

# CONTRIBUTION OF SPORTS TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN CHILDHOOD, PREADOLESCENCE AND ADOLESCENCE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes physical activity as a scope for meeting the main needs and interests of children and young people, their problems of insufficient physical and sports activities and the impact of sports on social skills, communication, motivation and a positive self-image. Also, the paper discusses the influence of physical activity on cognitive development, psychosocial health and motor development of children, preadolescents and adolescents. The current lack of physical activity implies a relevant health challenge and a general social problem in our country and in the modern world. Through team work and interaction with peers, sport significantly contributes to the socialization of children and young people, whereby they develop social skills, cooperation and a sense of belonging to a social group. In addition, physical and sports activities affect the psychosocial development of children, as they enable them to express their emotions and face challenges, but also have a positive impact on their mental health, and on reducing stress, anxiety and depression. Sport is definitely a relevant factor for improving the quality of life of children, preadolescents and adolescents, because it motivates their proper development, social integration, personal growth and overall psychophysical development.

**Key words:** sports activity, children and young people, interests, social skills, communication, motivation, psychosocial health

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## QUALITY OF LIFE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### *Physical activity satisfies the main needs and interests*

Various physical and sports activities provide children and young people with an opportunity to satisfy their needs, but also provide a social climate in which a gifted child can develop his creative talents above the norm. Child development and goal realization develops according to Maslow's hierarchy (Oppong-Gyebi et al., 2024). In the process of achieving desires and goals, there is a certain order and rules, where certain motives, goals and desires are more important than others, which is observed in the five-level hierarchical model.

At the first level of the hierarchical model is what is most important for the child's wishes and needs, which is why the first level must be satisfied before all levels. At the same time, if the conditions for children's needs are not provided during training, children and young people will not be able to progress and realize the greatest sport effects, regardless of their abilities and talents. The first level in the hierarchical model represents the need for movement, when children feel that their need for movement is fulfilled during the process of sports activity. The second level in the hierarchical model refers to the need for safety through playing sports in the environment of one's teammates and coaches, whereby a sense of stability is created. After satisfying the second level, the need for belonging and love follows. Through various sports activities, children, preadolescents and adolescents acquire the need for belonging and love through team spirit, i.e. by achieving common goals, and through praise and rewards. After satisfying the need for belonging and love follows the fourth need for self-esteem, which develops and progresses through the support of the coach and teammates, through various recognitions and awards. Finally, the fifth and last hierarchical level is self-actualization, which is reached only by children and young people who have effectively passed the first four levels. Self-actualization affects the development of young athletes, intensifies their abilities and motivates them to become satisfied individuals in sports and in life (Amat, & Amiruddin, 2024).

Physical and health education, with its means and methods, develops the functional, morphological, motor, conative and cognitive characteristics of the organism, acting systematically on the biological, health, educational, educational, economic, defensive, recreational and creative domain of human activities (Ivanović & Ivanović, 2012). In the context of a model of physical and health education in which more serious physical activity begins, attention is directed to current health status and potential goals to encourage and preserve health status. With this concept, everyone engaged in physical and sports activities can directly or indirectly positively influence their health. Regular sports activity can directly improve physical fitness, strengthen skeletal muscles and bones, and indirectly improve mood and reduce stress in children, preadolescents and adolescents (Ivanović & Ivanović, 2014).

According to the findings of the author's research (Aksović et al., 2020), physical exercise and sports affect human characteristics, abilities and skills. They play a major role in maintaining and improving health, physical appearance and health, and social

and psychological well-being. Participating in sports and physical activities enables the maintenance of body mass and regulation of body fat, strengthening of skeletal muscles, joints and bones. The results of the study (Selestrin & Belošević, 2022) emphasize that regular physical activity is effective in reducing cognitive tension, relieving stress, as well as preventing persistent and inappropriate thoughts, which greatly contributes to increasing the quality of life of children and young people. The most important thing is to choose a sports activity that fulfills the children, the one which they believe suits them best and in which they feel comfortable. In addition to sports helping to improve mood and psychological well-being, athletes often exhibit higher levels of self-esteem compared to individuals who do not play sports. Participation in sports activities has a positive contribution to building self-esteem, but also to the development of sports competence. This process enables children to improve their perception of their own abilities, which positively affects their self-image (Grošić & Filipčić, 2019).

### ***Problems of insufficient physical activity of children and young people***

Insufficient physical activity is a big problem in our country and in the world, especially among children, preadolescents and adolescents. Lack of physical activity is correlated with health, obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. A study by the World Health Organization (WHO 2023) showed that regular and systematic physical activity has a positive effect on maintaining a healthy body and preventing disease. Children who are less active in sports, i.e. physical activity are more prone to overweight and other health problems in the later stages of life (Komilovich & Jamshidovich, 2024). The aforementioned authors highlight the worrying increase in obesity among children and young people. They believe that the sedentary lifestyle is one of the main generators of the sudden increase in obesity in the population, which causes an imbalance in the calorie ratio, that is, leads to children and young people taking in more calories than they spend, which leads to caloric surplus. In addition to obesity due to lack of physical activity, type II diabetes often occurs in the youth population. The analysis of the aforementioned research concludes that there is a big drop in physical activity at the transition from elementary to high school, because puberty reduces the motivation for exercise and sports activities (Ivanović & Ivanović, 2018a).

## **THE IMPACT OF SPORTS ACTIVITIES ON THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Socialization is defined as a process during which people of a certain group acquire the attitudes and values of a certain culture and the most appropriate behaviors (Fan & Park, 2021). It enables children to develop skills, e.g. communication, cooperation and understanding. Children, preadolescents and adolescents in various sports activities form their identity in the family, thereby creating values and rules that apply in their communities. From a traditional perspective, socialization was observed as a one-way process influenced by parents, peers and school. But children and youth actively

influence various socialization factors (LeBaron & Kelley, 2021). By identifying the two-way character of socialization, children's behaviors and attitudes will be better understood. In children and young people, the two-way character is best developed through the application of various sports and sports activities, which promotes positive social development, cooperation and team spirit.

### ***Impact of sport on social skills***

Sports play a major role in a child's physical development, from the earliest ball games to more complex training. Regardless of whether they play team or individual sports, children and young people have the chance to develop various physical and social skills. Sport affects socialization through teamwork, in such way that children and young people cooperate to achieve the desired goal (Hassan, 2024). Through sports and sports activities, emotional intelligence is developed, children face various emotions through various victories, defeats, disappointments, while learning how to fight in a positive way. Respect the differences and opponents is one of the most important values of socialization, through various sports activities and competitions, children have the opportunity to cooperate with other children of different religions, races and cultures. At the same time, the development of self-confidence and self-esteem are the most important variables in the development of socialization, and children develop them through various successes, goals and challenges.

The role of coaches in sports is one of the most important factors for the development of the socialization of children and young people. The job of a coach is complex and demanding, as one must have the necessary competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities and values), as well as qualities, e.g. communication skills to motivate self-confidence, play and fair sports relations in children and young people. Coaches, through their work, significantly influence the social development of children in all sports. Support, guidance and his mentoring create a positive environment in which children develop basic social, family and personal values. A quality coach should focus on developing sports skills in children, preadolescents and adolescents.

Sport has a relevant impact on child development, as it includes various aspects of morphological-functional, emotional, voluntary, moral, work, intellectual and aesthetic dimensions (Purnomo et al., 2024). Quality and correctly dosed sports activities are necessary for the development of various components of social competence, regulation of emotions and understanding of social interactions, e.g. prediction of other people's reactions, which are correlated skills with social relations, e.g. sharing and waiting for a turn. The impact of physical education on the overall development of psychological constructs is noticeable, because it fosters and nurtures various aspects of social behavior and develops desirable character traits that are necessary for the effective integration of an individual into his environment and the realization of social life.

### ***Impact of sport on communication***

The fact is that the ability of people to endure and survive in difficult times, as social beings, depends on the ability to interact with the environment. Quality

communication is the most important basis for any healthy relationship and for the functionality of society as a whole, which, among other things, has a relevant impact on the quality of life. Communication contains overall social skills that enable the promotion, establishment and maintenance of relationships between people (Pashaie et al., 2022).

Communication plays a significant role in the field of recreation, since the competences and skills of managers of recreational programs play a crucial role in attracting children and young people to sports. Regardless of significant amounts of practical and theoretical knowledge, their value remains unused if the recreational manager is not able to successfully transfer that knowledge to children and youth. That is why program managers are the ones who, with their approach and communication skills, motivate users to participate in recreational activities, effectively transfer their knowledge to them and encourage them to engage in regular recreational exercise (Ivanović, 2024). From a traditional perspective, the participation of children, preadolescents and adolescents in sports has a twofold importance: 1) it enables their social integration into the peer group and 2) it gathers them into a wider social community. Sports games influence the formation of personality traits, the establishment of communication, the motivation of self-awareness and self-confidence, which contributes to mutual adaptation and acceptance.

To achieve social integration in sports games, it is important that team members have the chance to make decisions based on their own perceptions and attitudes. Excessive involvement of adults in the communication of children and young people can make it difficult to realize this goal, narrowing the space for children to participate independently and play. Adolescence is a developmental period in an individual's life that includes physical, emotional, social and cognitive changes and usually last from puberty to adulthood (Rosato & Brackenridge, 2024). At this age, due to competition and long-term psychological effects on the child's development, interest in sports often declines. The aforementioned author believes that the inclusion of children and young people in sports games is better to be adapted to their individual characteristics, instead making them adhere to pre-set criteria of adults. At the same time, it is important to understand what motivates young people to play sports and compete, and not just to expect or demand high results. If not approached in this way, there is a high probability that a large number of children will be excluded and not accepted, since they probably cannot meet the expectations of adults, even if they have average or lower abilities.

### ***Impact of sport on motivation***

The most common way of engaging children in sports activities involves physical education in primary and secondary schools and participation in sports clubs, competitions and various additional sports programs. At the same time, club membership and regular trainings usually show the level of motivation in children for continuous participation in such activities. It should be noted that not all children are equally motivated to participate in physical education classes or other sports activities. However, there are also children who often miss physical education classes, avoid

physical activity-exercise or forget their sports equipment. In these circumstances, teachers often look for methods of how to best motivate children who do not show interest in practicing sports activities (Weber, 2024).

Psychological models highlight the main function of motivation as a relevant factor that affects the physical activity of children, preadolescents and adolescents. In addition, the importance of external influences and environmental factors on motivation is emphasized. By participating in social groups, children ensure survival, protection and support from other group members (Ivanović & Ivanović, 2023a). In general, an intense intrinsic motivation of children to participate in various sports activities is identified, where it should be emphasized that the influence of peers has a relevant contribution to the child's engagement. In addition, the family also plays an important role in the formation of the child's interest in sports activities. It is obvious that sports competition is a real social phenomenon that children are exposed to from the earliest stages of life (Ensrud-Skraastad & Haga, 2024). In the last two decades of the XXI century, the concept of motivation is often analyzed in terms of dividing it into two basic types: internal and external motivation (Weber, 2024). Internal (intrinsic) motivation is performed by the individual because of the action, where he perceives the satisfaction that comes from the act of performing or developing his own skills and knowledge. Within sports, internal motivation is manifested in athletes who train for the pleasure of training, improving their sports abilities and enjoying the process of motor learning. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation contains various exogenous factors that motivate a person to engage in certain activities. Extrinsically motivated athletes train and compete for material rewards, social status, popularity, or the desire to conquer and prove superiority among their peers. Physical education teachers have an important role in motivating children to practice sports activities. In addition to encouraging positive motivation, teachers should encourage students to acquire skills and knowledge in physical activities, avoid punishing, ridiculing and criticizing children for their clumsiness or failure. Also, introducing prizes can be an external motivation for participation in sports activities (Agrasadya et al., 2024). The aforementioned author believes that the reasons for participating in sports in order to develop motivation in children and young people include the desire for: learning new skills and improving existing ones, enjoying sports, physical fitness, enjoying the challenge and excitement of competing in sports, and the desire to enjoy teamwork with friends.

Youth sports represent an exciting and challenging environment in which participants can achieve increased self-esteem and motivation (Apriansyah et al., 2022). Through sports motivation, children acquire the skills of defining goals, persistence and self-confidence, they learn to confront challenges, develop mental strength and the ability to face obstacles. Sports motivation encourages regular physical activity and health care, which has long-term benefits for their physical and emotional well-being. Through teamwork in sports, adolescent athletes develop social skills and form lasting friendships (Ivanović & Ivanović, 2023b).

## Impact of sports on a positive self-image

Self-image presupposes the method by which a person evaluates and perceives himself, including his beliefs and feelings about his own abilities, potentials and social relationships (Ivanović, M., & Ivanović, U. (2022). The image that an individual has of himself to a large extent affects his behavior, relations with others and daily activities, which is reflected in his interaction with the environment.

Self-esteem is a widespread concept in professional and scientific psychological literature (Martiny et al., 2024). It plays a key role in the way an individual interprets external information, acting as a means of protection through which his value is valorized. A high level of self-esteem is usually correlated with positive mental outcomes, including a better ability to cope with challenges and a lower likelihood of developing depression. An individual with high self-esteem perceives a sense of satisfaction and has a positive opinion of himself, while an individual with low self-esteem tends to feel bad when thinking about himself. He often does not fully accept himself and underestimates himself in various circumstances of his life, which results in a negative opinion of himself (Doyle & Barreto, 2023).

The lack of desired success and recognition in physical activity can lower the level of self-esteem, which can be difficult to resolve. On the other hand, the positive attitude of children, preadolescents and adolescents towards parents, adults and coaches, as well as a supportive and nurturing social environment, can significantly increase the level of self-esteem in children and young people. Their participation in sports activities has the possibility of having a positive effect on their self-esteem, especially with the support of adults and a positive environment (Lekka et al., 2022). Athletes generally manifest higher self-esteem in comparison to non-athletes, which shows that participation in sports affects the development of self-esteem. Engaging in sports activities and professionally organized sports training provides children and young people with the opportunity to develop, improve their sports skills and positively perceive their own abilities. Preadolescents and adolescents who play sports become more aware of their skills and often get opportunities from their peers, parents and coaches, which additionally confirms their positive self-image (Renger et al., 2023).

Seeing that achievements in sports can have a positive effect on self-confidence and that motivation is crucial for the effort athletes put into their training, it is evident that there is an intense interaction between motivation and self-confidence. The support of physical education teachers, coaches and parents plays an important role in preventing the negative consequences of sports on the self-confidence of children, preadolescent and adolescent athletes. By providing support and understanding, teachers, coaches and parents can contribute to the formation of a positive sports environment in which emotional well-being and the realization of goals are highlighted. The support of parents, teachers and coaches enables young athletes to stay motivated, build self-confidence and develop competencies that will help them in sports and improve life outside the sports field.



## **PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AND OVERALL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

New generations predominantly prefer a sedentary lifestyle, which leads to significant difficulties in the quality of life of children and young people. The aforementioned authors found that continuous physical activity has a relevant impact on improving health, especially cognitive and psychosocial health. In children, preadolescents and adolescents, the brain is particularly sensitive to various stimuli, while physical activity encourages cognitive and psychosocial development. Sports activities, e.g. football, basketball, handball, various dances and physical exercises, where concentration is required, motivate cognitive and psychosocial processes (Ivanović, 2014).

### ***Physical activity and cognitive development***

Cognition implies a mental function introduced in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, whereby a high degree of cognitive development has been identified as a positive marker of health (M. Ivanović & U. Ivanović, 2018b). The aforementioned authors believe that the period of youth is dominant for cognitive development, since fundamental cognitive functions that have an impact on the health of young people are formed. Cognitive functions refer to a set of associated constructs, e.g. attention and memory, (Rosell-Díaz & Fernández-Real, 2024).

Success in school is mostly determined by cognitive factors (concentration, attention, memory, etc.). Physical exercise and sports activity affect the development of cognitive functions, which shows that the school environment is illusory for setting up physical activity through physical education classes, which gives children and young people a chance for the development of cognitive functions. According to research (Latino & Tafuri, 2024), a positive connection between physical activity and school achievements was confirmed, and that students who participate in collective or individual sports have better academic success than students who do not engage in sports or physical activity.

Attention as a cognitive ability has a major role for effective behavior in education and sports life (Fung et al., 2022). The authors conclude that attention is selective if it focuses on certain stimuli, a variable that adapts in different situations, and that attention is more effective in children, preadolescents and adolescents who engage in physical activity compared to children who do not engage in physical and sports activities. Also, they found that sports activity improves attention to certain stimuli, i.e. selective attention, which is improved through shorter aerobic monostructural cyclical activities (cycling, swimming, rowing, etc.). The findings of the study (Heisler et al., 2023) showed that children who participated in a sport or physical activity at least once a week achieved significantly better results than children who did not participate in physical activity.



### ***Impact of physical activity on psychosocial health***

Mental health is a state of well-being and efficient functioning in which a person realizes his abilities, fights with the stresses of everyday life, and contributes to his community (Ivanović & Ivanović, 2021). Studies from developed countries indicate that the mental health of a large number of young people is not at an optimal level, and the most common mental health problems in children and young people are depression and anxiety. Also, according to the findings of the study (Ivanović, 2019), a lower risk of developing depression was established among physically active young people, while on the other hand, sedentary behavior increases the risk of developing anxiety and depression among adolescents. Therefore, through various sports successes, children and young people increase their self-confidence, which contributes to the improvement of their mental health. One of the more important factors is participation in sports teams, which enables children to form social communication, thereby increasing the sense of interaction and reducing the feeling of loneliness.

Active engagement in physical and sports activities has a positive effect on the formation of self-confidence and the improvement of the experience of one's own life value outside of the sports context. According to research (Böckler & Singer, 2022), engaging in sports and physical activities contributes more positively than negatively to mental health in children and young people. Positive factors include the development of social-emotional skills, and negative factors include delinquency, conflict between partners or opposing players.

The findings of the study (Mahindru et al., 2023) emphasize the mutual relationship between physical activity and improved mental function, which is reflected in better academic performance in children who participated in additional physical activities at school. Research (López-Gajardo et al. 2023) signals the positive impact of physical and sports activity on mental health, with its significant role, from a psychological, social and cognitive aspect, in the development of children and young people. Physical and sports activity encourages the development of skills for regulating emotions, better concentration and positive peer relationships. In addition, they contribute positively to the psychological well-being of children and young people by raising their self-esteem, reducing psychosocial anxiety and the risk of developing depression.

### ***Impact of sports on motor development***

Engaging in various sports activities affects motor ability and motor skills, which is the foundation for children's development from early childhood to adolescence. This is why it is important to start developing basic motor skills as early as possible, from age 3 to 4, because early motor development leads to better coordination of movements, balance, flexibility and preparation of children for a healthy and active life (Brumnić, 2019).

Before starting training for any sport, it is very important to learn the movement methodology, i.e. movement in all directions. Active participation in sports requires

relevant physical and mental effort because sports involve movement in different directions and various movements of arms and legs, in a limited space and time. First of all, it is important that children receive the basic motor information that they need to master, followed by the process of adaptation to those movements, and finally, when the movements are perfected, they can be gradually accelerated and performed more often (Wang & Wang, 2024).

Regular exercise habits are formed during childhood and adolescence and usually persist throughout life. During adolescence, there is a change in interest, which usually results in young people giving up on sports because they devote time to other obligations, thus losing interest in sports. According to research results (Nobre et al., 2022), a child's health and development require more than two hours of physical exercise per week. For a significant number of children and young people, sports and recreation are of dominant importance, because they improve health, give a positive sense of achievement and affect the formation of healthy habits throughout life. For a significant number of children and young people, sports and recreation are the focus of life, because they improve health. Training increases physical fitness, strengthens the will and helps the individual socialize, and in addition to sports, the individual becomes stronger for other life responsibilities.

According to the research findings (Ivanović & Ivanović, 2023c). Katagiri et al., 2021) the development of motor skills in children and young people is basis for their health and general well-being, since sport has a relevant role in encouraging and developing: a) movement coordination and balance – motor skills, e.g. walking, running, jumping and cycling develop these skills, which helps them in their daily movement and reduces the risk of sports injuries; b) muscle strength and endurance – sports such as swimming, gymnastics and weightlifting c) speed – quick reaction and execution of movements are crucial in many sports, which young athletes develop through training and competition, and g) agility – the ability to perform fast and exact change of direction and movement, e.g. in basketball, tennis and football.

Motor skills contribute to the quality of life of children and young people. Developed motor skills allow them to better participate in the activities of everyday life, reducing the risk of sports injuries and boosting self-confidence. Through all these benefits, motor skills significantly contribute to the quality of life of children and young people, strengthening their experience and overall development.

## **CONCLUSION**

The impact of sports on the quality of life of children, pre adolescents and adolescents shows the significant role that sports play in their psychophysical development. Considering the fundamental aspects of socialization, pedagogical and physical development, it is noted that sport has positive effects on the physical health and mental and social well-being of each individual. Physical activity and sports have been identified as relevant factors in maintaining the optimal health of children and young people. By regularly and systematically participating in sports activities, they develop physical endurance, but also teamwork skills, persistence and self-discipline.

The importance of free time becomes noticeable as a place for developing creativity, testing one's own interests and identifying new passions, which enables the individual to make a decision on how to use free time.

Sports and various physical activities play an important role in meeting the most important needs and interests of children and young people. Participating in sports develops motor skills, a sense of responsibility, self-confidence and discipline. Also, playing sports reduces the stress level, which contributes to better general health and the development of socialization. Through sports competitions, children and young people develop teamwork and interaction, which contributes to the quality of life.

A worryingly high percentage of insufficient physical activity among children and young people, who lose motivation and interest in physical activity, has negative consequences on their physical and mental health. In addition to negative effects on physical health, lack of physical activity generates problems, such as: obesity, reduced self-esteem, stress and anxiety. In addition to physical health and physical endurance, sports enable socialization and the development of social skills in young people. Through team communication with peers and coaches, as well as participation in competitions, children and young people develop basic social skills (cooperation, respect, empathy, and conflict resolution). Sports encourage motivation in children and young people. The tendency towards the realization of sports goals teaches them perseverance, self-discipline and goal-oriented motivation. These experiences motivate them to achieve success in sports, but also in school and other aspects of life. Self-image is completed by participating in sports. Achieving sports success and overcoming challenges intensifies self-confidence and self-awareness in young athletes. Achieving success shapes a positive perception of one's own abilities, which has a strong impact on self-image and belief that they can achieve their goals.

Participation in sports activities contributes to physical health, but also to the development of cognitive functions. Children and young people, through sports challenges, better shape concentration, more intense reactions and the ability to solve problems, which is crucial for their overall development. Sport has a positive effect on the psychological well-being of children, preadolescents and adolescents. Regular and systematic physical and sports activity reduces stress and anxiety, raises the level of self-confidence and contributes to the overall feeling of happiness, which is decisive for their emotional stability and satisfaction with life.

The family, as a fundamental social unit, provides basic support for children's development. Its support, motivation and guidance play a dominant role in children's sports development. A family that motivates physical activity, supports sports goals and promotes values such as responsibility and cooperation, contributes to the quality of life of children and young people. In addition to family, coaches also play a significant role in the sports development of young athletes. Their expertise, advice and pedagogical guidance contribute to the improvement of sports skills, but also to the development of specific characteristics such as persistence, self-confidence and team spirit. Coaches shape sports performance and life skills that young athletes apply outside of the sports field. Definitely, the impact of sports on the quality of life of children and young people should not be underestimated, since it gives a chance for

growth, development, shaping of interpersonal relations and improvement of various areas of life. Thus, sports shape the bodies of young people, their minds and souls, creating the foundation for future efficient and satisfied adults.

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