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Original Research Article

Physiological and psychological influences shaping children's future growth and mental health: An analytical study of attitudes towards sports in school going children

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ABSTRACT

Background: There is growing concern among physical education professionals regarding the inadequate participation of children in sports activities. Understanding children's motivations for joining, participating in, and dropping out of sports is crucial for fostering better engagement and promoting a sporting culture.

Aim: This study aims to examine the factors influencing children's motivation to join and participate in sports, as well as reasons for dropping out, with a focus on identifying the key motivations for boys and girls.

Material and Methods: The study sample comprised 750 boys and 750 girls, aged 10-14 years, from classes five to nine. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire that assessed various motivational factors related to sports participation.

Results: The survey results indicated that boys primarily participated in sports "To have fun" (first choice) and "To learn new skills" (second choice). For girls, the top motivations were "To stay in shape" and "To have fun." Conversely, many girls cited their dislike for exercising, sweating, and getting tired as significant deterrents. Factors such as "Learning new skills," "Improving," and "Team work" were prioritized over items like "Winning," "Trophies," "Be popular," and "Get to a higher level of competition."

Conclusion: The findings highlight the importance of understanding and addressing the various motivational factors that influence children's sports participation. Parents, teachers, and coaches need to be aware of these drivers to effectively motivate children and develop a robust sporting culture in schools. Emphasizing fun, skill development, and teamwork, while addressing concerns about exercise discomfort, is crucial for fostering sustained participation and promoting overall health and fitness.

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1. Introduction

There has been an increase in the knowledge in students' attitudes toward physical education/activity. The increased interest in this topic may be attributed by the influence of

attitudes toward further participation in physical activities after school and out of school that is related to students' achievement in athletic activities. Researchers indicated that children in elementary schools tend to report inflated physical activity abilities, interests, and attitudes due to their limited developmental ability of self-evaluation.¹ Physical education gives help to individuals to know themselves

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psychologically, biologically, socially and culturally and to make them live in harmony.²

Various aspects of sport performance are the sum total of an individual's characteristics which make him or her unique. Enduring characteristics generally individuals build in all sports events. Social learning behaviour is learned from peer group, parents, friends etc. Interactionist approach is a mixture of all these traits & social learning theories. In nutshell, behaviour is a reflection of personality & environment.

Personality measurements can be done by interviews, questionnaires and observations which depend on attitudes. Attitude is 'A mental state of readiness organised through experiences that influence the response of an individual towards any object or situation with which it is related'. Predispositions that can affect behaviour towards an object are friends, peers, family, teachers, coaches, prejudice, past experiences and media.

Gender differences in preferences for kind of sport activities were reported in the literature. The boys demonstrated strong interests in archery, bowling, flag football, and wrestling, whereas girls preferred gymnastics, softball, and volleyball.³ Another investigation revealed that boys wanted more of risk-taking experiences and reducing stress, whereas girls were more eager for beautiful and graceful movements.⁴

A number of workers probed children's motivation to participate in youth sports programs.^{5,6} Sports have the potential to accomplish three important objectives in children's development. First, sports can provide youth with opportunities to be physically active which in turn can lead to improved physical health. Second, sports have long been considered important to youth's psychosocial development, providing opportunities to learn important life skills such as co-operation, discipline, leadership and self-control. Third, sport programs are critical for learning of motor skills; these motor skills serve as a foundation for future national sports star and recreational adult sport participants.

Various studies have demonstrated that physical activity can be an effective intervention for a variety of mental health conditions.^{7–10} The studies done on children's attitudes concerning sports activities in elementary school are relatively scant in our region. Therefore, our research survey targeted elementary school children. The purpose of this study was to investigate children's motivations to join, participate enthusiastically, and/or drop out reasons. Physical education and sports/activities choice of middle school students in urban public schools were also included in our research project.

2. Materials and Methods

Sample consisted of 750 boys and 750 girls from class five to nine {age group 10-14 yrs}. Appropriate consent is taken from children's parents and explained properly about

the questioner. These students used to participate in school sports activities like-kho kho, hockey, handball, basketball, badminton and chess etc. two to three times per week. A pre structured questionnaire was administered to obtain the data. Along with specific reasons for playing and drop outs, any other reasons for the same were also noted down on the questionnaire proforma. Participants checked each item on a 1–5-point Likert scale. Strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree. Participants were also asked to select the "one MOST important reason" from the original statements and any other most important reason was also recorded.

3. Results

The proformas filled by the students were collected and analysed (Tables 1 and 2). Feedback on various reasons for participating in sports activities like, to have fun, to learn new skill, to stay in shape, to win, to be part of team, to be popular and to improve skill were included in the proformas. Few students mentioned some other reasons for their active role in physical activities. Those choices were, like, to do something I am good at, challenge and excitement of competition, career option, to stay away from routine stress of studies. The most important reasons were to have fun, to learn new skill by both girls and boys (Table 1). 'To stay in shape' was third preferred choice amongst girls (78%), which was not a popular choice amongst boys (13.3%). Amongst boys percentages of options on Likert scale for various reasons for playing showed almost similar results as in girls, with few variations. 90% of boys and girls opted for 'have fun' and 'to learn new skill' as their preferred choices respectively. Second choice for boys (84%), was to, 'learn new skill' while in girls (86%) was, 'to have fun'. Similarly, greater percentages of boys (90%) and girls (86%) showed 'loss of interest' as one of the biggest reason for 'drop out' from sports activities in school (Table 2). There were certain reasons mentioned by students for 'drop outs' other than, what were written on proformas, for example, team mates being non-cooperative, too much pressure, sweating (girls), coach is not good and need more study time.

4. Discussion

Adult supervised non-school youth sports programs are rapidly growing and cater to some 25 million kids. Almost 50% of the children ages 5-16 participate in youth sports. 90% of parents encourage their children to engage in sports.

"To have fun" was the clear first choice; "To learn new skills" was the second choice. The findings by earlier studies were replicated in this study. "Winning" came in 10th place. This finding is very consistent with the existing literature.¹¹

In our study some of the reasons mentioned by the boys to participate in the sports were like, to do something I am good at, challenge and excitement of competition,

Table 1: Percentages of options on Likert scale for various reasons for playing

	Have fun		New skill		Stay in shape		Winnig		Part of team		Popular		Improve skill	
	B %	G %	B %	G %	B %	G %	B %	G %	B %	G %	B %	G %	B %	G %
S.Agree	70	65.1	64	66.6	5.3	71.3	44	41.33	39.3	31.4	28.4	37.4	31.8	24.6
Agree	20	21.3	20	24.0	8.0	6.6	22.6	24.4	17.7	16.9	26	26.3	22.3	22.2
Undecided	5.07	5.6	2.6	7.7	2.6	2.0	16.4	15.33	7.6	10.2	15.6	7.0	10.5	31.8
Disagree	4.93	6.0	8.0	16.0	64	14.6	14	10.93	28.2	27.1	22	13.6	24.7	10.5
S.Disagre	0	2	5.3	0	2	5.3	2.93	8	7.07	14.3	8	15.6	10.7	0

S. Agree- Strongly agree, B- Boys, G- Girls

Table 2: Percentages of options on Likert scale for various reasons of drop outs in sports

	Loss of interest		Tired of it		Coach played favorite	
	B %	G %	B %	G %	B %	G %
Strongly Agree	70	65	24.9	36.1	37.4	28.4
Agree	20	21.3	25.4	25.2	26.3	26
Undecided	5.7	5.6	27.6	26.9	7	15.6
Disagree	4.9	6	15.4	7.7	13.6	22
S.Disagre	0	2	6.5	4	15.6	8

S. Agree-strongly agree, B- Boys, G-Girls

career option, to stay away from routine stress of studies. Similar observations were recorded in earlier study where, boys were reported to have more positive attitudes than girls toward physical activities bringing them risk-taking experiences and reducing stress, whereas girls were more positive than boys in physical activities with beautiful and graceful movements.⁴

“To stay in shape” and “To get exercise” were top choices. When asked to indicate what they liked least about their best sport, many Girls indicated their dislike of exercising, sweating, and getting tired. It appears that Girls in this study felt pressured to choose “To stay in shape” but did not like to engage in activities that lead to improved physical fitness. Societal pressures on girls to look a certain way are apparent. However, previous researches did not find gender difference in attitudes toward physical education and activities between boys and girls although they were found to possess moderate positive attitudes.¹²

Gender and sports preferences appear to be the factors that also influence the results of this sample of urban high school students. Over all children, regardless of income or ethnicity, ranked self-regulated items (e.g., “fun,” “learning new skills,” “improving,” and “team work”) ahead of other-controlled items (e.g., “winning,” “trophies,” “be popular,” and “get to a higher level of competition”).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, children generally play for fun. At the same time they want to improve their gaming skills. The role of parents and sport coaches is pivotal in this regard. In short, fun, improving skills, playing as a team mate, getting in shape, are all universally endorsed reasons for participating

in sport activities. So, it is appropriate to concentrate on the content of the sport programs and not the ethnic, social or economic factors. A well designed sport program will make a good psychological impact on students.^{13–15}

6. Source of Funding

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7. Conflict of Interest

None.


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