

AWARENESS ANALYSIS OF BENEFITS FROM SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46733/PESH24131059d>

(Original scientific paper)

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Abstract

The generally accepted theory is that sports have a positive impact on people's physical and mental health. In addition to long-term health preservation, today, regular and systematic physical activity increasingly targets the development of cognitive and intellectual abilities. Also, through the competitive spirit and the overall structure of sports, the focus is on developing interpersonal, leadership, and life skills, as well as strategic thinking, effective decision-making, better focus, and memory. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Macedonian population's awareness of the benefits of regular physical activities and sports. The empirical research was done by collecting primary data from 198 surveys, using Microsoft Office Forms. The data is analyzed by using descriptive statistics and crosstabulations. The research intends to fill in a research gap related to this topic, to propose further recommendations for improving or offering new initiatives in the area of school sport, physical education, sport recreation etc. Findings reveal that the Macedonian population on average partially with a tendency towards full agreement with the benefits that sports and physical activity provide to them. This should be taken as an imperative for sportsmen, coaches, teachers, authorities, and policymakers in terms of undertaking many sports initiatives and physically educating children and youth for their benefit, and finally for societal and economic improvement.

Keywords: awareness, sports, physical activities, benefits.

Introduction

With daily physical activity, a person achieves stress relief, inner peace, reduction of anxiety and depression, preventive and long-term health effects, and communication and collaboration, improves teamwork and leadership. According to Bailey et al. (2015), there is an evident relationship between sports, physical activity, and human capital development, in terms of physical and mental health, individual, social human capital, intellectual, and financial capital. Therefore, awareness of sports and physical activity benefits should be at its highest level for every nation. Policymakers, national agencies, teachers and parents should all be aware of sports' positive impact on the human body and achievement of well-being (Macovei et al. 2014). According to Malm et al. (2019) sports and physical activity have multifaceted impact on individuals and society, primarily highlighting the physiological, psychosocial and personal development, as well as reduced alcohol consumption, injuries, eating disorders, and burnout. WHO (2022) presented the key facts related to sports, i.e. it highlights that sports improve overall well-being, improve physical and mental health, and contribute to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

However, despite the benefits of sports and physical activities, on a global scale over 1.4 billion adults, comprising more than a quarter of the adult population, do not meet recommended activity levels. Approximately one-third of women and one-fourth of men worldwide fail to engage in sufficient physical activity to maintain good health. In high-income nations, inactivity rates are twice as prevalent as in low-income countries. Alarming, there has been no enhancement in global physical activity levels since 2001. Moreover, between 2001 and 2016, inadequate activity surged by 5% in high-income countries, escalating from 31.6% to 36.8%. (WHO, 2022). However, the latest data about Macedonian population dates back 11 years ago, showing that only 36% of the adults were physically active. (Simovska-Jarevska et al., 2013). Additionally, in the literature, empirical research related to awareness of sports benefits among the Macedonian population cannot be found. Focusing on the latter, the purpose of this paper is to investigate

the awareness of sports benefits among the Macedonian population, and to discover if there is a relationship between practising sports and awareness of sports benefits among respondents.

Results and Discussion

The research utilizes primary data collected through a survey responded by 198 participants by using Microsoft Office Forms, throughout the period July 2023 - February 2024. The data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and crosstabulation. By employing these methods, the research aims to discover and understand the relationship between respondents' demographic characteristics and sports affiliation with awareness of sport benefits, on an overall level, and a separate aspect of human capital, i.e. physical, emotional, intellectual, social, financial and individual (Bailey et al., 2015).

According to the results, 46% of the respondents were female while 54% were male. 5.56% belonged to the age category of 18-24 years, 9.09% to the 25-29 years, 10.61% to the 30-34 years, 25.76% to the 35-39 years, 24.24% to the 40-45 years, and 24.75% to the age category of above 45 years. The majority of the respondents 51.01% had a Bachelor's degree, 32.83% held either a master's or doctoral degree, and 16.16% had only a high school diploma. Related to the monthly income, 12.12% have a monthly income of below

30.000 MKD, 22.22% between 30.001-40.000 MKD, 31.31% between 40.001-60.000 MKD and 34.34%

have a monthly income above 60.000 MKD. Additionally, according to their affiliation to sports and physical activity, 8.08% were professional sportsmen, 63.64% were recreational sportsmen, 12.12% were sports workers, and 16.16% did not have any affiliation with sports.

Awareness of the benefits of sports was determined by providing respondents with 6 statements related to each aspect of human capital, according to the proposed human capitals of Bailey et al. (2015), and asked to assign a level of agreement with each of the statements, where 1 refers to completely disagree, 2 - partially disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - partially agree, 5 - completely agree). As shown in Figure 1, respondents have the highest level of agreement with the statements that sports and physical activities contribute to improvement in their physical and mental health (with weighted average of 4.86 and 4.78 respectively), i.e., physical and emotional human capital. Furthermore, with a weighted average of agreement of 4.62, respondents agree that sports and physical activity contribute to the improvement of their interpersonal, leadership, life skills and resilience, i.e., individual capital. With a weighted average of below 4.5, respondents assigned the statements related to financial, intellectual, and social capital (4.49, 4.47 and 4.37, respectively). In general, the findings reveal that the total average level of agreement for the provided statements related to benefits from sports and physical activity is above 4.6.

As shown in Table 1, it can be determined that there is a statistically significant difference related to awareness of sports' benefits between respondents with different levels of education, monthly income and affiliation to sports.

Figure 1. Level of agreement (on a scale from 1 to 5) with each of the statements related to benefits from sports and physical activities (weighted average)

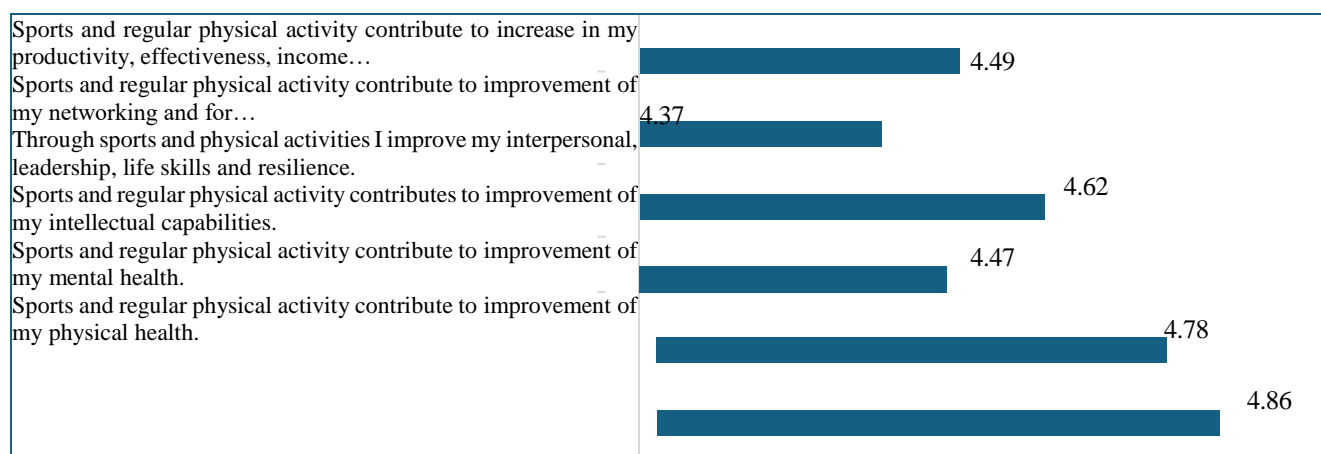


Table 1. Determining statistically significant differences among respondents regarding their characteristics (rows) and level of agreement with each of the statements of benefits of sports – by using Crosstabs

Benefits of sports – Human Capitals	Physical Capital Coef.of associaltion (Spearman’s rho)	Emotional Capital Coef.of associaltion (Spearman’s rho)	Intellectual Capital Coef.of associaltion (Spearman’s rho)	Individual Capital Coef.of associaltion (Spearman’s rho)	Social Capital Coef.of associaltion (Spearman’s rho)	Financial Capital Coef.of associaltion (Spearman’s rho)
Gender	-0.066 (0.071)	0.097 (0.070)	0.066 (0.071)	0.002 (0.071)	-0.079 (0.071)	-0.092 (0.071)
Age	-0.002 (0.074)	0.103 (0.074)	0.078 (0.069)	0.007 (0.073)	-0.017 (0.75)	-0.025 (0.071)
Education	-0.131 (0.070)*	-0.127 (0.070)*	-0.096 (0.070)	-0.135 (0.071)*	-0.189 (0.070)***	-0.083 (0.068)
Monthly income	0.029 (0.070)	0.019 (0.069)	-0.058 (0.071)	-0.034 (0.072)	-0.136 (0.070)*	-0.032 (0.070)
Affiliation with sports	-0.361 (0.068)***	0.0151 (0.077)**	-0.151 (0.071)**	-0.186 (0.070)**	-0.191 (0.071)**	-0.216 (0.071)**

*, **, *** indicate significance levels of 10 %, 5 %, and 1 %, respectively.

Figure 2. Level of agreement with the statement “Sports and regular physical activity contribute to the improvement of my networking and for overcoming the differences among people and their acceptance” according to level of education

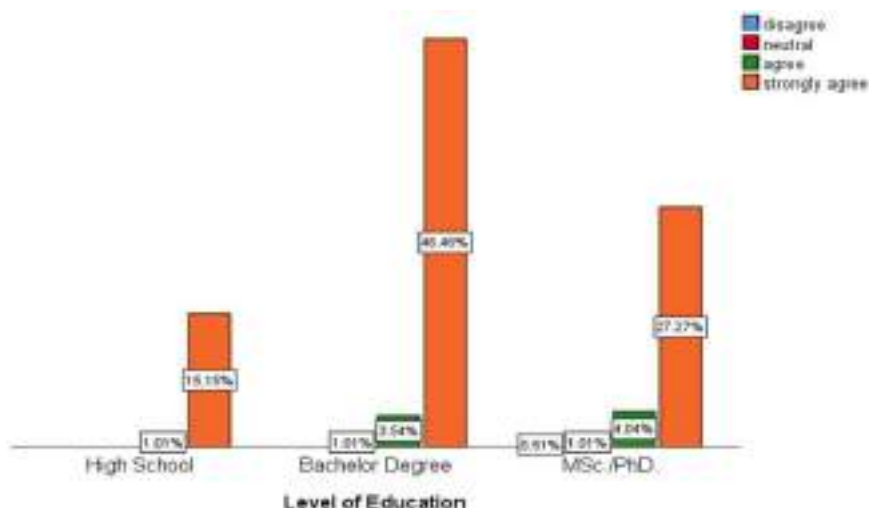
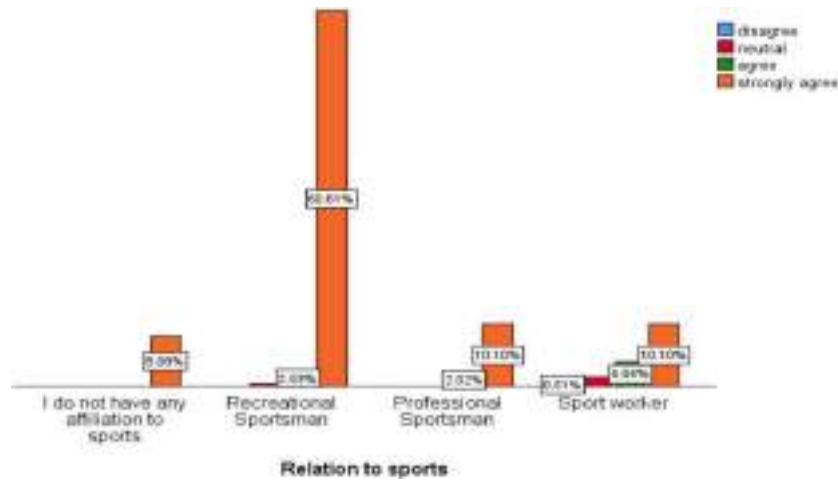


Figure 3. Level of agreement with the statement “Sports and regular physical activity contribute to the improvement of my physical health” according to involvement in sports



More precisely, there is a statistically significant difference (at a significance level of 1%) among respondents when being aware of the benefit of improvement in social capital (networking and overcoming differences among people) according to their level of education, and when being aware about improvement in physical health based on their affiliation to sports. 27.27% and 4.04% of respondents holding MA degree strongly agree and agree (respectively) that through sports people improve their social capital, while 46.46% and 3.54% % of respondents holders of bachelor degree also strongly agree and agree (respectively) that sports improve their social capital. This only further explains the negative (but weak) relation between the level of education and benefits of sports awareness.

Related to Figure 3, more than 80% strongly agree that sports contribute to the improvement of their physical capital, approximately 15% agree, and less than 5% are either neutral or disagree.

Figure 4. Level of agreement with the statement “Sports and regular physical activity contribute to improvement of my mental health” according to involvement in sports

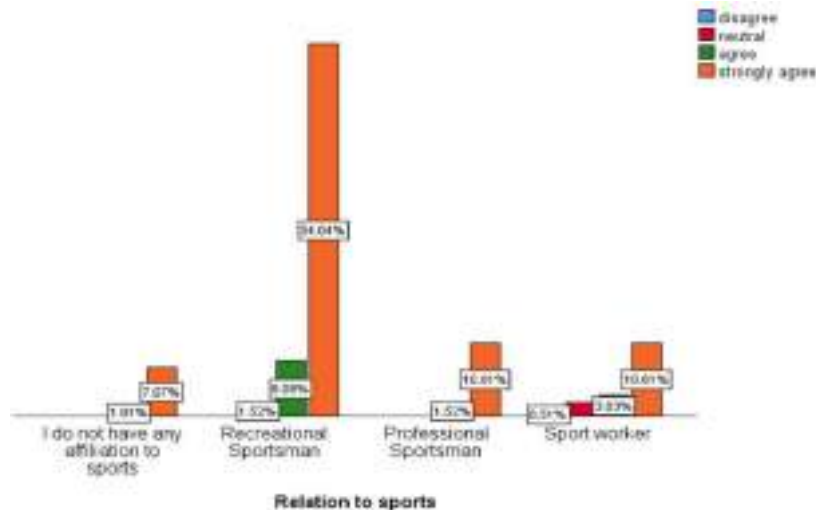


Figure 4 shows again the strong agreement of all groups with the statement that sports improve their mental health, meaning the possibility of reduced stress, burnout, anxiety and improvement in self-esteem, intrinsic motivation etc.

Figure 5. Level of agreement with the statement “Sports and regular physical activity contribute to the improvement of my intellectual capabilities” according to involvement in sports

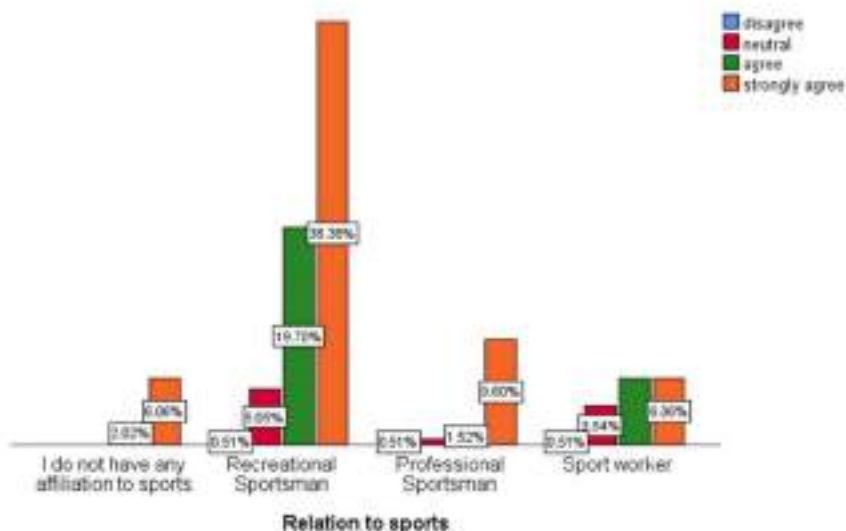


Figure 5 also shows a high level of agreement across all groups, where approximately 60% strongly agree that sports and regular physical activity contribute to the improvement of their intellectual capabilities, and 25% agree.

Figure 6. Level of agreement with the statement “Sports and regular physical activity contribute to increase in my productivity, effectiveness, income and dedication” according to involvement in sports

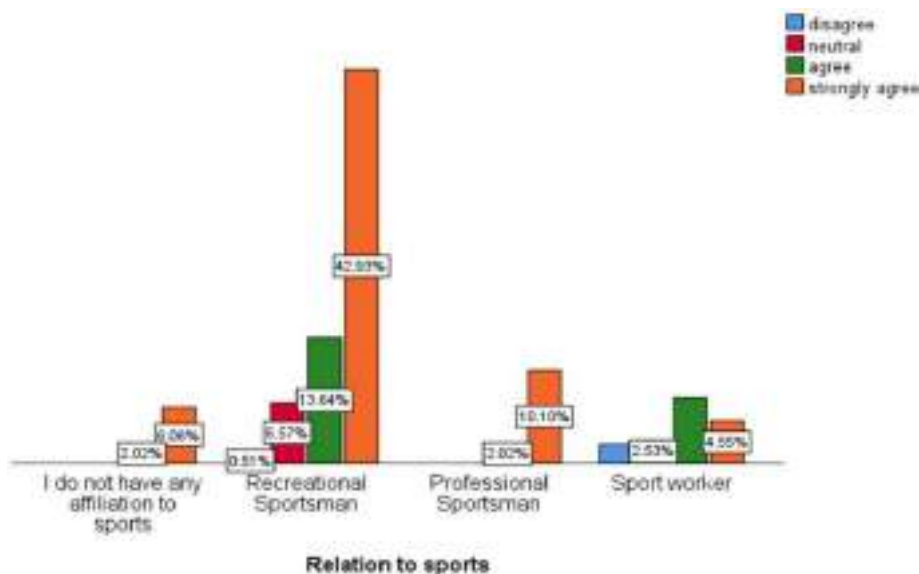


Figure 7. Level of agreement with the statement “Through sports and physical activities I improve my interpersonal, leadership, life skills and resilience” according to involvement in sports

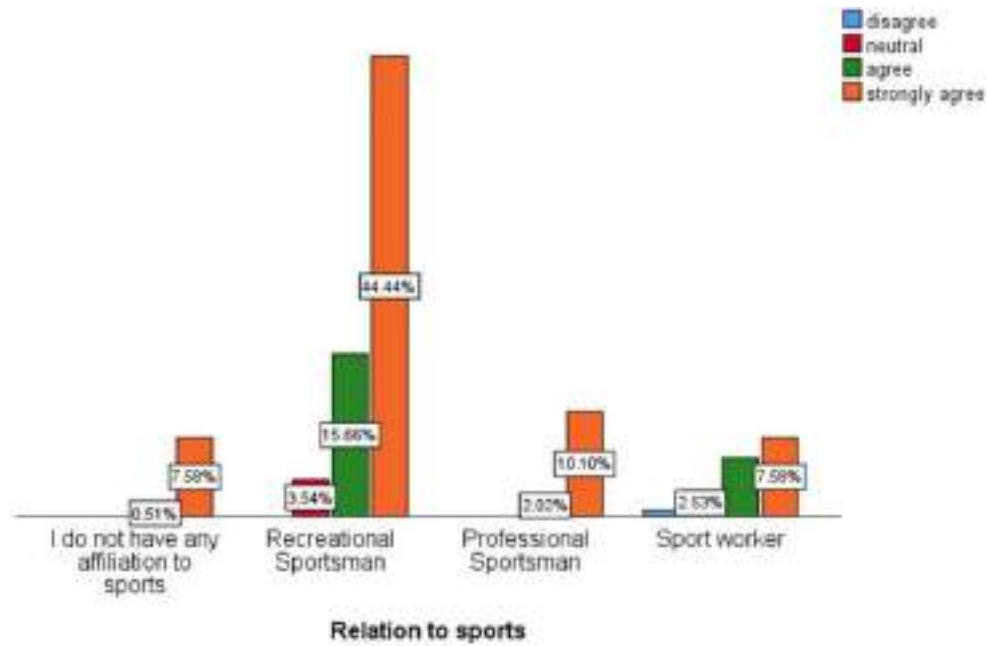
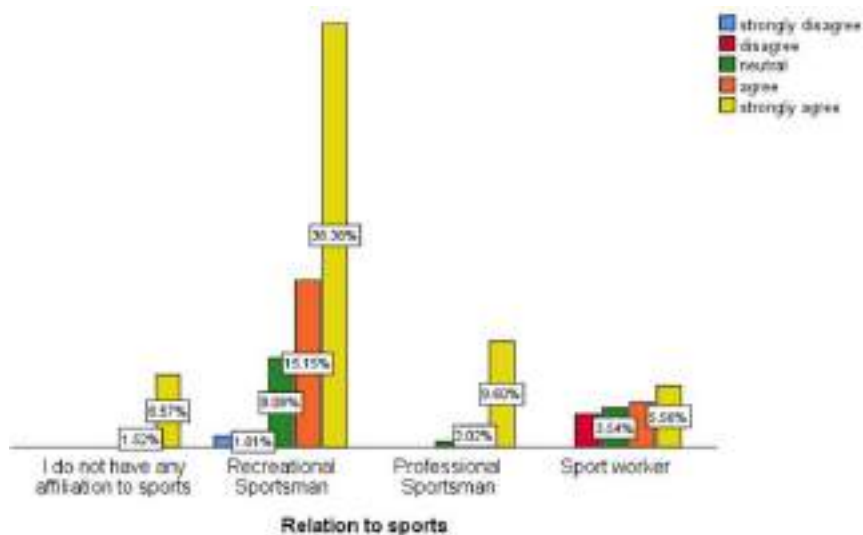


Figure 6 and Figure 7, relate to the statements regarding improvement in financial and individual capital and according to the results, 63.64% strongly agree and 24.75% agree with the statement about financial capital, while 69.85% and 23.62% strongly agree and agree (respectively) with the statement about the individual capital.

Figure 8. Level of agreement with the statement “Sports and regular physical activity contribute to the improvement of my networking and for overcoming the differences among people and their acceptance” according to involvement in sports



60.3% of respondents strongly agree and 22.61% agree that sports and physical activity improve their social skills in terms of bridging differences, teamwork, collaboration, building networks etc.

In summary, the crosstabulation and descriptive statistics provided here attempted to analyze how respondents from different categories perceive the relationship between sports participation and awareness about the improvement of human capitals, since a feature of respondents makes a statistically significant difference when analyzing sample’s awareness of sports benefits. Since involvement in sports makes a statistically significant difference with the awareness of benefits, this finding can be further used for

motivating people to start practicing sports and become aware of all of its benefits.

The respondents were also asked about the necessity of more measures and initiatives to be introduced on a national level for increasing the awareness about sports and physical activities benefits. More than 85% of respondents consider that more measures and initiatives should be introduced to increase awareness for the benefits coming from sports and physical activities. Several of their proposed measures and initiatives include the following:

Campaigns for increasing sports awareness, sports events, educational broadcasts with more practical insights for beginners, and encouraging children's engagement in sports to foster lifelong sports practicing;

Greater support from the government on all levels, and cooperation with the Chamber of Psychologists, Educational Institutions, and Primary Healthcare;

To promote sports that involve basic motor activities: running, gymnastics, contact, ball games.

More education about the benefits of sports, advice on balanced nutrition, and a positive mental attitude through social networks, free workshops, training sessions.

Conclusions

Surveyed Macedonian population with a weighted average of 4.6 agrees that sports come with benefits and this should be taken as an imperative for sportsmen, coaches, teachers, authorities and policymakers in terms of undertaking many sports initiatives and physically educating children and youth for their own benefit, and finally for societal and economics improvement.

According to the results, based on respondents' involvement in sports there is a statistically significant difference related to the awareness of sport benefits. Gender, age, monthly income and education do not present a base for statistically significant differences in sport awareness, thereby policies and measures should be introduced for involving people in sports, educating and motivating them to start and maintain a regular and healthy lifestyle.

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Acknowledgement: This article is based upon work from the Activity Coopsports-Gr8tness of Sport, supported by the EU Civil Resilience Mechanism (CRM) within the framework of the EU-funded project "Technical Assistance for Improving the enabling environment for Civil Society Organisations in the Republic of North Macedonia."

