

## ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN SPORT ACTIVITIES

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### **Abstract**

*Research in many countries has shown that the most common barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in sport, in addition to the lack of previous experience in the sport and the lack of knowledge of how to include a person with disabilities in sport, are social prejudices toward sport engagement of people with disabilities. Bearing in mind the importance of engagement in sport activities for the population of disabled, we aimed to examine social attitudes toward sport engagement of persons with disabilities. The sample included 178 respondents (93 men and 85 women). 45 of respondents are actively involved in sports, 45 are engaged in recreational sports, 43 are not engaged in sports and 45 are parents of children with disabilities. The obtained results show that among people without disabilities prevail indifference, lack of knowledge and negative attitudes toward participation in sport activities of persons with disabilities.*

**Key words:** *attitudes, sports, persons with disabilities*

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### **Introduction**

Persons with disabilities, like other persons, have various needs, desires and goals, among which is a need to engage in sport. Psychophysical engagement through sports and physical exercise have positive influence on physical abilities and resistance of human body, preservation of health and better regeneration of motor functions. Participation in sport is one of the best ways to achieve personal affirmation within family and broader social surrounding. Shephard (1991) and Stewart (1981), have stated that participation in sport contributes to the reduction of anxiety and depression in persons with disabilities, increase their self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy. In addition, people with disabilities who are involved in sport have more positive perception of their physical health and are at lower risk of chronic diseases, compared to persons with disabilities who do not engage in sport.

Also, according to these authors, sport experience provides an opportunity for the expansion of the network of friends. Research in many countries has shown that the most common barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in sport are the following: - Lack of persons' with disabilities early experience in sport (this factor depends on whether the disability is congenital or acquired later in life); -Lack of knowledge of how to include persons with disabilities in sport activities; -Lack of financial resources; - Limited-access to information; - Social negative prejudices toward persons with disabilities.

### **The aim of the research**

Given the fact that social attitudes represent one of the important factors that influence the degree of involvement of persons with disabilities in sport activities, we aimed to investigate attitudes of persons without disabilities toward sport participation of persons with disabilities. Attitudes are relatively permanent mental dispositions that are manifested as a tendency to think, feel and act in a certain way in relation to an object. Attitudes include cognitive, emotional and action component. Cognitive component consists of knowledge about the object of the attitude, emotional component consists of feelings toward that object, and action component is the need to act in accordance with the attitude.

### **Methods**

#### *Sample*

The sample included 178 respondents (93 men and 85 women): 45 competitive athletes, 45 recreational athletes, 43 non-sporting persons, and 45 parents of children with disabilities. 25.8% of the respondents are under the age of 20, 46.1% of respondents are between 20 and 40 years, 28.1% of the respondents are more than 40 years old. The structure of the sample in terms of level of education is as follows: 20.8% completed primary school, 62.4% completed secondary school and 16.9% completed university or higher education. 37.6% of respondents live in an urban, and 62.4% in a rural community.

Their economic situation 28.7% of respondents estimated as satisfactory, 52.8% of respondents as average and 18.5% as poor.

*Procedure*

Respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of 29 close-ended questions.

**Results**

*Familiarity with sport activities of persons with disabilities*

Respondents answered questions about whether they had the opportunity to watch sport events in which participated persons with disabilities, to read about them in press and whether they are informed about the existence of sport clubs and sport associations of disabled persons in the country. Percentages of answers to these questions are presented in Tables 1-3.

Table 1: "Have you had the opportunity to watch sport events in which persons with disabilities have participated?"

	Several times	Once	Never
Recreational athletes	33.30%	31.10%	35.60%
Non-sporting	48.80%	23.30%	27.90%
Competitive athletes	44.40%	13.30%	42.20%
Parents	35.60%	31.10%	33.30%
Total	40.40%	24.70%	34.80%

Table 2: "Have you had the opportunity to read in press about sport events in which persons with disabilities have participated?"

	Yes	No
Recreational athletes	37.80%	62.20%
Non-sporting	48.80%	51.20%
Competitive athletes	37.80%	62.20%
Parents	48.90%	51.10%
Total	43.30%	56.70%

Table 3: "Are you informed about the existence of sport associations and sport clubs of disabled persons in the country?"

	Yes	No
Recreational athletes	53.30%	46.70%
Non-sporting	69.80%	30.20%
Competitive athletes	62.20%	37.80%
Parents	62.20%	37.80%
Total	Total	38.20%

Percentage of respondents' answers to the question whether, according to their opinion, sport events in which participate persons with disabilities receive sufficient attention in media are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: "Do you think that sport events in which participate persons with disabilities receive sufficient media attention?"

	Enough	Mostly enough	Not enough
Recreational athletes	42.20%	48.90%	8.90%
Non-sporting	37.20%	48.80%	14.00%
Competitive athletes	35.60%	53.30%	11.10%
Parents	31.10%	66.70%	2.20%
Total	Total	54.50%	9.00%

Opinion about the influence of sport engagement on psycho-physical functioning of people with disabilities. Respondents were asked about the general influence of sport engagement on persons with disabilities, and about its influence on their inclusion into society. Percentages of answers are presented in tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: "What influence does sport engagement have for persons with disabilities?"

	Positive influence	Negative influence	No influence
Recreational athletes	0.00%	6.70%	93.30%
Non-sporting	2.30%	7.00%	90.70%
Competitive athletes	0.00%	6.70%	93.30%
Parents	0.00%	2.20%	97.80%
Total	Total	5.60%	93.80%

Table 6: "Does sport engagement contributes to persons' with disabilities inclusion into society?"

	yes	no	I don't know
Recreational athletes	0.00%	13.30%	86.70%
Non-sporting	0.00%	25.60%	74.40%
Competitive athletes	2.20%	15.60%	82.20%
Parents	0.00%	6.70%	93.30%
Total	Total	15.20%	84.30%

Opinion of respondents on the impact of the participation of persons with disabilities in sport events on the quality of these events.

We asked respondents whether, according to their opinion, persons with disabilities should participate in active sport competitions and whether participation of persons with disabilities in sport events negatively affects the quality of these events. The questions were designed to obtain insight into the views of respondents on whether and how the participation of persons with disabilities in sports events affects the quality and attractiveness of these events. Answers to the questions are shown in the tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: "What do you think about the participation of persons with disabilities in active sports competitions?"

	I support it	I have nothing against it	I do not support it
Recreational athletes	2.20%	48.90%	48.90%
Non-sporting	0.00%	34.90%	65.10%
Competitive athletes	0.00%	26.70%	73.30%
Parents	4.40%	44.40%	51.10%
Total	Total	38.80%	59.60%

Table 8: "Does participation of persons with disabilities negatively affect the quality of a sport event?"

	yes	mostly yes	no
Recreational athletes	86.70%	8.90%	4.40%
Non-sporting	79.10%	14.00%	7.00%
Competitive athletes	75.60%	17.80%	6.70%
Parents	93.30%	6.70%	0.00%
Total	Total	11.80%	4.50%

Table 10: "Would you like to take part in organizing sport events for people with disabilities?"

	yes	I haven't thought about it	no	Yes	I haven't thought about it	no
Recreational athletes	4.40%	71.10%	24.40%			
Non-sporting	4.70%	65.10%	30.20%			
Competitive athletes	2.20%	62.20%	35.60%	3,8%	66,2%	30,1%
Parents	0.00%	42.20%	57.80%	0.00%	42,2%	57,8%
Total	2.80%	60.10%	37.10%	2,8%	60,1%	37,1%

*Readiness for personal engagement in promotion of persons' with disabilities inclusion in sport activities*

In order to explore the action component of attitudes towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities in sport, i.e. the willingness of respondents to be involved in promotion of sport activities for persons with disabilities, we asked them whether they would participate in sport activities together with persons with disabilities and whether they would take part in organizing sport events for persons with disabilities. Also, we asked them in which way would they be willing to contribute to the promotion of inclusion of persons with disabilities in sport activities. Percentages of answers to the questions are presented in Tables 9, 10, and 11.

Table 9: "Would you like to participate in a sport event in which are included persons with disabilities?"

	yes	No	yes	no
Recreational athletes	35.60%	64.40%		
Non-sporting	53.50%	46.50%		
Competitive athletes	24.40%	75.60%	37,6%	62,4%
Parents	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100%
Total	Total	71.90%	28,1%	71,9%

There is a statistically significant difference in the frequencies of responses of parents who have children with disabilities and other categories of respondents to the question on the willingness to take part in sport events with persons with disabilities,  $\chi^2 = 23526$  ( $p < .001$ ). None of the parents of children with disabilities from our sample would like to participate in such events, but 37,6% of other respondents would participate in them.

Table 11: "In which way would you contribute to the promotion of sport for persons with disabilities?"

	I would join a group of volunteers	I would financially help	I am not interested in it	I would join a group of volunteers	I would financially help	I am not interested in it
Recreational athletes	43.20%	29.50%	27.30%			
Non-sporting	20.90%	32.60%	46.50%			
Competitive athletes	46.70%	33.30%	20.00%	37,1%	31,8%	31,0%
Parents	82.20%	17.80%	0.00%	82,2%	17,8%	0.00%
Total	Total	28.20%	23.10%	48,6%	28,2%	23,1%

In table 10, parents of children with disabilities are statistically significantly less frequently willing to take part in the organization of sport events for persons with disabilities compared to other categories of respondents,  $\chi^2 = 11,858$  ( $p < .01$ ). Frequencies of answers of parents of children (table 12) with disabilities are statistically significantly different from answers of other respondents, concerning the ways in which they would contribute to the promotion of sport for persons with disabilities,  $\chi^2 = 30,369$  ( $p < .001$ ).

#### *Willingness of parents to include children with disabilities in sport activities*

We asked parents of children with disabilities how often they practice sport with their child in a free time, and whether they would allow their child to engage in sport activities under the supervision of professional trainers. Frequencies of answers are presented in Tables 12 and 13.

Table 13: "How often do you practice sport with your child during a free time?"

Often	Rarely	Never
40,0%	15,6%	44,4%

Table 13: "Would you allow your child to engage in sport activities under the supervision of a professional trainer?"

Yes	No
8,9%	91,1%

## Discussion and conclusion

Previous research has shown that attitudes towards persons with disabilities are mostly negative and that they are manifested in the form of rejection, intolerance and distancing (Hanak and Dragojevic, 2002). Even when a willingness to interact with persons with disabilities is verbally expressed, feelings of

anxiety, confusion and fear prevail (Krahé and Altwasser, 2006; Matejić-Đuričić and Djuricic, 2007), as well as negative prejudices about the behavior, personality and achievements of persons with disabilities (Seifert and Bergman, 1983). Previous studies have examined the general attitude toward persons with disabilities. However, Rosenbaum and Katz (1980) indicate the need to examine attitudes in relation to the specific roles of persons with disabilities in different areas of life. According to our knowledge, this work is the first study that deals with social attitudes toward inclusion of persons with disabilities in sport activities.

#### *Familiarity with sport events in which are included persons with disabilities and attitude towards these events*

Although majority of respondents is informed that sport clubs and sport associations of persons with disability exist in the country, they have very seldom or never had an opportunity to watch a sport event for persons with disabilities or to read about it in media. Results show that among subjects from our sample prevail negative prejudices towards such events. A large percentage (95%) of respondents believes that participation of persons with disabilities reduces the value of sport events. Majority of respondents (60% of them) does not support the participation of persons with disabilities in sport events, about 40% declare that they are not against it, and less than 2% support it. In accordance with this, majority of respondents (over 90%) thinks that sport events for persons with disabilities should not get more attention in media.

#### *Opinion about the influence of sport engagement on psycho-physical functioning of people with disabilities*

A large percentage of respondents (93.8%) believe that engaging in sport does not have an influence on persons with disabilities, a small number (5,6%) believe that sport affects them negatively, and a very small number (less than one per cent) thinks that practicing sport has a

positive influence on persons with disabilities. Majority of respondents (84.3%) states that they do not know whether sport engagement contributes to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, 15% think that it does not contribute to their inclusion into the society, and less than one per cent state that sport engagement is beneficial for persons' with disabilities inclusion into society. These results indicate that among the respondents prevails insufficient awareness about the benefits which sport practicing brings to persons with disabilities.

#### *Readiness for personal engagement in promotion of persons' with disabilities inclusion in sport activities*

Majority of respondents state that they would not participate in a sports event together with persons with disabilities. A possible cause of this reluctance are unpleasant emotional states of fear, confusion, and sympathy which prevail in interaction with persons with disabilities (Krahé and Altwasser, 2006; Matejić-Đuričić and Djuricic, 2007, Seifert and Bergman, 1983). The majority of respondents (60.1%) have not thought about participating in the organization of a sport event for people with disabilities, more than one third (37.1%) declared that they would not participate, and a small percentage (2.8%) that they would participate in organization of such an event.. Among parents of children with disabilities, willingness to participate in these events and their organization is statistically significantly lower in comparison to other respondents. We assume that this can be explained by the fact that raising a child with disability requires much engagement that leaves little room for additional activities. Contrary to the findings that most respondents are not ready to participate in a sport event with persons with

disabilities and have not thought about the possibility to engage in organizing such events, the data indicate readiness of the majority of respondents to contribute to the development of sport for persons with disabilities. Approximately half of the respondents (48.6%) is willing to participate in voluntary work, and approximately one third (28.2%) to allocate funds to promote the development of sport for persons with disabilities.

#### *Willingness of parents to include children with disabilities in sport activities*

Sports activities with children with disabilities often practice 40% of the surveyed parents. Approximately the same percentage of parents (44.4%) declare that they never practice sport with their child, and 15% that they do so rarely. More than 90 percent of parents is not willing to include their child with disabilities in sport under the supervision of professional trainers. Further research should determine the reasons why parents reject the possibility that their child practices sport under sport coaches supervision.

Among people without disabilities prevail indifference and negative attitudes toward sport events in which participate persons with disabilities. Also, persons without disabilities are not sufficiently informed about positive effects of practicing sport on persons with disabilities.. However, the results reveal the readiness of the majority of respondents to contribute to the promotion of sport for persons with disabilities. Given the fact that social attitudes affect the degree of involvement of persons with disabilities in sport activities, the obtained results are important for planning future programs intended to increase the degree of involvement of persons with disabilities in sport.

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## STAVOVI PREMA UKLJUČIVANJU OSOBA S ONEMOGUĆENJIMA U SPORTSKE AKTIVNOSTI

### **Sažetak**

Istraživanja u brojnim zemljama nalaze da su najčešće prepreke za učešće osoba sa invaliditetom u sportu, pored nedostatka ranijih iskustava u sportu, nedostatka znanja i svijesti o tome kako uključiti osobu sa invaliditetom u sport, predrasude prema sportu osoba sa invaliditetom. Imajući u vidu značaj sporta za ovu populaciju željeli smo ispitati stavove osoba bez invaliditeta prema bavljenju sportom osoba sa invaliditetom. Uzorkom je obuhvaćeno 178 ispitanika (93 muškaraca i 85 žena), 45 osoba koje se aktivno bave sportom, 45 osoba koje se rekreativno bave sportom, 43 osobe koje se ne bave sportom i 45 roditelja koji imaju dijete sa invaliditetom. Rezultati dobiveni u istraživanju pokazuju da među osobama bez invaliditeta prevladavaju nezainteresiranost, nedovoljna obaviještenost i negativni stavovi prema sportskim događajima u kojima sudjeluju osobe sa invaliditetom.

**Ključne riječi:** stavovi, sport, osobe sa invaliditetom

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