

Stodółka Weronika, Filipowski Damian, Kosa Jerzy, Stodółka Jacek. Motives of physically active adults to participate in the 5 PKO Wrocław Night Half Marathon. *Journal of Education, Health and Sport*. 2017;7(9):517-525. eISSN 2391-8306. DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.997521>
<http://ojs.ukw.edu.pl/index.php/johs/article/view/4862>

The journal has had 7 points in Ministry of Science and Higher Education parametric evaluation. Part B item 1223 (26.01.2017).
1223 Journal of Education, Health and Sport eISSN 2391-8306 7

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.
Received: 15.08.2017. Revised: 10.09.2017. Accepted: 10.09.2017.

MOTIVES OF PHYSICALLY ACTIVE ADULTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 5 PKO WROCLAW NIGHT HALF MARATHON

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Abstract

Introduction and aim: Running has become an integral part of social life around the world. It is the simplest and most natural form of movement, which is the basis of human existence. The popularity of this physical activity is increasing rapidly due to many sports and recreational events which are being more frequently organized. In Poland, long-distance running events are held, not only in big cities, but also in small towns and villages. Being by nature a “social animal”, people feel pressure from their environment to participate in such events. Thus, what motivates them to frequently make extreme physical effort?

Materials and methods: The research group was comprised of 450 runners from all over Poland (331 men, 119 women). Diagnostic survey techniques and a questionnaire were used in the study.

Results: Nearly one-third of the respondents declared their willingness to participate and complete another half marathon (29.11%). Only 28 people wanted to become champions in their age group, and another 23 subjects wanted a prize sponsored by an employer or other organization interested in their participation in a run. More than half of the respondents replied that participation in the half marathon was the result of many months of leading a healthy lifestyle.

Conclusions: Participation in a half marathon allows competitors to fight their weaknesses. Runners want to participate in sports events because of the atmosphere and opportunity to spend time with their loved ones.

Keywords: motivation, sports, adults, running, sports event

Introduction

The modern world is characterized by unusual environmental volatility. People living in such a reality must show complete physical and mental efficiency. Being aware of existing threats they should, to a large extent, devote their leisure to physical activity.

In recent years, physical activity has become very popular, reflecting the growing interest in man's own body, health, and mental and physical condition. Demand for physical activity increases along with the increase of free time and improvement of living conditions. It contributes to the formation of new social ties, helps to reduce the feeling of loneliness and eliminates social isolation. It is local government which is responsible for creating conditions for conducting physical activity. They should provide residents access to various forms of leisure time activities. The aim is to raise the level of physical and mental health of the inhabitants and give them the chance to better integrate.

Physical activity has a huge impact on health. Programs that are implemented by national and international institutions have the common goal of promoting sport. The World Health Organization (WHO) promotes health just by encouraging physical activity [1]. The European Union has released documents and created initiatives which promote physical activity, i.e. the White Paper on Sport [2]; White Paper on a Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity [3]; National Health Program for 2007-2015 [4]; Strategy for the Development of Sport in Poland until 2015 [5] or the National Program for the Prevention of Lifestyle Diseases. Module 1. The program focuses on the prevention of overweight people, obesity, and non-communicable diseases by improving nourishment and physical activity in the years 2012 – 2014 [6, 7].

Running in particular has become an integral part of social life around the world. It is the simplest and natural form of movement, which is the basis of human existence. The technological development of civilization, resulting in more free time, has led to a decrease of physical activity in everyday working life. This situation has enabled entrepreneurs and other financial institutions to establish a new sector as an excellent source of income. Offers aiming to fill the need for physical activity are wide and varied, revealing the attractiveness of sporting events, sports equipment, and an impact on human awareness. In Poland, long-distance running events are held not only in Warsaw, Poznan, Krakow and Wroclaw, but other cities and towns as well. The increase in the number of places organizing such events shows their popularity. It should be pointed out that in 2014 marathons were held in all capitals of the member countries of the European Union, except for Cyprus. Comparison of the number of marathon participants in the US over the years shows a strong upward trend. In 1980 there were 150,000 participants, and only five years later the number increased to 290,000. In 2000 it reached 350,000, while in 2012 it reached a record number of 500,000 people [8]. In 2013 close to 3,900 running events were organized, attended by 1.6 million people [9].

Undoubtedly a “social animal”, when put under pressure, a human complies. What motivates them to take so frequently such extreme physical effort? Is it that the vision of becoming the legendary Athenian messenger Pheidippides, who ran from Sparta to Athens to deliver news of a victory, has become so appealing? All this leads to determining the aim of this study, which was to examine motivational characteristics of adult amateurs participating in long-distance running and half marathons.

Aim

The aim of the study was to examine the motivational characteristics of adult amateurs participating in long-distance running and half marathons based on the 5 PKO Wroclaw Night Half Marathon.

Material and methods

The research group was comprised of 450 runners from all over Poland, including 331 males (73,56%) and 119 females (26,44%). The mean age of the respondents was 37,36 years. The youngest runner was 20, while the oldest 67. The subjects participated in the 5 PKO Wroclaw Night Half Marathon. The diagnostic survey technique and a questionnaire were used in the study (self-designed questionnaire). The results obtained were analysed in a Microsoft Office Excel 2010 spreadsheet.

Results

The survey enquired about sports, financial, social, health and tourist/travel motives for participation in the 5 PKO Wroclaw Night Half Marathon. 450 responses were given (Table 1).

Tab. 1. Motives for participation in the 5 PKO Wroclaw Night Marathon

No.	Answer	Number of answers	%
1	I wanted to beat my own record of this course	11	2.44
2	I wanted to improve my best result in the half marathon	118	26.22
3	I wanted to obtain my best result this year	40	8.88
4	I wanted to improve my best result on this course	30	6.69
5	I wanted to reach a previously planned result	75	16.68
6	I wanted to complete my first half marathon	31	6.88
7	I wanted to complete another half marathon	131	29.11
8	I wanted to win in my age group	1	0.22
9	I wanted to be better than my friend	13	2.88

Nearly one third of the respondents admitted they wanted to complete another half marathon in their lives (29.11%). Slightly less runners (26.22%) aimed to improve their best result in a half marathon. Only a few people wanted to set a new course record or compete with their friends.

Table 2 presents the results of the surveys based on financial motives for participating in the 5 PKO Wroclaw Night Half Marathon.

Table 2. Financial motives for participation in the 5 PKO Wroclaw Night Half Marathon

No.	Answer	Number of answers	%
1	I wanted to win the prize or a place in the general classification	13	2.88
2	I wanted to win the prize or take a place in my age group	28	6.22
3	I wanted to win a prize sponsored by an employer (or other organization interested in my participation in the race)	23	5.11
4	My motivation was not financial	386	85.79

It was observed that almost 86% of the responders were motivated by reasons other than financial. A similar number of the participants wanted to win the prize in their age group (28 runners) or a prize sponsored by an employer or other organization interested in their participation in the event (23 runners).

Social motives for participating in the Half Marathon are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Social motives for participating in the 5 PKO Wroclaw Night Half Marathon

No.	Answer	Number of answers	%
1	I wanted to gain popularity in my environment	4	0.88
2	I wanted to gain recognition in the eyes of my relatives and friends	22	4.92
3	I wanted to improve my self-esteem	37	8.22
4	I wanted to spend time with friends	75	16.66
5	I wanted to spend time with people with similar interests	74	16.44
6	I wanted to meet new people	27	6.00
7	I like the atmosphere of half marathons	116	25.77
8	I like the atmosphere of the Wroclaw Night Half Marathon	95	21.11

Analysis of social motives behind the participation in the 5 PKO Wroclaw Night Half Marathon showed that atmosphere was the key. Few runners wanted to gain popularity in their environment (4 participants) or recognition in the eyes of their relatives and friends (22 participants).

The following table (4) provides information on health motives for participating in the Half Marathon.

Table 4. Health motives for participation in the 5 PKO Wroclaw Night Half Marathon

No.	Answer	Number of answers	%
1	I wanted to lose weight	72	16.00
2	I wanted to run in the half marathon to complement many months (or many years) of leading a healthy lifestyle	231	51.34
3	My motivation was not for health reasons	147	32.66

More than half of the respondents confirmed that participation in the Half Marathon complemented many months or even years of healthy living.

Tourist (or travel) motives for participating in the Half Marathon are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Tourism/travel motives for participating in 5 PKO Wroclaw Night Half Marathon

No.	Answer	Number of answers	%
1	Visiting the city was the main goal, followed by participating in the Half Marathon	42	9.33
2	Participation in the Half Marathon was the main goal, followed by visiting the city or region	256	56.88
3	While visiting the region I took part in the Half Marathon	36	8.00
4	I participate in all important half marathons in the country (or abroad) in order to visit different places	84	18.66
5	I came to Wroclaw for completely different reasons than tourism, and I used the opportunity to participate in the Half Marathon	32	7.13

Participation in the race (56.88%) was the strongest motivator indicated by analysis. The runners only used the opportunity to visit the city and region. However, 78 subjects admitted their main goal was visiting the city and region, followed by taking part in the Half Marathon.

Discussion

Public awareness among Poles regarding physical education is gradually increasing. In highly developed countries, running is a natural activity and constitutes part of daily life. It is an alternative form of rest and relaxation after work. It helps to release stress and other tensions, which benefits the human mental state. Local authorities are expected to meet rising expectations of local communities to provide them with more and better options to develop in this area of life.

Research points to the benefits of regular exercises. Regular physical effort plays a key role in both the primary and secondary prevention of many diseases. It contributes to maintaining correct body weight and reduces the risk of such diseases as: heart disease,

diabetes, breast and colon cancer, and hypertension. It also strengthens bone structure. Regular sports activities are also beneficial to stressful situations since they release psychological tension and result in mood improvement [10, 11].

Many doctors emphasise the health benefits of exercise and physical activity [12]. Stempień (2016) indicates that running is associated with a healthy living. One of the main objectives often used by marathon organizers is the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. Weight loss or care for their bodies are the most common motivators indicated by runners [13]. The authors of this study confirmed that the vast majority of runners participate in the half-marathon due to the positive effects of a healthy lifestyle.

Such motivations have a reasonable basis. Running understood as endurance exercise involves large muscle groups, which are the main component of health training [14]. Carefully planned training for running is often in preparation for a marathon. Then there are other factors which affect the motivation of runners. Each of them have their own individual goals which they strive to achieve during the preparatory period. This can be either time to complete a previously determined distance, or number of completed marathons. Marathons attract competitors through history and legends which emphasize the heroism of a man going beyond his limits [15, 16]. Our findings indicate that the major motives pushing for participation in a half marathon are: completion of the race and improvement of one's best result by going beyond one's limits.

A healthy lifestyle, internal struggle and competition are not the only factors having influence on runners' motivations. It's still an amateur sport which helps people to unwind and relax. Participation in running does not always need to validate a runner's capabilities, but it can be an active form of spending free time. The social aspect of such an event should also be considered. It is an excellent opportunity to meet new people and make new contacts, including business ones which can bring rewards in professional life [17]. Our own research shows that atmosphere and the opportunity to spend quality time with friends are two factors important to the participants.

Another key factor having influence on motivation is the sports tourism phenomenon. This refers to the combination of sports activities and travelling, which allows free time to be used more efficiently. One trip can combine a marathon (physical activity) with an opportunity to visit new places in a home country or abroad [18]. Dreyer presented an interesting definition of sports tourism, which he described as any form of trip in which the main goal is doing sport [19]. The study carried out by the authors shows that the vast

majority of runners came to Wroclaw participate in the half marathon, and visiting the city was strictly related to the event.

Conclusions

1. Nowadays people feels the need to push their limits. Striving for self-improvement, they increase expectations on themselves. Participation in a half marathon enables them to face and fight their weaknesses.
2. Runners feel the urge to participate in sports events due to atmosphere and the opportunity to spend time with their loved ones. Financial and health reasons are of secondary importance.
3. The decision to participate in the Half Marathon was well thought out. Participation is noted as the most important factor, followed by the opportunity to visit the city and region.

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