



Intergenerational trends in sports discipline participation: A study of youth athletes, their parents, and grandparents in Albania

Scientific Report 2025- START project

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Abstract

This study (START project) examines intergenerational trends in sports participation, comparing the percentage of involvement in various sports disciplines among mothers, fathers, maternal grandmothers, maternal grandfathers, paternal grandmothers, and paternal grandfathers of youth athletes in Albania. The aim is to identify patterns and shifts in sports engagement across generations, as well as gender-based differences in participation. The study sample consisted of 716 youth athletes (514 boys, 202 girls) aged 8-19 years, actively involved in organized sports programs. Data were collected through a questionnaire assessing family sports history. Results showed that boys predominantly participated in football (54.9%) and basketball (38.7%), while girls heavily favored volleyball (78.2%). Volleyball was the leading sport among mothers (49.2%) and maternal grandmothers (40.0%), indicating continuity across female generations. Football dominated among fathers (59.8%) and maternal grandfathers (68.2%), showing sustained popularity among males. Basketball was highly favored by paternal grandmothers (80.0%) and grandfathers (73.8%), reflecting historical preferences. A decline in diversity of sports disciplines was observed from older to younger generations, with less representation in sports like wrestling, boxing, and athletics.

These findings highlight intergenerational trends, gender influences, and shifts in sports preferences, offering actionable insights for promoting a diverse and inclusive sporting culture in Albania.

Keywords: Generational trends, sports participation, youth athletes, gender differences, Albania, intergenerational analysis.



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

This study investigates generational trends in sports discipline participation among youth athletes in Albania and their parents (mothers and fathers) and grandparents (maternal and paternal). Understanding these patterns provides insight into how sports preferences evolve over time and informs strategies to promote diverse and inclusive sports engagement.

Methods

The sample consisted of 716 youth participants (514 boys and 202 girls) aged 8-19 years, actively involved in organized sports programs in Albania. Participants were selected randomly from various sports disciplines, ensuring representation of both genders. A structured questionnaire was distributed to youth participants. The questionnaire collected self-reported data on: current sports disciplines of youth participants and sports participation of their parents (mothers and fathers) and grandparents (maternal and paternal) during their youth. Percentages of participation in various sports disciplines were calculated for each generational group. Comparative trends between generations (mothers to maternal grandparents and fathers to paternal grandparents) were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results

Boys predominantly participated in football (54.9%) and basketball (38.7%), while girls favored volleyball (78.2%). Among maternal lineages, volleyball was the most common sport for mothers (49.2%) and maternal grandmothers (40%), whereas maternal grandfathers primarily participated in football (68.2%). Paternal lineages revealed a decline in basketball participation from paternal grandparents (80.0% and 73.8%) to fathers (16.0%), while football participation increased significantly among fathers (59.8%). Grandparental generations exhibited greater diversity in sports participation, including traditional sports like gymnastics and athletics, compared to parents and youth.

**Youth Sports Participation**

Participation by gender and sport among youth is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Gender		Frequency	Percent
Boy	Basketball	199	38.7
	Football	282	54.9
	Volleyball	24	4.7
	Taekwondo	9	1.8
	Total	514	
Girl	Basketball	8	4.0
	Football	31	15.3
	Volleyball	158	78.2
	Taekwondo	5	2.5
	Total	202	

Parental and Grandparental Sports Participation

Table 2 Percentage Participation Across Generations – Maternal Lineage

	Maternal					
	Mothers		Grandmother		Grandfather	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Basketball	15	23.1			2	9.1
Football	2	3.1			15	68.2
Volleyball	32	49.2	5	50.0	3	13.6
Gymnastics	5	7.7	2	20.0	1	4.5
Judo	3	4.6				
Badminton	3	4.6				
Athletics	3	4.6	2	20.0	1	4.5
Swimming	2	3.1				
Boxing						
Wrestling			1	10.0		
Total	65		10		22	



Table 3 Percentage Participation Across Generations – Paternal Lineage

	Paternal					
	Fathers		Grandmother		Grandfather	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Basketball	4	16.0	8	80.0	31	73.8
Football	31	59.8			6	14.3
Volleyball	116	6.7	2	20.0	5	11.9
Karate	13	0.5				
Taekwondo	1	0.5				
Weight Lifting	1	1.0				
Table Tennis	2	0.5				
Gymnastics	1	5.7				
Judo	11	1.0				
Tennis	2	3.6				
Wrestling	7	2.1				
Boxing	4	1.5				
Athletics	3	0.5				
Swimming	1	0.5				
Total	197		10		42	

Discussion

Maternal Lineage Trends: volleyball: Dominant among mothers (49.2%) and maternal grandmothers (40%), indicating intergenerational continuity, although declining: football: higher participation by maternal grandfathers (68.2%), suggesting a gender shift in sports preferences over generations: diversity of Sports: Maternal grandmothers displayed a broader spectrum of sports participation, including gymnastics, athletics, and wrestling, reflecting earlier engagement in non-team sports.

Paternal Lineage Trends: basketball: High participation among paternal grandparents (80.0% and 73.8%) drastically declined among fathers (16.0%), highlighting a generational shift away from this sport; football: Increased dramatically among fathers (59.8%) compared to paternal grandfathers (14.3%), signifying a modern preference for team sports; volleyball: Steady but low participation across all paternal generations.

Gender Differences in Youth: Boys predominantly participated in football (54.9%) and basketball (38.7%), whereas girls overwhelmingly favored volleyball (78.2%). These patterns mirror historical gender preferences observed in parental generations.

Conclusions

Generational shifts indicate a decline in traditional sports and an increased focus on modern team sports, particularly football. Gendered preferences persist, with boys gravitating toward football and basketball and girls toward volleyball. Efforts are needed to promote balanced participation across genders and revive interest in underrepresented sports. Over three generations, there has been a notable shift from traditional and individual sports (e.g., gymnastics, wrestling) to modern team sports (e.g., football). Gendered sports preferences persist, with males gravitating toward football and females toward volleyball. Grandparental generations exhibited greater diversity in sports participation, whereas parental and youth generations concentrated on fewer, popular disciplines.



Implications for Sports Development:

Strategies are needed to promote balanced and diverse sports participation across genders and generations, particularly in underrepresented sports like athletics and gymnastics.

Recommendations

Develop programs targeting traditional sports to revitalize interest and preserve cultural diversity in sports participation. Address gender biases by encouraging participation in non-stereotypical sports disciplines (e.g., girls in football, boys in volleyball). Further research is necessary to explore causal factors driving these generational trends, such as cultural, economic, or policy influences.