



PARTICIPATION MOTIVATION AMONG YOUNG SOCCER ATHLETES: RESEARCH EVIDENCE FROM GREECE

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to determine participation motives of youth soccer players and to examine their participation motives with regard to their age, sport experience, and training volume levels. The sample of this empirical research consisted of 171 young soccer athletes from 16 different soccer teams, all located in the prefecture of Ilia, Western Greece. The well-known sports participation motivation questionnaire (PMQ) was used. Analysis of data was conducted by the use non-parametric k-independent-samples t-tests. The results showed that among the components of the sports participation motivation, significant differences were observed for the aspects of achievement and the aspect of finding friendship. No other significant differences were found. The results of this study confirm that sport experience and the athletes' age is effective in motivating athletes' continuation and commitment to their physical activity.

Keywords: soccer, sport motivation, young soccer athletes, motivation participation, motivation scale

1. Introduction

One of the most prominent factors that stimulate and maintain individuals' participation in physical activity is their motivation (Roychowdhury, 2018). Understanding the motives for youth sport participation has become important issue for sport practitioners and researchers in the last few years. Sport psychology literature defines sport motivation as the combination of personality factors, social factors, and cognitive processes, which become dominant when a person takes part in an important physical exercise, or starts competing with others and aims for perfection (Klint & Weiss, 1987; Roberts, 1992). Indeed, during the last decades, the opportunity for individuals to participate in sport activities has tremendously increased, which is the most significant reason why

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researchers thrive to determine the importance of sport participation motivation (Cunningham & Kwon, 2003). Examining sport participation from a participant's perspective, a motivated behavior is primarily affected by a sportsman's individual characteristics (Gould, Feltz & Weiss, 1985; Weinberg & Gould, 2011). Specifically, an athlete's sport motivation is primarily determined by the person's personality traits, necessities and purposes. Hence, what seems to be extremely important in assessing the motivation for participation in sport activities is to understand the priorities and processes of participation motivation in order to carry on and maintain physical activity (Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989). The perspective of sport and exercise psychology is twofold. The first is analysis pertaining to how actions in sports are regulated/controlled by psychic processes, and the second is how actions in sports and exercise regulate/control psychic processes (cognitive, motivational, volitional and affective/emotional processes (Hackfort, Duda & Lidor, 2005).

2. Literature Review

Sports psychology examines the psychological principles, processes, and psychological effects of sports on participants. At the same time, it examines the psychological processes and strategies through which the participants in sports are supported in order to maximize their performance, but also in the direction of psychological empowerment. Also, it focuses on the study of behavior, psychological processes, emotional, cognitive, motivational, or psychomotor processes. It includes issues related to those who are systematically involved in organized sports, i.e. athletes, coaches, administrators, support staff, parents and spectators (Theodorakis, Goudas, & Papaioannou, 2003). In addition, Landers & Arent (2007) report that exercise and physical activity often help people improve their cognitive function, reduce stress, and effectively treat depression, increase positive mood, increase self-esteem, and self-awareness. Biddle (1997) surveyed all of the articles published in the *International Journal of Sport Psychology (IJSP)* and the *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology (JSEP)*; called *Journal of Sport Psychology* from 1979 to 1987) from 1985 to 1994. The most researched topics were motivation, anxiety, imagery, self-efficacy/confidence, exercise and mental health, and group dynamics, while simultaneously it was revealed that most of the publications consisted of experimental (30.3%) or survey (38.0%) methodologies.

Indeed, young athletes can very easily be taught a variety of physical and psychological skills, such as mental practice, goal setting, relaxation, self-concentration and use them in a variety of situations, such as play, sports, school, at home, in their conflicts, as well as when they are afraid, when they get sick, or when they are injured. The development of these psychological skills helps these young athletes to be aware of their body, to be able to control their body, to concentrate, as well as to control their stress (Orlick & McCaffrey, 1991). In most primary education schools mental training programs are implemented through games and playful learning approaches. Considerable consistency has been found across both sport and age levels in the relative importance of the different enjoyment factors. Factors that are interpreted as being intrinsic to the sport

activity (excitement of the sport, personal accomplishment, improving one's skills, testing skills against others, and just doing the skills) are consistently rated as being most important, whereas more extrinsic or outcome-related factors (pleasing others, winning rewards, winning the game) are consistently rated least important (Wankel & Kreissel, 1985).

In the last few years, numerous different theoretical and empirical approaches have been proposed to help the research community develop a standardized instrument to effectively examine and study the motives that underlie an athlete's participation to any kind of sport activity. One of the first approaches appeared to study participation motivation involved the examination of the theoretical correlates of different motives that pertain to physical activity. Examples of such questionnaires that were developed leveraging this method included the 28-item Sport Motivation Scale (SMS; Fortier, Vallerand, Biere, & Provencher, 1995), the 32-item Exercise Motivation Scale (EMS; Li, 1999), the 44-item Exercise Motivation Inventory (EMI; Markland & Hardy, 1993), the 69-item Exercise Motivation Inventory-2 (EMI-2; Markland & Ingledew, 1997), the 23-item Motivation for Physical Activity Measure (MPAM), and the 30-item Motivation for Physical Activity Measure – Revised (MPAM-R; Ryan, Frederick, Lepes, Rubio, & Sheldon, 1997).

3. Material and Methods

Participants included 171 young soccer athletes (male athletes: $n=150$, 87,7%; female athletes: $n=21$, 12,3%). These young athletes came from 16 different soccer teams (14 male soccer teams and 2 female soccer teams). All the soccer teams were located in the prefecture of Ilia, Western Greece. The sample included participants at four age levels (18 years old and below, 18-20 years old, 20-23 years old, 23 years old and over). The sample also included participants at four experience levels (2 years and less, 3-4 years, 5-6 years, 7 years and more), and also included participants at three training volume levels (5 hours per week and less, 6-8 hours per week, more than 9 hours per week). The selection of the sample occurred through a non-probability casual sampling. For this purpose, all coaches and officials were contacted before the beginning of the competitions and informed about the nature and objectives of the study and the principle of confidentiality. Next, their authorization was obtained to contact and invite the athletes to participate in the study. Data were collected before the beginning of the training. The questionnaire was distributed among the participants and was collected after 20 minutes.

A modified version of the Participation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ; Gill et al., 1983), which has been widely used in several studies of motives to participate in youth sports, was employed together with demographical items that included gender, age, training volume, and sport experience. Totally, the research instrument consisted of 34 items, i.e 4 demographic items, and 30 Likert-type items offered in a three level scale (1 to 3). The original English version of the PMQ (Gill et al., 1983) has been one of the most frequently research instrument employed in the sport participation research field. PMQ has constantly permitted a fairly balanced comparison between numerous related studies

(Buonamano et al., 1995; Garyfallos & Asterios, 2011; Guillén-García et al., 2005; Gürbüz et al., 2007; Kirkby et al., 1999; Koivula, 1999; Salselas et al., 2007; Shang, 1997; Sirard et al., 2006; Zahariadis & Biddle, 2000). Also, PMQ almost represents a weighted measurement scale instrument that it has proved to have satisfactory reliability, thus leading to unbiased results. In this study, the questionnaire evaluated motivational factors affecting sport participation based on eight factors, namely: achievement/status, teamwork, fitness, energy release, situational factors, skill development, friendship, and fun through a three-level scale (very important=3, somewhat important=2, and not important at all=1). The reliability of this questionnaire has been reported by Zahariadis and Biddle (2000), using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, as 0.88. Also, the total internal consistency of the sport participation motivation questionnaire has been estimated as 0.87. In this study, the internal consistency for the subscales was found to be generally adequate (coefficients alpha ranged from .67 to .90). More analytically, Cronbach's alpha for the dimensions of achievement/status, teamwork, fitness, energy release, situational factors, skill development, friendship, and fun was .86, .75, .90, .67, .72, .75, .80 and .85 respectively. Descriptive statistics were used to measure the frequencies of the demographic variables of the questionnaire, along with the Likert-type items that measure the subscales of sport participation motivation. Moreover, inferential tests, such as independent-samples t-test (parametric test), and Friedman test (non-parametric test) were used to compare the levels of sports participation motivation of young soccer athletes, regarding their age, their sport experience, and their training volume. Data were analyzed using SPSS software version 23. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

4. Results and Discussion

Examining the demographics of the participants, research results revealed the following:

- A. Gender: the participants were male soccer players (N=150, 87,7%) and female soccer players (N=21, 12,3%).
- B. Age: the participants were between 20-23 years old (n=91, 53,2%), between 18-20 years old (n=52, 30,4%), above 23 years old (n=15, 8,8%), and under 18 years old (n=13, 7,6%).
- C. Training Volume: the participants were training for about 6-8 hours per week (n=116, 67,8%), for 5 hours and less (n=43, 25,1%), and for 9 hours and more per week (n=12, 7%).
- D. Sport Experience: the participants had experience in sports between 5-6 years of experience (n=78, 45,6%), between 3-4 years of experience (n=72, 42,1%), less than 2 years of experience in sports (n=14, 8,2%), and more than 7 years of experience in sports (n=7, 4,1%).

Regarding the descriptive statistics of the PMQ subscales, the results indicated that the young soccer athletes' most important motives for participating in physical activity were: (a) to experience fun, excitement, and challenge (M=2,317, SD=0,289) (b) the existence of situational factors (M=2,308, SD=,0277) (c) to make friends (M=2,307, SD=0,410) and d) to develop skills (M=2,301, SD=0,381). The least important motives for

participating in physical activity were (a) to release energy ($M=0,227$, $SD=0,444$) (b) obtain achievement and status ($M=2,228$, $SD=0,221$) (c) to achieve teamwork ($M=2,292$, $SD=0,365$) and d) to maintain fitness ($M=2,298$, $SD=0,337$). These findings corroborate earlier research findings.

Table 1: Frequencies of the demographic variable "Gender"

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	150	87,7
Female	21	12,3
Total	171	100,0

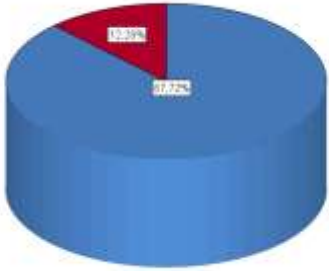


Table 2: Frequencies of the demographic variable "Age"

Age	Frequency	Percent
Under 18	13	7,6
18-20	52	30,4
20-23	91	53,2
Above 23	15	8,8
Total	171	100,0

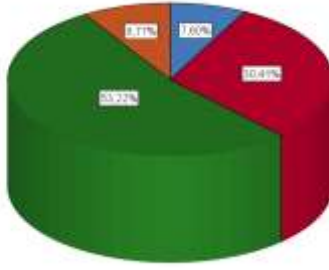


Table 3: Frequencies of the demographic variable "Training Volume"

Training Volume	Frequency	Percent
5 hours and less	43	25,1
6-8 hours	116	67,8
9 hours and more	12	7,0
Total	171	100,0

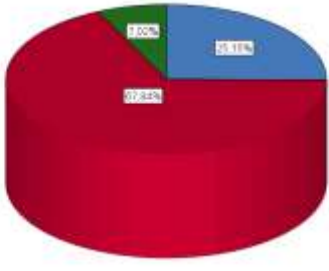


Table 4: Frequencies of the demographic variable "Sport Experience"

Sport Experience	Frequency	Percent
2 years and less	14	8,2
3-4 years	72	42,1
5-6 years	78	45,6
7 years and more	7	4,1
Total	171	100,0

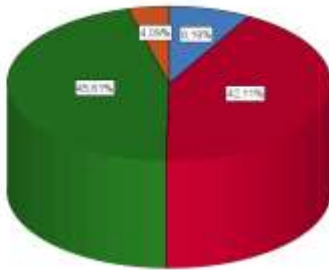


Table 5: Descriptive statistics of PMQ subscales

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fun	171	2,3173	,28929
Situational Factors	171	2,3080	,27773
Friendship	171	2,3070	,41039
Skills Development	171	2,3012	,38148
Fitness	171	2,2982	,33733
Teamwork	171	2,2924	,36553
Achievement / Status	171	2,2851	,22165
Energy Release	171	2,2778	,44428
Valid N (listwise)	171		

The inferential statistics (Kruskal-Wallis, non-parametric k-independent samples tests), that were employed to examine for possible significant differences between different groups of participants, regarding the subscales of PMQ, showed that there were no significant differences between the different groups of participants, for any of the 8 PMQ subscales.

Table 6: Kruskal-Wallis test for differences regarding the age of participants

Test Statistics^{a,b}								
	Achievement / Status	Teamwork	Fitness	Energy Release	Situational Factors	Skills Development	Friendship	Fun
Kruskal-Wallis H	5,191	1,295	2,526	2,478	1,846	5,659	2,022	1,577
df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	,158	,730	,471	,479	,605	,129	,568	,665
a. Kruskal Wallis Test								
b. Grouping Variable: Age								

Table 7: Kruskal-Wallis test for differences regarding the training volume of participants

Test Statistics^{a,b}								
	Achievement / Status	Teamwork	Fitness	Energy Release	Situational Factors	Skills Development	Friendship	Fun
Kruskal-Wallis H	,444	4,059	,064	1,565	3,107	1,754	5,035	1,565
df	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	,801	,131	,969	,457	,211	,416	,081	,457
a. Kruskal Wallis Test								
b. Grouping Variable: Training Volume								

Table 8: Kruskal-Wallis test for differences regarding the sport experience of participants

Test Statistics^{a,b}								
	Achievement / Status	Teamwork	Fitness	Energy Release	Situational Factors	Skills Development	Friendship	Fun
Kruskal-Wallis H	1,885	1,858	1,637	4,299	,681	,420	,764	3,870
df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	,597	,602	,651	,231	,878	,936	,858	,276
a. Kruskal Wallis Test								
b. Grouping Variable: Sport Experience								

5. Conclusion

This study intended to determine participation motives of youth soccer players and examine their participation motives with regard to their age, sport experience, and training volume levels. Analysis revealed no significant differences among young soccer athletes of different sport experience, regarding their participation motives, based on all the subscales of PMQ. This means that, there is no significant difference between the dimensions of the sport participation motivation for young soccer athletes of different age, of different training volume, and of different sport experience. These results are similar to those of Jacobson (2014), who did not find any difference between the motivation of team and individual athletes. In his research, only the enjoyment component in team athletes was higher than individual athletes. Probably one of the reasons for the lack of difference in the Jacobson (2014) research, was the different sport disciplines and the low number of participants. These cases probably affected the difference in results. Also, the ranking of motives for participation in sports revealed that fun, situational factors, and friendship are the most important factors for young soccer athletes to participate in sport activities. Therefore, considering that motivation plays an important role in the onset and continuation of exercise, understanding the most important motivations from the perspective of young soccer athletes is very important, and will help extend the percentages of participation and therefore limit the percentages of young athletes' dropout of sports.

However, despite the valuable results obtained, the present study also had some limitations. The data were collected from a limited area in Greece, and the sample size was not weighted between genders. In this study, Gill et al. (1983) questionnaire was used. Therefore, it may not cover all the motivations of athletes. It is suggested that these limitations be considered in future studies.

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Appendix

Table 9: The Participation Motivation Questionnaire
(Adapted from Gill, D. L., Gross, J. B., and Huddleston, S. 1983)

Participation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ)			
	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important at all
I want to improve my skills	1	2	3
I want to be with my friends	1	2	3
I like to win	1	2	3
I want to get rid of energy	1	2	3
I like to play sport	1	2	3
I want to stay in shape	1	2	3
I like the excitement	1	2	3
I like the teamwork	1	2	3
My parents or close friends want me to play	1	2	3
I want to learn new skills	1	2	3
I like to meet new friends	1	2	3
I like to do something I'm good at	1	2	3
I want to release tension	1	2	3
I like the rewards	1	2	3
I like to get exercise	1	2	3
I like to have something to do	1	2	3
I like the action	1	2	3
I like the team spirit	1	2	3
I like to get out of the house	1	2	3
I like to compete	1	2	3
I like to feel important	1	2	3
I like being on a team	1	2	3
I want to play sport at a higher level	1	2	3
I want to be physically fit	1	2	3
I want to be popular	1	2	3
I like the challenge	1	2	3
I like the teacher or coaches	1	2	3
I want to gain status or recognition	1	2	3
I like to use the equipment or facilities	1	2	3

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