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## Access to sport and recreation services for visually impaired and blind people - a case study of the city of Wrocław

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### Abstract

Access to sports services is important for the physical development and functioning of blind and visually impaired people. Access to this type of activity also affects the rehabilitation of people with visual impairment and their daily functioning. Sport activity and participation in various forms of recreation is a very broad concept in physical culture. Understanding the form of physical activities that the visually impaired and blind people prefer can help educators, physical education teachers, and people associated with visually impaired and blind children in planning physical activities. It is important to understand the needs of such people regarding the sports environment and whether they are given active participation in it through infrastructure adapted to the needs of youth with sight disabilities. The aim of the study was to find out the opinions of blind and visually impaired students about the availability of sports and recreation services and equipment in their immediate surroundings. The subject of the study were boys and girls with low vision and blind attending the seventh and eighth grades of primary, secondary (technical and high school) schools at the Special Educational Center for Blind and Visually Impaired Children in Wrocław and among the graduates of that school. The subjects belonged to the age group in the range from 13 to 25 years. The study group included 32 boys and 21 girls. Based on the documentation, the blind group includes students with a significant degree of disability, vision defects. The visually impaired include persons with various moderate and mild eyesight injuries. The research used a survey method of my own authorship, which allowed to know the problem while maintaining anonymity. 26 questions related to min. interests of respondents, access to sports bases, sports sections for the blind and visually impaired. The obtained results showed that it is worth making young people aware of the importance of participation in broadly understood physical culture. Equal opportunities for boys and girls to engage in various types of sports should also be equalized. Not always sports that are preferred by young people are available to them.

**Keywords:** disability, visual impairment, services, sport, recreation

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## Introduction

Sport is one of the components of physical culture with particularly developed scopes of activity in various environments and great interest, both in passive observation and taking active part in it (Zuchora, 1976; Jaworski, 2015). The concept of sport is diverse and is attributed to many terms, such as mass, recreational, professional, amateur, school, professional, academic and national sport. Sport also has many functions, including social, educational, health, educational, spectacular, recreational, economic, ecological, defensive, integrative. An important feature of sport is competition, permanent direct competition with other players (Ulatowski, 1979). It is also expressed through games and exercises grown according to specific rules, which promotes health and develops the personality of the person practicing it. In qualified sport, the most important thing is to achieve maximum results at all levels of regional, national, global or Olympic competition. It requires adequate, both special and general preparation by the athlete. Intensive and long-term training under the watchful eye of a training staff. There is also an undesirable side of the sport. In many disciplines, athletes cross their barriers to achieve top-level results, which can sometimes result in injury and injury.

The sport of the disabled begins to play an extremely important role in sport. The history of disabled sport dates back to the early 20th century (Tasiemski and Koper, 2008). And the importance of sport in the process of rehabilitation of people with disabilities was noticed over 70 years ago (Tasiemski, 1999). From the very beginning of the sport of people with disabilities, mainly its therapeutic, health and integrating function of the disabled with each other and non-disabled persons was emphasized (Sobiecka, 2000). Despite the limitations of people with disabilities, the creators of the world Paralympic movement intended from the very beginning to create the same conditions for sporting competition as they do at the Olympic Games among non-disabled people (Tasiemski and Koper, 2008). The beginnings of sports competition for disabled people concerned only people with paraplegia. In subsequent years, competitors with other types of dysfunctions joined the competition. In connection with the above, international organizations were formed that represented individual groups of athletes. In its assumptions, sport was to serve, among others, maintain physical fitness and maintain good health and be an integration factor for people actively participating in it. These components are of great importance in relation to the dynamically developing sport of disabled people in recent years.

In order to meet the expectations of the community of people with disabilities and including them in various spheres of social activity, it can be observed that the sport and recreation of the disabled is an extremely dynamically developing field of sport (Ronikier, 1999). Adapted Physical Activity began to form through the centuries-old tradition of physical activity. It is the result of attempts to integrate various methods of influencing disabled people by means of movement through the use of adapted physical activity (Kowalik, 2009). AAF is defined as interdisciplinary knowledge aimed at identifying and resolving individual differences in physical activity. It is associated with the provision of services and scientific research that support the acceptance of individual differences. He also advocates access to an active lifestyle and sport. Promotes innovation and cooperation in sports programs and improvement of sports equipment. It aims to tailor physical activity to the needs of specific individuals, but is not limited to physical education, sport, recreation, dance, creative arts, nutrition, medicine and rehabilitation (Hutzler and Sherrill, 2007). The basic goal of Adapted Physical Activity is to organize a variety of activities related to physical activity to cause the development of a disabled

person - despite the weakness - focusing on the activities he is able to perform at the current moment (Morgulec et al., 2006). Adapted sport is an important element of AAF. It is a sport intended for disabled people with special needs. It has been prepared especially for disabled people who have already participated in various forms of physical activity and said that the time has come for greater challenges. It was expected that greater involvement in this type of sporting activities could support these people in their own development. So the assumption was that it would be a form of continuing improvement while consolidating the effects of previous treatment.

## **Aim**

The aim of the article was to present the opinions of blind and visually impaired pupils about the availability of sports and recreation services and equipment in their immediate surroundings. Such knowledge should help in improving and improving the rehabilitation of girls and boys with visual impairment to physical activity through places where they will be able to practice sports of their choice using appropriate sports equipment.

The respondents were boys and girls with low vision and blind attending the seventh and eighth grades of elementary school and upper secondary (technical and high school) classes at the Special Educational Center for Blind and Visually Impaired Children in Wrocław and among the graduates of that school. The subjects belonged to the age group in the range from 13 to 25 years. The study group included 24 boys and 29 girls. Based on the documentation, the blind group includes students with a significant degree of disability, vision defects. The visually impaired include persons with various moderate and light sight injuries. The experiment distinguished three types of physical activity: sport, recreation and entertainment. The questionnaire method using the author's own questionnaire was used. The survey consisted of 26 questions about participants and their contacts with sport and other forms of participation in broadly understood physical culture. The questionnaire was completed by study participants in the presence of the authors. The research was conducted in 5 sessions during which respondents gathered. The collection of data depended on the respondents' temporal disposition. The results of the survey are summarized in tables and charts showing the percentage and quantitative answers to the questions asked.

## **Results**

The respondents were divided according to their degree of disability. There are 3 degrees - significant, moderate and light. In the study group, more than half of the participants (57%) have a high level of sight defect, a smaller proportion of the respondents (30%) have moderate vision defect, while the remaining 13% of respondents were included in the group of people with a slight defect. For research purposes, the groups were divided into two subgroups, i.e. people with a significant defect were classified as blind, persons with a low or moderate level were classified as visually impaired.

Next, the participants' participation in practicing sports for people with visual impairment was presented. The vast majority of respondents (75% of all survey participants) stated that they practice sports related to the sport of people with visual impairments. The smallest percentage of people who do not participate in practicing sports closely related to this particular disability was among blind boys (at the level of 14%) and

visually impaired girls (it was 23%). Visually impaired boys and blind girls more often chose the "I do not participate" answer (40% visually impaired boys and 31% blind girls), this may be due to the lack of sports in their immediate environment.

The most frequently chosen form of activity among girls with visual impairment is the recreational form (this answer was given by 68% of girls - 62.5% of blind girls and 77% of visually impaired girls), while boys predominantly sported (71% boys - 78, 5% among blind boys and 60% of visually impaired boys). An interesting relationship is that the choice of form of physical activity among blind and visually impaired boys was similar. The same relationship can also be observed among girls. The study showed that a fun form of classes is preferred by a small proportion of the blind (13% among the blind).

In response to the question "who and how often encourages you to do sports or other forms of recreation?" are similar among individual groups. Over 33% of girls and boys indicated that friends often encourage them to engage in sports or recreation. It also turned out that friends more often support girls and boys with a larger defect (22.5%) than people with a smaller defect (11%). The influence of parents on the sport of the respondents is surprising, up to 86% said that parents do not encourage (42%), or do it rarely (44%), while girls (48%) more often indicated the answer "not at all", while boys (58%) answer "rare". Adolescents and children with visual impairments have indicated that only 14% of parents often encourage them to take up physical activity. In the case of siblings, it turned out that it has no effect (51%) on the subjects' physical activity or it is low (36%). Most respondents (60%) agreed that the educators did not encourage them to undertake any training at all.

The biggest similarity can be observed between low vision boys and low vision girls - most of these groups replied (40% of visually impaired boys and 46% of visually impaired girls) that the biggest obstacle to participating in sports competitions or any other form of competition is a lack of desire. In addition, the vast majority of blind boys indicated the answer that they prefer a typically sports form of physical activity, as many as 78% of them indicated regular or sporadic participation in competitions or forms of competition-related activity. As many as 34% of girls answered "I have no way" in participating in this type of competition or competition, which may mean that the girls do not have the right equipment or conditions to develop their interests related to the sport they want to practice. Half (50%) of blind girls indicated that they engage in this type of activity regularly or sporadically. The visually impaired girls showed the least activity, only 23% declared regular or sporadic participation in sports competitions or other forms of competition.

And the biggest benefit of participating in competitions or other forms of competition is self-testing (45% of all respondents) and social contact (this answer was given by 28% of the study participants). It should be noted that blind girls definitely more often marked the answer "social contact" (50% of blind girls), in the remaining groups the most common answer to the question about the greatest benefit of participating in sports competitions or other forms of recreation related to competition is "checking yourself" . Competition (15% of respondents marked this answer) and winning (11%) in the environment of the visually impaired and blind are put in second place.

The most common reason for giving up sports or other forms of recreation in the environment of the visually impaired and blind among girls was lack of willingness (34%). Among all boys, the most frequently chosen reason is lack of company (25%). As the second most common reason girls mentioned lack of time (20%) and lack of company (14%), and boys lack of desire (17%) and lack of time (11%). The visually impaired boys more often than other groups associated the resignation from physical activity with the

lack of equipment and facilities (20% of all visually impaired boys) and fear of injury (20% among visually impaired boys).

The vast majority of respondents (64% of all respondents) stated that the possibility of playing sports or any form of activity has a very large impact on the rehabilitation of people with visual impairment. The rest of the people (30% among the respondents) with sight dysfunction indicated that physical activity has a great impact on rehabilitation. A small percentage of respondents (4%) indicated that sport had little impact on rehabilitation, and two people abstained from answering this question.

The majority of respondents (62% among all respondents) stated that there are sports disciplines that they cannot practice, among the disciplines which listed such disciplines as boxing, athletics, basketball, volleyball, running, ski jumping, acrobatics, handball, sports fight, football. Less than half of the study participants indicated (48% of respondents) that they could practice their favorite sport. It also appeared that blind people more often argued that they were not able to practice their favorite sport (66% among blind people replied that they were not able to practice their favorite sport, and among the visually impaired, 44% of respondents marked this answer).

Also, most of the respondents stated that they had the opportunity to practice sport or recreation in their surroundings. These results among girls and boys are very similar (76% girls and 87% boys). Most likely, this is due to the fact that the respondents live in a boarding house adapted to their needs and with access to good infrastructure and employees / trainers who are able to help in various sports and physical activities. The remaining part of the study participants indicated that this option is not available (18% among all respondents). It is possible that the center does not have equipment for cultivating the discipline that respondents prefer.

In addition, 87% of all respondents said that a Sports Championship School adapted to the needs of people with visual impairments should be created. Nobody out of 53 study participants replied that such a school is needed. 13% of respondents abstained from opinions. This means that there is a very high demand for such a field of study for people with visual impairments.

Referring to the impact of sport or recreation on the everyday life of people with disabilities, the vast majority of respondents (87% of all respondents) said that any form of physical activity has an impact on the daily life and functioning of people with visual impairment. Answers that sport has no such impact were given by 2% of participants, while 11% of respondents abstained from answering. It can also be seen that the answers "I have no opinion" were more frequently marked by blind people (16% among all blind people), both boys (14% among all blind boys) and girls (19% of blind girls). Blind boys mentioned that sport affects everyday life by improving fitness, social contact and better mood. The visually impaired boys mainly mentioned aspects such as improving well-being and a way of relaxation. Blind girls wrote that sport teaches regularity and has a positive effect on well-being, while visually impaired girls said that it improves their fitness and well-being.

## **Discussion**

The access to sports services in the environment of people with sight disabilities is closely related to the possibilities for such persons to undertake physical activity. According to Woynarowska (1996), "the second decade of life is particularly important due to the fact that young people need to become independent from the environment." Thus, the impact

of the environment in childhood plays a very important role in shaping the child and has a very large impact on his physical activity in adulthood. In the studies of other authors (Żychowicz and Pławny, 2007), it can be found that a large proportion of boys and girls were not encouraged by sports caregivers at all. 26% of boys and 41% of the girls from the study did not receive such support from their parents. In addition, friends and siblings had the greatest impact on taking up physical activity by children with visual impairments. They here had the greatest impact on taking physical activity by people with visual impairments. The difference appeared in the case of siblings, which in most cases did not encourage (51%) subjects to undertake any physical activity. And 36% of study participants said this is rare. Another difference in research was to encourage people with visual impairments to do sports for educators and parents. The vast majority of respondents (62% girls and 58% boys) noticed that educators do not encourage them to engage in any form of physical activity at all. In this respect, the respondents did not receive support from parents (48% of girls and 33% of boys). In the research of Żychowicz and Pławny (2007) we can read that boys more often undertook physical activity after lessons and sports competitions. It turned out that children with a damaged eye organ competing in sports competitions put self-confidence first, not victory, which coincides with the results of our work. According to the study, children with sight disabilities do not have the majority of opportunities to participate in competitive activities. The biggest barrier to practicing any type of activity in the environment of blind and visually impaired people is fear of injury. Some people with vision impairments have various types of contraindications to perform exercises that are not precisely defined. Otherwise, there are the visually impaired, it is very important to retain the eyesight because it is easily damaged. Physical activity is therefore limited in such people. The research of Cabak and Zdrodowska (2003) carried out at the Kraków center for blind and visually impaired children shows that girls with visual impairment most often undertook a recreational form of physical activity (49% among blind girls and 55% among visually impaired girls). The form of sport that boys preferred was sports (61% of blind boys and 57% of visually impaired boys), followed by recreation and play. These results are slightly different from ours, because the vast majority of girls (62.5% of blind girls and 77% of visually impaired girls) chose recreation as their favorite form of physical activity. In the case of boys, the situation is very similar, because, as in the studies of the above-mentioned authors, the sporting form of physical activity definitely prevailed (78.5% of blind boys and 60% of visually impaired boys).

## Conclusions

1. The awareness of parents and educators should be increased so that they motivate blind and visually impaired children to engage in physical activity as soon as possible, and contribute to shaping sporting habits to a greater extent. This will increase confidence in later life, affect the effects of such a person's rehabilitation, and activate a disabled person's life.
2. In order to improve rehabilitation and increase access to sports infrastructure and sports equipment, a Sports Championship School should be created for blind and visually impaired people. The vast majority of the society with visual impairment supports this idea positively. This would be a very big step forward, because until recently the sport of disabled people was imperceptible.

3. It is necessary to increase the number of disciplines for girls so that they can participate in various forms of sport activity in order to improve and rehabilitate.

4. The awareness that sport has a very positive effect on the rehabilitation of people with vision impairment in the environment of blind and visually impaired people is very high. This knowledge should be used and conditions should be created for people with visual impairments to engage in various forms of sport activity. Considering that the research was conducted in a center for children with a visual impairment, the best option would be extracurricular activities related to sports in which visually impaired and blind children are interested.

5. An important part of the respondents cannot practice their favorite sports. Some of these disciplines, due to their specificity, cannot be grown by people with visual impairment. In contrast, disciplines such as shot put or running, people with vision impairments are able to perform. Therefore, there should be training sessions and meetings where disabled people will be able to participate in this type of physical activity.

The authors declare that the test procedures comply with ethical standards. There are no conflicts of interest between the authors.

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