

HEALTH OR RIVALRY - MOTIVATION BEHIND AMATEUR PARTICIPATION IN LONG DISTANCE RUNNING EVENTS IN POLAND AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Paweł F. Nowak

Faculty of Physical Education and Physiotherapy, Opole University of Technology, Opole, Poland

Abstract

The aim of the study is to determine motivation of runners from Poland and the Czech Republic in the context of their participation in running competitions.

In this study, correlations between age, experience, training period and motives for participation in the competition by comparing the cross-country runners from both countries was researched. The study examined the place of health in the structure of motives.

The study involved 847 runners from Poland and 118 from the Czech Republic. The method of a diagnostic survey was carried out using questionnaires.

Competition with ourselves, overcoming our own limits, and improving physical fitness are the main motives of runners who participate in running events. Motives related to health are placed in subsequent positions. Polish runners are more sport goal-oriented; this may result from the fact that in the Czech Republic recreational sport is more grounded in culture. Running events are an important element of cross-country passion, since up to nearly 45% of runners from the Czech Republic and more than half from Poland would limit the practice, or stop it, if they did not have eligibility to participate in competitions.

Organizers of sports and recreational events involving road running should rather educate runners in the direction of healthy behaviors. They should enrich the content of health education emphasizing the value of active participation and healthy lifestyle over sports rivalry.

Key words: runners, motivation, health promotion, running events, recreational sport.

Introduction

Open cross-country races, including marathon running, are sports and recreational events. Their goal is to select the winners in both the general and in very popular age categories.

These events are created to promote a specific sport and a healthy active lifestyle. Events of this type are not characterized by egalitarianism; any amateur competes in the common run with professional athletes. The organizers main idea is to promote sport and a healthy lifestyle.

Physical activity is an important part of a healthy life style; popularization of it is a key strategy of public health in many countries – developing and high developed. But there is a problem with popularization of physical activity

for health [1]. The culture of fans, observing sports teams, and the culture of passive participation in popular sport events is promoted disproportionately in relation to active participation in mass forms of recreation. Too low a percentage of people is physically active on a systematic basis. There is consequently is a problem with motivation to maintain regular effort [2]. One factor with regard to motivating participation in physical activity is by entering competitions. But rivalry may take many forms and can also lead to negative health consequences. Competitions may override health benefits, emphasizing the maximization of physical fitness – even at the expense of health.

Open access mass events - sports and recreational - are meetings of enthusiasts of a specific physical activity. There comprise very

diverse social groups. It is worth examining the motives of participation in competitions to be able to organize events more efficiently, because recreational events are recognized tools of promoting a healthy lifestyle [3].

In the Czech Republic recreational sport is well established and has long-standing traditions and in Poland in recent years a rapid development in mass street racing and a growing community of amateur runners has been seen [4].

The aim of the study is to determine the runners' motivations from Poland and the Czech Republic in the context of their participation in running competitions.

In this study, correlations between age, experience, training periods and motives for participation in competitions was researched through comparing cross-country runners from both countries. The study isolated the place of health in the structure of motives.

Material and methods

The study involved 847 runners from Poland and 118 from the Czech Republic. All subjects were registered on Poland's largest Internet portal for runners, uniting during the study almost 9 thousand users who have personal profiles. The method of a diagnostic survey was carried out using questionnaires. During the study of the issues, covert participant observation was also used; this helped to formulate conclusions for this study.) An anonymous questionnaire survey was sent via the Internet to verified people (regularly training and competing in competitions for at least a year). Closed questions were related to training experience and their level of training speed and attitudes to training if it does not bind with the start in the competition. However, the main task of the respondents was to assign to the 5-point scale values for each of the 14 listed motives for participation in running competitions. The collected material was statistically analyzed using Statistica 12.5. To study the correlations between variables Tau Kendall correlation was used. To assess the significance of differences between variables the non-parametric U Mann-Whitney test was applied. To group the motives, multivariate clustering analysis with Ward agglomeration was

applied by using Euclidean distance. The analyses were assumed as relevant effects, for which the probability value was lower than the accepted level of significance of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$).

Analysis of results

In the group of runners from Poland 131 women (15.5%) and 716 men (84.5%) were observed and in the group of runners from the Czech Republic 39 women (33.1%) and 79 men (66.9%) were observed. The average age of respondents was: 35.8 years for runners from Poland and 36.5 years runners from the Czech Republic. The training period significantly differentiates runners from both countries (6 years old for Poles, and 23 years for Czechs), the difference is statistically significant ($Z = -15.099$, $P = 0.000$). The average number of training sessions per week (approx. 4) does not differentiate significantly between the study groups. However, the Poles mostly run more kilometers during the week (52.5 km) than Czech runners (46.9 km) ($Z = 3.046$; $p = 0.002$).

Poles are more determined than the Czechs to participate in a competition. As many as 42.9% say they would significantly reduce their training, if they did not have the eligibility to participate in competitions, and 9.3% would resign from training at all. Most of the runners from the Czech Republic (55.1%) can systematically train without the necessity of participation in competition. However, the percentage who cannot imagine running without participation in running events is disputable, because 39% would limit their training, and 5.9% of runners would stop it completely.

Motivation for participation in running events

Among many motivating participation factors in running competitions, runners from both Poland and the Czech Republic rated competing with themselves on the top ranking, followed by improving their physical fitness, tab. 1. For the Polish runners in comparison with the Czech athletes, important motives are the ability to overcome their own boundaries - setting personal records, the organization, rank and tradition of the event, but for runners from the Czech Republic it is more important to relieve

stress, the ability to improve well-being, and satisfaction with the completion of the race (to overcome a distance, e.g. a marathon). For runners, health as the participation motive in the event is very important, because the assessment of the Poles made it possible to classify it only as sixth in the rankings, and in the case of Czech runners ninth. Competition with others is a motive that both compared groups of runners

classified in tenth place based on ratings. Fashion has the lowest value of all the reasons given. Runners from both countries do not rely on fashion while participating in running events.

Statistically significant differences between the values broadcast by individual motives among runners from the compared groups were calculated. In all these cases, the Poles gave higher scores for individual motives.

Tab. 1. Rank motives while participating in running events with Polish and Czech runners

Motivation factors - POLES	\bar{x}	rank	Motivation factors – CZECHS	\bar{x}
competition with himself*	4.63	1	competition with himself*	4.26
physical fitness	4.48	2	physical fitness	4.20
record of life*	4.32	3	relieve stress	4.13
relieve stress	4.29	4	the satisfaction of completion*	3.94
the satisfaction of completion*	4.24	5	record of life*	3.71
organization and rank of events	3.90	6	improving body shape	3.61
health	3.77	7	organization and rank of events	3.60
place of event	3.76	8	place of event	3.58
improving body shape	3.69	9	health	3.55
competition with other*	3.26	10	competition with other*	2.91
commemorative medal*	3.13	11	the size of the event*	2.74
to be in various ways attractive to others*	3.13	12	to be in various ways attractive to others*	2.64
the size of the event*	3.02	13	commemorative medal *	2.53
fashion*	1.47	14	fashion*	1.42

*differences statistically significant for $p < 0.05$

Motivation and age, training period and the amount of training

The analysis of the runners' correlation from Poland shows that motives associated with the competition fall with age, such as beating personal records and desiring to be in various ways attractive to others, while motives such as health, getting rid of stress, satisfaction with the completion of the race and a good organization of the event grow. The length of training period is negatively correlated with most analyzed motives. With the increase in

the average amount of training and mileage a decline is seen in the field of health motivation, the desire to escape stress, the satisfaction of completing a distance or receiving a commemorative medal. With the increase in the amount of training, motives associated with rivalry and the desire to improve records (athletic performance) grow.

Among runners from the Czech Republic, there was no statistically significant correlation with analyzed motives for participation in the competition connected with increasing age.

However, with regard to experience of the training period, motives related to the satisfaction of the completion of the race grow. The improvement of athletic performance, physical ability or appearance of your body also grow. With the increase in the average amount of training and completed kilometers for Czech runners, health, body shape improvement, physical fitness, satisfaction with the completion of the competition and escape from stress are less important.

The structure of motivation

With data clustering performed for all runners' motifs from Poland and the Czech Republic

two large groups can be seen. In the first group motives are associated with the size of the event, the desire to compete, to obtain a symbol of success i.e. a medal for finishing which combines with the need to be fashionable and attractive to others. In the second large cluster of 9 motives two subgroups can be seen: the first one related to physical fitness, stress, records, self-rivalry and satisfaction with the completion of the competition, while the second one combines motives related to improving their health and the organization and the attractiveness of the venue.

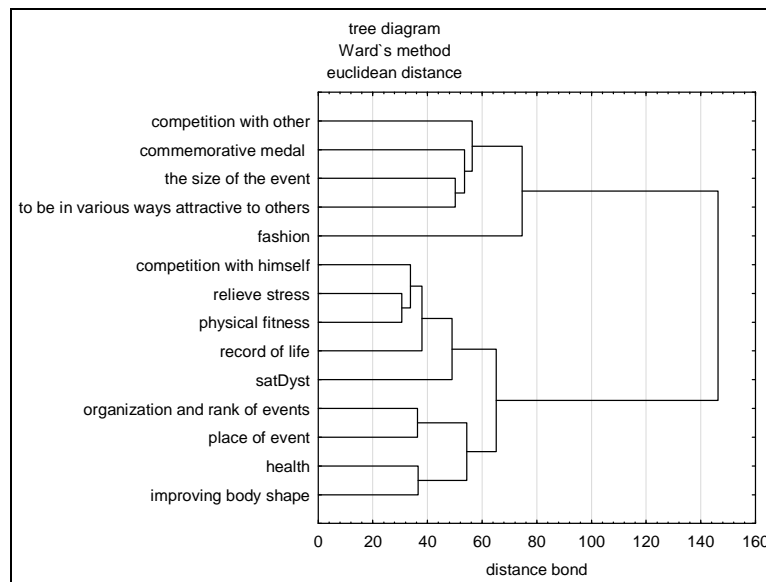


Fig. 1. Structure of the relationship between the individual motives of participation in running events

Discussion

The researchers point out that there are many factors that motivate physical activity which change with age. According to Reykowski [5] motivational tension occurs when a state of affairs, which could reduce tensivity, is noticed; and also when there is a conviction that the value of gratification is available. The most effective interventions are those which are based on multi-dimensional socio-ecological strategies. One way is to create opportunities to participate in an event in which a person can check the level of his physical fitness and succeed in their abilities [6]. According to the

report-Poland Runs, 95% of runners claim that they run for health and well-being and only 35% to improve sports performance. Most of those who run regularly-58% do so to compete [7].

Rivalry is a natural primary human need, recreational sport is accessible to everyone who makes a convenient platform to meet the needs of a higher order, related to social recognition and improving itself. The growing number of organized running events in Poland leads to too frequent starts and the pursuit of sporting successes, the paradigm of health should be the basis for recreational sport [8].

Many enthusiastic runners cross the border between recreational and competitive sport that brings the risk of injury and other negative physical consequences. Many people forget that this is a fun way to spend free time and surrender their whole lives to a passion that becomes an addiction with negative consequences for the runner and his environment [9, 10]. Some studies show that runners are able to train despite injury. Despite numerous injuries resulting from overloads caused by exhausting workouts or competitions, runners in the vast majority, believe that running and participating in marathons and races longer than a marathon is a healthy way of spending free time.

Most experienced runners would not interrupt or limit training, despite awareness that this may harm their health [11].

It is worth noting that from the point of view of health, systematic training and a healthy lifestyle is a valuable factor in determining public health rather than development-commercial events promoting rivalries in a different form in which a person overloads his body.

Conclusions

- Running events are an important element of cross-country passion, since up to nearly 45% of runners from the Czech Republic and more than half from Poland would limit the practice, or stop it, if they did not have eligibility to participate in the competition.
- Competition with ourselves, overcoming our own limits, and improving physical fitness are the main motives of runners who participate in running events. Motives related to health are placed in subsequent positions. Polish runners are more sport goal-oriented, this may result from the fact that in the Czech Republic recreational sport is more grounded in culture.
- Organizers of sports and recreational events focussed on road running should rather educate runners in the pursuit of healthy behaviors. They should enrich the content of health education, emphasizing the value of active participation and a healthy lifestyle over sports rivalry.

References

1. Khan K. M., Thompson A. M., Blair S. N., Sallis J. F., Powell K. E., Bull F. C., Bauman A. E. (2012). Sport and exercise as contributors to the health of nations. *Lancet*, 380, 59–64.
2. Brunet J., Sabiston C. M. (2011). Exploring motivation for physical activity across the adult lifespan. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 12, 99–105.
3. Murphy N. M., Bauman A. (2007). Mass sporting and physical activity events – are they “bread and circuses” or public health interventions to increase population levels of physical activity? *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 4, 193–202.
4. Nowak P. F. (2013). Rozwój wybranych aspektów rekreacji fizycznej w Polsce po 1989 roku - na przykładzie masowych imprez sportowo-rekreacyjnych. In: J. Iskra, R. Tataruch, C. Kuśnierz (Eds.), *Wykorzystanie badań naukowych w wychowaniu fizycznym i sporcie* (pp. 35–48). Politechnika Opolska, Opole.
5. Reykowski J. (1985). Emocje i motywacja. In: T. Tomaszewski (Ed.), *Psychologia*. PWN, Warszawa.
6. Heath G. W., Parra D. C., Sarmiento O. L., Andersen L. B., Owen N., Goenka S., Montes F., Brownson R. C. (2012). Evidence-based intervention in physical activity: lessons from around the world. *Lancet*, 380, 272–281.
7. Raport Polska Biega (2014). *Narodowy Spis Biegaczy 2014*. Agora, Warszawa.
8. Nowak P. F. (2010). Sport rekreacyjny – na pograniczu wartości prozdrowotnych. *Zdrowie – Kultura Zdrowotna – Edukacja*, 6, 129–134.
9. Hausenblas H. A., Downs D. S. (2002). Exercise dependence: a systematic review. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 3, 89–123.
10. Paradis K. F., Cooke L. M., Martin L. J., Hall C. R. (2013). Too much of a good thing? Examining the relationship between passion for exercise and exercise dependence. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 14, 493–500.
11. Nowak P. F., Supiński J. (2014). Uczestnictwo w biegach maratońskich a zdrowotność polskich biegaczy. *Rozprawy Naukowe AWF we Wrocławiu*, 45(2), 41–47.

12. Williams P. T. (1997). Relationship of distance run per week to coronary heart disease risk factors in 8283 male runners the national runners' health study. *Arch Intern Med.*, 157, 191–198.
13. Nesti M. S. (2016). Exercise for health: Serious fun for the whole person? *Journal of Sport and Health Science*, 5, 135–138.

Correspondence

Paweł F. Nowak
E-mail: p.nowak@po.opole.pl