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## SPORTS AND MOTOR ACTIVITY OF THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY AT SOFIA UNIVERSITY

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### ABSTRACT

In the modern hectic and intense daily routine, sport and physical activity are left in the background, even though they help to improve the health, physical and mental state of those involved. *The purpose* of this article is to present summarized and specific data from the information of the academic community about their interests and expectations for sports and motor activities at Sofia University.

The analysis of the results of the study under a project at the University will support the actions of the lecturers at the Department of Sport to provide adequate and interesting sports services to the academic community.

The summaries will result in updated sports curricula not only for students, but also for lecturers and staff from the University.

**Key words:** sport, physical activity, academic community, Sofia University

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" is the largest, oldest and most prestigious university in Bulgaria. The education provided by the University is recognized throughout the world, and its specialists are respected in academic and scientific community not only in Bulgaria. The University attracts students and scientists from other countries through the various European programs and activities, as Sofia University is the leader in the country in terms of the number of participants in student and teaching mobility and the establishment of the European area of higher education (1).

Although the University is developing well, it is still seeing some changes in a negative direction based on social and economic problems, continuous stress and lately the Covid 19 Pandemic and the War in Ukraine. Current problems increase stress and worsen people's health.

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In this regard, the Department of Sports at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" since 2008 pays special attention to the health of the academic community by providing opportunities for active sports and tourism activities.

According to the Rules for the Organization and Activities of Sofia University, the Department of Sports is the unit that organizes and coordinates sports activities at the University. The goal is to achieve lasting habits and improve the physical activity and health status of the academic community by offering conditions and training for practicing sports and physical activities at the University, which in turn activates the teaching, learning, research and project activities of the academic society from The Sports Department.

The development and improvement of sports science and the gradual expansion of pedagogical knowledge leads to pedagogical reflection and interpretation of the complex processes and phenomena in the field of physical education, the training process and recreational activities (2).

Many authors claim that sports and physical activity improve health, physical and mental state. They prove that those engaged in sports and physical activity experience positive feelings and satisfaction from the achieved results, physical and mental improvement, while at the same time strengthening their health and developing personal qualities (3-5).

Physical activity has a wide range of health and well-being benefits, reducing the risk of various chronic diseases, such as coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, obesity and several types of cancer. Even just one hour of moderate-intensity physical activity per week was associated with a 33% lower risk of mortality (6). Activities with physical exercises, sports and tourism strengthen the physical and health condition, support the emotional, moral and intellectual growth of the personality.

The role of adapted physical activities and sports in education, training and recreational activities designed to meet the unique physical, mental, social and educational needs of people is significant. In the field of physical education and sport, in the educational system, sport provides a solution to long-term unique needs and equal access to physical activity for all (3).

Practicing sports improves communication, includes, gives greater social support, rejects the discriminatory factor, improves physical condition; foregrounds pleasure, emotion and fun (7).

Nowadays, especially in the last few years, more and more attention is paid to a healthy lifestyle and optimal motor activity, ensuring a better physical, functional and mental state of the person. In this regard, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". The policy of the European Union is also aimed at a healthy lifestyle and creation of suitable and accessible conditions for sports, equality, tolerance, improvement of physical, mental and functional condition, as well as social integration (8).

Promoting physical activity is one of the key public health priorities worldwide. The various studies on the issue relate specifically to people's

participation in recreational sports, which have shown health benefits, including improved aerobic and metabolic fitness, improved cardiovascular function at rest, reduced obesity, reduced risk of all-cause mortality, and improved psychological health, and social well-being (9).

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study analyzes the responses from an anonymous survey conducted among the academic community of Sofia University in 2022, as part of the project: "Investigating the interests and expectations for sports and motor activities of the academic community at Sofia University" (No. 80-10- 189/27.05.2022), which continues in 2023 (No. 80-10-134/10.05.2023). The scope of the research made it necessary to continue the project, but with updated goals, tasks and team from the Department of Sports: Mina Antonova (head), M. Nedkova, G. Ignatov, E. Yordanov and T. Georgiev (doctoral student).

The Google forms platform (<https://forms.office.com/r/kjxwTn5aTg>) is used to distribute and collect information. The survey card is composed of 23 questions, which are of open, closed and ranked type (10, 11).

The purpose of the research is to present summarized and specific data from the responses of the academic community, about their interests and expectations for sports and motor activities at Sofia University.

The object of research is the motives and reasons for playing sports.

The subject of research is the indicators (answers) of the respondents (respondents) about the ways to motivate them to do sports.

The subject of research is the academic community - students, teachers and employees from the Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski". In the research, the respondents are divided into groups, regardless of whether they play sports, although the analysis is also based on this indicator: age, activity at the University and unit or faculty.

## RESULTS

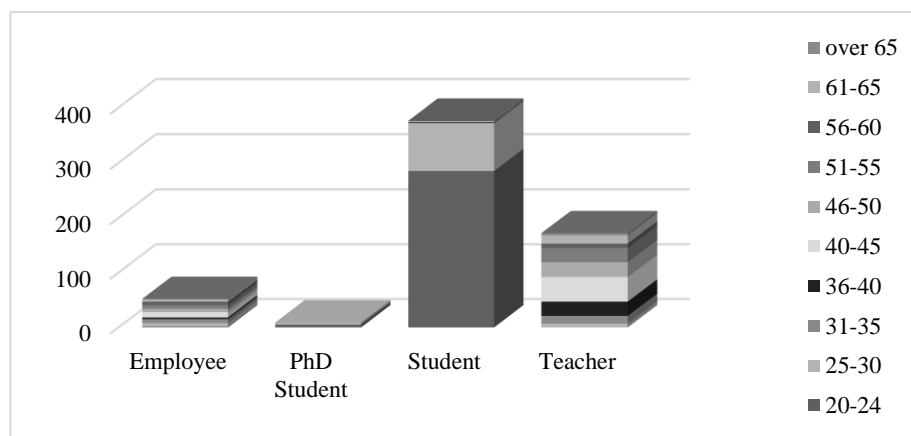
The 612 surveyed respondents are distributed according to their activity at the University as follows: 62% students, 29% teachers and 9%

employees. It is interesting that a group of doctoral students, who are 2% of the total number of students, also formed without being defined. The respondents were distributed proportionally (about 10% of each group), according to the total number of teachers, employees and students at Sofia University.

The age distribution is almost the same for all groups from 30 to 65 years old, with a preponderance in the group 40-45 years old (9.4%), and the least, as expected, are in the group over 65 years old (0.9%).

24 years and up to 30 years, there are 64.4%, in which age limit mainly students enter, which are 62%, i.e. only 2.4% are faculty and staff participating in the study (**Figure 1**).

The even distribution by age, according to the number of participants, as well as the proportional distribution by activity are a prerequisite for the credibility of the results obtained. In addition, the respondents are from all faculties and units of Sofia University, which is also a fact for the reliability of the results.



**Figure 1.** Age distribution

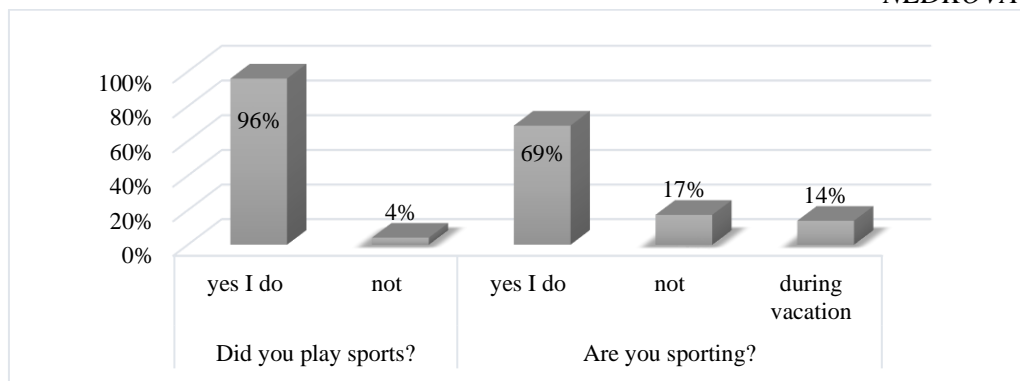
In the research, an analysis was made of the opinion of the respondents about motor activity and sports as an opportunity and reason for practicing. In some studies, common reasons for participating in sports are enjoyment, social interactions, and weight management (12).

In the present study, the respondents indicate in the first three places in terms of importance that sport for them is "health" (66%, 24% and 6% - a total of 92%), "fun, recreation, relaxation" (21%, 41% and 21% - total 83%) and "physical perfection" (8%, 22% and 24% - total 54%). A large percentage of participants (46%) also indicated "social communication" (10, 11). These results lead to the conclusion that the Academic Community is aware of the benefits of sports activities, as good physical and health conditions, as well as social communication and entertainment, relaxation, are placed in the first places of importance.

Another problem that the researchers have is related to the motivation for sports activities, the most important reason being the lack or insufficient material base, its condition or distance from the University (11).

This article traces the dynamics of the answers to the questions: "Have you played sports?" and "Are you playing sports?" (currently). **Figure 2** presents the data for all respondents, and **Figures 3, 4 and 5** present the data for individual activity groups: students, teachers and employees.

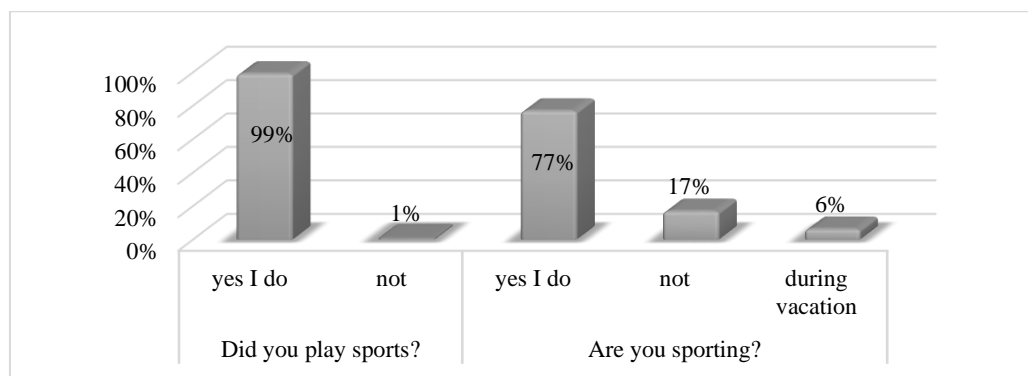
**Figure 2** clearly shows that 96% used to do sports, but only 69% currently do sports, as well as 14% who only do sports during their annual vacation. Of those who do not do sports at the moment (19%), only 3% cite the Covid 19 Pandemic as the reason, which shows that they do not have the necessary motivation for sports and physical activity.



**Figure 2.** “Did you play sports?” and “Are you sporting?” for everyone

The answers to the questions "Have you played sports?" for the group "students" (Figure 3) show that 99% of them were involved in sports actively, either professionally, for health or to maintain a good physical shape. Unfortunately, the number of people currently playing sports, as can be seen

from the figure, has drastically decreased, with 77% actively playing sports and 6% only playing sports during vacations. The reason for this may be the busy curriculum, distance from the sports base, etc.

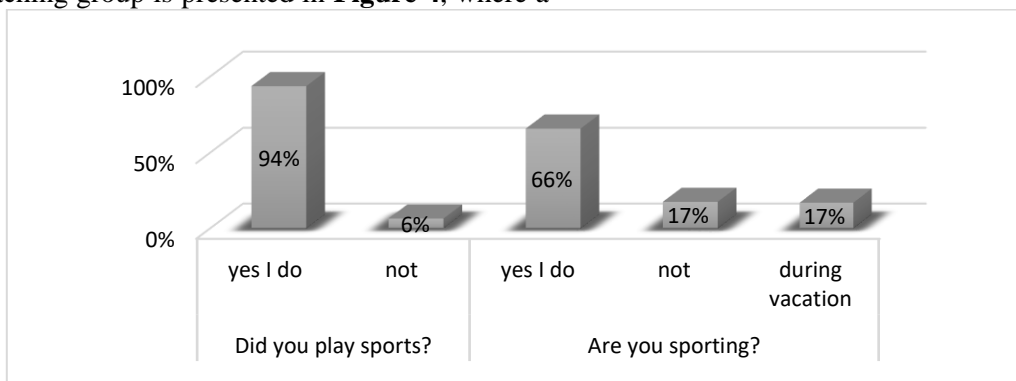


**Figure 3.** The answers to the questions: "Do you exercise?" and "Have you exercised?" for the group of students

In both samples - of the students and the general sample of the academic staff of the University (Figures 2 and 3), there is a drop in their activity by about 22%.

negative difference of almost 30% is observed. The desire for sports and physical activity during the annual vacation shows that teachers like to do sports, but the reason is clearly the lack of free time or an inconvenient place for sports.

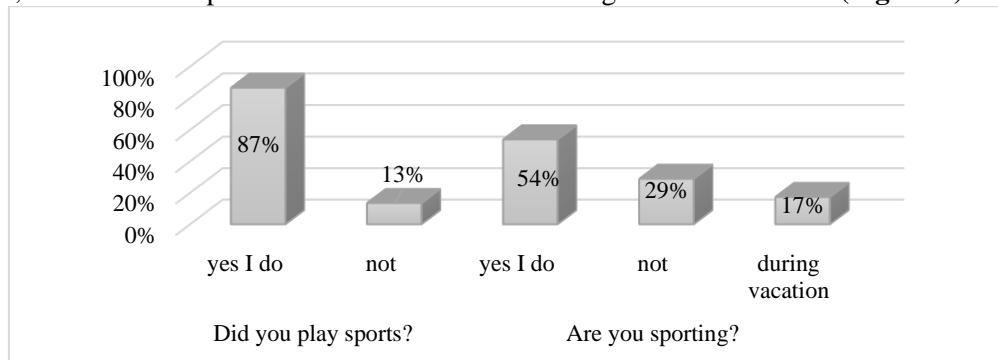
The comparative analysis of responses for the teaching group is presented in Figure 4, where a



**Figure 4.** The answers to the questions: "Do you exercise?" and "Have you exercised?" for the group of teachers

The situation is similar for the group of "employees", but in more pronounced values:

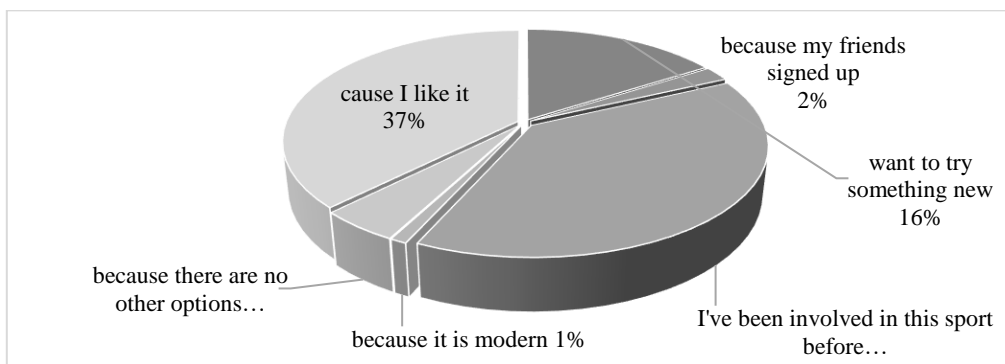
33% no longer do sports, and only 17% do sports during their annual leave (**Figure 5**).



**Figure 5.** The answers to the questions: "Do you exercise?" and "Have you exercised?" for the group of employee

To the question "Why did you choose this sport?", the respondents from the academic community of Sofia University indicated two main reasons: because they "like the sport" and "have played it before". Not a small percentage (16%) shared that the reason was "to try something new" (**Figure 6**).

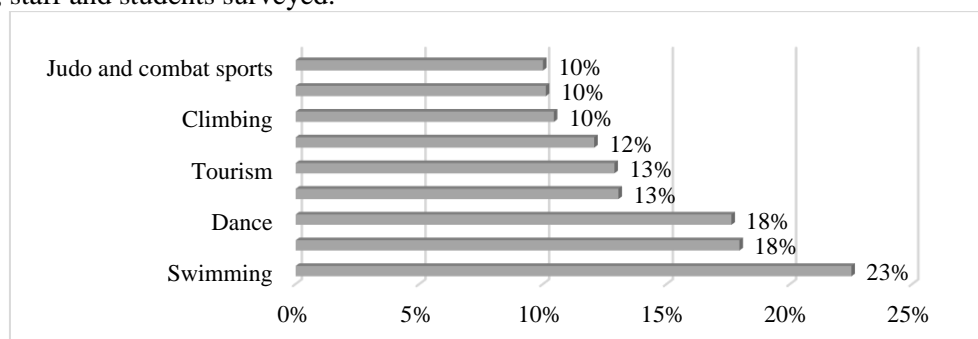
In a previous 2016 study on this question, the most students indicated that they chose the sport to "try something new" (47%) and "because they played the sport" (35%) (13).



**Figure 6.** Why did you choose this sport?

The possibility of an "Other" response leads to the conclusion that the academic community's choice of sports is based on what they like. This shows that the sports disciplines and motor activities offered by the Department of Sports are liked by the teachers, staff and students surveyed.

To the question "Which sports disciplines would you participate in?" from the sports offered at the University, 32 sports were indicated by the respondents, with the most interested in the sports presented in **Figure 7**.



**Figure 7.** In which sports disciplines would you participate from the offered at the University?

Some of the sports at the University are offered as group sports, such as judo and combat sports, aerobic sports. Dances are also summarized because some indicated specifically what dances they wanted (folk or sports), but some answered more generally – dances.

There is a large percentage of respondents who did not indicate any sport (9%), and some said that they liked all the sports offered (2%).

It should be noted that some respondents have comments, both about the remoteness of the bases and the lack of bases, and some are of the opinion that the external company "Multisport" can easily do the work of the teachers from the Department of Sports. There are even surprising opinions from colleagues, such as: "The sports department does not care and that it should be closed." (survey quote).

The fact is that the University, instead of finishing the sports hall and creating conditions for physical activity of its employees, in the case of the academic community, according to the Law on physical education and sports, provides the easier option – external services for sports via the "Multisport" program.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis:

√ The number of sportsmen from the three groups of respondents has decreased alarmingly, and it is very disturbing for employees, as they work in a static position and are often immobilized. Reasons for this are the lack of flexible working hours and a base that is in the University building.

√ The decrease in student activity is due to both youth and commitments in everyday life – studies, internships, work.

√ A large part of the respondents are not familiar with the opportunities for sports and recreation at the University, especially with the activities related to the prevention, rehabilitation and treatment of injuries and other health problems. In this regard, a large part of the Academic community does not take advantage of the conditions provided by the kinesitherapy centers in the Rectorate and the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts, which are staffed by kinesitherapy and rehabilitation specialists from the University's Department of Sports.

The efforts of the teachers from the Department of Sports are aimed at creating opportunities for the academic community to participate in organized sports activities such as school hours, training by type of sport and/or using the sports facility according to the schedule, but the opportunities are few due to the lack of a sports facility of Sofia University.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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