

Investigating Factors Affecting the Development of Public Sports and Well-Being in Medical Universities

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Abstract

Background: The purpose of this study was to identify the factors affecting the development of public sports and well-being in Iran's medical universities.

Methods: The present study employed a qualitative design, and the foundation theory was used to construct a conceptual model for the research. The statistical population included professors of sports management, managers and experts working in medical universities and sports organizations, and physical education coaches and teachers in medical universities. Purposeful sampling was performed, and a total of 14 interviews were conducted until saturation was reached. The data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and analyzed by open, axial, and selective coding.

Results: The factors affecting the development of public sports and health measures in Iran's medical universities were categorized into three classes, including causal, contextual, and intervening factors. In relation to causal factors, 13 sub-categories and four main categories were identified. Regarding contextual factors, 45 sub-categories were identified in 7 main categories, and with regard to intervening factors, there were 34 sub-categories under 8 main categories.

Conclusions: The results of this research can be provided as a roadmap to relevant organizations, such as the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and all medical universities and their managers, to formulate effective strategies to expand public sports and improve the desired health outcomes.

Keywords: Public Sports; Well-being; University of Medical Sciences; Physical Health; Iran

1. Background

With the expansion of urbanization, development of commercial systems, and mechanization of activities, people's access to various necessary services has increased. In parallel, activities have become more specialized and automated, leading to a reduction in people's physical activity. In the present era, sports have gained a valuable position and role in the economy, health, entertainment, education, younger generations' lifestyle, social communication, disease prevention, and preventing many social vices and ethical deviations, among numerous other applications (1). Moreover, the most important part of sports that is closely related to social health and vitality, by summarizing many of sports' fundamental functions, is universal sports or sports for all (2). To understand the concept of universal sports, familiarity with related concepts seems to be necessary. Several international organizations, such as

the European Section of Universal Sports, TAFISA, the International Olympic Committee, and the United Nations, have provided various definitions for universal sports. In general, universal sports require creating opportunities and a desirable environment through the cooperation of all organizations involved (governmental and non-governmental) in a way that every person, regardless of gender, age, abilities, socioeconomic status, and race, can participate in physical and sports activities with the aim of improving health, vitality, and social relationships. All of these organizations share a national responsibility to ensure that every citizen has equal rights to participate in sports and physical activities, demanding the substantial contribution of government and non-governmental organizations (3). Nowadays, about 50 sports around the world are recognized as universal sports, ranging from gentle running



to Olympic sports fields. Some other experts consider universal sports as a sport that is generally executable in any condition as leisure activities without the need for specialized facilities and equipment in order to improve health (4). Other reasons for encouraging universal sports include gaining energy and pleasure, enriching leisure time, gaining physical health and fitness, improving occupational relationships, establishing and expanding social connections, improving lifestyle, preventing and treating diseases, enjoying the benefits of sports, feeling happy, risk-free energy discharge and toxin removal, weight management, body fitness, and nurturing social emotions (2).

In Iran, numerous organizations and departments consider themselves responsible for public sports, including the General Sports Federation, the General Sports Deputy of the Ministry of Sports and Youth, municipalities, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, etc., yet not many people participate in public sports compared to other countries. Moreover, due to the tendency of physical education managers and sports media toward championship sports, less attention has been paid to public sports so far (5). In this regard, a study reported that only 19% of Iranians participate in public sports, an area that countries like Finland, the Netherlands, and Germany are leading with 81%, 77%, and 75%, respectively (6). The philosophy of public sports encourages citizens to exercise and engage in physical activities and demands policymakers to use their position to promote this goal and provide opportunities for public participation. Research results show that governments should prioritize the expansion of public sports when planning long-term policies; otherwise, they should expect outbreaks of diseases associated with a sedentary lifestyle and physical inactivity, absenteeism due to such diseases, increased mortality, and decreased public health (6, 7). Like any other system, public sports also require formulating general goals, strategies, and operational plans to guide the direction of movement, avoid repetition or going astray, and waste financial, human, physical, and informational resources. One of the most important duties of sports policymakers is to expand sports among the general public. The United Nations, in 2003, designated sports as a social right and stated that having the opportunity to participate in sports and physical activities is a right of every human being, and governments are obliged to provide such opportunities for everyone (8).

Given the aforementioned, the aim of this research was to design a model for the development of sports and health in Iran's medical universities. As important scientific centers, medical universities in Iran play a crucial role in the development and expansion of sports within and outside the university. The deep impact of these centers inside and outside the university has caused them to be recognized as an important pioneer

in expanding public sports in the country. Regarding the substantial personal and social benefits of sports, appropriate science-based plans should be considered to develop sports activities in universities. The lack of comprehensive studies and developmental models in this area has made the utilization of all the capacities of these universities to develop sports impossible and risk-born. As mentioned earlier, no comprehensive study has been conducted so far on the development of sports in Iran's medical universities, noting the presence of a gap in this area. On the other hand, this issue harbors substantial theoretical importance since it can provide significant contributions to the expansion of public sports in universities and society. Furthermore, the results of this research can serve as a roadmap for relevant organizations, such as the Ministry of Health and all medical universities, as well as managers to develop sports in medical universities and their members, including students, managers, employees, nurses, etc.

2. Objectives

This research aimed to provide a comprehensive model for the development of sports and identify the factors affecting this important task in the medical universities of Iran.

3. Methods

The present study utilized a qualitative approach, specifically the grounded theory, to construct a conceptual model for the development of public sports in Iran's medical universities. The use of qualitative research methods is essential when exploring the underlying aspects of a phenomenon and understanding it in social, human, and behavioral contexts. Quantitative methods do not guide the researcher to tangible results, so in this study, we employed a qualitative approach (9). The grounded theory is used when we need to explain a process. When existing theories cannot explain a process, one can formulate a theory based on available data using the grounded theory. In this study, a systematic approach was adopted. Initially, a literature review was conducted to gather the current knowledge about the research variable. Then, we performed the description and analysis of the research related to sports development in medical universities. This analysis in the first step of the research led to an improvement in knowledge and the development of interview guidelines for the second step (i.e., in-depth interviews), where the grounded theory was used to construct the proposed research model. The grounded theory offers a qualitative research approach that uses a set of data to construct a theory (10).

The statistical population of this study included all informed stakeholders in the field of universal sports

development, who were divided into two groups: (1) academic experts and scientists and (2) executive experts and managers. In the first group, professors of sports management were included, and the second group consisted of managers, experts, and physical education instructors in medical universities, sports organizations, and coaches. Sampling was purposeful, leading to the enrollment of 14 people, who participated in 14 interviews to reach theoretical data saturation. In this regard, Glaser and Strauss (1994) stated that in a well-conducted qualitative study with an evolutionary and sequential sampling approach, saturation will be reached with about 12 participants, and the number of participants is unlikely to exceed 20 (11).

To develop the research tool in the first step of the study (i.e., the literature review), the researcher reviewed relevant studies and identified the main and influential components of sports development in medical universities. Websites, information portals, books, and Persian and English articles were reviewed to explore the theoretical foundations and background of previous research using library studies. These sources were then used as a guide for conducting the interviews in the second step of the research. Interviewing offers one of the most common methods of data collection using the grounded theory. In this study, in addition to note-

taking, the researcher obtained permission from the interviewee to record the interview using a specialized audio recording device. Potential participants were contacted, and those who wished to participate were interviewed at a scheduled time and location. In this regard, a guide to the interview process was initially sent to the participant, which included the title, objectives, and general questions of the interview to familiarize him/her with the topic of discussion.

In order to assess the reliability of the research process and interviews, test-retest reliability was used. In order to calculate test-retest reliability, a number of the interviews were selected as samples, and each one was coded twice within a short and specific time interval. The codes identified for each interview on the two occasions were compared, and the retest method was employed to determine the stability of the coding process. This method is subjected to the impact of the coder's practice (experience) and memory, which may lead to changes in the reliability of the coding process. In each of the interviews, similar codes identified on the two occasions were identified as "agreements", and dissimilar codes were identified as "disagreements." Table 1 summarizes the method used for calculating the reliability between the codes identified by the researcher.

Table 1. Calculation of Interview Reliability Using the Test-retest Method

No.	Interview Title	Total Codes	Total Agreements	Total Disagreements	Test-retest Reliability (%)
1	P1	36	14	3	90
2	P6	21	8	6	77
3	P11	19	10	3	84
	Total	76	32	12	84

As shown in Table 1, the total number of codes identified on two occasions within a 30-day interval was 76, with a total of 32 agreements and 12 disagreements between the codes. The test-retest reliability of the interviews conducted in this study using the formula provided was 84%. Since this level of reliability was higher than 60% (Streiner and Norman, 2004), the reliability of the coding process was acceptable. In order to assess the validity of this study, the researcher followed validation standards in a seven-stage process, including the selection of the topic, designing questions and research objectives, interviewing, replicating important and key interview codes, analyzing responses, verifying results, data collection, and reporting or presenting data to the audience. Data analysis in qualitative studies can be performed during the data collection process because the final analysis is a heavy and difficult task (12). Therefore, it is important to design a systematic method for categorizing the data obtained from interviews and then converting them into codes (13) using a paradigmatic coding pattern based on data theory, a pattern that is

created through a systematic coding process, consisting of three steps: open, axial, and selective coding (14). During the third step of coding (i.e., selective coding), the researcher develops a theory on the relationship between the concepts obtained in the axial coding paradigm. In fact, this step is a process of integrating and improving the theory (15). As explained above, in the first step of the study, qualitative data analysis methods were used based on in-depth interviews. In this step, open, axial, and selective coding patterns were used to analyze and categorize the data, and the theory was prepared and developed by analyzing the relationships between the concepts that emerged based on the grounded theory model.

4. Results

Table 2 provides a brief description of the demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, age, education level, work experience, and their field of activity.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees

Interview Code	Gender	Age	Education level	Work Experience	Field of Activity			
P1	Female	42	Master's of injury prevention and correction	17	Sports coach and instructor at medical universities	Sports organization managers and experts	Faculty member in the field of sports management	Physical education managers or experts at universities
P2	Male	45	Master's in sports management	22				•
P3	Female	40	Ph.D. in sports management (student)	12				•
P4	Male	53	Ph.D. in sports management	18			•	•
P5	Male	38	Ph.D. student in sports physiology	10		•		
P6	Male	35	Ph.D. student in sports management	7				•
P7	Male	32	Master's in Sports Management	7	•			
P8	Male	50	Master's in physical education	23		•		
P9	Male	53	Ph.D. in sports management	21			•	
P10	Male	41	Ph.D. in sports management	8			•	
P11	Female	45	Ph.D. in medical physics	10				•
P12	Female	35	Ph.D. in sports physiology	11	•			
P13	Male	29	Bachelor's in physical education and sports science	3				•
P14	male	38	Phd in sports management	4			•	

The results of Table 2 show that there were 14 interviewees, consisting of 11 males (78.57%) and 3 females (21.43%). In terms of age, 1 person (14.29%) was under 30 years old; 35.71% (5 people) were between the ages of 30 and 39 years; 35.71% (5 people) were between the ages of 40 and 49 years, and the remaining 21.43% (3 people) were over 49 years old. In terms of education level, 1 person (7.14%) had a Bachelor's degree; 28.57% (4 people) had a Master's degree; 21.43% (3 people) were Ph.D. students, and 42.86% (6 people) had a postgraduate degree. Furthermore, 35.71% (5 people) had less than 10 years of work experi-

ence, 42.86% (6 people) had between 10 and 20 years of work experience, and the remaining 21.43% (3 people) had over 20 years of work experience. Out of the participants, 42.86% (6 people) were physical education managers or experts at medical universities; 28.57% (4 people) were faculty members in the field of Sports Management; 14.29% (2 people) were managers or experts at Sports organizations, and 14.29% (2 people) were Sports coaches or instructors at medical universities. In order to obtain the data, after reviewing and studying the literature in the first step, the researcher held face-to-face interviews with

the interviewees.

As shown in Table 3, the qualitative analysis of the data showed that the factors affecting sports development in Iran's medical universities could be classified under three categories: causal, contextual, and intervening factors. In

relation to causal factors, 13 sub-categories and four main categories were identified. Regarding contextual factors, 45 sub-categories were obtained under 7 main categories, and regarding intervening factors, 34 sub-categories and 8 main categories were identified.

Table 3. Factors Affecting the Development of Sports in Medical Universities of Iran

Topic(s)	Sub-topics	Main Concepts
Causal factors	Individual factors	Lack of student participation in sports
		Inadequate participation of managers and employees in sports
		Sports not being a daily habit among students and employees.
	Managerial factors	Confusion among senior managers of the Ministry of Health
		Lack of a regular and consistent sports development program in the Ministry of Health
		Multiplicity of organizations and managers
	Health-related factors	A gap between implementers and top managers
		An increase in immobility-related diseases
		An increase in overweight and obesity
		An increase in skeletal abnormalities among students
	Underlying factors	Psychological pressures on students due to reasons such as being away from the family
		The existence of sports talents among students
	Contextual factors	Individual and familial contexts; The position of women's sports; Economic factors
Sports culture in students' families		
Sports literacy among students and employees		
Understanding the benefits and necessity of exercising		
Physical and skill abilities of students and employees		
Students' perception of sports developmental patterns		
Students and employees' expectations of sports goals and needs		
Students and employees' social skills		
Students and employees' awareness of sports achievements		
Students and employees' expectations of sports requirements and criteria		
Parents' attitudes towards students' sports activities		
Attention to sports infrastructure for women		
Society and university acceptance of women's sports		
Women's share of the university sports budget		
The budget allocated to women's sports		
Women's ranking as sports managers in universities and ministries		
Medical universities' participation in sports activities		
Costs of sports services based on perceived value		
Inflation rate in the country		
Attention of benefactors to financial support for sports in universities		
Attention of families to the costs and investments in sports		
Costs of sports equipment and supplies		
Structure of sports in medical universities		
The country's policies regarding all-inclusive development of educational and sports equity		
The prioritization of sports and physical activities in ministries and universities		
Separation of universal and championship sports		

Intervening factors	Structural fields	Social values and norms regarding physical sports activities
		Comprehensive plans for sports development in the country
		Suitable space for physical education during school hours
	Infrastructural fields	The existence of health stations in the green spaces of universities
		Quantity and quality of sports facilities
		Attractiveness of sports spaces (design, color, architecture)
		Attention to sports infrastructure for people with disabilities
		Special sports spaces for women
		Status of natural environments promoting sports activities in the region (mountains, forests, rivers)
		Fair distribution of sports facilities and equipment in universities across the country
		Safety and security of sports facilities
		Attitudes of ministerial and university managers towards sports
		Sports literacy among managers, employees, and professors
	Managerial fields	The way of thinking and philosophy of university sports among planners
		Level of support from local and regional media for university sports activities
		Level of support from municipalities, governors, and city councils for physical education in universities
	Supporting fields	Support from the Ministry of Sports and Youth
		Level of support from parents for the development and promotion of sports activities
		Amount of charitable and local support for the promotion of physical education and sports in universities
		Signage or announcements installed in universities highlighting the necessity and benefits of sports
	Information and media activities	Documentary films about the quantity and quality of student sports
		The quantity of sports journals published by medical universities
		Media coverage of student sports competitions and activities
		Cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the National Radio and Television Network for broadcasting educational programs and sports events in universities
		Number of recreational sports camps dedicated to employees and students
		The number of universities hosting championship competitions
	Communication	Number of universities hosting sports conferences and competitions
		Communication between universities and all stakeholders involved in student sports
		Cooperation between medical universities and relevant local organizations (such as municipalities and sports clubs).
	Organizational activities	The existence of laws mandating sports for students and employees
		Access of individuals to sports facilities
		The existence of incentive plans to increase employees and students' participation in sports activities
		Dedicating special days in the year named "University Sports Day."
Purchasing facilities and sports equipment specifically for students and employees		
Symbolic attendance of national sports elites at university sports programs		
Strategies	Persuasive activities	Presence of interested media.
		The attendance of university professors in university sports programs
	Validation	Health validation of sports by university managers
		Justice in the distribution of sports facilities and equipment in universities across the country
		Safety and security of sports facilities
Validation	Teaching physical education courses by sports elites and famous athletes	
	The presence of national sports elites at the operational levels of the ministry	
	The presence of famous sports figures as coaches and sports experts in universities	

	Manpower	Motivated and accessible specialized coaches
		Number of specialized coaches
		Quality and quantity of physical education programs for students
	Educational programs and curricula	Type of sports offered to students
		Lowering costs or offering free sports education classes
		Sports education courses for employees
		Talent identification systems
		Teaching methods employed by sports professors and coaches
		Evaluation systems
	Monitoring and evaluation	Assessment standards for evaluating students
Sports feedback systems		

Based on studies, one of the contextual factors that could affect the development of sports in medical universities included the lack of students' participation and interest in sports. These factors can hinder the development of sports in medical universities. Confusion among senior managers of the health ministry and their lack of clarity and following a specific direction can negatively affect the development of sports in medical universities. The lack of physical activity and exercise can lead to an increase in skeletal abnormalities among students. Other factors that could affect the development of sports in medical universities included identifying and supporting talented athletes among students, attitudes towards women's sports and the acceptance and support of women's sports by society and universities, governmental and non-governmental financial support from sports, giving priority to the development of sports by ministerial and university managers, making sports facilities accessible for students with disabilities, fair distribution of sports equipment and facilities, nurturing the philosophy of sports planning in universities, governmental support from the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the quality and quantity of physical education programs offered to students, media coverage of sports events in medical universities, hosting national sports events by medical universities, and collaboration with local organizations such as municipalities and sports clubs.

5. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to identify the factors affecting the development of public sports and well-being in Iran's medical universities. Thirteen sub-categories were identified during qualitative data analysis, which were grouped into four main categories: individual, managerial, health, and infrastructural. These factors were summarized under the concept of "the causal factors affecting sports development in Iran's medical universities." According to our participants, factors such as the lack of students' participation in sports, confusion among senior managers of the Ministry of Health, skeletal abnormalities among students, the existence of sports talents among students, etc., were among the

most important causal factors affecting sports development in medical universities of Iran.

In this regard, Vafaei Moghadam et al. (15) conducted a study entitled "Analysis of Universal Sports Development Factors Based on Data Foundation Theory". Under the causal factors category, they found factors such as the low participation of different groups in implemented programs, development of various diseases among Iranians due to the lack of participation in universal sports, lack of national unity to encourage participation in universal sports in the country, participation in universal sports not being a daily habit, great opportunities offered by participation in universal sports, and confusion in the macro-management level of universal sports in Iran.

The results of Saif et al. (16) showed that health and psychological factors, social and cultural deficiencies, and economic factors were among the most important causal factors affecting the growth and development of universal sports among healthy elderly men and women in Ilam province. The findings of Rahimi et al. (17) regarding the causal factors affecting the development of universal sports in student dormitories showed that all causal factors had a significant impact on the development of universal sports in these places. Hierarchical analysis revealed that the factors identified to have the highest priority in order were structural factors, time, managerial factors, and individual and cultural factors for boys and structural factors, managerial factors, time, and cultural and individual factors for girls.

Chaleshtori et al. (15) identified the main barriers to the development of sports activities were managerial barriers, infrastructural barriers, and barriers related to athletes and competitions, in that order. In addition, factors such as cultural, economic, infrastructural, managerial, and cultural weaknesses, as well as the lack of diverse and attractive programs, inadequate and inappropriate sports equipment, high volume of daily activities, lack of coaches and specialized human resources, lack of information and awareness of the benefits of universal sports, and inattention to the appropriate time for holding universal sports were among other barriers mentioned. Another study identified that organizational and managerial factors, environmental constraints, time constraints,

lack of social support, and intrapersonal and psychological factors were among the most important barriers to the development of sports activities (18).

Furthermore, Ganbari et al. (19) conducted a study entitled "Designing a Model of Factors Affecting Elementary School Students' Orientation towards Sports: A Mixed-Methods Research", leading to the emergence of 54 components at three levels: contextual (society and environment), organizational (school and physical education teachers), and behavioral (individual and familial factors). Based on the model created in the recent study, it could be said that physical education teachers, individual factors, families, the environment, society, and schools had the greatest impact on students' orientation towards sports in schools. The contextual dimension, in addition to its direct impact on students' orientation towards sports, had a significant effect on individual factors, school, the family, and physical education teachers. The factor of the environment also had a significant effect not only on the variables of the family, school, and individual factors but also on students' orientation toward sports. The family and school variables also had a significant effect on individual factors and physical education teachers, respectively.

The limitations of the present research include the non-random and purposeful selection of the study participants, the use of interviews to collect the required information, and limitations beyond the researcher's control, such as the unavailability of some high-ranking officials for interviews due to overwhelmed occupational schedule, lack of cooperation, and broken promises. Additionally, some of the research participants might have had difficulties understanding some interview questions. In addition, the researcher did not have access to documents and files related to sports programs in medical universities.

In conclusion, based on the influential factors identified in the context of the talent identification program among Iranian wrestlers, it is recommended to control some of the negative factors and propagate the use of beneficial ones. Overall, it is necessary to better control these factors to improve the outcomes of the talent identification program. Furthermore, organizations and relevant individuals are advised to take necessary steps towards implementing the proposed solutions to improve the policy-making process in the talent identification program. Given the roles and responsibilities of relevant organizations in improving the above-mentioned program in the country, policymakers are recommended to pay special attention to the share and role of these organizations when setting policies. It is suggested to create a unified procedure among executive managers to improve the talent identification program in wrestling. Mass media, especially the national media, should play their role in improving the talent identification program in wrestling in the country, particularly in culture-building. Finally, it is recommended to instigate the developed

model to relevant organizations, especially the Ministry of Sports and Youth and Wrestling Federation.

5.1. Conclusions

The development of public sports and well-being is necessary in all societies, especially in medical universities, which demands identifying the factors affecting the implementation of such interventions. The results of this research can draw a roadmap for relevant organizations such as the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, all medical universities, and their managers to design effective strategies to develop universal sports in these universities.

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Authors' Contribution:

Moin Bani Asadi: Data collection, data analysis, drafting, and revising of the manuscript. Hossein Peymanizad: Developing the idea, study design, data analysis, manuscript revision, and supervision. Mohammad Reza Esmailzadeh Kandahari: Study design, data analysis, manuscript revision. Javad Mohammadkhani: Study design, data analysis, manuscript revision. All authors approved the final manuscript before submission.

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