

## **PARENTS' INFLUENCE ON ATTITUDES OF ADOLESCENTS TOWARDS SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN A CHANGING SOCIETY: THE CASE OF TRANSYLVANIA**

**SANDOR IOSIF<sup>1\*</sup>, ISIDORI EMANUELE<sup>2</sup>, TADDEI FRANCESCO<sup>2</sup>,  
STEFĂNESCU HOREA LEONIDA<sup>1</sup>, KALININ RĂZVAN<sup>1</sup>**

**ABSTRACT.** Nowadays, minimal data are available on active behaviors of young people in Romania, relatively new entry in the European Union. Within this country, physical activity behavior patterns of adolescents aged 14-18 years from the region of Transylvania's have been scarcely studied. To examine and better understand these behaviors, a Likert-scale-based questionnaire was administered to a sample of 750 adolescents. The questionnaire aimed to detect the involvement of the Romanian adolescents from Transylvania region in physical activity and sport and to understand who was influencing them the most in choosing the type of physical activity and sport. Our data show the role of parents, as main educational agents, in influencing the involvement of adolescents in physical activity and sport. Parental influence seems to be more significant for girls and boys living in rural areas than for those from cities. In conclusion, this study wants to encourage, via educational support, Romanian parents to reflect on their own characteristics, orientations and pedagogical models to better play their role as educators in Romanian society.

**Keywords:** *physical activity, parents, family, education, values.*

**ABSTRACT. Influența părinților în ceea ce privește atitudinea adolescenților față de activitatea fizică și sportivă într-o societate în schimbare: cazul Transilvaniei.** În zilele noastre, în România, țară integrată recent în Uniunea Europeană, sunt disponibile date minime privind comportamentele active ale tinerilor. Tiparele comportamentului fizic al adolescenților în vârstă de 14-18 ani din regiunea Transilvaniei au fost rareori studiate. Pentru a examina și pentru a

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<sup>1</sup> Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

<sup>2</sup> University of Rome Foro Italico, Department of Movement, Humanities and Health Sciences, Rome, Italy

\* Corresponding Author: iosif\_sandor@yahoo.com

Înțelege mai bine aceste comportamente, unui eșantion de 750 adolescenți a fost administrat un chestionar bazat pe scara Likert. Chestionarul conceput în scopul de a detecta implicarea adolescenților români din regiunea Transilvania în activitatea fizică și sportivă și să scoată în evidență influența anumitor categorii de persoane care au influențat cel mai mult alegerea tipului de activitate fizică și sportivă. Datele obținute scot în evidență rolul părinților, ca principalii agenți educaționali, în influențarea implicării adolescenților în activitatea fizică și în sportivă. Influența parentală pare a fi mai semnificativă pentru fetele și băieții care trăiesc în mediul rural decât pentru cei din orașe. În concluzie, acest studiu dorește să încurajeze părinții români, prin intermediul sprijinului educațional, ca să reflecteze asupra propriilor caracteristici, orientări și modele pedagogice pentru a-și juca mai bine rolul de educatori în societatea românească.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *activitate fizică, părinți, familie, educație, valori.*

## Introduction

To increase the quality of life is a primary objective of modern society, to which every citizen must participate. In modern society, sport and physical activities occupy an increasingly important place both in terms of quantitative and qualitative increase. An active and systematic activity can ensure the independence of the individual-medium-society relationship. This activity must be done rationally. We must take into account the physiological particularities of those who practice it, the society and the environment they live in.

Practicing exercise and sport is a right to all people; actually, having formative goals and moral, aesthetic and cultural valences, sport is addressed to all people of all social categories. Its practice expresses the need of human beings for movement and desire of expressing their psychomotor potential. This need is the starting point for the search for a healthy way of life.

By practicing them in clubs, fitness centers outdoors, sport and physical activity provide people with an outstanding opportunity to develop new relationships the possibility of improving communication skills. In current society, with new, significant political, social, demographic and economic changes, the practice of sport and physical activity acquires new valences and meanings related fun, risk, esthetic values, communication, social integration, and so on. Actually, the practice of physical activity and sport influences the personality of young people. Often, physical activities are practiced to improve the physical condition for prevention purposes in moderate programs with social effects. These effects deal with the group involvement and changes in body image of people who are involved in.

A good physical condition implies the person's ability to function with force and liveliness, without excessive fatigue, with enough energy to prevent physical stress. Such a condition can significantly reduce the risk of mental disorders in adults of both genders. Regularly practiced, physical activity and sport can stimulate emotional functions so that stress factors are more easily tolerated.

After the collapse of the socialist bloc and joining the European Union, Romania has increased the lifestyle quality of its population. Romanians' behaviors have become more similar to those of Western Europe, especially in the higher socioeconomic status (SES) groups (Biddle et al., 2009; Soos et al., 2014).

Childhood obesity is rising steadily in the industrialized world, and low levels of physical activity are likely to be a primary cause (Kipping et al., 2012; Biddle et al., 2004). Some theorists claim that personality can be modeled by sport and physical exercise. Furnham (1990) has stressed the effects of sport and recreational activities as a means for socializing and changing the lifestyle through different patterns of interaction with various individuals that can substantially influence the functioning of personality.

Family plays a crucial role in changing adolescents' attitudes and the perception of physical activity and sport. Families are responsible for the way adolescents perceive physical activity and sport and acquire values through them. This is particularly true for parents who are models for their adolescents. Parents having a high level of education and social status tend to focus more on active behaviors. They are mainly interested in helping their adolescents learn to live according to a healthy lifestyle gained through sport and physical activity.

For parents, to have a positive influence on their adolescents, it is important not to have a mere practical conception of sport and physical activity but be aware of their real role and function as educators and parents taking care of the future of their children. They must be capable of justifying and explaining to their adolescents why they must be physically active in a coherent way in the lifespan. The parents must be role models for their adolescents. Also, they have to be provided with tools making them capable of clarifying their knowledge and values like educators.

Among the main determinant factors through which parents influence the perception of physical activity and sport of their adolescents, there is the social status of the family, its social environment, the size of the family, housing conditions, parents' education, level of education, urbanization, everyday circumstances, and nutrition.

Also, the social status of a family can be influenced by several environmental conditions, such as social affiliation, social relations, cultural environment, habits, and so on.

Early investigations on the influence of parents and family about the perception of sport and physical activity by children and adolescents have stressed the complexity of this influence (Ponthieux, Barker 1965; Prudham 1969, Quell, Sattel, 1976; Farnosi, 2011).

Different social classes, ethnic groups, and different cultures have different child-rearing habits. The social situation of the family is mainly influenced by father's education, his occupational status, and of income of parents. Renson et al. (1979) concluded that the father's occupational status is, more than education, a dominant factor in influencing the attitude towards physical activity and sport in children. There is no doubt, however, that occupation and education are closely related.

The social circumstances of the family affect adolescents' development, personality and motor behaviors. A better social situation and education of parents create a better educational situation (Farnosi, 2011). Urbanization and territorial environment are two other factors influencing attitude towards Physical Activity and sport in youngsters.

Urbanization, which is related to the settlement of population, can influence both motor behaviors and development of adolescents. In the same way, different geographical environments and the lifestyles (rural or urban) tied to them can have a similar impact.

## **Theoretical framework**

Therefore, in this study, we present data on how family influences adolescents involvement in sport and physical activity. Our scope is to provide perspective researchers with useful baseline data to investigate the changes in lifestyle and attitudes towards sport and physical activity by adolescents in the area of Transylvania region.

The Research on sports socialization, both theoretical and experimental, has highlighted the role played by the following main educational agents (Isidori et al., 2014):

- 1) family;
- 2) school;
- 3) peer group;
- 4) coaches;
- 5) sports promotion institutions;
- 6) mass media;
- 7) spectators and fans.

In the last three decades, the Romanian family, due to relevant economic, social and demographic changes, has experienced significant changes regarding lifestyles. Therefore, as an adaptation response, people have changed their behaviors. In so doing, each geographical area has adopted a particular and specific way of life, which has affected and influenced the behavior of its inhabitants. This effect and influence are mirrored in two main attitudes towards physical activity and sport, mainly active or sedentary behavior.

In our study, we will try to show the importance of family as the primary educational agent capable of influencing the perception of and the attitude towards physical activity and sport of Romanian adolescents aged 14-18 years from Transylvania.

## Method

### Participants

750 students aged between 14 and 18 years have participated in the study. The sample was composed of 164 females, and 181 males from urban geographical areas and 199 females and 206 males from rural geographical areas (Table 1) randomly selected in different primary and secondary schools from eight Romanian counties (Covasna, Harghita, Bistrita-Nasaud, Maramures, Salaj, Bihor and Cluj). The sample was represented by adolescents belonging to families whose classification of socioeconomic status by parents' occupation can be largely considered on the 'average' for SES. All students involved in the study were regular students attending regular classes of Physical Education in the school.

**Table 1.** Number and age of the research participants, divided by gender and birthplace.

Participants N (mean age, SD)		Birthplace		
		Urban	Rural	Total
Gender	Female	164 (15.81, 1.37)	199 (16.22, 1.17)	363 (16.03, 1.28)
	Male	181 (15.89, 1.31)	206 (15.90, 1.42)	387 (15.90, 1.37)
Total		345 (15.85, 1.34)	405 (16.05, 1.31)	750 (15.96, 1.33)

## Questionnaire

To carry out the research, a questionnaire validated in a previous study was used (Isidori et al., 2014). The questionnaire aimed to detect the motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of students concerning physical and sports practice. The original Italian version has been translated into Romanian language and validated with a forward-backward process, verifying its comprehensibility, clarity, and conformity.

In this work, only the data relating to questions on the influence of parents and various educational agents on the choice and practice of sports activity by Romanian adolescents were analyzed. Participants responded to the statement «your parents have influenced you in order to practice regular physical activity and sport» and have 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 and sport 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?

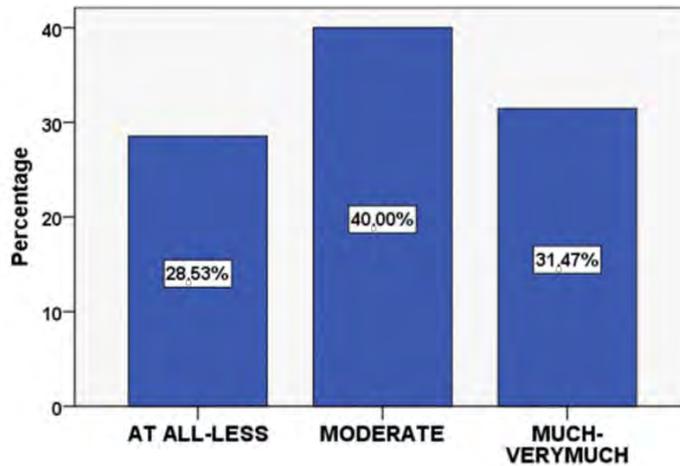
## Data analysis

A descriptive analysis was carried out by taking into account and focusing on all variables of interest. Firstly, the percentages for the answers were calculated. Secondly, the relationships between the answers, gender, and birthplace variables were analyzed. For this reason, the Cramer's V was calculated, and standardized residuals were analyzed to identify significant differences.

## Results

### 1) *Parents' influence*

The data show that overall 40% of the students who participated in the survey consider the influence of parents to be moderate in physical activity and sport regular practice. In the analysis, the answers 1 and 2 (at all/less) and 4 and 5 (much/very much) were grouped. 28.53% of the participants declared that the parents had a little or no influence on their attitudes towards and the choices related to physical activity and sport, while 31.47% considered the influence of parents relevant or very relevant (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Parents' influence on physical activity and sport regularly practiced by adolescents

2) *Who did influence you most in choosing the type of physical activity?*

The data showed that friends are those who have influenced most (18.0%) and, after that, the parents (14.4%). The other preferences are distributed in this way: brothers or sisters 3.2%; the physical education teacher 7.6%; another teacher 1.1%, the coach 5.85%; the church (0.4%) (Tab.2). Taking into account multiple responses that also include the previous categories, parents (35.4%) seem to have a more significant influence than friends (24.3%). Using this criterion, also the physical education teacher seems to have a certain weight in the choice of students (14.1%).

3) *Parents' influence and Gender*

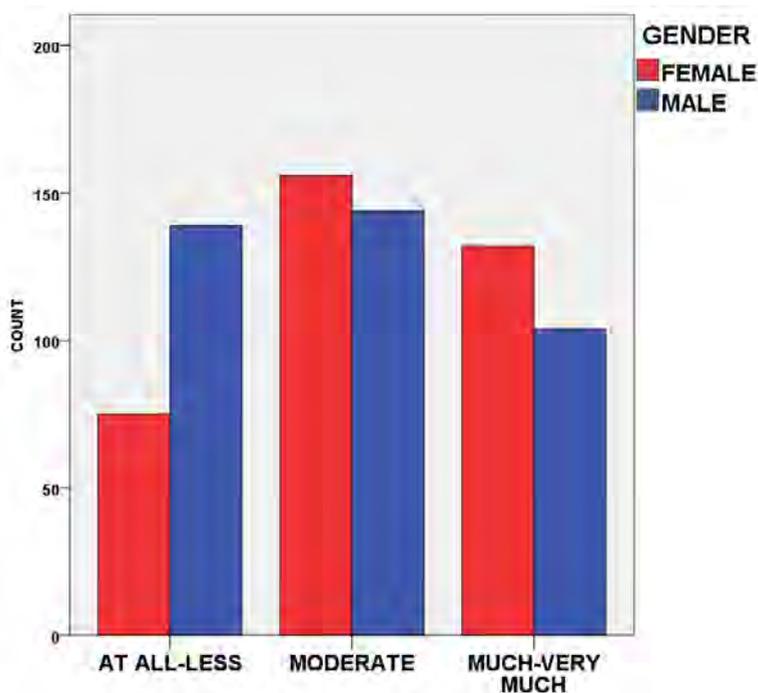
The differences are significant (Cramer's  $V=0.172$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The analysis of standardized residuals shows differences in the responses according to gender (at all/less, female=10.0%, male=18.5%). A more significant number of male students, compared to the females, claims to be at all or less influenced by the parents in the regular practice of physical and sport activity (Fig. 3).

4) *Parents' influence and Birthplace*

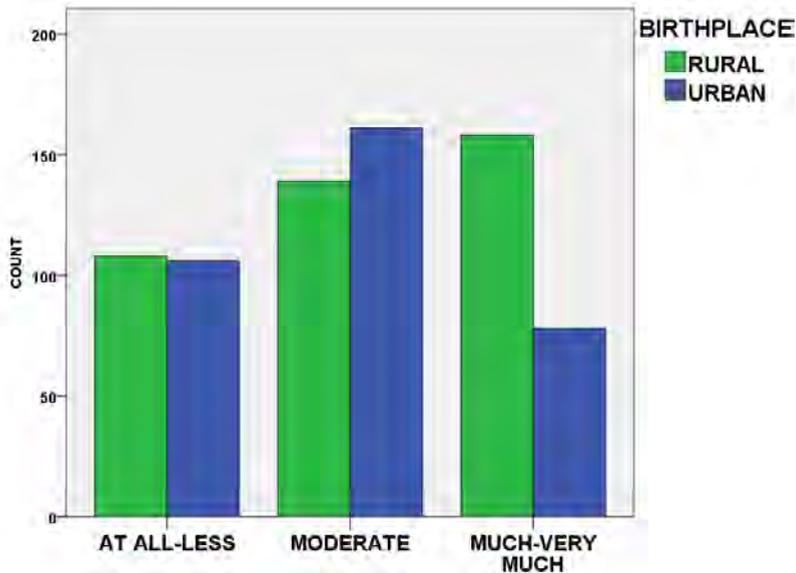
We have found significant differences regarding the relationship between parents influence and birthplace (Cramer's  $V=0.179$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Standardized residuals analysis shows that a more significant number of students living in rural areas (21.1%) considers the influence of parents in sports practice to be very strong (much-very much) compared to students living in an urban context (10.4%) (Fig. 4).

**Table 2.** Frequencies and percentages of answers to the question «Who did influence you most in choosing the type of physical activity?» (n=632)

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Parents	91	14.4	14.4
Brothers or Sisters	20	3.2	17.6
My Physical Education Teacher	48	7.6	25.2
Another teacher	7	1.1	26.3
A Coach	37	5.9	32.1
My friends	114	18.0	50.2
Church	3	0.5	50.6
Somebody else	49	7.8	58.4
Parents + Brothers or Sisters + Other Responses	52	8.2	66.6
Parents + P.E. Teacher	41	6.5	73.1
Parents + My Friends	40	6.3	79.4
OtherResponses	130	20.6	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>632</b>	<b>100.0</b>	



**Figure 3.** Influence of parents on the regular practice of physical activity and sport according to gender



**Figure 4.** Influence of parents in the regular practice of physical and sport activity according to birthplace

## Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of parents influence on the preferences and attitudes towards physical activity and sport in Romanian adolescents can detect and reveal socio-economic status, social problems and the policies of governmental bodies for what it refers to sports facilities, as well as the policies of the labor market (more than 3millions of Romanians work abroad).

Our data show that 40% of respondents consider the influence of parents to be moderate in sports practice; 31.47% believe that such influence is very significant, while 28.53% think it is very low or inexistent. These opinions seem to vary according to gender and place of residence. The males affirm to be less influenced than females by their parents in the practice of physical and sport activities. Instead, compared to their peers living in urban areas, adolescents living in rural areas consider parents as the most influent agents on their lives. About the influence regarding the choice of the type of physical activity, the role of friends is primary and is followed by that of parents. Taking into account the same categories (parents and friends) provided along with other answers, parents generally assume greater relevance for adolescents (35.4%) than their friends (24.3%).

The questionnaire we have adapted and utilized in this study wants to encourage Romanian parents to reflect on their characteristics, orientations and pedagogical models. This study shows the importance of family and parents as primary educational agents in making adolescents involved in physical activity and sport.

In conclusion, we can affirm that it is always the philosophy regarding the orientation towards and the conceiving of sport and physical activity adopted by the family to make these two bodily practices an outstanding means for educating Transylvanian adolescents by giving them the opportunity to become active members of Romanian and European society.

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