

**DETERMINANTS AND REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION AND DROP OUT IN SPORTS
ACTIVITIES IN ITALY
DETERMINANTI E MOTIVAZIONI DELLA PARTECIPAZIONE E DELL'ABBANDONO ALLE
ATTIVITÀ SPORTIVE IN ITALIA**

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Double Blind Peer Review

Citazione

Pisaniello A., Figus A., (2023) Determinants and reasons for participation and drop out in sports activities in Italy, *Giornale Italiano di Educazione alla Salute, Sport e Didattica Inclusiva - Italian Journal of Health Education, Sports and Inclusive Didactics*. Anno 7, V 1. Edizioni Universitarie Romane

Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.32043/gsd.v7i1.843>

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gsdjournal.it

ISSN: 2532-3296

ISBN: 978-88-6022-469-9

ABSTRACT

This article aims to represent a systematic literature review on sport participation and dropout in Italy, based on quantitative studies. The research methodology included the collection of data.

Official data were analyzed, using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, such as logistic regression, to identify the factors that influence sports participation and the reasons that lead to abandonment. The research results show that, despite the growing awareness of the importance of physical activity for health, participation in sport remains relatively low in Italy.

Lo scopo di questo articolo è rappresentare una revisione sistematica della letteratura sulla partecipazione e l'abbandono dello sport in Italia, basata su studi quantitativi, attraverso una raccolta dati.

I dati ufficiali sono stati analizzati, utilizzando tecniche statistiche descrittive e inferenziali, come la regressione logistica, per identificare i fattori che influenzano la partecipazione sportiva e le ragioni che portano all'abbandono.

I risultati mostrano che la partecipazione allo sport rimane relativamente bassa in Italia.

KEYWORDS

Physical activity, strategic skills, motivation, sport participation, education.

Attività fisica, abilità strategiche, motivazione, partecipazione sportiva, apprendimento.

Received 10/04/2023

Accepted 5/05/2023

Published 20/05/2023

Introduction

This article, based on quantitative studies, presents a systematic literature review on sport participation and dropout in Italy. The research methodology included the collection of data from sources such as ISTAT, EUROBAROMETER, Sport and Health, and the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI). Participation in physical and sporting activity is considered an important factor in promoting health and psychophysical well-being (Fraser-Thomas, J.; Côté, J., 2006). However, sport participation in Italy presents some challenges, including early leaving and gender and age disparities. Therefore, the focus of the research was on the factors influencing sport participation and dropout in Italy, including age, gender, availability of free time, availability of sports facilities and affordability. In addition, the aim was to provide an overview of the current situation of sports practice.

Currently our society, and the Italian one, presents a serious problem such as a sedentary lifestyle, especially in old age, which implies a higher relative risk of mortality when we speak in terms of physical condition. Furthermore, low cardiorespiratory fitness and strength deficits have correlated with a higher relative risk of mortality in recent years (Bauman, A., & Craig, C. L. 2016).

We emphasise that precisely for this reason it is important to influence the achievement of sports practice habits from its origins, creating sustained habits. Italians, many in Mediterranean Europe, devote little of our time to sports and interest in it has increased in recent decades, confirming the difference between men and women.

This growth is not so clear when we go back to adolescence and youth, where unfortunately the highest dropout rates are recorded. The age between 10 and 16 is the critical period in which abandonment occurs. Furthermore, in the phase of compulsory secondary education, a percentage is established which always remains below the threshold of 50%.

The abandonment of the practice of physical and sporting activity is certainly complex to analyse, since temporary abandonment should not be considered as such, being in some cases a transitory state. There is also a difference between the practice of organised and disorganised physical activity, which must be considered (Berger, 2008) and verifiable in some North American studies.

Today, many studies have analysed the motivations that lead to physical and sporting activity, focusing on the various types of age. Among the most common

reasons are entertainment and recreation. But, instead with age these motivations evolve to be fit and compete.

Assesment Methods

The studies included in this review were selected through a systematic search. The selection was limited to quantitative studies published in English or Italian in the last 10 years. Information on demographic variables, sports activities and outcomes were extracted from each study and analysed to identify factors associated with sport participation and dropout in Italy.

To conduct this analysis, data from various official sources were used, including the ISTAT survey on participation in physical and sporting activity, the EUROBAROMETER survey on the sporting habits of European citizens, the data collected by Sport and Health on physical of the Italian population, and the data collected by CONI on organised sporting activities. In addition, data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, such as logistic regression, to identify factors influencing sport participation and reasons leading to dropout. The tool used for data processing was the questionnaire, with multiple choice questions and questions with Linkert scale.

Physical activity and sport are essential for maintaining a healthy lifestyle and preventing disease. However, participation in sport and abandonment are complex phenomena that depend on a series of social, cultural, and economic factors. In Italy, participation in sports is lower than in other European countries and the numbers of sports abandonment are worrying. According to the 2022 ISTAT survey "Aspects of daily life", only 34,5% of the Italian population practices sport regularly, while 33,7% do not practice any physical activity. Furthermore, Eurobarometer data (2022) show that only 48% of Italians believe that sport is important for health, while 35% believe that sport is too expensive.

Several factors influence sports practice in Italy. The Eurobarometer survey (2022) found that 40% of Italians consider lack of time as the main obstacle to practicing sport, followed by lack of motivation (27%) and cost (10%). Furthermore, according to the 2022 ISTAT survey, participation in sports practice is more common among people aged between 18 and 44, while it is less common among older people and young people.

This article uses a quantitative methodology to provide a review of the main studies on sport participation and dropout in Italy. We will focus on analysing data from ISTAT, the Eurobarometer, the Sport and Health report and the Italian National

Olympic Committee (CONI) annual report. Furthermore, we will review studies investigating factors associated with sport participation and dropout in Italy, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation.

According to CONI's 2021 annual report, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted sport practice in Italy. During the lockdown, many people stopped playing sports and sedentary lifestyle increased. In addition, access to sports facilities has been restricted and sporting events have been canceled or postponed. This has resulted in decreased participation in sports practice and increased dropouts. However, CONI has implemented various initiatives to promote safe sports, such as the "Sport doesn't stop" campaign, which encouraged people to practice sports at home and provided training tips and programs online.

A study conducted by Ipsos (2021) analyzed the impact of the pandemic on participation in sports practice in Italy. The results showed that pre-Covid active people who practiced sport were 73% in the 6-13 age group, 59% in the 14-19 age group and 20% among adults.

With the advent of the pandemic, however, abandonments were very high: 48% among children, 30% among children and 26% among adults.

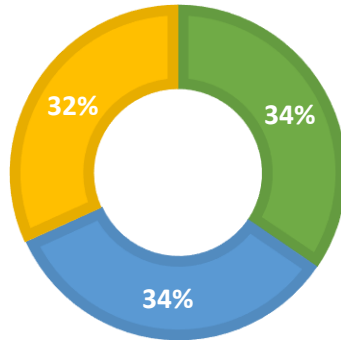
A third of those who continued changed activities and more than half changed their way of doing sport, with outdoor activities and home fitness. The analysis of the 2019 ISTAT data showed that 68% of people who do not practice physical activity declare that they do not have enough time available, while 16% believe that they are not in adequate physical shape to practice sport.

Affordability is another important factor in participating in sports. According to the 2020 Sport and Health report, 26% of low-income Italian families cannot afford to enroll their children in a sports club. Furthermore, 43% of those interviewed stated that they did not have adequate sports equipment, while 28% indicated that the costs of joining a sports club are too high.

Sports culture and social influence are other factors influencing participation in sports in Italy. According to the 2020 Sport and Health report, 35% of Italians say that family and friends influence the decision to play sport. Furthermore, 50% of respondents said they played sports at school, while only 22% said they continued to play after school. This suggests that promoting sports culture at the school level could positively impact participation in sports.

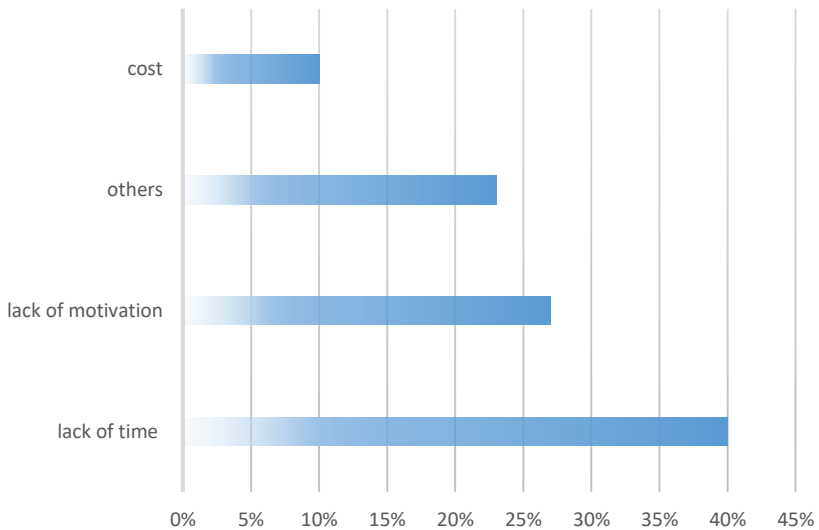
SPORT ACTIVITY PRACTISED IN ITALY

- practices sport regularly
- do not practice any physical activity
- practices sport occasionally



Personal graphic data processing. Source: ISTAT Personal graphic data processing. Source: ISTAT Sports practices and physical activity of the resident population 2021

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SPORT PRACTICE IN ITALY



Results

The research results show that, despite the growing awareness of the importance of physical activity for health, participation in sport remains relatively low in Italy.

According to ISTAT data, only 34,5% of Italian adults declared that they regularly practiced physical activity or sports. This rate is lower than the European average (48.2%) and varies according to gender, age, and socio-economic position.

Studies have shown that sports participation in Italy is influenced by multiple factors, with age and gender being the most significant variables. For example, ISTAT data indicate that 30% of the Italian population aged between 18 and 64 has participated in a sporting activity in the last year, with greater participation among men than women. Furthermore, the EUROBAROMETER and Sport and Health studies found that the availability of free time is an important factor for sports participation, with 68% of respondents saying they would participate in more physical activities if they had more free time.

Regarding sport abandonment, the data show that it is a significant problem, especially among young people, with a significant increase in the percentage of those who stopped practising sport during their adolescence.

Studies have identified the availability of sports facilities and affordability as key factors. For example, CONI data show that 25% of sportsmen and women have abandoned their activity due to inadequate structures, while 22% said they could no longer afford to practice sports due to high costs.

In summary, participation in and abandonment of sport in Italy depend on social, cultural, and economic factors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted sports practice, reduced participation and increasing attrition. We need to consider that “the Covid-19 pandemic has placed states in crisis by questioning the model of globalisation, the political system, and the economic system, as well as highlighting difficulties in the health sector at local, national, and international levels. The article starts with a historical-philosophical analysis and tries to find solutions to get out of the crisis, the science alone is not enough; it is necessary to redesign sustainable models in the economy and new political strategies” (Figus, 2020). Lack of time, lack of

motivation and cost are the main barriers to participation, while sports culture and social influence can positively influence participation. Sports institutions and organisations must implement policies and initiatives to promote sports practice, especially in times of crisis such as the current one.

Discussion

The study's objectives were to investigate the factors influencing sports participation and abandonment in Italy, with particular attention to the COVID-19 pandemic and data from authoritative sources such as ISTAT, EUROBAROMETER, Sport and Health and CONI.

Firstly, the aim was to analyse the main obstacles to sports participation in Italy. Studies conducted in recent years, such as those by ISTAT, have shown that lack of time is one of the main reasons people do not exercise regular physical activity.

However, lack of motivation, lack of accessibility to sports facilities and high costs have been identified as other factors influencing participation in sports practice in Italy.

Therefore, one of the study's main objectives was to investigate these factors and identify possible solutions to overcome the barriers to participation. It appears evident that on the world scene this is framed by a growing concern for the consequences that the poor practice of physical activity or sport can entail.

This concern must be considered of strategic importance for citizens and, therefore a criterion for political evaluation in general.

Governmental public health agencies must be alarmed by data indicating low physical activity and the accompanying social consequences for physical well-being (Mountjoy M., Sundgot-Borgen, 2015). Recent studies indicate a sedentary lifestyle as a factor accompanying the occurrence and severity of many chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity, among others.

Secondly, the aim was to evaluate the effect of sports culture and social influence on participation in sports practice. For example, some studies have shown that family and friends can influence the decision to play sports. Furthermore, the promotion of sports culture at the school level could have a positive impact on participation in sports practice.

Therefore, these factors need to be investigated to understand better how sports culture and social influence may affect participation.

Thirdly, the aim was to analyse the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on participation in sport practice in Italy. As reported in several studies, the pandemic has significantly impacted participation in sports practice, reducing attendance and increasing abandonment. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the effects of the pandemic on the factors influencing participation, to identify possible solutions to maintain participation in sports even in times of crisis such as the current one.

The aim has been to provide suggestions for policies and initiatives aimed at promoting sports practice in Italy. The data collected during the study made it possible to identify the main challenges that sports organisations must face to promote participation in sports practice in Italy. Furthermore, studies conducted in other countries have provided useful insights for developing new policies and initiatives aimed at promoting participation in sports, for example, through financial incentive programs or the promotion of sports culture at the school level.

To achieve these objectives, authoritative data sources such as ISTAT, EUROBAROMETER, Sport and Health and CONI have been used, which provide information on the sporting habits of Italians and on the factors influencing sport participation and abandonment.

Furthermore, statistical analyses were conducted to identify the main factors influencing sport participation and dropout in Italy and to evaluate the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, that in any case we would like to consider simply as an effect limited in time and not to be considered permanent, even if we do not exclude the possibility of being able to repeat itself.

Conclusions

The results of this systematic examination suggest that several factors, including age, gender, leisure availability, availability of sports facilities, and affordability, influence sport participation and dropout in Italy. The quantitative methodology used in this review has made it possible to analyse these factors in depth and to provide a complete picture of the current situation.

To improve sports participation in Italy, targeted interventions are needed to increase the availability of leisure and sports facilities and reduce sports activities' costs, especially for the most vulnerable sections of the population. These

measures could help increase sport participation, reduce sport dropout, and improve population health and well-being.

In the future, it would be important to continue monitoring the situation of sport participation and abandonment in Italy, to identify any trends and refine strategies to promote an active life and regular sport practice. Furthermore, it would be useful to conduct further research to investigate the factors associated with sports participation and abandonment, to provide a solid knowledge base for future policies and interventions.

If soon, we would like further to investigate the studies on the abandonment of sports practice, we could verify in depth how these are not likely to be generalised and require an analysis of the social context in which one intends to intervene to expect the success from the sports promotion programs that are proposed, not only in Italy.

In conclusion, to direct these programs to convey the benefits that physical-sport activity would bring to the students.

All this is not related to the next level of practice, probably because it does not correspond to the interests of the age of the subjects analysed (school cycles, up to the University).

For this reason, the proposals should focus less on transmitting information and more on an attractive and recreational physical-sport activity.

The existence of one of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors directly influences the motivation and the abandonment of the practice of physical-sport activity. This summed up the importance of the analysis, with the aim of providing a clear idea and adapted to reality to be able to implement effectively.

Then there is the question of personal factors to verify, their importance where the level of practice of physical-sporting activity is largely influenced by biological and psychological aspects.

Equally important are also the environmental factors dependent on the climatology, the programming of the physical-sport activity and ease of access to sports facilities in the event of adverse weather conditions.

These are reasons that allow us to justify the abandonment of exercise programs or limited access at least partially to facilities and the related problems that cause a daily routine, especially if the population is adults (King and all, 1992).

It is necessary to focus on organised physical activity, quality training for those directly responsible for the sporting practice, as well as for the main social agent, and, therefore, the family. This would improve both provision and family involvement, increasing the quality of school sports. The practice of unorganised physical activity using the natural environment could then be encouraged. For this reason, active centres, and parks, for example, should be considered, where the population who frequent them claims to practice walking, hiking and mountain biking to a greater extent. Its objectives would therefore be to actively use free time to satisfy social needs and thus achieve integral development based on the motivations that promote it (King and all, 1992).

Today, contact with nature, physical and sporting activity, and improving social relations are fundamental. What plays an important role in this complex situation is intrinsic motivation, the important role that physical activity determines, and which must include those reasons why the individual himself argues with the practice to produce satisfaction, therefore seen as a goal. Interpersonal relationships are central when we are talking about sport. For example, going to the gym, going out for a run, cycling, spinning, to play tennis and other group classes, swimming...etc. etc. All sport modalities that can be practiced as a couple or with friends, not to mention team sports. With these, interpersonal relationships can only be strengthened by improving physical performance, health, and self-esteem. It is the overall system that benefits.

Therefore, practicing sport helps to meet people, not only for training, but also in competitions. There are many people who are preparing to achieve the same targets and with whom a connection can be generated that cannot be achieved with other people.

In conclusion, we can say that sport is really productive and relationship-strengthening means, it is in fact possible to train in different contexts, with more people, and thus the possibilities of carrying out different activities are expanded. In this context, the role of leadership in sport is also played on a matter of personal relationships. Leadership becomes essential from the relational context, removing conflicts within organizations (Scott 2021) and grows with the growth of communication factors and with a close relationship between sports players.

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