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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Correlates of adults' participation in sport and frequency of sport

Corrélat de la participation des adultes en sport et de la fréquence avec laquelle ils le pratiquent

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KEYWORDS

Hurdle model;
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Summary The aim of this research is to analyze the correlates of adults' participation in sport and frequency of sport. A hurdle model approach comprising a binary choice regression to model participation in sport and a count model to address frequency of sport was applied to analyze the data obtained from 516 personal interviews in a Portuguese city. Participation in sport and frequent sport are associated with men, younger people, not married and without children under 2 years, nonsmokers and regular drinkers and with good perceived health. However, participation in sport and frequency of sport participation are associated with different levels of perception of the benefits of sport activity. Whereas awareness of the health and enjoyment benefits fosters participation, fitness, socializing and appearance might increase the frequency of sport. Sport communication strategies might play a prominent role in persuading potential participants of the benefits of sport activity and frequency.

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MOTS CLÉS

Modèle « Hurdle » ;

Résumé Le but de cette recherche est d'analyser les corrélats de la participation des adultes en sport et de la fréquence avec laquelle ils pratiquent le sport. Un modèle « Hurdle », comprenant un modèle de régression de choix binaire pour modéliser la participation en sport et un modèle de comptage numérique pour traiter la fréquence du sport, a été appliqué pour analyser

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Bénéfices perçus ;
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Corrélat

les données obtenues par 516 entretiens personnels dans une ville portugaise. La participation en sport ainsi que la fréquence sont associés aux hommes, jeunes, non mariés et sans enfants en dessous de deux ans, qui ne fument pas ni ne boivent régulièrement, et perçus en bonne santé. Cependant, la participation en sport et la fréquence de participation en sport sont associées à différents niveaux de perception des bénéfices de l'activité sportive. Tandis que le savoir relatif aux bénéfices sur la santé et sur le plaisir encourage la participation, la forme physique, la socialisation et l'apparence pourraient augmenter la fréquence de l'activité physique. Les stratégies de communication du sport pourraient jouer un rôle de premier plan pour persuader les participants potentiels des bénéfices de l'activité sportive et de sa fréquence.

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1. Introduction

Regular participation in sport among adults has become an important part of a healthy lifestyle benefiting both the mind and the body [1]. On the other hand, physical inactivity has negative implications not only for the individuals, but also for society as a whole, namely in terms of the related financial costs and the implications for government in health care policy, and it has become a major public health concern [1]. At the European level, with the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in late 2009, Member States recognized the importance of setting a process in motion whereby physical activity and sport are actively promoted not only with a view to increasing health, physical and mental well-being across the European Union (EU), but also to improve the role that sport can play in boosting the social structure. Citizens' right to a culture of physical fitness and sport is also established in national Constitutions.¹ However, despite these guidelines and the well-recognized benefits of regular physical activity for both participants and communities, there is evidence that large numbers of people in Europe still report being inactive. According to a recent Euro Barometer study [2] on the 27 Member States' sport participation statistics, 61% of EU citizens report that they seldom or never do sports, 33% practice sport with some regularity (at least once a week) and 8% do sports regularly (five times a week or more). Moreover, sport participation in Europe seems to have stagnated [3].

Collectively, these findings emphasize the need to improve sport participation rates for health, economic and social reasons. However, since quality sport participation data is an important prerequisite for designing interventions that effectively meet community needs [4], research is required to identify the correlates of sport participation. Both sport managers and policy makers are motivated to learn more about the variables associated with sport participation and the possible barriers and incentives involved in sport demand. Consequently, there has been growing interest in sport participation research in Europe in recent decades [5,6]. Different lines of research have been developed to address this issue and a wide range of demographic,

psychological, behavioral, social and environmental factors are associated with adult participation in sport.

A large body of the literature has investigated the participation decision (yes/no) and strives to identify the correlates of people's decision to participate in sport. Recent studies have also studied the correlates of the frequency of participation among practitioners [7–10]. These studies have shown that the factors driving the decision to participate or not in sports are different from those determining the frequency of sports. Accordingly, this study is based on the hypothesis that the correlates of sport participation and sport frequency vary.

A recent study by Downward et al. [9] maintained that a policy simply promoting the health benefits of sport participation might not be sufficient and it highlighted that social interaction, personal development and living life to the full are associated with sport participation. The study by Lera-López and Rapún-Gárate [3] revealed that motives such as recreation, keeping slim, fitness, competition and professional development correlate with sport frequency. Collectively, these results suggest the important role of motivation variables in this type of research.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the correlates of citizens' sport participation and frequency by considering the role of a wide range of sociodemographic and behavioral variables as well as motivational variables. The particular contribution of the paper is to examine the association between perceived benefits of both sport participation and frequency.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section provides an overview of the empirical studies of sport activity behavior among adults. This is followed by a description of the methodology adopted in this study, including the research context, the model and data sources employed in the estimations. Some descriptive statistics and the results of the model estimations are then presented and interpreted. We finish with a summary of the main findings and an indication of implications and opportunities for further research.

2. Literature review

A number of sport participation studies targeted European countries, such as Belgium [11], England [12,13], Spain [3,10,14], Scotland [8] and Germany [15,16]. Hovemann and Wicker [17] analyzed sport participation in 25 Member States.

¹ For Example, Article 79 of the Portuguese Constitution establishes the fundamental right of citizens to a culture of physical fitness and sport.

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