

PARENTS 'PERCEPTION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES IN CHILDREN LEISURE TIME

Marina Lujić¹, Magdalena Spudić¹, Franjo Lovrić²

¹Kindergarten "Bajka", Zagreb, Croatia

²Faculty of science and education, University of Mostar

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Abstract

Parents seek to involve their children in various leisure activities as they believe this will enable them to acquire specific and better skills. Among them are various physical activities that are globally perceived as important. This paper sought to examine how important physical activity is perceived by parents, and what activities do they give priority when choosing content in which their child will engage in in their spare time. The aim of the study was to determine the parents' attitudes about the physical activities of their children in their leisure time. The study was conducted on a sample of 207 participants and examined the parents' perceptions of the importance of physical activities of their children and the relation of physical activities to educational ones. The results showed that parents find physical activities more useful than educational. The results are interesting and reveal new dimensions that will be explored by further research, such as a statistically significant difference between the perceived usefulness of team and individual sports.

Key words: questionnaire, skills, primary school, monitoring

Introduction

For preschool children, movement is exceedingly important for harmonious psychophysical growth and development (Hills, 1995). Today's children have most of their time organized, and most children attend various activities. Van der Eecken, Spruyt and Bradt (2019) state that parents seek to involve their children in leisure activities because they believe this will enable them to acquire better skills. The content offered to children and young people can greatly shape thinking and attitudes that will have an impact on identity formation and the ultimate quality of life. Furthermore, certain motor skills for children of this age are recognized as fundamental and necessary in the development (Lovrić, Mandić Jelaska, Bilić, 2018). Watchman and Spencer (2019) say that parents base their decision to include their children in sports activities on the experiences and recommendations of other parents. Children have more leisure time than adults and their leisure time must be specifically organized (Badrić, Prskalo, and Šilić, 2011). Physical activity is a predictor of health and quality living, however healthy lifestyles, which include physical activity and quality meals, are applied by very few students (Salihefendić, Zildžić, and Jašić, 2015). Children need to be retained in sport for as long as possible, and this is not the practice of today's youth, as seen in the study by Jeđud and Novak (2005). Their research shows that young people engaged in organized sports activities in elementary school, but only a few continued to engage in these activities at a later age. Similar results were obtained by Žnidarec Čučković and Ohnjec (2014), who noted a

high interest in energetic activities among primary school children, whereas in high school students movement and physical activity play a key role in their interests but are not included in their daily lives. The period of life from two to seven years of age is as asserted to be the period of the greatest FMS development (Gallahue et al., 2012), and can be divided into three phases: initial, basic and mature (Lloyd & Oliver, 2012). When beginning to participate in formal educational processes, i.e., while attending the lower grades of elementary school, pupils should be in the FMS mature phase of development (Lovric et al., 2019). That is why it is important to start introducing physical activities in the youngest age, even before preschool. Accordingly, the aim of this research was to determine parents' perception about their children's physical activities in their leisure time. The research questions that emerged from the aim of the study were to examine whether there is a correlation between parents' physical activity and their children's physical activity, and to examine whether there is a difference in parents' perceptions of the usefulness of physical activities as to educational leisure activities.

Methods

Participants

A total of 207 parents, 188 mothers and 19 fathers participated in this correlation study. The age of the parents ranged from 23 to 58 years, with an average parental age of 38.01 ± 6.19 years. 6 parents completed elementary school, 83 parents graduated from high school, 55 completed

undergraduate studies (higher education), 60 graduate studies (university degrees), and 3 parents completed scientific studies (masters or doctorates).

Instrument

The questionnaire "Physical activity of children - questionnaire for parents" was developed for the purpose of the research. The parents completed a questionnaire consisting of 3 parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, parents answered questions about themselves, their demographic characteristics, and physical activity (whether they were members of a sports club, whether they were active in some physical activity, and if so, how often). In the second part of the questionnaire, they answered the same questions regarding physical activity, but for their children (are the children members of a sports club, are they engaged in physical activity and how often). In the last part of the questionnaire, they assessed the usefulness of leisure activities for their children on a Likert scale from 1 (not at all useful) to 5 (completely useful). The questionnaire indicated a total of six types of children's leisure activities, three physical activities (individual sports, team sports, dance activities) and three educational activities (foreign language courses, music school and educational extracurricular activities such as math, chemistry, history etc.).

Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed through various online groups in which parents communicate about their children and their concerns, in September 2019. It was explained to the parents that participation was anonymous and voluntary and that the data obtained from the analysis would be used for scientific and research purposes.

Statistical analysis

The results were analyzed in the IBM SPSS 23 statistical program. In addition to the descriptive data representations, the Spearman correlation coefficient and the t-test for independent samples with a significance level of $p < 0.05$ were calculated.

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics show that only 14.5% of parents are members of a sports club or association, while 70% of children are members of a sports club or association. Children are in a great number, actively engaged in some form of physical activity, 80.2% of them, while only 37.7% of parents are actively engaged in physical activity. When observing the frequency of physical activity in parents and children, children are also more likely to engage in physical activity more often than parents. As many as 90.2% of children actively engage in some physical activity at least three times a week, while 51.2% of parents report the same frequency of physical activity. The results show that

children are more likely to be actively engaged in physical activities than their parents and that they are active members of sports clubs and associations. Schools have various "sports schools" organized in the afternoon where children can try and train different sports, and by participating in these activities they become their members.

To determine whether there is a correlation between physical activities of parents and children and whether children of parents who are actively engaged in physical activity are statistically more involved in physical activity than children of parents who are not engaged in physical activity, a Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated.

Table 1. Relationship between physical activity of parents and physical activity of children

	Children physical activity
Parent physical activity	0,04

In this study, no statistically significant correlation was found with the risk level of 5%, in other words no correlation was found between the physical activities of parents and children. There remains room for exploring the type of physical activity. Are these activities organized by clubs and associations or are they intensive walks and other similar activities in their own organization?

Parents evaluated the usefulness of their children's leisure activities. They evaluated their perceived usefulness of a foreign language course, music school and extracurricular activities as variables belonging to educational activities, as well as variables of team and individual sports in addition to dance activities belonging to physical activities. Parents rated the usefulness of a particular leisure activity on a scale of 1 to 5, from not a useful activity at all to a completely useful activity. Parents rate team sports, such as basketball, football, hockey, etc., as the most useful activity. They also rated music school as the least useful activity, such as playing an instrument or singing in a choir. The linear combination of estimated usefulness of variables foreign language courses, music schools and extracurricular activities provided a new variable called *Educational Activities*, while the linear combination of estimated usefulness of variables team sports, individual sports and dance schools gave the variable *Physical Activities*.

Table 2. Differences in parental perceptions of the usefulness of physical and educational activities for children

	Activity	M	SD	Df	p
Usefulness	Physical	12.63	1.35	206	.00
	Educational	12.21	1.66		

The T-test for independent samples confirmed that there was a statistically significant difference in the perceived usefulness between the physical and educational activities of children. Parents in this study find that physical activities (individual / team sports and dance activities) are more beneficial to their children than educational activities (foreign language schools, music schools and extracurricular activities). We can say that parents are aware of the importance of physical activity for the quality development and well-being of their own child. Although educational activities such as learning a new foreign language are important, parents estimate that physical activities are more beneficial. Difference was found between the perceived usefulness of team and individual sports. Parents rated team sports as statistically significantly more useful than individual sports ($t = 3.88, p < 0.01$). The dimensions offered by team sports are more appealing to parents as they offer children more opportunities to travel, participate in tournaments and socialize with peers. Also, Croatian athletes are much more successful in team sports, they are more promoted in the media than athletes of individual sports, so one can find a reason for parents to be more inclined to team sports.

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Conclusion

This study did not find that physically active parents have more physically active children than parents who are not as physically active. However, a statistically significant difference in the perceived usefulness between physical and educational activities in parents was obtained where parents evaluate physical activities more useful than educational activities for the leisure time of their children. The awareness of the importance of physical activity and movement strengthens, especially in childhood. Assessing parents who favor physical activity over educational activities also supports raising awareness and knowledge of the importance and benefits of physical activity for children. The research also opened up opportunities defining the types of physical activities that children engage in, are they organized by sports clubs and associations or are they self-initiated? But there is also the question of monitoring and evaluating physical activity. The reasons for finding team sport more useful than individual sport should also be examined. What are the dimensions of team sport that parents find more useful and better than the dimensions of individual sport? It is certainly positive and encouraging that parents have a positive attitude towards physical activity and that awareness of its importance emerges, it is only necessary to provide adequately educated staff that will be able to respond to the interests of parents and children in a quality and correct manner.

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Corresponding information:

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Correspondence to: Franjo Lovrić

University: University of Mostar

Faculty: Faculty of science and education, Department of kinesiology

Phone: 0038763 548 958

E-mail: franjo.lovric@fpmoz.sum.ba
