

PHYSICAL EXERCISE AS LEISURE ACTIVITIES IN YOUTH'S LIVES

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Abstract: Introduction. Despite the known benefits of physical activity, there is a worldwide trend towards less daily physical activity. According to the latest Eurobarometer, 63% of the population of our country never do physical exercises or sports, placing them at the bottom of the ranking of EU countries. The present study aims to identify the share of physical activities in the free time budget of young people. Thus, it is desired that, through a sociological investigation, to investigate whether young people in the Oltenia area spend their free time in an active way. **Methods.** The research was carried out between April and June 2022 and consisted in the development, transmission and interpretation of the data of a questionnaire applied in the online system, on the google.doc platform. The questionnaire contained 15 items referring to the free time of young people, which were answered by 71 young people under conditions of anonymity. **Results.** Most respondents exercise occasionally in their free time, with frequency of exercise positively correlating with perception of physical appearance ($r=0.45$, $p<0.01$).

Key words: leisure activities, youth, physical exercise.

1. Introduction

Today, although young people are doing more sports than in any other past life, it is also the time when there is an increase in the level of obesity, sedentary lifestyle and spending free time in the digital world. The specialized literature should seek to answer as many possibilities as possible to answer this paradox, also emphasizing the idea that the life of today's young people is included by many aspects, and the approach should be a

holistic one [17].

It is also important to emphasize the variations that exist between competitive sports (including football, volleyball, basketball, athletics, tennis, etc.) and recreational physical activities. The major difference between them is that the former activities are defined by competitiveness, while the latter are not. This distinction does not prevent recreational sports or physical activities; as a means of recovery or recreation.

Sport also has an important role in the

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rehabilitation of young people, but the programs used must be individualized and also the feedback of the participants is very important [1].

The studies carried out so far also support the fact that the data obtained by them related to the practice of sports, associate the practice of physical exercises with academic performance and contribute to the repositioning of research in the field of sports in development [15].

Other research also suggests the importance of highlighting the gender disparity in sports, for example, football is played by men and volleyball by women. There are also big differences in terms of the number of hours of sports practiced by men and women, in the case of the former, the number of hours being higher. As a solution to improve these disparities, the organization of more sports events is proposed [8].

Although it remains a desired and, at least at the level of programs and proposals, at the level of European directives, preparing young people for lifelong participation in sports activities is a key objective, the concrete activities carried out in this sense remain a problem whose solution is still wanted. A conclusion reached by a research in this regard is that the preferences of young people should be taken into account in the first place in terms of these programs, and that they should have multiple activities, which can become a lifestyle [10].

There are studies that also take into account the importance of social networks and their omnipresence in the lives of young people and a proposed solution could be the use of digital representations that illustrate the experiences of young people's involvement in health-related social networks [9].

Other conditions that may appear in sports activities among young people may also come from the limited possibilities that families may have. For example, a study carried out on 24 children between the ages of 11 and 14, from single-parent families and with low incomes, came to the conclusion that they preferred sedentary activities to sports, and the causes were the lack of financial resources and of parents' time [20].

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought, among other negative changes in sports, coaches having an extremely difficult mission to use platforms and applications for online training but also to monitor the progress of their athletes [4]. At the same time, the coaches are also interested in the mental health of young people and make every effort to help them. In a qualitative research in which 13 sports coaches of young people between the ages of 12 and 18 participated, their statements were directed to the well-being that children gain by practicing sports activities [18].

2. Research Methods

2.1. Participants and procedure

71 young people aged between 16-30 participated in this research, of whom 55.7% (39) were female and 44.3% (32) were male, 87.3% of them living in urban area. Respondents' participation in the study was voluntary.

2.2. Instruments

The applied tool was created by us for the purpose of this research and consisted of a set of 15 questions with self-reported answers. Among them were found items such as: "Do you usually practice physical

exercise in your free time?", "Are you satisfied with the way you look?", "Do you consider that physical exercise is important in your development?", "Practicing physical exercise makes you more confident in your strength?", etc.

2.3. Purpose and hypothesis

The present study aims to identify the importance of physical activities in young people's free time. Thus, it is desired that through a sociological investigation, it will be investigated whether young people in the Oltenia Region spend their free time in an active way.

The research hypotheses are as follows:

- H1. *Practicing a performance sport is positively associated with daily physical exercises as leisure activities.*
- H2. *Practicing a performance sport is positively associated with an increased level of physical appearance.*
- H3. *Physical exercises as leisure activities are positively associated with an increased level of physical appearance.*

2. Results

Descriptive statistics

The study participants were aged between 16 and 55 years, with an average of M= 31.38, SD=10.31.

Descriptive statistics

Table 1

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	71	16	55	31.38	10.310
Valid N (listwise)	71				

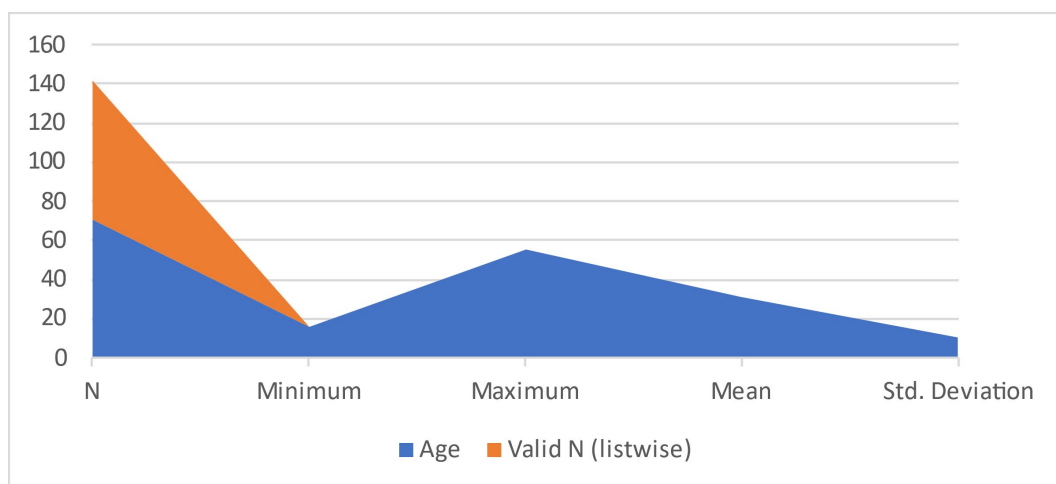


Fig. 1. *Image of descriptive statistics*

Among the respondents participating in the study, 71.8% do not practice performance sports, and 16 of them are performance athletes. The sports practiced are: sambo (6 respondents), football (4 respondents), handball (1), swimming (1), sports orientation (1), fencing (1), table tennis (1) and kickboxing (1), while the others only practice the sport occasionally.

Regarding the non-practicing participants

Hypotheses testing

H1. *Practicing a performance sport is positively associated with daily physical exercises as leisure activities.*

of a performance sport, among the physical activities practiced by them, in their free time, we find tennis, jogging, cycling and yoga.

The last questions referred to the importance of physical exercise in the personal and emotional development of the respondents, with the majority stating that physical exercise is an excellent means of achieving relaxation, developing self-confidence and 100% recommend and others practicing physical exercises.

To test this hypothesis, a Pearson Correlation was performed.

Table 2

Correlations between performance sports and daily physical exercises as leisure activities (N = 71)

		Performance sport	Physical exercises as leisure activities
Performance sport	Pearson	1	
Physical exercises as leisure activities	Pearson	.60**	1

** . Correlations are significant at the level .01.

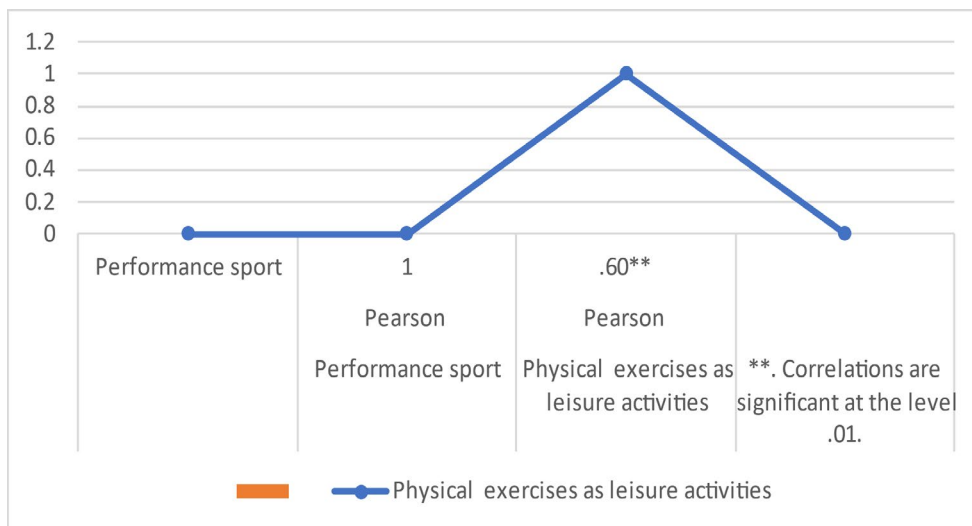


Fig. 2. Image of the correlations between performance sports and daily physical exercises as leisure activities (N = 71)

It is observed that there are statistically significant positive associations between the Performance Sport and Physical exercises as leisure activities $r = .60$, $p < .01$.

H2. *Practicing a performance sport is positively associated with an increased level of physical appearance.*

Therefore, it can be stated that hypothesis H1 is supported by the analyzed data, in the sense that Performance Sport is positively associated with Physical exercises as leisure activities.

To test this hypothesis, a Pearson Correlation was performed.

Table 3
Correlations between performance sport and the level of physical appearance (N = 71)

		Performance sport	The level of physical appearance	
Performance sport	Pearson	1		
The level of physical appearance	Pearson	.56**	1	

** . Correlations are significant at the level .01.

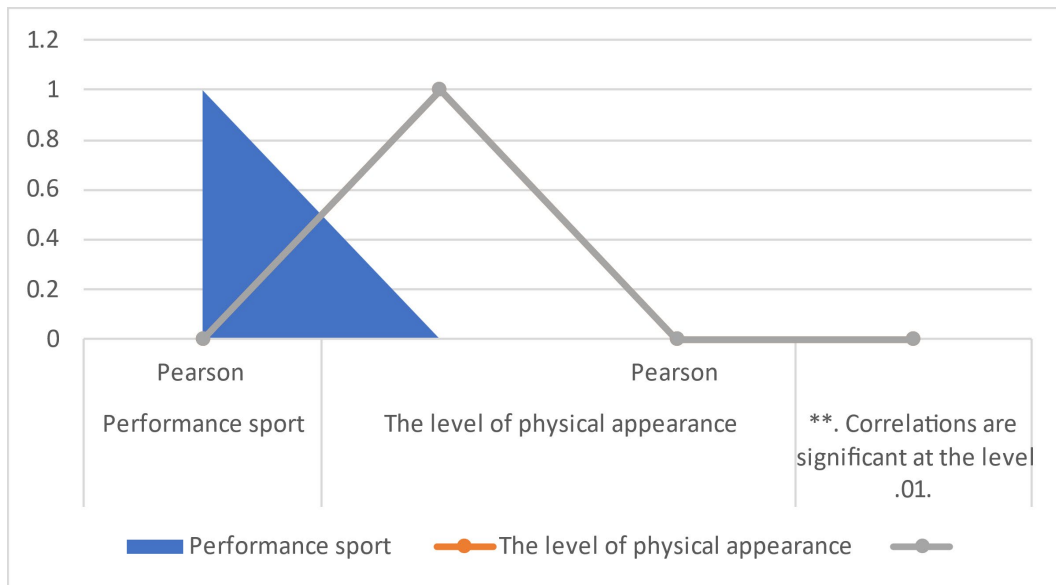


Fig. 3. Image of the Correlations between performance sport and the level of physical appearance (N = 71)

It is observed that there are statistically significant positive associations between

performance sport and the level of physical appearance $r = .56$, $p < .01$.

Hypothesis H2 is supported by the analyzed data, in the sense that

Performance Sport is positively associated with the level of physical appearance.

H3. *Physical exercises as leisure activities are positively associated with an increased level of physical appearance.*

To test this hypothesis, a Pearson Correlation was performed.

Table 4

Correlations between daily physical exercises as leisure activities and the level of physical appearance (N = 71)

		Physical exercises as leisure activities	The level of physical appearance	
Physical exercises as leisure activities	Pearson	1		
The level of physical appearance	Pearson	.40**	1	

** . Correlations are significant at the level .01.

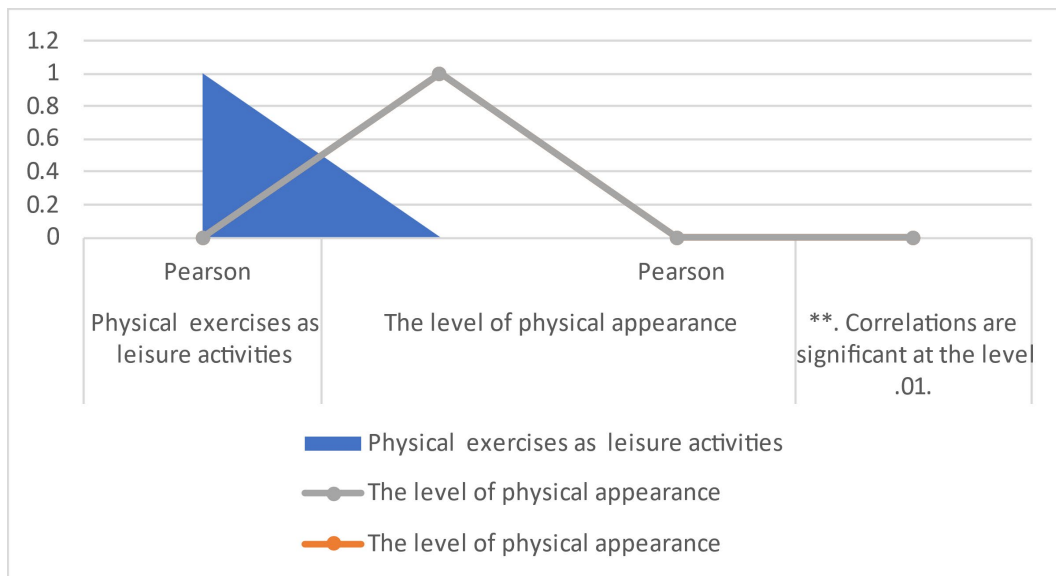


Fig. 4. Image of the correlations between daily physical exercises as leisure activities and the level of physical appearance (N = 71)

It is observed that there are statistically significant positive links between Physical exercises as leisure activities and The level of physical appearance $r = .40$, $p < .01$.

Taking into account these results, we can state that hypothesis H3 is supported by the analyzed data.

4. Conclusions and Discussions

It is important that physical activity is practiced throughout life and is consolidated as a daily habit, such as proper nutrition, sufficient rest or any other action that helps the body function properly [21]. No one becomes a performance athlete without experience, and extensive experience does not invariably lead people to become experts. The reasons for reaching or, rather, not reaching performance are highly studied and the conducted research is the basis for the development of the methodology for the selection of potential performance athletes, based on preferences, abilities, mental capacities and native data. However, one aspect remains indisputable, namely the involvement in deliberate and sustained practice by the athletes [6].

A study conducted in 2002 investigates the causal and direct relationship between sports activity and performance; and describes how this relationship may be mediated by feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy; as well as the relationship between playing team sports and school or academic performance. Given the heterogeneity of high self-esteem, indiscriminate praise could just as easily promote narcissism, with its less desirable consequences. Instead, some studies

recommend that praise be used to boost self-esteem as a socially desirable reward [19], [2].

Another association made in other research concerns the relationship between nutrient intake, body mass, and physical activity in relation to cognitive development and academic achievement. What they found is that increased participation in physical activity suggests increased health and cognitive function, including improved brain health and cognitive function across the lifespan [3].

A large number of studies are devoted to the association between playing sports and academic performance. Not all studies have found strong associations between sports and academic performance [5], and others have found young people's unrealistic expectations for their future and even unhealthy behaviors in an attempt to improve performance [7].

At the level of other experimental studies, an attempt was made to increase self-esteem through: areas of the curriculum; (special classroom procedures; changes in teacher behavior; and changes in student behavior. The review is followed by a discussion of issues arising from the experiments, including that of a causal link between self-esteem and performance, along with implications for practice in class [11].

Another research carried out on students practicing and not practicing sports showed that Students involved in sports, alone or in combination with other activities, had significantly higher chances than others for physical exercise and healthy self-image and significantly lower chances for emotional distress, suicidal behavior, family substance abuse, and

victimization of physical and sexual abuse, for alcohol use, marijuana use, and vandalism [12, 13].

A meta-analysis of the literature, in line with our study, captured serious negative effects of body image disturbance among athletes and non-athletes (N = 78 studies, 294 effect sizes). A small effect was found indicating that athletes had a more positive body image compared to non-athletes. Possible explanations for the more positive body image of athletes than non-athletes are discussed [14].

Another similar study aimed to investigate the relationship between body perception and the ability to describes emotional states in young adults (N= 200 young people, 100 athletes, 100 non-athletes, with an average age of 25). The analysis of the data confirmed differences regarding body schema, and the conclusion was that a negative body perception of the body, associated with the inability to recognize emotions, can lead to an exaggerated practice of sports that can lead to addiction [16].

5. Proposals

An important direction, as a proposal, also supported by the cited literature, would be the existence of multiple sports activities programs, accessible to the entire population, which could make sports activities possible to be practiced anywhere and anytime (including through special arrangements of bike lanes, running tracks, Semi-Olympic swimming pools, etc.).

These programs should also be implemented in schools, high schools, universities, and participation should be

encouraged from the earliest possible age, so that sport can become a lifestyle.

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