
Original Article


Parental attitudes towards extracurricular physical and sports activity in school-age children

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ABSTRACT

Reverter, J., Montero, D., Hernandez, V., Jové, C. & Coiduras, J. (2013). Parental attitudes towards extracurricular physical and sports activity in school-age children. *J. Hum. Sport Exerc.*, 8(3), pp.861-876. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the attitudes and degree of interest and implication of parents whose school-age children participate in extracurricular physical and sports activities. Particular attention has been paid to the responsibility parents bestow on the different people and institutions that are linked to promoting sports in school-age children. We have also analysed the relationship between parents' attitudes towards their children's sporting habits and their own degree of involvement with sports. Furthermore, we have analysed the implications of these results in order to encourage parental involvement in promoting physical and sports activities. **Key words:** SPORTS PARTICIPATION, PROMOTION, CHILDREN, PARENTS.

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INTRODUCTION

Although it is well accepted that doing sport is associated with an improvement in health, well-being and quality of life, recent epidemiological studies have demonstrated that more than half the adult population is sedentary or physically less active than what is recommended (Pate et al., 1995; U.S. Dept. of Health, 1996; Dishman et al., 2004; Ramos & Gonzalez, 2005). In spite of the fact that it is generally true that children and adolescents are much more active than adults, there has been a gradual reduction in children's participation in sports during infancy and, in adolescence, we have begun to find rather worrying rates of sedentary (Ara et al., 2006). Among adolescents, sedentarism rates have progressively risen as both boys and girls advance towards adulthood; although girls demonstrate a significantly higher rate of inactivity (Sallis, 1993; Armstrong & Van Machelen, 1998; Mendoza, 2000). Mendoza (2000) has stated that the results obtained from a study simultaneously carried out in 24 European countries with 110.000 students between 11 and 15 years of age, demonstrates that the participation rate in intense extracurricular physical activity is higher for boys than girls in the studied countries. Moreover, intense physical activity remains stable in boys in this age group, whereas girls become more sedentary as they grow older. With regard to Spain, the number of girls who do intense physical activity (40%) is the lowest of all the European countries studied. What is more, they are the group, which presents greater differences from the boys (Gonzalez, 2005).

We find the same panorama when analysing participation rates in extracurricular sport, that is to say that only 29% of Spanish girls over 12 do sport at least twice a week. Furthermore, three out of every ten girls aged 10 never takes part in extracurricular sports.

In other studies undertaken with Spanish adolescents, female participation in physical and sports activities is also significantly less in comparison with boys (García Ferrando, 2001; Fernández et al., 2002; González et al., 2004; Hernán et al., 2004; Martín et al., 2004).

Girls' rate of participation in physical and sports activities in their free time starts to decline after the age of ten and, by about age 14, the number is reduced to half. From this age onwards, differences in aspects associated with physical activity and sports become progressively greater between boys and girls, as do changes in the perception boys and girls have of aspects concerning their fitness, health and lifestyle: compared to boys, girls feel that their overall health, regular exercise routine and level of fitness are significantly lower (Gonzalez, 2005).

Insomuch as sedentary habits establish behavioural patterns which start during infancy and adolescence, special attention should be paid to the low level of commitment teenagers demonstrate towards physical activity and sports in order to implement strategies and mechanisms which encourage an early commitment to exercise which lasts throughout their lives.

During the schooling period physical activity is an essential component of children and youths' education because it encourages socializing and transmits positive values, but moreover it promotes the students future commitment to sports (Sallis et al., 1997; González et al., 2004). The institutional backing of the Education System should enable Physical Education to play its rightful role in the development of the motor skills needed to enjoy participating in physical and sports activities, in promoting fitness maintenance and in encouraging a positive outlook towards active lifestyles. However, although some studies state that Physical Education can produce these kinds of benefits, as well as others, for example, linked to improvements in academic performance and self-esteem (Allensworth et al., 1997; Guillén et al., 2003),

specialists do not generally appear to be so optimistic in this sense. In all truthfulness, it does not seem that Physical Education as a school subject is proving effective in establishing these ties, as shown in the results gathered by Sánchez et al., (1997) which evidence that Physical Education classes are seemingly having little impact on the creation of extracurricular physical activity and sports habits. According to Mendoza (2000) more than a third of students show indifference or rebuff Physical Education classes that, in their current design, do not seem to be effective at motivating youths to adopt more active lifestyles.

Some reasons that possibly explain why Physical Education has little success in promoting and encouraging school children to partake in physical and sports activities in their spare time can be found in the limited relationship between this subject and extracurricular sports activities, in its insufficient recognition in countries like Spain and in the lack of family awareness (González et al., 2004).

Given the circumstances, most children partake in physical activity by participating in extracurricular sports programmes (Sallis, 1994). Therefore, extracurricular physical and sports activities acquire an extremely important role in the promotion of health and active lifestyles because the frequency and duration of curricular physical activity is insufficient to reach the minimum level of daily recommended physical activity for youths (Biddle et al., 1998; U.S. Depart. of Health, 2000). What is more, although the subject is compulsory in Primary Education, ESO and the first course of Baccalaureate, that is, more or less between the ages of 6 and 17, it only represents on average a total of 1 to 2.2 hours of weekly classes which sometimes occur on the same day.

Given that the association between adolescents and adults' "previous behaviour" and their early introduction to physical and sports activities appears to be one of the variables with a greater predictive value of the levels of physical activity during adolescence and adulthood (Telama et al., 1997; Calmeiro & Matos, 1998), it is crucial to develop from infancy onwards active lifestyles which enable people to maintain exercise and sports habits throughout life.

Parents' role in this commitment is important: from an early age onwards, they act as the socialising agents of their children by encouraging them to partake in sports activities (Escartí & Ballester, 1993; Stucky-Ropp & DiLorenzo, 1993; Sallis, 1994; Carratalá, 1996; Castillo et al., 1997). However, as their children grow up, parents' ability to influence them in this manner significantly decreases. In fact studies with adolescents have demonstrated that, during this stage in life, a high percentage cease to do physical activity and sports and that, at this age, youths have significantly reduced their previous family ties and are less susceptible to their parents influence on physical activity and health attitudes and behaviour (Cruz, 1997; NASPE, 2003; Dishman et al., 2004).

Many adults, who have incorporated regular physical and sports activities into their daily routine, have attributed their attitudes and behaviour to their parents although they generally admit that this influence was greater during infancy (from 5 to 12 years) than during adolescence (Greendorfer, 1977; Weiss & Knoppers, 1982).

Therefore, children and adolescents' physical and sports activity is not only affected by factors from their schooling environment. For this reason, as we try to overcome the education system's limitations when promoting the participation of children and youths in extracurricular physical and sports activities, it becomes increasingly patent that it is necessary to include parents from the start in any step taken to encourage their school-age children to adopt and maintain these behaviours. Consequently, we must find out how parents generally conceive physical and sports activities, as well as the specific views of their

children because, when determining the nature of children and youths' attitudes and their type and degree of participation in these activities, parents' conceptions have been found to constitute one of the greatest contributing factors (Melcher & Sage, 1978; Fernández et al., 2002).

We must not forget that youths' attitudes towards physical and sports activities and their perception of their competence, are formed before the age of 10/12 and are strongly influenced by their parents' attitudes. Later on, at the age of 13-14, these attitudes are already set and it is their own self-perceived physical and sports' skill which starts to play a decisive role in their participation intentions and behaviour, especially once they have reached adolescence (Calmeiro & Matos, 1998). Although many parents continue to believe that their attitudes influence those of their adolescent children, teenagers tend to report that they no longer specially affect them. For example, in a study commissioned by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE, 2003), 63% of teenage boys stated that their parents' attitudes towards physical activity did not affect their opinion of it; 48% of teenage girls were of the same view.

There is a need for parents to be well-informed about their children's interest and degree of participation in physical and sports activities. It could be assumed that parents already know about these aspects, as well as how much physical and sports activities their children do and the levels deemed necessary to maintain a healthy lifestyle. However, previous studies in the field have shown that parents' perceptions do not often coincide with reality. For example, in a recent study by NASPE (2003), three quarters of parents of children aged between 12 and 17 believed their children did enough physical activity to uphold a healthy lifestyle when most of them were not really doing sufficient physical activity. In fact, the teenagers' pattern of activity did not even reach the minimum recommended amount for adolescents and adults (at least half an hour per day). Of course most of the parents did not reach these minimum levels of physical activity either, although 88 per cent of them believed they were doing sufficient activity. Therefore, in order to effectively promote physical and sports activity we need to find creative and efficient ways of assessing parents' knowledge and attitudes with regard to participation in these activities and those factors which condition them.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse parents' implication and interest in the extracurricular physical activity and sports habits of their school-age children.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants

The target population for this study was the parents of school-age children in the Torrevieja (Valencian Community). The sample is composed of a total of 733 fathers and mothers of primary school children from the thirteen schools, which teach primary education in Torrevieja (Valencian Community). The questionnaires have been filled in by the father or mother of primary school children during June and July 2010 and the information contained refers to the 2009-2010 school year.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire (Latorre, 2006), whose version demonstrates an adequate factorial structure (Latorre, 2006). The questionnaire assesses parents' attitudes and proposals with regard to promoting physical and sports activities among their school-age children. Besides data relating to demographic information, such as the age of the father or mother who was completing the questionnaire, the age of the child, the school and year the child was in, we have analysed the following

groups of variables: Whether they did physical and sports activity; Social variables linked to physical and sports habits; Encouragement of sports participation.

Procedure

Data was gathered through an anonymous questionnaire which was voluntarily completed by a child's father and mother. In their homes, parents filled in the questionnaire, which together with a cover letter explaining the aims of the study and requesting their collaboration, was conveyed to them by their children. They returned the questionnaires in a sealed envelope in person or via their children.

We conducted a descriptive analysis of all study variables, in a way that enabled us to differentiate the responses of all the parents surveyed from those of the groups in which the study participants had been divided. As a matter of fact, in order to assess the possible differences in parent implication and interest in their children's physical and sports habits, those surveyed were grouped according to whether or not they regularly did physical and sports activities, their level of education, age, nationality and school.

Data analysis

Statistical analysis has been performed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences programme, in its 14.0 Version. All data has been expressed in percentages. The Chi-square or Fisher and the Mann-Whitney U tests have been respectively applied to obtain qualitative and quantitative variables, whose reliability was determined using the Spearman test for quantitative ordinal variables, and the McNemar test for qualitative variables. When the significance level is higher than 0.05, we accept the null hypothesis of independence.

RESULTS

In 4.8% of the cases, parents' ages were under 30; in 45.7%, they were between 31 and 39; in 43.5%, they were comprised between 40 and 49 and in 6% of cases they were other ages. 39.5% of parents had university degrees; 39.9% had completed high school and 20.6%, had obtained their school leaving certificate or had no education. 63.8% of couples were comprised of Spanish nationals; 13.2% of a Spanish national and someone from another country; and 23% of two non-Spanish nationals.

Out of those parents questioned, 42.1% stated that they did not regularly partake in physical and sports activities.

With regard to their daughters' degree of participation in extracurricular sports activities, a little over a third of parents questioned (45.5%) stated that their daughters never participated in after-school sports activities. Although this result does not statistically differ due to parents' age, level of studies or sports habits, it is significantly affected by their nationality (Table 1).

Table 1. Daughters' degree of participation in extracurricular sports activities

| | | Nationality | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|--------------|--------|-----------------------------|--------|------------------------|--------|--|--------|-------|--------|
| | | Both Spanish | | Spanish - other nationality | | Both other nationality | | Does not know (DK)/ Does not answer (DA) | | Total | |
| | | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Does your child do any extracurricular physical or sports activity (in clubs, associations, the local council, etc.) which follows a weekly schedule? | Yes | 273 | 61,3% | 39 | 42,4% | 80 | 49,7% | 15 | 42,9% | 407 | 55,5% |
| | NO | 167 | 37,5% | 52 | 56,5% | 78 | 48,4% | 18 | 51,4% | 315 | 43,0% |
| | DK/DA | 5 | 1,1% | 1 | 1,1% | 3 | 1,9% | 2 | 5,7% | 11 | 1,5% |
| | Total | 445 | 100,0% | 92 | 100,0% | 161 | 100,0% | 35 | 100,0% | 733 | 100,0% |

Out of all the extracurricular activities on offer to their children, parents prefer swimming and football (Figure 1).

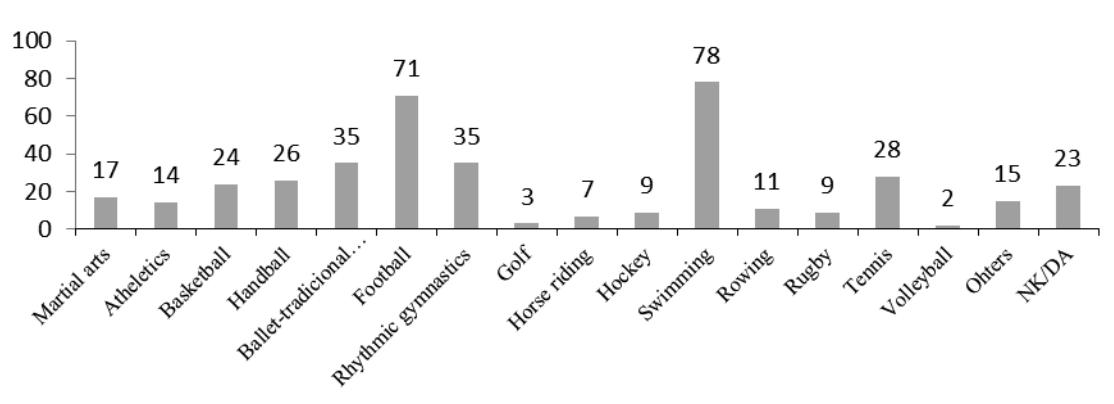


Figure 1. Extracurricular activities preferred by parents

With regard to how parents view these activities, half of those questioned are satisfied with the sports their children do and with the performance of the teacher or monitor (Table 2).

Table 2. How parents view extracurricular sports

| | Age | | School | | Nationality | | Level of studies | | Current sporting habits | |
|--|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------------|-------|------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| | Z | Sig | Z | Sig | Z | Sig | Z | Sig | Z | Sig |
| We are happy our child takes part in this activity | 4,985 | 0,173 | 11,708 | 0,469 | 1,678 | 0,432 | 1,896 | 0,388 | 2,838 | 0,242 |
| We are happy with the performance of the activity's teacher or monitor | 3,664 | 0,300 | 15,373 | 0,222 | 0,721 | 0,697 | 2,486 | 0,288 | 0,023 | 0,988 |
| In the group or team everybody is equally important | 1,357 | 0,716 | 17,808 | 0,122 | 1,871 | 0,392 | 1,584 | 0,453 | 0,109 | 0,947 |
| The teacher or monitor treats all children equally | 1,069 | 0,785 | 12,821 | 0,382 | 0,246 | 0,884 | 0,956 | 0,620 | 0,062 | 0,969 |
| We believe our child will continue with this activity for a long time | 2,328 | 0,507 | 9,292 | 0,678 | 7,628 | 0,022 | 0,345 | 0,841 | 1,133 | 0,568 |
| We would like our child to do sports more times a week | 5,311 | 0,150 | 20,476 | 0,059 | 9,085 | 0,011 | 0,131 | 0,937 | 1,254 | 0,534 |
| The teacher or monitor places emphasis on beating the opponents | 1,650 | 0,648 | 18,418 | 0,104 | 15,189 | 0,001 | 3,645 | 0,162 | 8,647 | 0,013 |
| Everybody plays and takes part equally in matches or competitions | 3,487 | 0,322 | 23,472 | 0,024 | 0,297 | 0,862 | 0,489 | 0,783 | 1,922 | 0,383 |
| Our child has more fun when training than during matches or competitions | 1,061 | 0,787 | 13,652 | 0,323 | 3,579 | 0,167 | 1,707 | 0,426 | 2,677 | 0,262 |
| If our child loses, he/she does not have fun | 3,082 | 0,379 | 12,230 | 0,427 | 8,279 | 0,016 | 3,061 | 0,216 | 3,510 | 0,173 |
| We receive adequate assessment reports about the activity and our child | 0,965 | 0,810 | 13,481 | 0,335 | 7,315 | 0,026 | 3,774 | 0,151 | 2,626 | 0,269 |

In Torrevieja, 66.7% of parents are aware of the range of extracurricular sports activities available to their children. This percentage is greater in those couples who are Spanish nationals, have university degrees or still currently do sport. No significant difference has been observed among those parents who used to do sport ($P>0,000$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Parents' awareness of available extracurricular sports and physical activities

| | Nationality | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--------|-----------------------------|--------|----------------------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|------|
| | Both Spanish | | Spanish - other nationality | | Both non-Spanish nationals | | DK/DA | | Total | | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | |
| Yes | 326 | 73,3% | 51 | 55,4% | 86 | 53,4% | 26 | 74,3% | 489 | 66,7% | |
| NO | 108 | 24,3% | 35 | 38,0% | 71 | 44,1% | 8 | 22,9% | 222 | 30,3% | |
| Are you aware of the range of extracurricular sports activities available in Torrevieja? | DK/DA | 11 | 2,5% | 6 | 6,5% | 4 | 2,5% | 1 | 2,9% | 22 | 3,0% |
| Total | 445 | 100,0% | 92 | 100,0% | 161 | 100,0% | 35 | 100,0% | 733 | 100,0% | |

| | Level of studies | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|-------|---|-------|-------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| | School leaving certificate or without studies | | FP/BUP/COU/ Bachiller* *Job training, Baccalaureate, GCE A-level studies | | University degree | | DK/DA | | Total | | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | |
| Yes | 78 | 53,1% | 187 | 65,8% | 210 | 74,7% | 14 | 66,7% | 489 | 66,7% | |
| NO | 61 | 41,5% | 89 | 31,3% | 67 | 23,8% | 5 | 23,8% | 222 | 30,3% | |
| DK/DA | 8 | 5,4% | 8 | 2,8% | 4 | 1,4% | 2 | 9,5% | 22 | 3,0% | |
| Are you aware of the range of extracurricular sports activities available in Torrevieja? | Total | 147 | 100,0% | 284 | 100,0% | 281 | 100,0% | 21 | 100,0% | 733 | 100,0% |

| | Current sporting habits | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-------|------------|-------|----------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| | Both parents | | One parent | | Neither parent | | DK/DA | | Total | | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | |
| Yes | 140 | 75,7% | 175 | 76,4% | 163 | 54,2% | 11 | 61,1% | 489 | 66,7% | |
| NO | 42 | 22,7% | 49 | 21,4% | 126 | 41,9% | 5 | 27,8% | 222 | 30,3% | |
| DK/DA | 3 | 1,6% | 5 | 2,2% | 12 | 4,0% | 2 | 11,1% | 22 | 3,0% | |
| Are you aware of the range of extracurricular sports activities available in Torrevieja? | Total | 185 | 100,0% | 229 | 100,0% | 301 | 100,0% | 18 | 100,0% | 733 | 100,0% |

If we link extracurricular physical exercise with knowledge of available activities, we must conclude that those parents whose children do after-school sports and physical activity are more aware of the range of sports on offer ($P>0,000$). With regard to the activities most sought after by parents, these are swimming (5.3%) and tennis (4.5%).

Data on the assessment of municipal facilities generally shows scores above 3 on a scale of 1 to 4. In spite of this, there are significant differences with regard to “Comfort”, “Equipment” and “Timetable” among those who still do sport (Table4).

Table 4. Assessment of municipal facilities outside school

| | Age | | School | | Nationality | | Level of completed studies | | Current sporting habits | | Former sporting habits | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------------|-------|----------------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| | Z | Sig | Z | Sig | Z | Sig | Z | Sig | Z | Sig | Z | Sig |
| Cleanliness | 0,423 | 0,935 | 18,729 | 0,095 | 0,259 | 0,878 | 2,145 | 0,342 | 0,000 | 1,000 | 0,068 | 0,967 |
| Condition | 6,948 | 0,074 | 14,465 | 0,272 | 4,307 | 0,116 | 7,537 | 0,023 | 1,863 | 0,394 | 0,096 | 0,953 |
| Comfort | 2,638 | 0,451 | 14,718 | 0,257 | 0,902 | 0,637 | 2,943 | 0,230 | 8,568 | 0,014 | 0,924 | 0,630 |
| Equipment | 6,579 | 0,087 | 14,401 | 0,276 | 1,049 | 0,592 | 1,587 | 0,452 | 7,543 | 0,023 | 2,302 | 0,316 |
| Timetable | 2,419 | 0,490 | 12,025 | 0,444 | 0,107 | 0,948 | 1,457 | 0,483 | 7,643 | 0,022 | 0,121 | 0,941 |
| Staff services | 1,605 | 0,658 | 16,989 | 0,150 | 0,823 | 0,663 | 5,246 | 0,073 | 1,511 | 0,470 | 0,855 | 0,652 |
| Overall average | 3,453 | 0,327 | 19,535 | 0,076 | 0,438 | 0,803 | 2,905 | 0,234 | 3,139 | 0,208 | 0,237 | 0,888 |

In figure 2, the most prominent item is parent attitude and behaviour during the physical and sports activities their children do, which demonstrates they are concerned and interested in these activities.

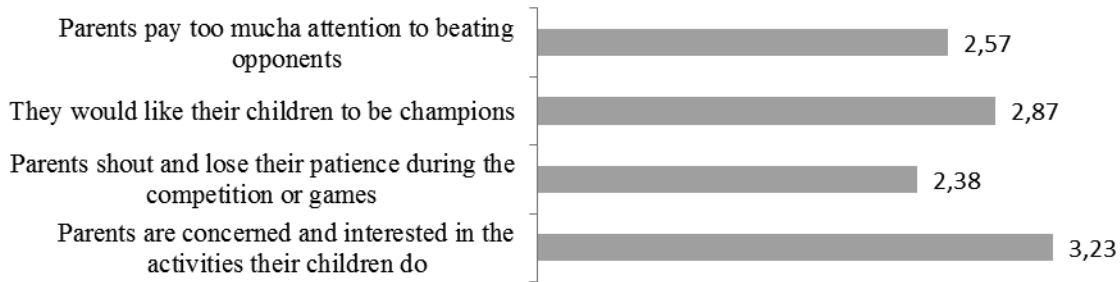


Figure 2. Parents’ attitudes and behaviour during the physical and sports activities their children do

With regard to parents’ overall opinion of physical and sporting habits, they generally agree on “Doing sports is good for your health” (with a score of 3.69 on a scale of 1 to 4). However, parents are most opposed to the idea that “Our children should do sports because it is important to compete and win”, which scores 2.05 on the scale (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Parents’ opinion of physical and sports activities

With regard to the organization and those in charge of extracurricular activities, most parents agree that “Teachers and monitors’ professional training is the main component of these activities’ educational quality”, which scored 3.46 on a scale of 1 to 4. However, parents strongly opposed the idea that “Children’s introduction to competitions currently starts at a very young age” (Figure 4).

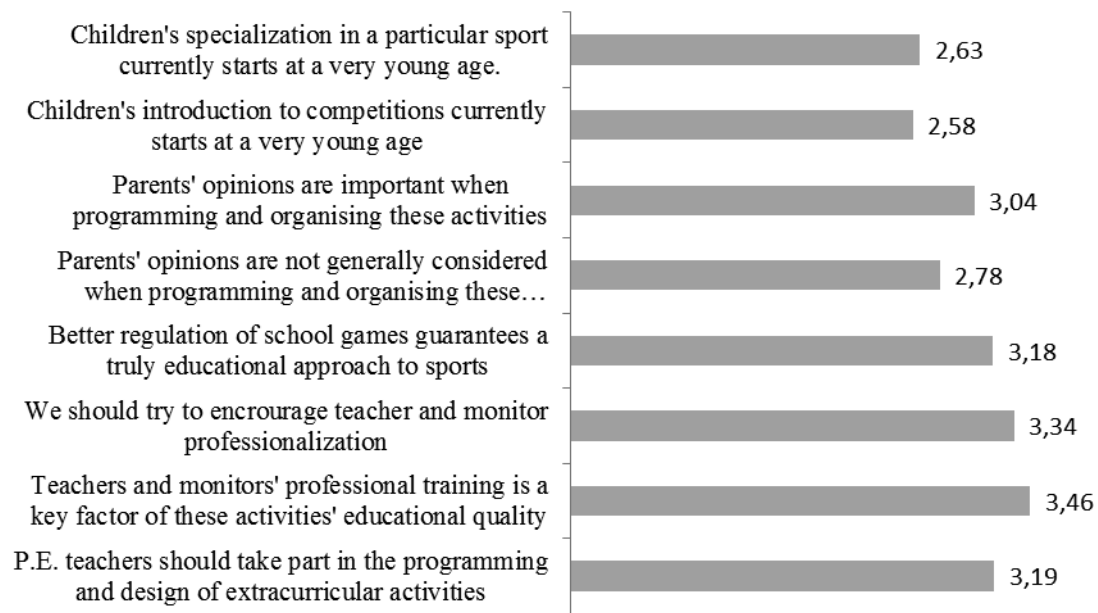


Figure 4. Parents' opinion of the organization and those responsible for extracurricular activities
 In general, we can also state that parents are highly satisfied with extracurricular activities (Figure 5).

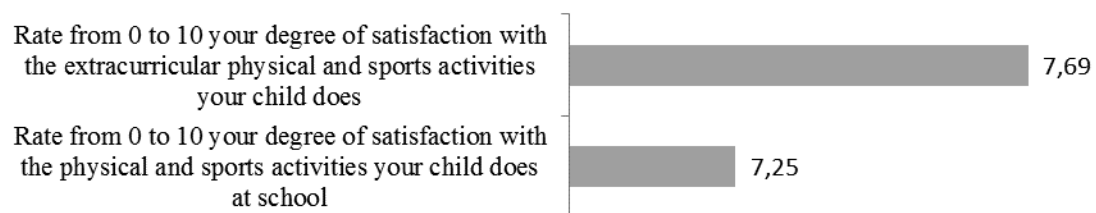


Figure 5. Parents' degree of satisfaction with extracurricular activities

DISCUSSION

The high level of sedentarism in school-age children means that we need to set up measures that encourage them to embrace a healthy lifestyle by incorporating regular and sustained physical and sports activities into their free time (Martin et al., 2004). Data from a study which compares the rates of physical and sports activities of young people from 24 European countries (Mendoza, 2000) reveals that Spanish girls' rate of physical and sports activity is one of the lowest of all European countries.

Various researches have shown that physical and sporting activities' constraints vary depending on sex and, therefore, that it is necessary to analyse differentials in boys and girls in order to design policies specifically targeted at the characteristics of either population subgroup (Brustad, 1996; U.S. Dpt. of Health, 1996; Castillo et al., 1997).

In the present education system, the few hours allotted to P.E. classes (just 2 hours of weekly classes which can occur on the same day) and the occasional low physical content of these classes which sometimes does not reach ten minutes, leads us to assume that most children only do regular physical activity when taking part in extracurricular activities (Sallis, 1994). In general, parents condition this participation (Stucky-Ropp & DiLorenzo, 1993) because, by enrolling them in activities and paying the related fees, they are directly supporting their children to do sport. Indirectly, parents influence their children's attitudes and exercise patterns through their own attitudes and the parental model cast by their own active or sedentary lifestyles.

Under these circumstances, it is crucial to involve parents in any initiative aimed at encouraging their school-age daughters to acquire and maintain active lifestyles. For this reason, we need to consider the attitudes and perceptions that govern doing sports and some of the factors which condition it, as well as girls' level of participation in these kinds of activities. Research in this field has evidenced that regular parent involvement in sports activities has a strong link with their children's attitudes and level of participation (Melcher & Sage, 1978; Zakarian et al., 1994; García et al., 1995). Furthermore, the influence of parent attitudes and beliefs on their children's habits and whether they directly support them doing sports are equally determining factors in young people's physical and sporting habits (Dempsey et al., 1993; Brustad, 1993, 1996).

With regard to our findings, the information submitted by the surveyed parents on exercise habits, showed that approximately half the fathers and mothers questioned do not regularly do sports. What is more, their children's low participation rate in extracurricular sports activities and physical exercise is consistent with the findings of other nationally conducted studies (García Ferrando, 2001; Fernández et al., 2002; Hernán et al., 2004; Martín et al., 2004) and international surveys (Sallis, 1993; Armstrong & Van Machelen, 1998; Mendoza, 2000). More than half those questioned said their child did not participate in any extracurricular sports activity. As Martín et al., (2004) point out, these findings warn us of the risks to health and quality of life inherent to the high rate of inactivity in these school-age children and call for the urgent implementation of specific measures to promote daily or weekend exercise.

These findings also lead us to reflect on the poor success of the current conception of Physical Education when seeking a comprehensive student education, which includes the encouragement of extracurricular physical and sports activities (Sánchez, 1996; Mendoza, 2000; Devís et al., 2000; Delgado & Pérez, 2004; Martín et al., 2004).

Our findings highlight a close relationship between children and parent sporting habits, in a sense that we find significantly higher rates of inactivity among those children whose parents do not exercise regularly in comparison with girls whose parents often take part in sporting activities. Parents who regularly do sports often exert a noticeable influence on their children's involvement in sports through their own favourable attitudes or lifestyle model, or by directly encouraging and supporting them to acquire sporting habits they can progressively do on their own (Melcher & Sage, 1978; Andersen & Wold, 1992; Stucky-Ropp & DiLorenzo, 1993; Zakarian et al., 1994; García et al., 1995).

With regard to parent knowledge of extracurricular physical and sporting activities, our findings highlight that many mothers and fathers, and especially those with lesser studies, ignore the physical and sporting activities on offer. This indicates they have little or no interest in promoting the welfare state and their children's health.

Parents clearly prefer their children to take part in swimming and football, probably because of the tradition of these sports in Spain (Romero et al., 2009). What is more, parents are generally satisfied with the activity their child takes part in and the teacher's performance; data which is consistent with the findings of other research (Jordan et al., 2002; Capdevila et al., 2004). In line with these results, our research data has shown that most of the parents surveyed, when asked their opinion about physical and sporting habits, agreed that participating in these activities is good for your health. This reason coincides completely with those mentioned in previous studies aimed at elucidating why parents enrol their children in extracurricular sporting programmes: they want them to enjoy themselves, have fun and do exercise (Passer, 1982; Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989; Gill, 1992; McCullagh et al., 1993; Cruz, 1997).

Our findings on parent attitudes and behaviour when their children are doing physical and sports activities highlight that they are interested and worried about these activities. What is more, their attitudes and behaviour are linked to how children and youths react emotionally during sports (Torregrosa et al., 2007); particularly positive and encouraging parent attitudes and behaviour have been tied to positive emotional consequences for children and adolescents in sport. Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1986) stated that young athletes' feelings of thorough enjoyment were linked to their perception of parent satisfaction, positive parent intervention and interaction and when they did not feel overly pressured by their mothers. Brustad (1988) stated if young male and female basketball players thoroughly enjoyed the sporting season, it was because their parents hardly pressured them. Hellstedt (1988) found that young skiers' sporting enthusiasm is linked to how positively they perceive their parents' assistance and encouragement. Similarly, Leff and Hoyle (1995) found a positive connection between how young athletes perceived their parents' encouragement to take part in sports, the amount of fun they had and their levels of self-esteem.

Sports facilities are an environmental factor, which is positively linked to sporting habits in children of all ages (García et al., 1995; Sallis et al., 1993; Zakarian et al., 1994) and, therefore, the more favourable the evaluation, the more children who will do sports.

With regard to parents' opinion on extracurricular activities' organization and running, those surveyed pointed out the need to contract professionals with specialised training which met the demands of the particular sport. This data, which coincides with the findings of Reverter et al., (2009), shows that parents question the need to introduce children to sports at an early age and, therefore, highlights that parents are little trained in sporting matters because sports done in an educational setting have been studied and evaluated by different authors (Torregrosa et al., 2007). Furthermore, it may also evidence that sports experts have little training in this subject who has been pointed out in the research conducted by Sousa et al. (2006, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on information provided by the surveyed parents, we can conclude that this study's findings confirm the close relationship between school-age children and parents' patterns of participation in physical and sports activities. Although adolescents associate doing these activities with being sociable and personal wellbeing (Mendoza, 2000), it is true that both parents and their children display a disturbingly high rate of inactivity. In these cases, some parents find it particularly hard to encourage a shift towards active and healthy lifestyles.

As Díez and Guisasola (2002) suggest, we must make parents aware that their active participation in encouraging sporting habits among their daughters is indispensable and that, when they do not take on this

decisive and sustained role, they are giving their daughters the impression that this activity is not important. This is even worse when the role model offered by parents is built on a markedly sedentary lifestyle. The responsibility, with which parents usually self-attribute themselves when encouraging their daughters' sporting habits, is a dispositional factor of primary importance when designing initiatives to encourage and support their daughters. Nonetheless, we must comprehend that children and adolescents' patterns of physical and sports activity are also affected by factors outside the family environment. In this sense, these encouragement strategies should be based on the coordinated involvement of the school, the peer group, the extracurricular programmes of physical and sports activities, community health services and parents themselves, of course. In any case, because sedentary patterns of behaviour start to develop in childhood, when children reach age 11-12 and during adolescence, these patterns have reached alarming levels and are no longer readily permeable to parent influence. For this reason, any measure designed to encourage and support active lifestyles aimed at including physical and sporting activities in girls' daily lives must be started at an early age.

Conflict of interest:

"Please bear in mind that this paper does not present any conflict of interest"

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