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The influence of the pandemic generated by the SARS-COV-2 virus on the activity of the CSU Oradea women's handball team in the 2020-2021 season

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on ordinary activities and lifestyles. As a result of all these changes, it was anticipated that the level of physical activity would also change. Knowing and highlighting the effects of the pandemic on the CSU Oradea women's handball team can generate relevant data regarding the involvement of the players in the preparation process and also the obtained results in the competitions. The subjects of the research have been 16 members of the CSU Oradea women's handball team from the 2020-2021 season. The questionnaires applied, which includes 22 items, was pretested and then applied online between April and May 2021, without undergoing changes from one subject to another. The female athletes of the CSU Oradea team were mostly affected by this pandemic, primarily in terms of sports.

Keywords: COVID-19, sport, young, players perception, COVID-19 effects, rules, training

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on ordinary activities and lifestyles. Schools and universities have switched from face-to-face to online

education (Erdely et al., 2020), more jobs have moved from the office to the home, sporting events have been postponed or cancelled, and physical distancing has become something usual. As a result of all these changes, it was anticipated that the level of physical activity would also change, which will affect the mental well-being of the population (Brajša-Žganec, 2011; Ilies et al., 2014; Dragos, 2015a; Papp et al., 2019; Yan and Spaulding, 2020).

Other sport performers, such as coaches and referees were also experiencing meaningful changes to their sport engagement and career trajectories (Ilies et al., 2021, Mchunu et al., 2022), feeling less publicly essential than they were used to (Taku and Arai, 2020). It was suggested that elite referees faced issues, such as quarantine, time away from families and loved ones, a lack of ongoing contact with colleagues and fiscal concerns (Webb, 2020).

Once athletes have reduced training time and increased sedentary behavior, many harmful effects could occur during quarantine. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the protection of athletes' health must be seen in the context of the complex social systems of which they are included.

The quarantine period has led to many changes in the routine where high-performance athletes have to look for alternative strategies to stay in shape and maintain their training schedule by improvising both the home space and training tools safely (Chuchu et al., 2021). All these routine adjustments can culminate in constant episodes of sleep deprivation induced by changes in the regular circadian rhythm.

In addition to physical activity, the well-being of members of the sports sector is also very important to consider during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research in recent months has shown the importance of physical activity but also the intake of vitamins against severe (or even lethal) side effects of COVID-19 and its support for the immune system (Skalska et al., 2019).

In the time of the pandemic and physical distancing, in addition to physical health, mental and spiritual health has also been focused, and sport is one of the most effective tools to influence them (Mann et al., 2020). Several studies have shown the positive effect of physical activity and sport on shaping and supporting mental health and psychological well-being (Dragos, 2014; Gherman, 2014; Dragos, 2015b; Samuel, 2020).

Starting from these aspects and taking into consideration the effects of the pandemic on the population in general but especially on sport in particular (Turcu, 2020), by elaborating of this paper the authors tried to highlight the changes generated by the SARS-COV-2 virus and the influence of the pandemic on the activity of the CSU Oradea women's handball team in the 2020-2021 season.

Knowing and highlighting the effects of the pandemic on the CSU Oradea women's handball team can generate relevant data regarding the involvement of the players in the preparation process and also the results obtained in the competitions. In the same time, all this data will be able to be used in the future to reduce the possible negative effects generated by other malfunctions or unknown situations.

The objectives established in order to achieve the proposed goal were: determining the ways to act in order to obtain relevant and objective data, in

correlation with the topic studied; developing a questionnaire to collect the data necessary to establish the conclusions of the study; capitalizing on research results.

Methodology

The subjects of the research have been 16 members of the CSU Oradea women's handball team from the 2020-2021 season, almost half of them had been under contract for at least two years at this club. They are between 18 and 26 years old, 14 athletes are bachelor students, one of them is a master's student and another one is a student in High School. Out of the 16 subjects, only one is from Oradea, more than half live with their colleagues, one with her parents, two of them live alone and four with other people. Also, only one is engaged in other gainful activities.

The questionnaire, which includes 22 items, was pretested and then applied online between April and May 2021, without undergoing changes from one subject to another. During the completion of the questionnaire, no player abandoned or interrupted the completion of the set of questions. After the questionnaire was applied, the obtained results were centralized and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, by the influence of the answers obtained.

In addition to the questions regarding general aspects like age, level of studies, residence or involvement in other activities, the questionnaire was developed to collect data about the players' perception of the emotional impact, the influence on the results achieved in trainings and competitions, financial aspects related to the club and players itself but also the degree of damage to the health of players infected with the coronavirus.

Results and discussions

Regarding the level of restrictions of sports activity adopted by the authorities, out of a total of 16 handball players of the CSU Oradea club, almost half, i.e. 43.75%, considered that it was too high, also 43.75% were satisfied with the measures and restrictions imposed while a female athlete characterized them as too permissive (Table 1). One of the respondents could not appreciate it. From another point of view, 50% of the subjects stated that they cannot appreciate if the crisis has affected the club where they are active, being a party where they do not have access to information regarding the club's losses, gains, income during 12.5% believe that it was very affected. The rest believe that the club has been affected more or less, in equal proportions. Also in the same direction, the majority of respondents believe that at CSU Oradea the sports part, represented by the interruption of training and competitions, had the greatest negative effect.

On the other hand, 81.25% of the players were affected from a sporting point of view, they consider it a psychological and motivational problem that the pandemic stopped their performance at an age when a brutal interruption of the activity could compromise their future in sport performance. The emergence of the COVID virus also affected the financial side of sportswomen, due to the restrictions imposed, which prohibited the holding of matches for quite a long period of time. This also led to the decrease in monthly earnings, as for every match won according to the input, the players receive a game bonus (Table 1).

Table 1. Centralized answers from questionnaires

Questions	Answer 1	Answer 2	Answer 3	Answer 4
Do you think that the measures to restrict sports activity taken by the authorities in the current crisis were:	<i>Too drastic</i>	<i>Exactly as needed</i>	<i>Too loose</i>	<i>I don't know</i>
	7 (43.75%)	7 (43.75%)	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)
To what extent has your club been affected by the current crisis?	<i>Very much</i>	<i>Enough</i>	<i>A little bit</i>	<i>I don't know</i>
	2 (12.25%)	3 (18.75%)	3 (18.75%)	8 (50%)
What do you think is the most affected part of the health crisis at your club?	<i>Financial part</i>	<i>The sports part, represented by the interruption of training and competitions</i>	<i>Both, equally</i>	<i>I don't know</i>
	0	11 (68.75%)	4 (25%)	1 (6.25%)
From what point of view were you mainly affected by the interruption of sports activity?	<i>Financial</i>	<i>Sport</i>	<i>Personal</i>	<i>I was not affected</i>
	2 (12.25%)	13 (81.25%)	0	1 (6.25%)
Resuming sports activity has generally induced feelings of:	<i>Happy</i>	<i>Fear</i>	<i>Uncertainty</i>	<i>It was something normal</i>
	12 (75%)	0	1 (6.25%)	3 (18.75%)
How do you rate the training sessions after resuming them?	<i>Totally limited</i>	<i>Narrowed down to a few basic exercises</i>	<i>Only partially limited, able to perform several activities</i>	<i>Almost the same as under normal conditions</i>
	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)	4 (25%)	10 (62.5%)
Resuming sports activity meant for you, in particular, first of all:	<i>The joy of returning to sports</i>	<i>The joy of returning to the team and implicitly the socializing part</i>	<i>Joy, generated by the possibility of improving the financial situation</i>	
	8 (50%)	7 (43.75%)	1 (6.25%)	
Your involvement in the training process in terms of motivation was:	<i>At the pre-pandemic level</i>	<i>Above the pre-pandemic level</i>	<i>Below the pre-pandemic level</i>	
	12 (75%)	4 (25%)	0	
Adapting to effort after the pandemic break have been for you:	<i>Very difficult to achieve</i>	<i>Very easy to achieve</i>	<i>It didn't require much effort as we had a period of transition and gradual readjustment</i>	
	4 (25%)	1 (6.25%)	11 (68.75%)	
Yes / No Questions	Yes	No	<i>It was a break I wanted</i>	
Have you been affected in sport way by the COVID pandemic?	15 (93.75%)	1 (6.25%)	0	
But on a personal level?	10 (62.5%)	4 (25%)	2 (12.25%)	
Did you ever think about not returning to your sport when it resumed?	0	16 (100%)	NA	
Did the uncertainty and permanent change of the competitive schedule have influences on motivation and involvement in training?	7 (43.75%)	9 (56.25%)	NA	
Have you been confirmed as a person infected with COVID-19?	10 (62.5%)	6 (37.5%)	NA	
If YES, do you have any repercussions from the infection?	2 (12.25%)	8 (50%)	NA	

The feelings generated by the resumption of activity for the sportswomen surveyed are those of happiness for 75% of them. This is due to the fact that the players have reunited, and have resumed training for participation in competitions. The joy of returning to sports activity was declared by 11 of the athletes, the joy of returning to the team and implicitly the socializing part was expressed by 7 of them, and the joy, generated by the possibility of improving the financial situation, by only one athlete.

Regarding the idea of not returning to sports activity when it resumed, all subjects responded negatively. During this unexpected break, they realized that this sport is part of their lives, each having at least 7 years of practice, spending most of their free time in the gym.

The subjects considered that the involvement in training was at a high level, like the one before the pandemic, sometimes even above it, which means an assumption of the new normality and hopes for regaining the pleasure of doing performance sports. More than half of the respondents considered that the return effort was acceptable through the way of a properly managed transition and personal will of each of them and the technical staff. For only four athletes, the effort was very difficult to manage being less trained during the break, while only one stated that it was very easy to achieve. The only changes in training were the observance of the measures taken for the spread of the virus and the performance of a periodic covid test, changes that did not affect their normal course, being not disturbing.

In terms of sports, almost all players have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the lack of training, matches, the lack of exchange of game ideas, isolation, the impact of sports regime and discipline in performance, the imbalance of the diet, the disappearance of good mood. Only one athlete was not affected. Also, more than half of the sportswomen were personally affected by the pandemic through the fear of moving outside the home, unbalanced caloric meals, disruption of the rhythm of life. Four of them were not affected, and two considered this period to be auspicious.

On the other hand, the uncertainty and permanent modification of the competitive program had influences on the motivation and involvement in training just for 7 sportswomen, while 9 declared that they were not affected. The matches were played as tournaments, so players were more involved in training because the risk of injury was higher. Those that were not affected, had the same motivation and involvement as before the pandemic.

Of all sportswomen surveyed, 62.5% were confirmed positive for the COVID-19 virus (Table 1). Although more than half were affected by the disease, there are no functional sequelae for any of them.

Conclusions

The female athletes of the CSU Oradea team were mostly affected by this pandemic, primarily in terms of sports. Being a young team with an average age of 21, they were also affected personally by the lack of going out and socializing. Most

of the players considered the measures taken to be a bit drastic, and the others, to a small extent, considered that they were necessary for that period. In any case, the training and competition schedule has been disturbed by this global pandemic. After this unwanted break, the players of the Oradea team returned with new ambitions and better motivation. The majority considered that they gradually readapted to the effort, the training being almost the same as before the pandemic. Although most of the sportswomen were infected with COVID-19, according to the answers received, there are no functional sequelae, which proves that, through their good physical and mental health due to the fact that they carry out sports activities regularly, they were protected from the effects of the disease.

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