-being and also found that

children and adolescents with lower levels of physical activity have a higher prevalence of psychological and emotional distress. Tsambalis (2022) finds that physical activity provides an important tool for children and adolescents to be successful and this helps improve self-esteem and social well-being. Additionally, children with higher levels of physical activity are also more likely to have better cognitive functioning based on Tsambalis (2022). Rodriguez-Ayllon et al. (2019) report that findings from the meta-analysis suggest that physical activity interventions can improve adolescent mental health, but additional studies are needed to confirm the effects of physical activity on children's mental health. Based on Hale et al. (2021) findings suggest that interventions are beneficial in improving psychological well-being and quality of life, however the evidence for self-esteem is mixed. Martín-Rodríguez et al. (2024) highlight the profound impact of sport on mental health, highlighting its role in emotional regulation, resilience, cognitive function and the treatment of psychological conditions. Belcher et al. (2021) find that existing literature suggests that physical activity, exercise and aerobic fitness promote well-being and reduce the risk of mental health problems. Liu et al. (2023) found that the relationship between sports participation and subjective well-being is not clear, especially in Chinese primary and secondary schools. Appelqvist-Schmidlechner et al. (2018) found that regular physical activity has been shown to have a positive impact on various aspects of mental health, including reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression, improving mood and increasing self-confidence.

To summarize, participation in sports has been widely recognized as a contributor to various aspects of youth development. Several studies have shown that young people who are actively engaged in sports tend to perform better academically compared to their peers who do not participate in physical activities. In addition to academic benefits, sports participation is also associated with enhanced quality of life and higher self-esteem among youth. Despite some mixed findings, the overall evidence indicates that sports participation plays a meaningful role in promoting well-being and academic success in young people.

From the review of the literature online, we have not found studies of these variables in Kosovo.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

Participants were 126 young people, aged 14-19 years (Avg.Age = 16.75, SD = .88), while 5 participants have not indicated their age. Regarding the gender composition, there were 61 males (48.4%) and 65 (51.6%) females. The participants were recruited through the distribution of the link in two high schools in Pristina. Questionnaires were distributed through the link to groups of school students after the issuance of the relevant permits. Informed consent was sought from their parents prior to the administration of the questionnaire. No incentives were given for youth participation.

Instruments

The measuring instruments used in this study included:

1. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) is used to assess an individual's general attitudes toward himself. The scale consists of 10 items and respondents rate their agreement on a 4-point scale. The total score is calculated by summing the item scores, resulting in a score range from 10 to 40. Higher scores on the scale indicate higher levels of self-esteem.
2. The GQOL (Hyland & Sodergren, 1996) is a one-question scale that rates overall quality of life from 0 (no quality) to 100 (perfect quality).

3. Questions drafted by the authors regarding their sports activities (frequency and number of hours, motivation for participating in sports activities as well as their perceptions of the positive impacts from these activities)
4. Self-reported grade point average (GPA) was used to measure school achievement. In Kosovo, grades in pre-university education range from one (poor) to five (excellent). The classification was made on the basis of the average grade self-reported by the students at the time of conducting the research. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that there is empirical evidence (meta-analysis) suggesting that self-reported GPA is a good indicator of actual performance (eg Kuncel et al., 2005).

Study design

The study was a cross-sectional correlational study. Data processing and statistical analysis were performed using SPSS software version 21 and Microsoft Excel 2013. These descriptive data were further analyzed according to age, gender and other research variables. Normality is assessed with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic. In this case, Sig. value is .000, suggesting violation of the assumption of normality for the variables, suggesting the use of nonparametric tests. For differences between groups, the Kruskal Wallis Test was used. To examine the relationships between the variables, correlational analysis was used - the Spearman-Rho test.

Results

Statistical description of study variables

Table 1. Number and percentage of respondents according to variables

	N	%
Based on gender		
Male	61	48.4
Female	65	51.6
Based on residence		
Rural	39	31
Urban	87	69
Based on success		
Poor	2	1.6
Sufficient	3	2.4
Good	25	19.8
Very good	40	31.7
Excellent	48	38.1
Have not responded	8	6.4
How often do you participate in sports activities?		
Never	7	5.6
Rarely	30	23.8
Once a week	19	15.1
Several times a week	44	34.9
Have not responded	3	2.4
On average, how many hours per week do you spend participating in sports activities?		
0.5 hour	19	15.1
1 hour	25	19.8
2 hour	25	19.8

3 hour	14	11.1
4 hour	32	25.4
Have not responded	11	8.7

Participants according to self-reported success were: poor (1.6%), sufficient (2.4%), good (19.8%), very good (31.7%), excellent (38.1%) and did not answered (6.4 %) (see Tab 1). The results showed that the average value for self-esteem in the study sample was 27.85 (SD=5.76) while for Quality of life it was 7.63 (SD=2.12) (see Tab 2).

Table 2. Descriptive representation of the variables of quality of life and self-esteem

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	St.Dev.
Age	116	14.00	19.00	16.75	0.88
Quality of life	120	1.00	10.00	7.63	2.12
Self-assessment	121	11.00	39.00	27.85	5.76

As for the main motives to participate in sports, the respondents mostly appreciated the satisfaction, health benefits, companionship and finally competition/competition (see Tab 3).

Table 3. Descriptive representation of the main motives for participating in sports

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	St.Dev.
Satisfaction	121	0.00	2.00	1.57	0.63
Accompaniment	121	0.00	2.00	1.17	0.78
Health benefits	121	0.00	2.00	1.50	0.67
Competition	121	0.00	2.00	1.02	0.82

As for the opinions of whether participation in sports activities has had a positive impact on other areas of life, the respondents rated the impact on physical health the highest, followed by mental health and general well-being (see Tab 4).

Table 4. Descriptive representation of the positive impact of participation in sports in other areas of life

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	St. Dev.
Success in school	121	0.00	2.00	0.88	0.78
Social relations	121	0.00	2.00	1.10	0.70
General well-being	121	0.00	2.00	1.30	0.68
Family relations	121	0.00	2.00	0.83	0.78
Romantic relationships	121	0.00	2.00	0.50	0.73
Mental health	121	0.00	2.00	1.39	0.66
Physical health	121	0.00	2.00	1.55	0.64

Correlations between variables

Correlations between study variables were analyzed. A significant negative correlation was found between hours spent in sports activities and success ($r = -.217$; $p = .020$), but there was no significant correlation with quality of life and self-esteem. A significant positive correlation was found between the frequency of sports activities and quality of life ($r = .235$; $p = .011$), but there is no significant correlation with success and self-esteem. (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlation between the variable of self-esteem and school success

<i>Spearman's rho</i>		School success	Quality of Self-life	Self-assessment
How often do you participate in sports activities?	Correlation Coefficient	-0.142	.235*	0.102
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.13	0.011	0.273
	N	115	117	118
On average, how many hours per week do you spend participating in sports activities?	Correlation Coefficient	-.200*	0.096	0.097
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.035	0.308	0.303
	N	112	115	115

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Comparative analysis between variables

The Kruskal-Wallis test technique was used, performed on the groups according to the frequency of participation in sports activities as well as the average number of hours in sports activities, it showed that there are no differences in the level of self-esteem between them and there are also no differences in the level of quality of life and success in school.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between participation in sports activities with quality of life, self-esteem and school success among young people in Kosovo. The fact that almost 50% of the participants stated that they participate in sports activities from once to several times a week and also 1/3 of the participants spend 3 or more hours in sports activities, is not satisfactory and is not in line with WHO recommendations (Chaput et al., 2020). It is worth mentioning as positive the findings that they see sports activity as having a positive impact, especially on physical health, followed by mental health and general well-being. The finding of a significant negative correlation between hours spent in sports activities and school success and a significant positive correlation between the frequency of sports activities and quality of life indicate partial relationships between the variables of participation in sports activities and academic success, quality of life and self-esteem. These findings of ours are somewhat in line with the studies cited in this paper (Barbosa et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2023). When analyzing the partial relationships between sports participation and outcomes such as academic success, quality of life, and self-esteem among youth, it's crucial to account for potential confounding variables—factors that might influence both the independent variable (sports participation) and the dependent variables (academic success, quality of life, self-esteem), possibly distorting the observed relationships. Such factors may include socioeconomic level (more likely access to physical activity), School Environment, Peer Influence and Social Networks, Personality traits, etc.

Study limitations

However, this paper can see as a limitation the small sample size, then the non-representative sample, the non-standardization of the questionnaires as well as the use only of self-report without the possibility of an objective assessment.

Conclusions

The unsatisfactory involvement in sports activities of the participants in this study, lays the need for greater engagement of school institutions and other public health authorities in our country to increase awareness of the benefits of greater involvement of youth in these activities. A few findings indicating that those who had better success were less involved in sports activities and that those who exercised more often had better quality of life were found in this study. The findings of this study highlight the need for comprehensive, personalized and evidence-based policies, where sport is seen as part of a broader ecosystem of youth development. Sport should be seen as a supporting component within an integrated approach to youth development. Similarly, youth development policies should combine sport with educational, psychological and social interventions by including sport in personal development programs, career guidance and well-being promotion in schools. Other studies more focused on this issue may shed more light on these reports, especially on the possibility of interaction of other factors related to school success. Well-designed and randomized controlled follow-up studies (RCTs) that aim not only to test the effect of physical activity on academic achievement but also potential mediators are needed.

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