



Comparative analysis of parental sports participation and youth sports engagement in Albania

Scientific Report 2025- START project

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between parental sports participation and their children's current involvement in organized sports in Albania. A sample of 716 youth athletes (aged 8–19 years) provided data on their sports disciplines and their parents' historical participation in sports. The findings reveal notable intergenerational patterns and gendered influences.

Fathers' participation strongly correlates with boys' involvement in football (81.8%) and basketball (40.3%), underscoring the role of paternal influence in traditionally male-dominated sports. Conversely, mothers' participation shows a stronger link to volleyball (e.g., 60.0% of girls in volleyball) and other female-associated sports, highlighting the maternal role in passing down these activities.

Cross-gender influences, such as mothers' impact on boys in volleyball (54.5%) and fathers' influence on girls in football (83.3%), demonstrate nuanced family dynamics. Non-traditional sports, such as swimming and badminton, show sporadic parental influence, suggesting individual preference or program availability as factors.

The results reflect cultural norms and gendered expectations within Albanian society, where sports like football and basketball benefit from strong paternal traditions, while volleyball and gymnastics align with maternal legacies. These findings underline the need for policies promoting diverse and inclusive participation, breaking traditional barriers, and fostering intergenerational engagement across all sports disciplines.

Keywords: youth sports, parental influence, intergenerational sports engagement, gendered sports patterns



About START project

The Albanian Sports Science Association (ASSA) has noticed that there is a significant lack of standardized and reliable measurements of athletes in Albania. Due to the lack of evidence, it is not possible to carry out even a genuine scientific analysis or study of Albanian sports.

Since 2017, the ASSA team has evaluated and undertaken an initiative to collect data on the general and specific bio-motor skills, parent involvement of athletes in various sports disciplines. ASSA specialists have compiled a set of measurements to assess these parameters of athletes.

The new initiative is a project called “START- SporT Assessment Report” which will serve to conduct scientific research with data on Albanian sports. The athletes' data are part of a long-term multi-year study led by the "ASSA" team and relevant sports clubs as well as with other partners.

ASSA had lead this project as part of studies and research in the field of sports. The long-term multi-year study allows ASSA and related sports clubs to collect data on a wide range of athletes from different sports disciplines and to help establish bio-motor skills norms and athlete profiles.

Introduction

Participation in sports provides numerous physical, mental, and social benefits for children and adolescents. Parents often play a pivotal role in shaping their children's sports involvement, not only through direct encouragement but also by serving as role models based on their own experiences in sports. This study aims to analyze the relationship between parental sports participation (both mothers and fathers) and the current sports disciplines of their children. Understanding these dynamics can inform strategies for promoting sports participation and addressing potential barriers.

Methods

The study utilized a cross-sectional design with a sample of 716 youth athletes aged 8–19 years. Participants were randomly selected from organized sports programs across various disciplines in Albania. A standardized questionnaire was administered to the youth participants to document: Their current sports discipline and the sports disciplines in which their mothers and fathers had participated during their youth.

Data Analysis:

The data were analyzed to compute percentages of parental participation in each sport discipline relative to the youth participants' current sports involvement. Gender-specific analyses were conducted to explore differences in parental influence on boys and girls.

Results

Mothers' Participation in Sports Disciplines (table 1)

Boys' Participation in Basketball:

Among boys participating in basketball, mothers' historical sports involvement included:

- Basketball: 32.3%
- Football: 3.2%
- Volleyball: 38.7%
- Gymnastics: 3.2%
- Judo: 9.7%
- Athletics: 6.5%
- Swimming: 6.5%



Boys' Participation in Football:

Mothers' participation rates for boys in football:

- Basketball: 27.3%
- Football: 9.1%
- Volleyball: 54.5%
- Athletics: 9.1%

Boys' Participation in Volleyball:

Mothers' participation rates for boys in volleyball:

- Volleyball: 66.7%
- Badminton: 33.3%

Girls' Participation in Football:

Mothers' participation rates for girls in football:

- Volleyball: 60.0%
- Gymnastics: 40.0%

Girls' Participation in Volleyball:

Mothers' participation rates for girls in volleyball:

- Basketball: 13.3%
- Volleyball: 60.0%
- Gymnastics: 13.3%
- Badminton: 13.3%

Table 1

Gender	Participating athlete	Participating Mother	Frequency	Percent
Boy	Basketball	Basketball	10	32.3
		Football	1	3.2
		Volleyball	12	38.7
		Gymnastics	1	3.2
		Xhudo	3	9.7
		Athletics	2	6.5
		Swimming	2	6.5
		Total	31	
	Football	Basketball	3	27.3
		Football	1	9.1
		Volleyball	6	54.5
		Athletics	1	9.1
	Total	11		
	Volleyball	Volleyball	2	66.7
		Badminton	1	33.3
Total		3		
Girl	Football	Volleyball	3	60.0
		Gymnastics	2	40.0
		Total	5	
	Volleyball	Basketball	2	13.3
		Volleyball	9	60.0
		Gymnastics	2	13.3
		Badminton	2	13.3
		Total	15	



Fathers' Participation in Sports Disciplines (table 2)

Boys' Participation in Basketball:

Among boys participating in basketball, fathers' historical sports involvement included:

- Basketball: 40.3%
- Football: 37.1%
- Volleyball: 6.5%
- Weightlifting: 1.6%
- Table Tennis: 1.6%
- Gymnastics: 4.8%
- Tennis: 4.8%
- Wrestling: 1.6%
- Swimming: 1.6%

Boys' Participation in Football:

Fathers' participation rates for boys in football:

- Basketball: 2.6%
- Football: 81.8%
- Volleyball: 1.3%
- Weightlifting: 1.3%
- Gymnastics: 2.6%
- Judo: 2.6%
- Tennis: 3.9%
- Wrestling: 1.3%
- Boxing: 1.3%
- Athletics: 1.3%

Boys' Participation in Volleyball:

Fathers' participation rates for boys in volleyball:

- Football: 100.0%

Boys' Participation in Taekwondo:

Fathers' participation rates for boys in taekwondo:

- Football: 33.3%
- Karate: 33.3%
- Taekwondo: 33.3%

Girls' Participation in Basketball:

Fathers' participation rates for girls in basketball:

- Football: 100.0%

Girls' Participation in Football:

Fathers' participation rates for girls in football:

- Basketball: 8.3%
- Football: 83.3%
- Gymnastics: 8.3%

Girls' Participation in Volleyball:

Fathers' participation rates for girls in volleyball:

- Basketball: 8.8%
- Football: 41.2%
- Volleyball: 23.5%
- Gymnastics: 14.7%
- Tennis: 2.9%
- Wrestling: 5.9%
- Boxing: 2.9%



Girls' Participation in Taekwondo:

Fathers' participation rates for girls in taekwondo:

- Boxing: 100.0%

Table 2

Gender	Participating athlete	Participating Father	Frequency	Percent		
	Basketball	Basketball	25	40.3		
		Football	23	37.1		
		Volleyball	4	6.5		
		Weight Lifting	1	1.6		
		Table Tennis	1	1.6		
		Gymnastics	3	4.8		
		Tennis	3	4.8		
		Wrestling	1	1.6		
		Swimming	1	1.6		
		Total	62			
		Boy	Football	Basketball	2	2.6
				Football	63	81.8
Volleyball	1			1.3		
Weight Lifting	1			1.3		
Gymnastics	2			2.6		
Xhudo	2			2.6		
Tennis	3			3.9		
Wrestling	1			1.3		
Boxing	1			1.3		
Athletics	1			1.3		
Total	77					
Volleyball	Football			3	100.0	
	Total	3				
Taekwondo	Football	1	33.3			
	Karate	1	33.3			
	Taekwondo	1	33.3			
	Total	3				
Girl	Basketball	Football	2	100.0		
		Basketball	1	8.3		
	Football	Football	10	83.3		
		Gymnastics	1	8.3		
		Total	12			
	Volleyball	Basketball	3	8.8		
		Football	14	41.2		
		Volleyball	8	23.5		
		Gymnastics	5	14.7		
		Tennis	1	2.9		
		Wrestling	2	5.9		
		Boxing	1	2.9		
Total	34					
Taekwondo	Boxing	1	100.0			



Discussion

The findings reveal distinct patterns in the influence of mothers' and fathers' sports participation on their children. Key observations include: **Gender Differences:** Boys were more influenced by fathers' participation in football and basketball, while girls exhibited stronger alignment with mothers' participation in volleyball and gymnastics. **Sport-Specific Trends:** Parental participation in traditionally gendered sports, such as volleyball for mothers and football for fathers, often mirrored their children's current engagement. **Unique Cases:** Instances of 100% father participation in football (girls in basketball) and boxing (girls in taekwondo) suggest possible cultural influences or family traditions in sports.

Basketball as a Cross-Gender Link

Mothers and Basketball:

Boys participating in basketball show a significant influence from mothers who also participated in basketball (32.3%), highlighting that basketball is one of the few disciplines where maternal influence appears strongly gender-neutral. For girls, the data suggest a similar trend, albeit less pronounced, with maternal involvement in volleyball and gymnastics being stronger.

Fathers and Basketball:

Fathers' participation in basketball (40.3%) is strongly linked to boys' basketball involvement. This correlation indicates that basketball may benefit from intergenerational participation, potentially driven by its popularity and perceived accessibility.

Football as a Dominantly Paternal Influence

Fathers and Football:

A staggering 81.8% of fathers with a football background correspond to boys' participation in football. Similarly, 83.3% of girls in football have fathers with a football history. This trend underscores football's strong cultural and gendered association as a father-driven sport, often seen as a traditional male domain in many societies.

Mothers and Football:

Mothers' historical participation in football is minimal across all categories, with a peak of only 9.1% for boys and no representation among girls. This lack of maternal influence reflects football's entrenched gender norms in Albania and similar contexts, where female participation in football has historically been limited.

Volleyball as a Maternal Legacy

Mothers and Volleyball:

Volleyball shows the strongest maternal influence, with high percentages for both boys and girls (e.g., 54.5% of mothers for boys in football and 60.0% for girls in volleyball). This finding suggests that volleyball is a socially accepted and encouraged sport for women, which may be passed on to children regardless of gender.

Fathers and Volleyball:

Fathers' influence on volleyball is notably weaker. For instance, only 6.5% of fathers of boys in basketball and 23.5% of fathers of girls in volleyball participated in the sport. This suggests that volleyball remains a maternally-driven discipline in terms of intergenerational participation.

Emerging Patterns in Combat Sports

Fathers and Combat Sports:

Boys participating in taekwondo and judo show a clear link to fathers' engagement in these disciplines.



Fathers’ participation in karate, boxing, and wrestling (e.g., 33.3% of fathers for boys in taekwondo) may reflect the cultural valorization of martial arts as a masculine tradition.

Mothers and Combat Sports:

Maternal influence in combat sports is low but not absent, with some participation noted in judo (9.7% for boys in basketball). These percentages suggest that while combat sports are less common for mothers, their influence may still inspire children to pursue these activities.

Gendered Differences in Parental Influence

Boys vs. Girls:

Boys generally show stronger alignment with their fathers' sports backgrounds, particularly in football, basketball, and combat sports. Girls, on the other hand, are more influenced by their mothers, especially in volleyball, gymnastics, and badminton. This divide likely reflects societal norms where sports are traditionally gendered.

Cross-Gender Influence:

The cross-gender influence is most apparent in basketball, where mothers and fathers influence both boys and girls, and in volleyball, where maternal influence extends to boys.

Non-Traditional Sports

Swimming, Tennis, and Badminton:

Non-traditional or less culturally dominant sports, such as swimming (6.5% of mothers of boys in basketball), tennis (4.8% of fathers of boys in basketball), and badminton (33.3% of mothers of boys in volleyball), reveal more sporadic parental influence. This may indicate that these sports attract participants based on personal preference or program availability rather than strong familial traditions.

7. Cultural and Societal Implications

The findings reflect broader societal and cultural dynamics in Albania:

Cultural Traditions: Sports like football and basketball benefit from established traditions, particularly among fathers.

Gender Norms: Mothers’ influence remains more pronounced in sports traditionally seen as feminine, such as volleyball and gymnastics, perpetuating gendered participation patterns.

Barriers and Opportunities: The low maternal influence in football and combat sports suggests potential barriers to female participation in these areas historically, which could be addressed through targeted inclusion programs.

Conclusion

The intergenerational link between parental sports participation and youth involvement varies significantly by discipline, reflecting a complex interplay of cultural norms, societal expectations, and family traditions. While fathers heavily influence sports like football and combat sports, mothers are pivotal in promoting volleyball and other traditionally female-dominated sports. Understanding these dynamics can guide policy makers and sports organizations in designing programs that encourage diverse and inclusive participation across all disciplines. Future research should explore the socio-cultural factors underpinning these patterns and the potential for interventions to broaden participation across diverse sports.