

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PRACTICE IN THREE ROMANIAN SCHOOLS WITH DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS

SANDOR IOSIF^{1*}, ISIDORI EMANUELE²,
TADDEI FRANCESCO², KALININ RĂZVAN¹

ABSTRACT. The lifestyles of minor ethnic groups in Romania are significantly different due to several habits inherited from ancient times. Being these differences significant, we presume that they could influence the physical activities the people from different ethnic groups practice in their free time. In particular, our study will focus on physical activities practiced by young people from three high schools with curricula taught in Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Slovakian language. The main aim of our paper is to deepen the influence of parents on physical activities practiced by students from the three Romanian ethnic groups mentioned above. The study aims to understand parents' impact on the motivation for physical activity practice in these people. In this regard, we will show some data regarding this influence. The data was collected by a questionnaire administered to three groups of Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Slovakian students from the northern and western part of Romania. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 149 adolescents. Our data shows the primary role played by parents as the main educational agent in influencing and determining the involvement of adolescents in physical activities. In conclusion, this study would want to encourage Romanian parents from the three ethnic groups object of our research to take awareness of their parental and educational role as social agency promoting sport and human values and influencing the motivation for physical activity in their children independently of their cultural, social, economic, and political heritage.

Keywords: *ethnic groups, physical activity, parents, education.*

¹ Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Pandurilor str. #7, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

² University of Rome Foro Italico, Department of Movement, Humanities and Health Sciences, Piazza L. De Bosis #15, Rome, Italy

* Corresponding author: iosif_sandor@yahoo.com

Introduction

The nation of Romania is home to many ethnic groups. The members of these ethnic groups are Romanian citizens but have several cultural and linguistic characteristics and are animated by the will of maintaining a collective identity with regard to culture, traditions, and language of the nation from which their original families come. At the international level, Romania is unanimously recognized as a country very committed to protecting its national minorities.

It is known that minority ethnic groups complement Romanian traditions, history, and culture. Nowadays, about 10.5% of Romania's population is represented by minorities (the rest of 89.5% are Romanians).

The Hungarians and Ukrainians are considered principal minorities and, in a smaller number, the Slovaks. Our study aims to study young people practicing physical activities who are from the three ethnic groups. The sample of our research was taken from the three historical regions situated in the north and west of Romania.

The Hungarian minority in Romania consists of 6.1% of the total population (1,227,623 citizens, according to the 2011 census), and it is the most significant ethnic minority of the country. From a historical point of view, Romanian people always had the most numerous and frequent contacts and interactions with Hungarian people living in the territories of their country.

In the last years, Hungarians living in Romania created and developed an influential network of educational, cultural, and information institutions. The results of their efforts can be seen in the extensive network of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools whose curricula are taught exclusively in Hungarian. Most of these Hungarians live in Maramureş County. In 2002, in the town of Sighetu Marmatiei, it was re-opened a former Hungarian school bearing the name of the pedagogue and revolutionary Leövey Klára (1821–1897), a Hungarian pioneer educator and women's' rights activist, who participated in the 1848 revolution.

The Ukrainians are the third largest ethnic minority in Romania. According to the 2011 Romanian census, they are about 51,703 people, making up 0.3% of the total population. Ukrainians mainly live in northern Romania, in areas close to the Ukrainian border. Over 60% of all Romanian Ukrainians live in Maramureş County (31,234), where they make up 6.77% of the population. Ukrainians make up a majority in seven communes of Maramureş County.

Since 1990, education taught in the Ukrainian language is going back to revive. In some schools in Maramureş, there are subjects taught in the Ukrainian language. In 1997, in Sighetu Marmatiei, secondary school "Taras Sevcenk" with education in the Ukrainian language was re-established.

After 1989, the social life of Slovaks all over Romania acquired a new dimension. Despite the natural process of integration after 1989, the region with the Slovakian population is preserving its specific features. Since the beginning of the nineties, the activities of local Slovakian organizations have been intensifying actions aimed at promoting the cultural, social, and political life of the population in rural and forest areas such as Bihor County.

The Slovakian population living in isolated localities is preserving its traditions and ethnic autonomy. In the vast majority of Slovakian mountain localities, the hard-living conditions did not allow the instruction level of the population to develop as it should be.

There exist Slovakian confessional schools in some areas, but most of the Slovakian schools, because of insufficient financial means, cannot develop a curriculum aimed to promote Slovakian language and cultural heritage. The activity of Slovakian Roman Catholic priests from Bihor County was highly relevant in the consolidation of Slovakian national identity in the region. The Slovak population has obtained and implemented the unitary development of the Slovakian network of schools. Budoii, in Bihor County, hosts the second high school in Romania with Slovakian as the primary teaching language: the Jozef Kozacek High School.

All those institutions we have mentioned contributed and are still contributing to the conservation of the cultural heritage of the three ethnic groups object of our research.

Nowadays, very few data are available on the physical behaviors of Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Slovakian adolescents from Romania. Even fewer are the data on physical activity behavior patterns of adolescents from the historical region of Maramures and Bihor County. Although they are all Romanian citizens, in the adolescents of the three ethnic groups there could be different views regarding the motivational valences and perception of physical activity.

Physical activity and sport are relevant for their contribution to the development and building of modern society. We have supposed that in each ethnic group (the Hungarian, Slovakian and Ukrainian one), there could be tendencies towards specific views and perception of physical activity valence and values (Sandor, Biddle, & Soos, 2010).

After joining the European Union, Romanians' lifestyles went through a significant transformation. Data on how physical activity influences the behavior of Hungarian, Ukrainian and Slovakian adolescents is very scarce, and our study aims to collect information to understand that better.

Some theorists argue that personality can be modeled by practicing physical activity in free time. Furnham (1990) has explored the effects of sport and recreational activities. He has shown that by socializing and changing the

way of life through different patterns of interaction with different individuals, the functioning of personality could be substantially changed.

We are convinced that, on the basis of traditional education and how it is imparted in the three small ethnic groups, the family plays a fundamental role in developing the attitude and motivation of youngsters towards physical and sports activities. The different ethnic ways of life, the tradition, and culture through which parents conceive education within their families play a crucial role in helping children acquire traditional ethnic values through physical activities (Marshall, Biddle *et al.*, 2004).

In the north and western part of Romania, where these ethnic groups live, the economy is based on agriculture, mining, and logging, that is to say, on manual and physical labor. In the last decades, Romanian families, like those from ethnic minorities, due to relevant economic, social, and demographic changes, have experienced significant changes regarding lifestyles (Soos, Biddle, *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, as an adaptation response, the ethnic groups living in Romania have changed their behaviors. The three ethnic groups have adopted a particular and specific way of life, which has affected and influenced the social, economic, political habits of their members. This effect and influence are mirrored in the principal attitudes towards practicing physical activity in free time, mainly active or sedentary behavior.

We present below data on how the Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Slovakian families influence adolescent's involvement in physical activity. Our scope is to provide prospective researchers with useful baseline data to investigate the changes in lifestyle and attitudes towards physical activity by adolescents in areas like northern and western Romania.

The ethnic and traditional lifestyles reflect the sociological status of the families. Therefore, we are interested in understanding what determines or does not the 14-17 years Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Slovakian adolescents' practice of physical activities. Also, we would want to understand whether there are similarities that concern the influence of the family regarding the practice of physical activities.

Methods

1. Participants

A sample of 55 Hungarian, 55 Ukrainian, and 39 Slovakian secondary school students aged between 14-17 years old has taken part in the study. The characteristics of the sample (sample size, gender, age) have been summed up in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample (sample size, age, standard deviation) divided by ethnic group and gender

Participants N (AGE - mean, Std.Dev.)	Ethnic group			
	Hungarian	Slovakian	Ukrainian	Total
Gender				
Female	28 (16.11, 0.96)	26 (15.58, 1.17)	43 (15.37, 0.90)	97 (15.64, 1.03)
Male	27 (16.11, 0.85)	13 (15.38, 1.12)	12 (15.92, 1.00)	52 (15.88, 0.98)
Total	55 (16.11, 0.90)	39 (15.51, 1.14)	55 (15.49, 0.94)	149 (15.72, 1.02)

2. Questionnaire

The questionnaires were administered in the schools where the teaching language is Hungarian (in “Leövey Klára” High School in Sighetu Marmatiei), Ukrainian (in “Taras Sevchenko” High School in Sighetu Marmatiei) and Slovakian (in “Jozef Kozacek” High School, Budoii, Bihor County).

To carry out the research, a questionnaire validated in a previous study was used (Isidori, *et al.*, 2014). The survey was aimed to detect the motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of adolescents concerning physical activity practice. The original Italian version has been translated into Romanian language and validated with a forward-backward translation procedure, verifying its comprehensibility, clarity, and conformity. Each student from the three ethnic groups speaks the Romanian language; therefore, they did not meet any problem in understanding the questions and answering.

In this research, only the data from questions dealing with the influence of parents and various educational agents on the choice and practice of physical activity by the Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Slovakian adolescents were analyzed. Participants responded to the statement, «your parents have influenced you to practice regular physical activity in your free time» and had to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1=at all; 2=less; 3=moderate; 4=much; 5=very much).

When asked, «who did influence you most in choosing the type of physical activity in your free time you are engaged in?» participants had to choose among the following options: 1. Parents; 2. Brothers or sisters; 3. My Physical Education teacher; 4. Another teacher; 5. A coach; 6. My friends; 7. Church; 8. Somebody else/who?

Also, the items from the same questionnaire aimed to detect the influence relating to who has influenced more the start of sports practice in the young Hungarian, Ukrainian and Slovakian have shown again how parents have been more influential than other social agents (codification of answers: A=Thanks

to my parents who have motivated me to join clubs, associations or sports circles; B=In the school through the participation in extracurricular activities; C= Through the suggestion of friends who practice various sports activities; D=Through my Physical Education teacher; E=Thanks to the sports offered within the town council; F=Thanks to the sports activities offered at the county or national level; G=Other).

3. Data analysis

A descriptive analysis was carried out by taking into account all variables of interest. The relationships between the answers and the ethnic groups were analyzed. For this reason, Cramer's V was calculated, and standardized residuals were analyzed to identify significant differences.

Results

Parents influence - Ethnic group

The analysis of the evaluations provided by the participants on the impact of parents in the regular practice of sport based on ethnic groups has shown significant differences (Cramer's $V=.240$, $p<005$). The analyses of the responses and standardized residues show that Ukrainians give greater importance to the influence of parents than other ethnic groups. The frequencies of the answers are significantly lower, compared to other ethnic groups, for the at All-less responses and higher for the "Much-Very much" reactions (fig. 1).

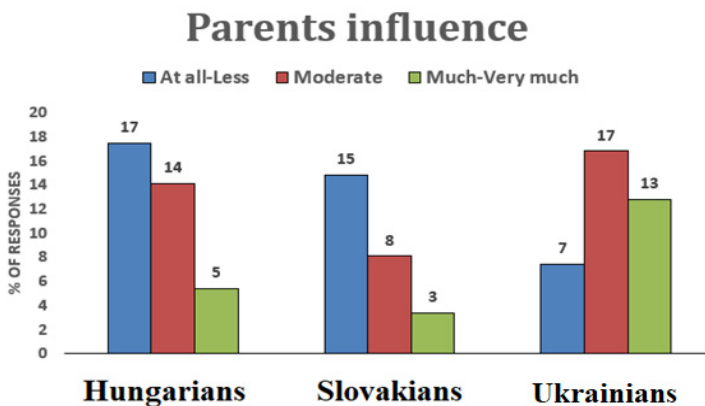


Fig. 1. Ukrainians declare that they give more importance to the influence of parents than other ethnic groups (Cramer's $V=.24$, $P<.005$)

Importance of practice - Ethnic group

Concerning the assessment given by adolescents on the importance of sports practice, the data analysis has shown significant differences (Cramer's $V=.215$, $P<.01$). Slovaks show higher frequencies in the “At all/Less” response than the other groups (Fig. 2).

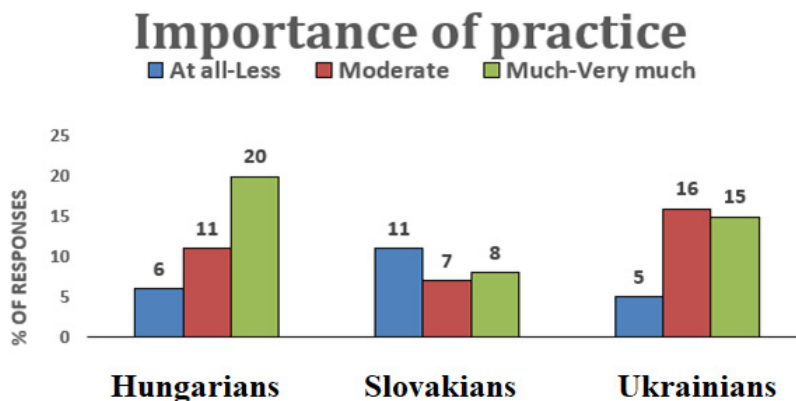


Fig. 2. Slovaks seem to give less importance to the practice of sport than other ethnic groups (Cramer's $V=.24$, $P<.005$)

Physical activity practice by Ethnic group

To the question «Do you practice physical activity and sport as free time activities?». The majority of participants answered “yes” (74.5%) (tab. 2). No significant differences have emerged from the answers by the ethnic groups.

Table 2. Answers to the question:
Do you practice physical activity and sport as free-time activities?

Participants N (%)	Ethnic groups			
	Hungarian	Slovakian	Ukrainian	Total
Physical activity				
YES	41 (74.5%)	28 (71.8%)	42 (76.4%)	111 (74.5%)
NO	14 (25.5%)	11 (28.2%)	13 (23.6%)	38 (25.5%)
Total	55 (100.0%)	39 (100.0%)	55 (100.0%)	149 (100.0%)

Reasons for “yes” by Ethnic group

About the purposes for adolescents to practice physical activity, some differences emerged between ethnic groups (Cramer's $V=0.548$, $P<0.001$). For Slovaks, the predominant reason is physical development (20%), while for Hungarians, it is the harmonious development of Personality (18%). For Ukrainians, the main reason is “maintaining an optimal state of health” (10%), which, taken together with the answer “Personality,” reaches 22% of the total responses.



Fig. 3. Answers to the question *Why do you practice physical activity?* Asterisks indicate significant differences between ethnic groups

Reasons for “no” by ethnic group

The reasons for participants not to exercise are generally lack of interest (*I'm not interested*, 65%) and lack of time (*Lack of time*, 23%). Significant differences emerged among the groups (Cramer's $V=0.495$, $P<0.05$): in Ukrainians,

the answer “Lack of time” has obtained higher frequencies than the other groups (17%), while for Slovaks the most frequent reason is «I don’t want to leave my family» (9%) (Fig. 4).

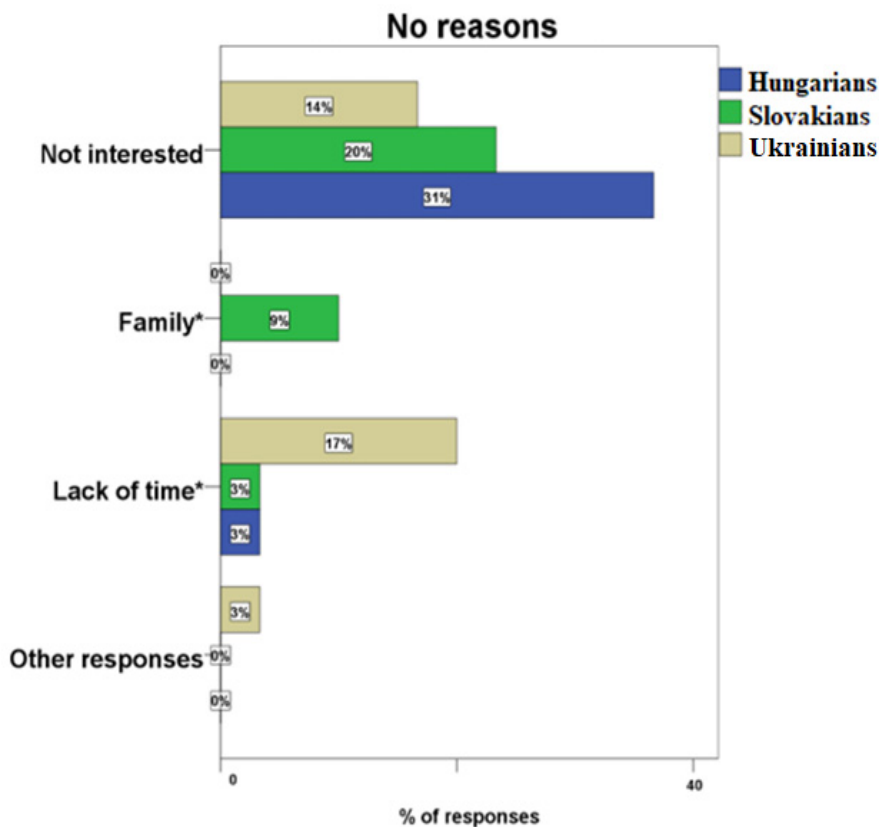


Fig. 4. Reasons for adolescents not to do physical exercise. Asterisks indicate significant differences between ethnic groups

Analysis of answers concerning the question “How did you start” by ethnic group

The answers to the question *How did you start practicing physical activities*, they showed no significant differences between the groups. For all participants, the most frequent responses were: *at the suggestion of friends who practice various sports activities* (34%), *thanks to my parents, who have joined me in clubs*,

associations or sports circles (22%), thanks to advise and guide of the physical education teacher (15%), in the school through participation in extracurricular activities (14%).

Analysis of answers concerning the question “Who did influence you most” by ethnic group

The answers to the question *Who did influence you most in choosing the type of practiced physical activity you practice*, they showed no significant differences between the groups. The answers were very fragmented and difficult to interpret. For all participants, the most frequent responses were: My friends (14%), My Physical Education teacher (13%), Parents (10%), A coach (5%).

Discussion and conclusions

The data collected and used in our study should be carefully interpreted because they were obtained on a rather small sample of individuals. In summary, the data analysis conducted has shown that:

1) Ukrainian adolescents seem to give more importance to the influence of their parents than other ethnic groups in the choice of the physical activity they practice;

2) Slovakian adolescents seem to give less importance to the practice of physical activity than other ethnic groups;

3) the reasons for adolescents to practice physical activities seem to differ according to the ethnic group: for Slovaks, the predominant reason is physical development, while for Hungarians, it seems to be the harmonious development of personality; instead, for Ukrainians, the main reason is maintaining an optimal state of health;

4) as regards to the reasons that influence the decision not to practice sport for Ukrainian adolescents it seems to be the lack of time, while for Slovakian adolescents these reasons deal with the family;

5) all individuals have highlighted the primary role played by friends in influencing the choice to start physical activity practice and, secondly, that of parents;

6) Moreover, in the selection of physical activity, the role of friends seems to prevail, followed by the physical education teacher and parents' one.

More scientific relevance to our study might come, in the future, from the enlargement of the sample of subjects studied. Moreover, it might come from possible case studies one could carry out in the geographical areas of Romania, in which the three ethnic groups we have examined live. It is hoped that, in these studies, a mixed quali-quantitative methodology will be used.

This methodology will allow collecting quantitative data and going hand in hand with the understanding and interpretation, through narrative methods, of the values deriving from the cultural and social contexts in which Romanian adolescents with different ethnic origins live and practice physical activity.

REFERENCES

- Furnham, A. (1990). *Personality and demographic determinants of leisure and sports preference and performance*. International Journal of Sport Psychology, 21:3, 218-236.
- Isidori, E., De Santis, M.G., & Ramos Echazarreta R., (2014). *Sport, famiglia ed educazione: uno studio pilota sulle influenze dei genitori nella scelta delle pratiche sportive degli studenti universitari di scienze motorie*. La famiglia. Rivista di problemi familiari, 48:1, 261-279.
- Marshall S.J, Biddle S.J.H., Gorely T., Cameron N., & Murdey I. (2004). *Relationships between media use, body fatness and physical activity in children and youth: a meta-analysis*. International Journal of Obesity, 28:10, 1238-1246.
- Sandor I., Biddle S.J.H, & Soos I. (2010). *The Relation Physical Activity-Rural Space Concerning Romanian 13-18 Age Youth*. Journal of Settlements and Spatial Planning, 1:1, 18-21.
- Soos I., Biddle S. J. H, Boros-Balint I., Sandor I, Szabo P., Hamar P., & Simonek J. (2014). *Prevalence of sedentary behavior in young people in Romania and Slovakia*. European Physical Education Review, 18:1, 19-46, DOI: 10.1177/1356336X11430659.

