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## PREFERENCES OF 5TH-7TH GRADE STUDENTS FOR SPORTS ACTIVITIES IN THEIR LEISURE TIME

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**Abstract:** Statement of the problem: identification and understanding of the relationship between the choice of a favorite sport and motor activity in schoolchildren. The participation of students in their favorite sports activities is a key element for their motor activity. The purpose of the study is to determine the attitude of students towards sports activities in their free time and their preferences for a favorite sport to practice. Participants: 52 students from grades 5-7 (29 boys and 23 girls) from the 68th municipal secondary school, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Results: They revealed two important categories among the students - the first category is physically active students who do sports from once a week to every day – 59.62%, and the second category is passive students who rarely do sports or do not like to do sports at all - 38.46%. The preferred sports for boys are team games: volleyball, basketball, and football. Girls prefer modern dances and folk dances (hora). In their free time, 5th-7th grade students prefer meeting with friends, walking with them, and discussing topics important to them. It was found that students do not have a regular daily routine, which makes it difficult to plan their day. This is the reason why 53.85% of them carry out their physical activity, such as a walk in the park, at different times and for different durations, according to their school, extracurricular, and family commitments. Cycling is an activity that students mainly practice during the holidays when they are visiting relatives. From the answers of the students, it was found that in their free time, they do the following activities: continue with their school preparation and further study, actively practice a type of sport participate in competitions, and have family commitments. The family environment is decisive for the development of tourist activities among students. Students who play with friends and go on hikes and outings with their parents demonstrate higher motor activity during their free time. This is a prerequisite for increased physical activity outside of school and for a longer time. Students show a positive attitude towards physical activity if they practice a sports activity they want.

In conclusion, our results revealed that students' current attitudes are positive towards physical activity during their free time. To attract the interest of students in grades 5-7 in extra sports, the activities should be related to the student's perception of friendship, group activity, and music

**Keywords:** physical education, sports, team sports, dances, hiking in the mountains

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A person's leisure time is intended for rest and for physical and mental recovery (Jiri, 2013). Establishing the attitude towards doing a certain activity during one's leisure time is a difficult task to research because it depends on many factors. When children participate in a given study, the discovery of personal preferences is tied to the family's attitude to the activity, which in turn influences the choice.

After many years of observations from practice and reading of leading scientific reports, of physical education and sports researchers, regarding the attitudes of students about active physical activity through sports, three main factors have been identified that have an impact on the attitude. The first is related to the characteristics of the student - sports activities, age, and gender, the second is related to the presence of sports halls and playgrounds in the school, and the third factor is related to the availability and access to sports facilities in leisure time (Solmon, 2003; Howard *et al.*, 2011). We, as authors, confidently add a fourth factor, namely the teaching competencies of the physical education and sports teacher and their qualities as a motivator. Dimkova (2023) points out that teachers should provoke students' interest in physical education classes by improving their teaching methods and creating good teamwork. The teacher aspires to create a pleasant atmosphere during school hours, which is associated with beneficial physical activity and emotional enjoyment of motor activity.

Any physical activity achieved through aerobic exercises and exercises for developing and strengthening the muscles can be counted among the sports activities of the students during their leisure time. This is achieved through games, practicing a type of sport or tourist trips that take place after the end of the school day, during weekends and holidays. Sports activities in leisure time are voluntary and take place without the participation of a sports teacher. The choice of the type of sport to practice depends on the personal preferences of the individual. However, it has been proven that any sports activity in leisure time contributes both to physical activity and improvement, as well as to the social and psychological growth of each practitioner. (Pomohaci & Sopa, 2018).

The health benefits of physical activity are well known, both in professional physical activity and in physical activity that is performed with the purpose of active rest during leisure time. (Rezende, *et.al* , 2018; Myers, *et. al.*, 2019; Karihtala, *et. al.*, 2023;) . There is overwhelming scientific evidence for the health benefits of lifelong physical activity and the risks of lack of movement. Immobility leads to obesity, which in turn leads to health problems and economic losses for health institutions. According to a study in England, 50 to 70% of obese children and adolescents remain obese as adults. Results of the same survey found alarmingly low levels of physical activity among children and young people between the ages of 11-25, with statistics showing that they are mostly from low socio-economic groups and ethnic minorities who have limited or no access to sports activities. The share of active young people decreases with the onset of adolescence, and for girls, this percentage is greater compared to boys (56 vs. 39%) ( Kumar, *et al.*, 2015. It can be confidently concluded that the fight against immobilization is related to planning sports activities in people's leisure time.

In recent years, there has been a slight increase in interest in physical activity in Bulgaria, taking into account increased attendance at gyms, swimming pools, and organized group activities for a fee, but according to statistics, the leading favorite activity during leisure time for a large percentage of the Bulgarian population is still watching television (between 3 and 4 hours per day, which is a total of 21–28 hours per week). A study in Romania on the growing importance of playing sports in their leisure time showed that in 1993, only 15% of the population indicated that they played sports, while in 2010, 26% played sports in their leisure time (Mărginean & Precupețu, 2010, p . 71).

There are numerous studies on the choice of sports activity in students' leisure time, but most of them cannot be applied successfully due to several factors. There is very little existing research on the opportunities for sports activities that students in the study area available. More precisely, there is no information about the sports activities preferred by these children in their leisure time. Therefore, **the purpose** of this study is to find out students' attitudes towards sports in their leisure time and their preferences for a favorite sport to practice.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted with 52 students from a municipal secondary school, city of Sofia, No. 68. "Academician Nicholas Obreshkov". All students and one parent or guardian each signed informed consent forms to join the study. Participants completed a paper questionnaire at the beginning of a physical education and sport class. Three experienced physical education teachers explained the instructions for completing the questionnaire questions. The survey card contains 7 questions, 1 of them with free text and 6 with multiple-choice answers, and the students can indicate only one answer. The questions in the survey were created by the authors of the article and are: Do you do sports in your leisure time? Do you go to the mountains in your leisure time? Do you take walks in the park or urban settings?, Do you ride a bike? If you had a choice between taking the stairs or taking the elevator which would you choose? What do you do in your leisure time?, and What sport do you prefer to play in your leisure time? Estimated time to complete is 5 min. Participants were classified by grade and gender without their names being collected. The results were processed using the statistical program SPSS -19.

## 3. RESULTS

### Characteristics of the study population

The participants (52) were 29 boys and 23 girls from the 5th, 6th, and 7th grades ages 11 to 15 years (**Table . 1**).

*Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the researched persons*

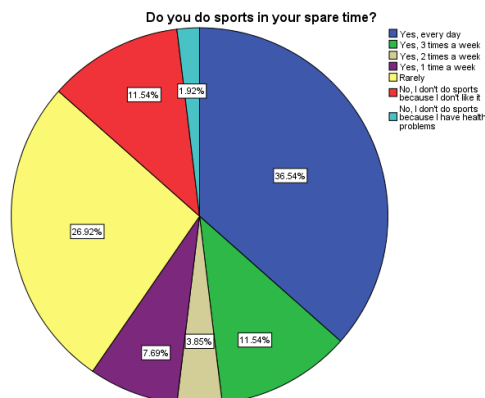
		Class (school)				
Gender			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Boys	Valid	5th grade	8	27.6	27.6	27.6
		6th grade	4	13.8	13.8	41.4
		7th grade	17	58.6	58.6	100.0
		Total	29	100.0	100.0	
Girls	Valid	5th grade	12	52.2	52.2	52.2
		6th grade	7	30.4	30.4	82.6
		7th grade	4	17.4	17.4	100.0
		Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Source: Peltekova, I & Peltekov, B.

### Findings from the responses received

From the analyzed results regarding sports during leisure time, two important categories were revealed among the students. The first category is physically active students who do sports from once a week to every day - 59.62%, and the second category is passive students who rarely do sports or do not like to do sports at all - 38.46%. Only one of the respondents indicated that they do not play sports for health reasons. The fact that young people do not like to play sports (11.54%) is alarming. (**Figure. 1**).

**Fig . 1. Weekly frequency of physical activity for students in grades 5-7**



Source: Peltekova, I & Peltekov, B.

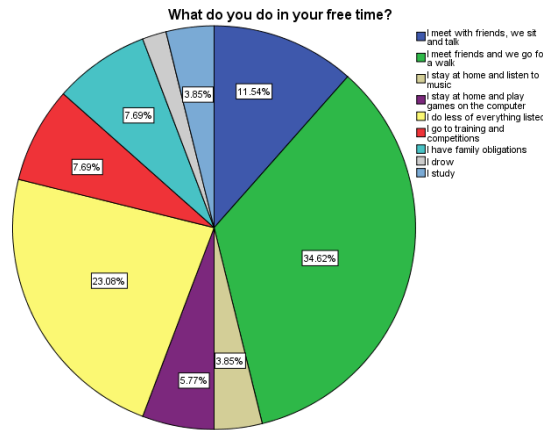
The participants go to the mountains with their parents (40.38%), but very rarely. A worrying result for us is the response of 13.46% of the students who say that they have no one to go to the mountains with and do not have suitable equipment (5.77%), and one student indicates that his family does not have the financial means to go to the mountain. Taking into account the fact that the studied students are not of legal age and the tourist activity is expected to be carried out with parents or with older relatives and friends, it is clear that this type of activity during leisure time is not preferred by parents either.

It was found that students do not have a regular daily routine, which makes it difficult to plan their day. This is the reason why 53.85% of them carry out their physical activity such as a walk in the park at different times and for different durations, according to their school and family commitments. Several students stated (5.77%) that they only walk when they have to take their dog for a walk, and 7.69% do not like to walk.

Riding a bicycle is an excellent opportunity to maintain motor activity, which is why we asked the students in the questionnaire whether they ride a bicycle in their leisure time. The results show that 59.62% of students ride a bike, with 25% of them only during vacations when visiting their relatives. Part of the students (17.31%) express regret that they don't have a bike, otherwise, they really like it and would ride, and other students (9.62%) say they can't ride a bike. Another 13.46% of participants answered that they did not like cycling and would not practice such physical activity in their leisure time.

It was found that between the ages of 11-15, students mainly use their leisure time to meet friends (46.16%). A small percentage prefer to stay at home, listen to music, draw, and play video games. We find logical the answer of 23.08% of the students that they do a little bit of all these activities in their leisure time. It is important to note that 7.69% of students indicate that they have family commitments and this takes away their leisure time, also a similar percentage of students actively train in sports clubs. Some students continue to study in their leisure time. We attribute this result to the fact that the 7th graders are facing a national external assessment exam and they want to achieve excellent results (**Figure 2**).

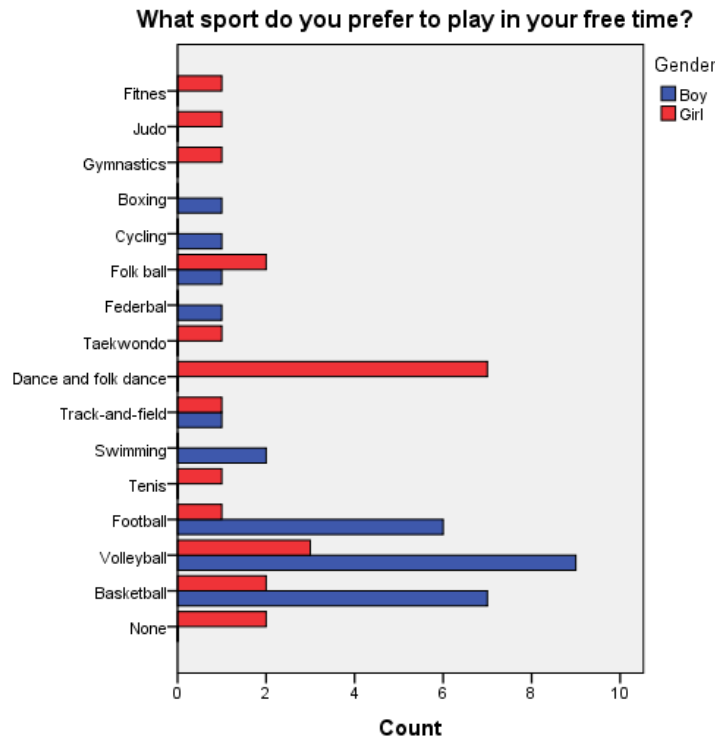
Figure 2. Types of leisure time activities of 5-7 grade students



Source: Peltekova, I & Peltekov, B.

The survey on the preferred sports disciplines among students found that team games - volleyball (9 boys and 3 girls), basketball (7 boys and 2 girls), and football (6 boys and 1 girl) are the sports that students practice in their leisure time. Dances and folk songs are also practiced by students as motor activities in leisure time (7 girls). National football was mentioned by 3 students (1 boy and 2 girls) as a preferred sport for practice, and 2 athletics (1 boy and 1 girl) and swimming (2 boys) each. One student each scored individual sports and martial arts: fitness, judo, gymnastics, boxing, cycling, federball, taekwondo, and tennis. Two of the students (girls) indicate that they do not have a favorite sport and do not practice it in their leisure time (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Favorite sports to practice during leisure time of students from 5-7 grades



Source: Peltekova, I & Peltekov, B.

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

The present study achieved its objective, which is to investigate and establish students' attitudes toward sports activities in their leisure time and their preferences for a favorite sport to practice. We analyzed and assessed the students' perception of the organization of their leisure time with activities they are interested in and two important directions emerged, related both directly to sports and physical activity and to the need for social interaction of young people between 11 and 15 years old. We make these conclusions based on the indicated choices for preferred sports, where team sports and dances, including folk dances, which are activities related to socializing and communication, stand out. Participating in these sports and dance activities can help students develop teamwork and leadership skills. Applying a multidisciplinary approach to children's education from an early age has a positive impact on their physical development as well as on their cognitive, aesthetic, and spiritual development. Such examples are found in sports and music. Music and sports have always had a mutual relationship with each other. Play activity and music stimulate thinking, ingenuity, and imagination (Angelov, 2021) Another example of a multidisciplinary approach is the connection between play (modeling) and the acquisition of skills, which are expressed in constructive-technical skills, through which the individual development of children is enriched (Georgieva, 2021). The acquired construction and technical skills can be successfully applied in games related to dexterity and motor activity.

Analyzing the answers of the students regarding trips to the mountains and tourist activities during their leisure time, it is evident that for parents this type of activity during their leisure time is not preferred. Taking into account the fact that the studied students are minors, it is expected that the tourist activity will be carried out with parents or with older relatives and friends.

Although the benefits of cycling have been established and over one billion people around the world every day use a bicycle as transport, for physical activity, or for competitive activity, there are young people in our country who cannot ride a bicycle, do not have one, and some of them don't want to ride it.

The management of students' leisure time is limited. It depends on their academic and family commitments. The results are suggestive but should be interpreted with caution due to frequent changes in students' moods and imitation of their choices to their friends.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, our results revealed that students' current attitude is positive towards physical activity during their leisure time. Some factors should be considered when physical education educators offer physical activity programs to students between grades 5-7. These activities should relate to students' perceptions of friendship, group activities, and music. The top three preferred sports of the students (boys) are volleyball, basketball, and football. The girls are interested in dancing including folk dances. Cycling is not a priority among students, therefore efforts should be made to popularize this activity among students in Bulgaria. The family environment is decisive for the development of tourist activity among students who are minors.

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