

INVOLVEMENT IN FREE SPORTS FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE: CASE STUDY

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Abstract. Leisure sport activities including extreme sports seem to be selected by youth to promote a healthy lifestyle and other reasons like socialization, communication, making new friends, self-image etc. Researchers share the opinion that among free sports more practiced seems to be the traditional ones, which pose health benefits such as elimination of obesity among young people and adults, reducing stress anxiety, etc. The aim of study is to identify the general level of the practicing of free sports among the young people in Elbasan city. Methodology of the study is based on survey whose questions are adapted to the application ground. Qualitative methods were used to achieve the purpose of the study through interpretive epistemological approach. The study sample among the youth of Elbasan N = 109 age from 18 years to over 27 years, male (N = 15; 13.8%) and females (N = 94; 86.2%). From data analysis Volleyball is exercised by young people (51.4%), approximately one year (28.4%), according to their statements sport practiced in a group sport, friends or other relatives (59.6%), while that emphasize that 14.7% of subjects do not deal with sports. Subjects argue that in exercising free sports hadn't been influenced by

others (63.3%), choices referring to stress management (39.4%), emotional regulation (34.9%), self-esteem increase when dealing with sports activities (42.2%), and to be physically active (75.2%). Subjects assert that, among other activities related to free sport is also watching various sports television programs (45.9%), as well as watching various sports video on the Internet (40.4%). In conclusion we affirm that young people practice free sport of personal motivation, as helps them among other things, for a better organization of their priorities, leisure, meetings with friends etc.

Keywords: free sport, youth, lifestyle, physical activity

Introduction

Throughout human evolution, individuals, regardless age group, strive to be physically active. Staying healthy for the rest of our life is a prerequisite for exercising physical activity. In recent decades' technology had reduced physical activity, affecting our health. Television programs, computer games, and the Internet have increased sedentary behavior, reducing the possibility of physical activity. According to statistics, in Albania only 4% of the population engages in physical-sports activities. Meanwhile, in Macedonia it is 16% of the population and in Finland 92% of the population. (Dimraj, 2014).

The ancient philosopher Plato noted: "Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it". The current World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines show that Plato's notion has not lost its importance, by encouraging everyone, regardless age or ability, to engage in regular physical activity, ensuring proper physical development and maintenance of physical and mental health throughout the lifespan ¹).

So according to the World Health Organization, the 18-64 age group should engage in physical activity that includes leisure (walking, dancing, gardening, hiking, swimming), transportation (walking or cycling), professional work, housework, planned sports activities or exercises. Adults aged 18-64 should have at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity during the week or 75 minutes of high-intensity physical activity during the week. For additional health benefits, adults should increase their moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes per week. Muscle strengthening activities should be done including large muscle groups on 2 or more days a week. These recommendations are applicable to all adults regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or income level.

Despite the importance of sport as a social, economic and political institution, research into sport and social capital has not been extensive. As a social phenomenon at all levels of modern society, physical activity and sports give a great impact on key areas of social life: it affects human relationships, business life, social status, ethical values, people's way of life. In support of this thesis, we can recall the sayings of some athletes "... today sports are a significant social factor, able to develop and promote a good culture of living away from bad habits" (Nicholson & Hoyer, 2008).

Coakley's remarks on the other hand, reflect a new form of research, in a more critical approach for understanding and influencing sport for sustainable forms of personal and community development, both in the context of youth and in the field of wide for sports developments (Coakley, 2011). While perceived benefits in the development of outdoor activities have a significant increase among adolescents. From the open questions, part of our research, in this groupage, it seems that walks in the hilly and mountainous nature of the city are gaining ground. Young people think that in the school years, the culture of outdoor education should be created.

Peter Senge reminds us that fundamental change occurs in people's minds. Without significant changes in mentality there will be no cultural evolution. The pressure between the tendency for constant change towards a traditional culture is the subject of constant discussion. The problem appears with people who are part of the change to understand what needs to change in their routine. The solution will come through a common understanding. Understanding nurtures motivation, knowledge nurtures self-confidence to provide solutions to various problems (Fullan, 2002). The benefits of physical activity for children and young people counted a lot but can be classified into physical, mental and social health benefits. Carrying healthy habits of physical activity into adulthood as a lifestyle. In mobilizing Communities for Social Change, Paolo Freire argue that: "People can change the world by changing how they perceive themselves in the world." (Todd, 2009).

In addition, Lerner et al. (2000) argue "As young age groups develop, physically, socially, psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually healthy, this creates continuity in adult life style; they will choose to contribute or "return" the same potential to society, thus promoting positive development in future generations of young people." According Spaaaj (2009) and Thorpe & Chawansky (2016), "We will further add an aspect of the diversity and access to which these programs aim and are effective to ensure the benefits of good social impact in all communities."

Methodology

Qualitative methods were used through interpretive epistemological approach, which gave us the opportunity to achieve the goal and interpret the data. Qualitative method and epistemological approach allow the data to be expressed through feelings and thoughts by the participants themselves (Matthews, 2010). Qualitative research seeks to explore and explain the world through the experiences of social actors and by bringing to light data that is not very easily accessible by quantitative research (Mays & Pope, 1995). When qualitative research

is applied, the researcher interprets the population or phenomenon under observation using the voices of participants (Nurani, 2008). The survey was used as a measuring instrument, which contains 8 questions based on the Likert Scale, from the lowest level to the highest one as well as open questions during the interview "face to face" in the focus group. The survey adapted by the authors in accordance with the purpose of the study was piloted and after objectivity was observed it was applied. The sample in qualitative research seems to be smaller than in quantitative research. A suitable sample for a qualitative research is one that answers the research question in the appropriate way (Cohen, 2007). The sample consists of 109 young people, students at the University of Elbasan "Aleksandër Xhuvani", Faculty of Educational Sciences. The study sample is intentional and random. As selective critics we had students who did not study in the branch of Physical Education. Statistical processing of data was performed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS, version 20, as well as Microsoft Office Excel 2007, while the processing of qualitative data was carried out through qualitative descriptions. When completing the survey and conducting the focus group interview by the subjects, care was taken in maintaining the Code of Ethics and the principle of confidentiality.

Interpretation and discussion of the data

Researchers carefully process and interpret the data, keeping in mind the purpose of the study and the participants' own arguments for the chosen alternatives.

Referring to the data processing for the gender of the participants, the graph shows that respectively in the study have participated 86.2% girls and 13.8% boys. The dominance of girls is related to gender preferences for the field of study in this faculty, where the largest number is occupied by students of the Primary Education, Preschool Education and Social.

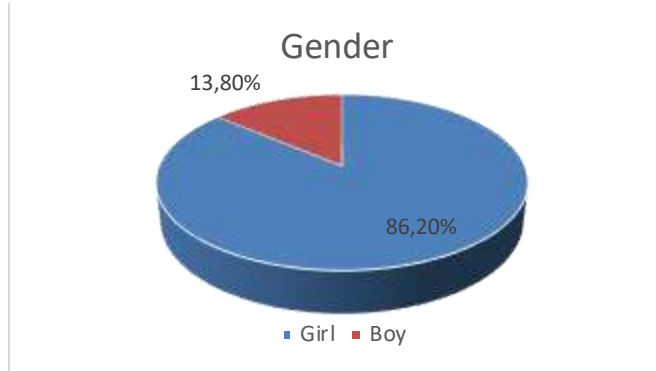


Figure 1. Gender of participants

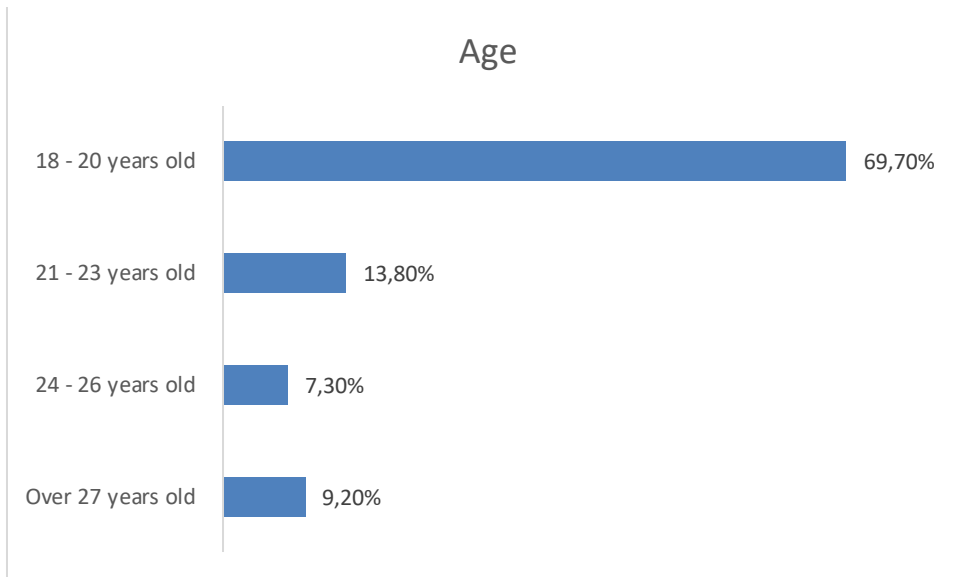


Figure 2. Percentage of the age groups participants

Graphically it shows that the dominant age group is 18-20 years old, with 69.70% or approximately 70%. This is because the largest number of students is at the bachelor level and belongs to this age group. The 30% of the age group 21 over 27 years old belongs to students studying at the Master's degree. The students at the age group 21 – 23 years old (13.80%) and are twice as many as the age group 24 – 26 years old, and 9.2% are students over 27 years old.

Table 1. The types of free sports as a healthy lifestyle

The types of sports they exercises	Fre- quency	Percent	Valid Per- cent	Cumulative Percent
Football	8	7.3	7.3	7.3
Swimming	6	5.5	5.5	12.8
Gymnastics	9	8.3	8.3	21.1
Volleyball	56	51.4	51.4	72.5
Basketball	2	1.8	1.8	89.0
Weightlifting	1	0.9	0.9	89.9
Other	11	10.1	10.1	87.2
I don't do sports	16	14.7	14.7	
Total	109	100.0	100.0	100.0

From the data obtained, referring to the types of free sports practiced, participants state that volleyball is the sport most practiced by them with 51.4%. Then we list the participation with gymnastics, 8.3%, football with 7.3% and finally weightlifting with 0.9%, as it is practiced only by boys. But what is striking is that 14.7% of them do not practice sports, while 10.1% of them refer to other types of free sports.

Table 2. Years of free sports practice

Years of practice	Frequency	Percent	Valid Per- cent	Cumulative Percent
0 -1 year	31	28.4	28.4	28.4
1 - 2 year	14	12.8	12.8	67.9
2 - 3 year	8	7.3	7.3	82.6
3 – 4 year	22	20.2	20.2	48.6
4 – 5 year	6	5.5	5.5	73.4
5 – 6 year	8	7.3	7.3	89.9
6 – 7 year	7	6.4	6.4	55.0
7 – 8 year	2	1.8	1.8	75.2
Over 8 years	11	10.1	10.1	
Total	109	100.0	100.0	100.0

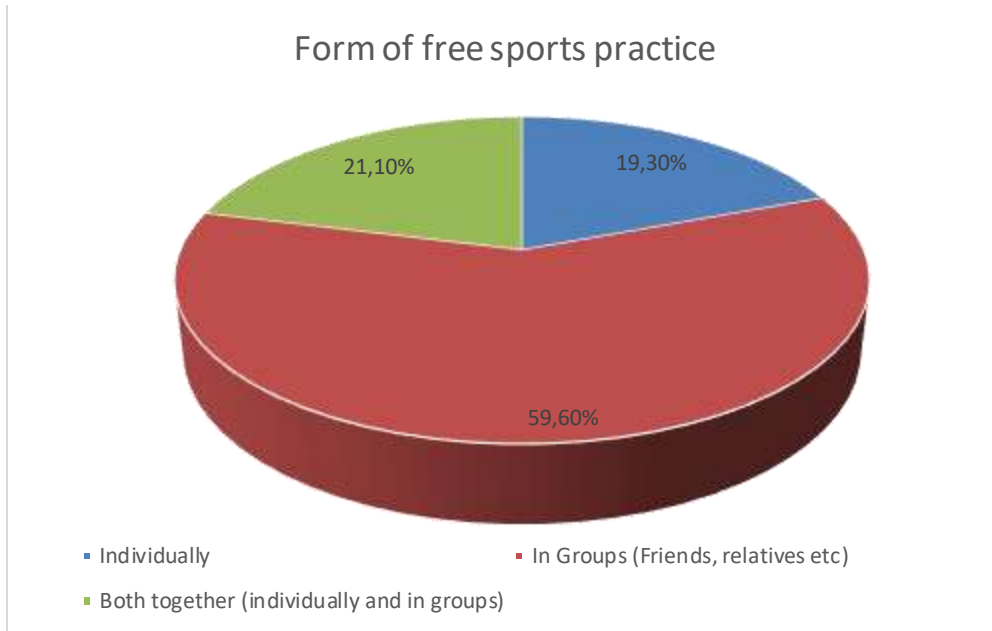


Figure 3. How the participant exercise free sports

For the participants, the way of exercising with sports is also important, emphasizing the influence of the social group and this is stated by 59.6% of the participants, who practice free sports in groups with friends or other relatives. The choice coincides with the declaration of the years of sports, dominated by participation for 1 year, influenced by society. Whereas 21.1% exercise individually and in groups, only 19.3% exercise individually.

One of the reasons for participating in free sports is the influence of society, but also personal motives (67.90%) mainly by affirming the fact of self-care to the appearance for body lines by this age group and 6.40% claim that they exercise for health reasons, which are mostly related to physical fatigue from overweight, i.e. obesity. While 8.30% do not specify the reasons for exercising in free sports, they simply state that they exercise, but not regularly. Sport also affects socialization among young people by declaring 7.30% of participants.

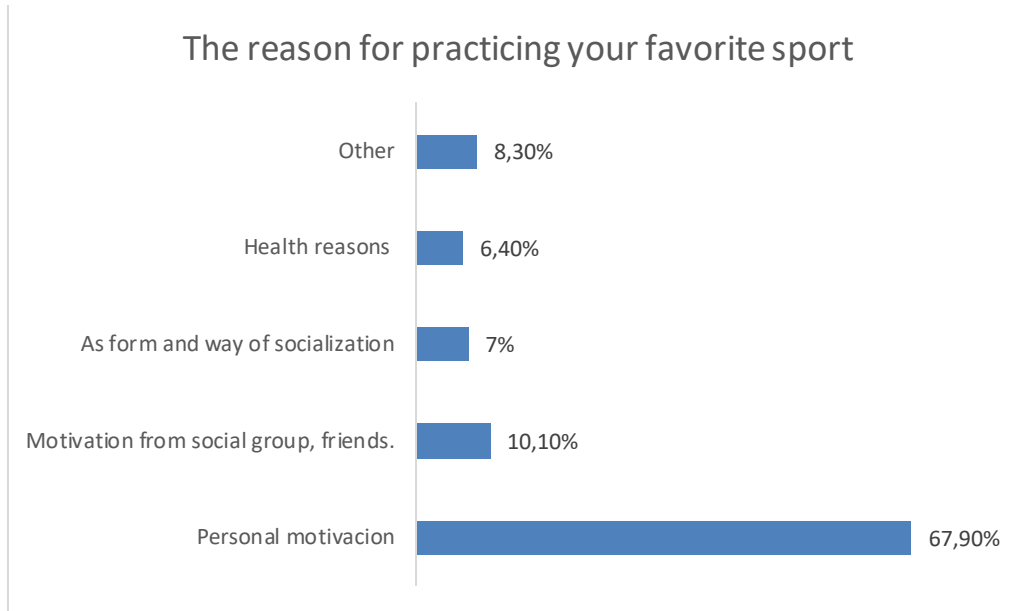


Figure 4. The reasons for applying favorite sports of the participants

In addition to the practice, the subjects were asked to select social activities related to free sport. According from the data obtained of the study, 45.9% of the subjects watch various sports TV programs, 40.4% of them watch sports videos on the Internet and 26.60% watch the photos of others posted on social networks. So the use of IT communication and information occupies the largest share among young people. Other activities such as reading magazines (10.10%) or writing articles (0.90%) are less selected from the participants.

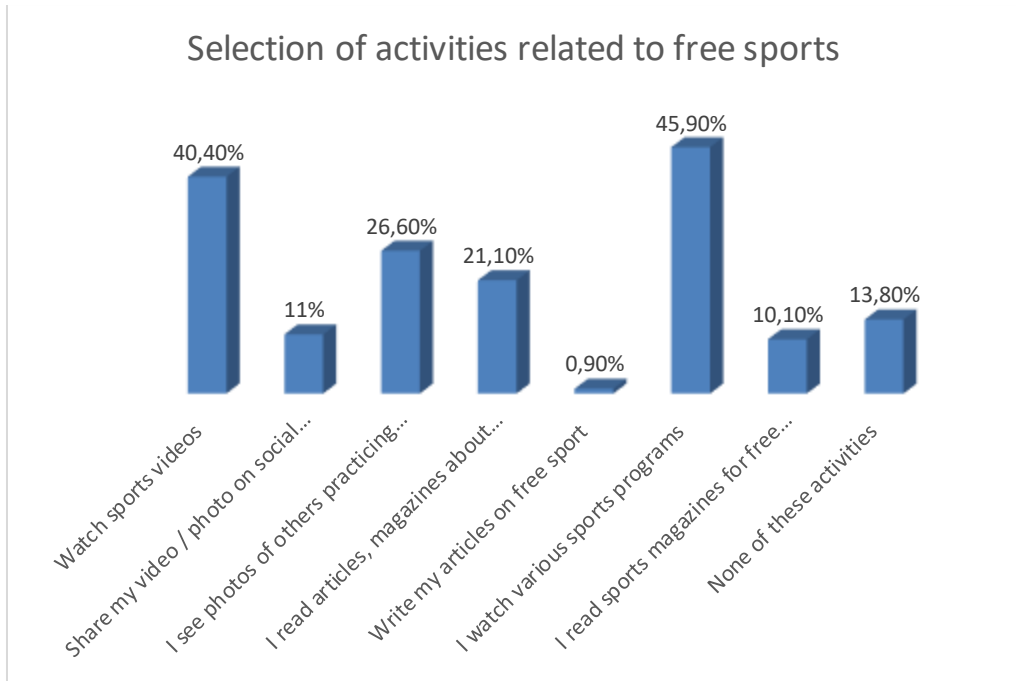


Figure 5. The selection of social activities related to free sports. The most preferred activities from the participants

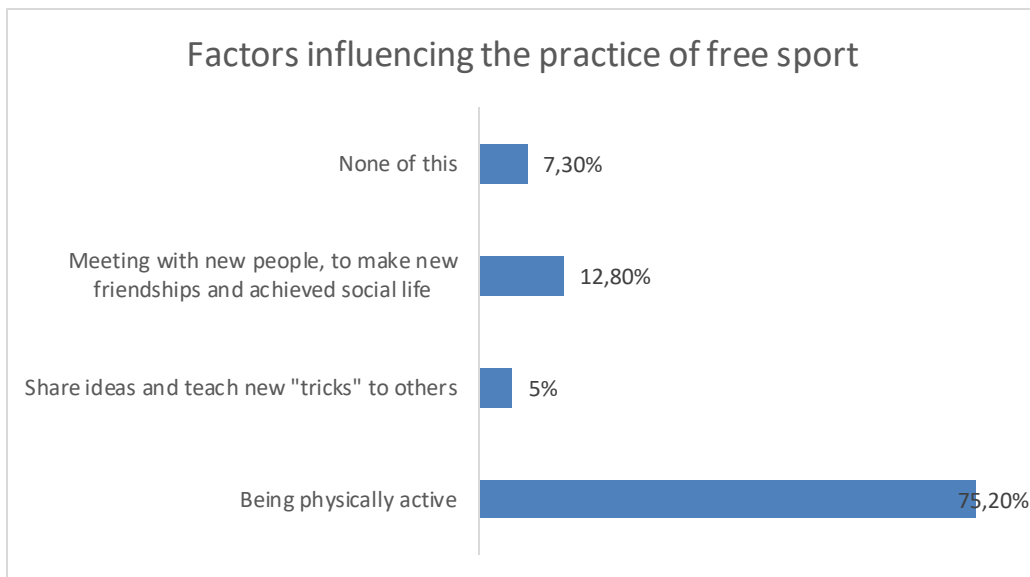


Figure 6. The factors of practicing the preferred sports

The subjects affirm that one of the most important factors in practicing free sport is being physically active (75.2%) as well as socializing with others to make new friends and meet new people (12.8%), while sharing ideas with others is not one of the factors influenced during practiced free sports from the youth (5%).

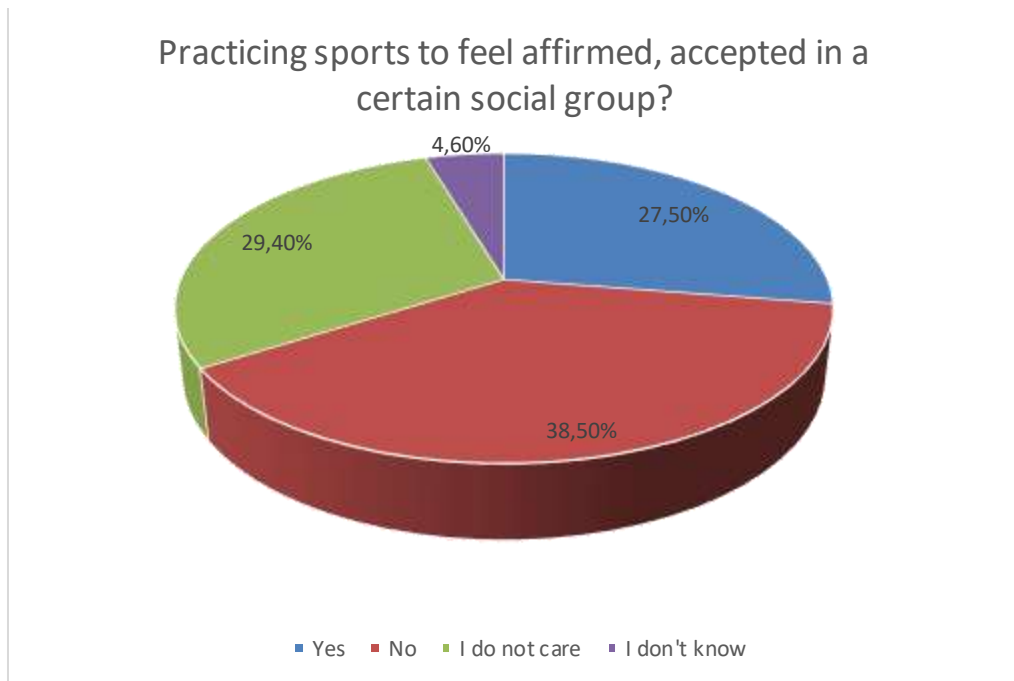


Figure 7. Feeling affirmed and independent in the social group

The data processing shows that the exercise of sports for affirmation and independence in the social group has no impact. If we read the graph carefully we notice that approximately 68% of the participants claim that sport has no impact on social affirmation, where: 38.50% say "No" and 29.40% say "I don't care", compared to 27.50% say "Yes" and 4.60% "Do not know". This fact is very positive as one is clearly observed a psychological well-being as a result of practicing free sport.

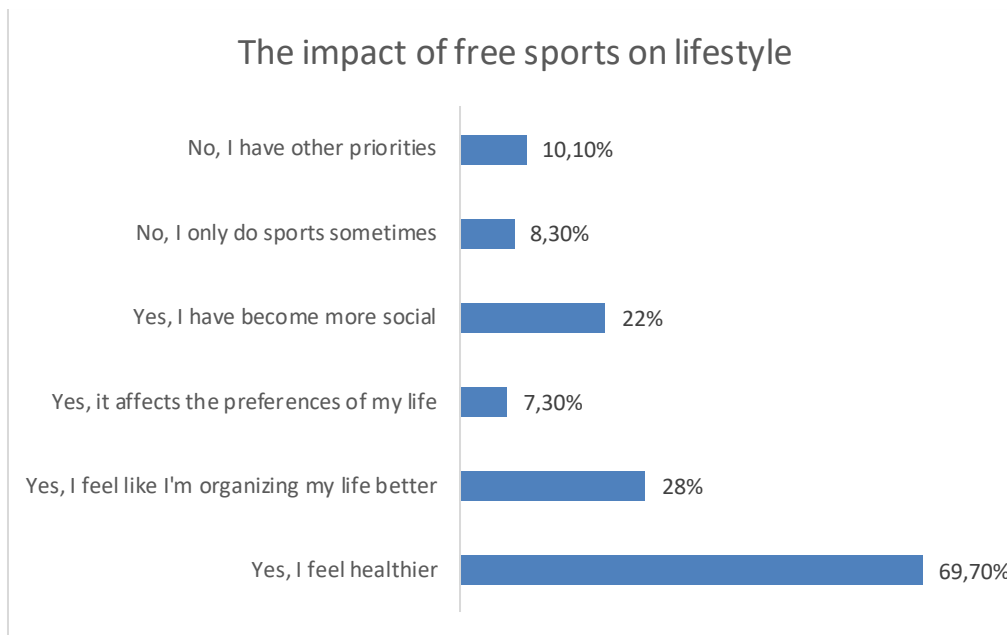


Figure 8. The impact of practicing free sports

To the subjects were given some alternatives related to the impact of free sport on a healthy lifestyle and whether or not they really turned out to be active in their daily lives after practicing free sport. As can be seen from the graph, 69.70% of the subjects claim that they feel healthier, 28% of them claim that they are better organized in time management in daily life, compared to 10.10% who choose not to practice the sport as they have other priorities and 8.30% who exercise when they have time.

Conclusion

The main conclusions of the present study are as follow: (1) In all age groups, the phenomenon of sedentary lifestyle is still present; (2) The modern times and technology in recent decades have caused sedentary behavior to prevail over physical activity and this directly affects our health; (3) The sport is an important social phenomenon at all levels of society and key areas of social

life: it affects human relationships, business life, social status, ethical values, people's way of life.

Recommendations

(1) Staying healthy for the rest of your life is a prerequisite for exercising physical activity.

(2) To promote education and culture of outdoor education, through walking, cycling, sports activities or planned exercise.

NOTES

1. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity>

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