

# The Impact of The Covid-19 Pandemic on the Psychosomatic Status of Athletes and Sports Stakeholders in the City of Zadar

Josip Miočić\*, Luka Androja and Žarko Bilić

Aspira University College, Split, Croatia

\*Corresponding author: Josip Miočić, Aspira University College, Split, Croatia.

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the world, the Republic of Croatia and the City of Zadar. It has affected athletes and other sports participants and left significant consequences. It has notably affected health and the economy, as well as the daily lives of people. A survey was conducted on a sample of 218 respondents in the Zadar area in order to determine the relevance of the pandemic on the psychosomatic status of athletes and stakeholders in sports. After analyzing the gathered answers, it is evident that due to the lack of regular sports activity the psychosomatic status is disturbed, there is lack of interest in sports competitions held without the presence of audience and online trainings are only partial replacement for the regular training process. Considering, there has not been enough research conducted on this topic yet, and them being important for all stakeholders in Zadar's sports, it is expected that the research results of this paper will contribute to the development of new guidelines in this research area on a theoretical level.

**Keywords:** Covid-19; Pandemic; Psychosomatic status; Athletes; Digital transformation

## Introduction

What is Covid-19? Such a question is asked all over the world, Europe, Republic of Croatia, the City of Zadar, among students, retirees, athletes, scientists, etc. One small invisible organism, a virus, appeared as a reflection of our civilization and set a series of obstacles, conditions, new relationships on the usual way of functioning of human society. Covid-19 as an event that completely surprised the world, is a typical example of the "black swan theory" appearing in modern society. After its first appearance (December 2019) in Wuhan, the capital of Hube province in central China, the virus spread around the world influencing all social and economic activities (Petrović, 2020 [1]). Regardless of whether the public reaction to this virus is considered excessive or not, the world is unpleasantly surprised, and the consequences for sports and global society will be enormous.

The black swan theory is based on the fact that it has long been believed that only white swans exist until the discovery of black swans in Australia, thus confirming that every rule has exceptions (Taleb, 2007). After a group of scientists from the American Seton Hall University in New Jersey in 2020 disclosed the opinion of Americans on issues related to sports during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In the same year the Croatian Association for Sports Management conducted a study "I am athlete", the authors decided to conduct a study on athletes from the City of Zadar and got interesting data.

The connection between psychosomatic status and physical activity has long been in the focus of the public and science, which is related to the way of life and social activities of modern man. The reality is nowhere near as simple, specifically with mental

health affecting not only emotional but also the financial and social status of a person and his family (Eu Joint action for Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2016). This was particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the global epidemic has caused numerous changes in social habits and customs, physical contact and all types of social behavior. Some of these changes seem reasonable, although many consider them reasonable, some people think they are bizarre. These changes, as stated in the text, cover numerous areas of everyday life. Interpersonal behavior and amenities in sports and in sports activities are highlighted for the purposes of this paper (Primorac, 2020) [2]. In particular, the usual functioning in team sports (football, basketball, handball, water polo, volleyball, and individual contact sports) is disrupted. In order to get a complete and somewhat structural overview of this pandemic, it is necessary to state the impact of digital media on all social groups and therefore athletes. The media have made our lives easier, in the areas of business, connections, education, migration, etc. However, there are negative consequences as well. Social groups are increasingly retreating into virtual communities alienating themselves from the society to which they belong. Digital media today have "occupied" our everyday life to such an extent that life without them has become unthinkable. That can be seen on the streets of our cities where people pass down with their eyes fixed on small screens (Turkle, 2011 [3]). In everyday life, and thus in the life of athletes, the word "digitalization" is appearing more and more often. Digital transformation refers to the process that begins when the organization starts planning the introduction of digital technologies in all business situations and lasts, the moment of its full integration (Ćirković, 2018 [4]). In the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of communication channels is a reflection of the digital transformation, as a society we manage to stay connected almost as if we are physically together, which is evident in the field of sports. As can be seen, we are witnessing an explosion of innovation in science, especially in the field of communications (Nambisan et al, 2019 [5]). Although tools for teleconferencing have existed for a long time (Webex, Netmeeting), today they are entering the mass use of digitalization, for example: classes, family and business

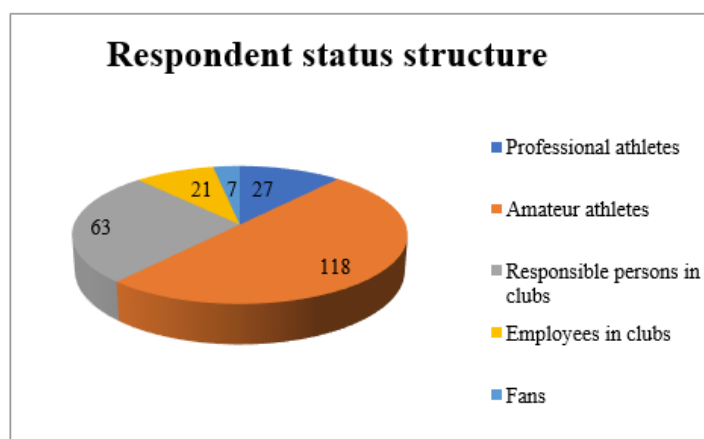
meetings, board games, etc. For example, the daily number of users of the Zoom platform has increased drastically (300 million users per day). Digital platforms (Big Blue Button, Skype, etc.) are used by scientists, young people, but also by older people and all other subgroups of society, who want to keep up with the galloping digital society (Vidaček-Hainš, V., Bushati, J., & Bencek, 2014 [6]). For the purposes of this paper, it is necessary to highlight the areas of sports in which the conditions of training activities have changed because of the pandemic.

Therefore, for the purposes of the research, the survey method was used, where the sports stakeholders of Zadar gave their opinion on the raised issues.

The aim of this research is to determine the degree of significance of the lack of sports activities on the psychosomatic status of athletes and other sports stakeholders in Zadar, and to directly determine whether media broadcasts can replace sports competitions in front of audience, and is online training an appropriate replacement for regular training. According to the presented research, it will be concluded whether the lack of regular sports activities, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, violated the psychosomatic status of athletes and sports stakeholders, are online trainings partly an appropriate substitute for regular training process and last is there significantly less interest in sports competitions without attendance of audience [7-10].

## Methods

The survey was conducted on 218 respondents who are in the period from 08 to 18 April 2020 filled out the questions addressed by this survey, among them, there are professional and amateur athletes, responsible persons in clubs, employees in clubs and federations (secretaries, administrators, accountants). Also, passionate sports fans from the area of the City of Zadar. The age of the respondents is from 15 to 65 years. Of the total number of respondents, 165 are males, 53 are females, and of the aforementioned total number are: professional athletes = 27, amateur athletes = 118, responsible persons in clubs = 63, employees = 21 and fans = 7 (Graph 1).



Graph 1: Structure of respondents' status.

The research was conducted online, by sending emails generated from the database of the Sports Association of the City of Zadar. For the purposes of this research, a survey method was used. The survey questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, divided into general and research aims. The survey is a quantitative form of research that collects different views and opinions of respondents and identified changes that occurred in respondents due to the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to: the training process, sports activities and competitions. In accordance with the goal, the hypothesis was set: that due to the lack of regular sports activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychosomatic status of athletes and other stakeholders in Zadar was significantly disturbed and that online trainings were partly a suitable substitute for regular training process, and that there is significantly less interest in sports without the presence of fans. The first part of the survey questionnaire refers to the general data of the respondents, and the second part contains questions aimed at answering the hypothesis set in the paper. After the implementation of the survey method, the completed survey questionnaires in printed form were entered into the Lime Survey program and exported to the specialized statistical program for data processing SPSS for further processing [11-18].

## Results and Discussion

After the survey, the analysis of the answers received by the respondents was performed. On the questions related to "The degree of significance of the lack of sports activity on the psychosomatic status of athletes and sports workers, it was found that due to the lack of regular sports activity the psychosomatic status is disturbed" (Table 1), given that 35% of respondents stated that it has neither a positive nor a negative effect, while 19% of them state that it has a partially negative effect. 7% of them state that it has a completely negative effect, and 26% of them state that it has a partially positive effect, but still 13% of respondents stated that it has a completely positive effect. In other questions from the above group of questions, the answer most often answer was: that sports activity is an indispensable part of everyday life of modern man.

**Table 1:** Presents results of the question - How much sports activity has a positive effect on personality development, by helping the process of socialization of the individual and to develop desirable traits, to offer positive models for identification, to create useful habits, and to reduce pathological reactions in athletes and sports employees?

Completely Negative	Partly Negative	Neither Negative nor Positive	Partly Positive	Completely Positive
7%	19%	35%	26%	13%

**Table 2:** Presents results of the question - If sports competitions were held without fans, what would be your interest in watching live events through the media broadcasts?

Completely Less Interest	Partly Less Interest	Neither Less nor More Interest	Partly Higher Interest	Completely Higher Interest
29%	26%	25%	11%	9%

**Table 3:** Presents results of the question - How much do we miss sports and sports activities?

I Miss Sports So Much	I Miss Sports	Same as Before	I Miss Sports Occasionally	I don't Miss it at All
37%	25%	18%	14%	10%

**Table 4:** presents results of the question - How would you rate the amount of your involvement in sports and sports activities since the beginning of the pandemic COVID-19?

I do Less Physical Activity than Before	Same as Before But Only In Another Media	I Practice Physical Activity Significantly
11%	25%	64%

The answer is understandable considering that the respondents come from one of the sports segments (Table 1).

Then on to a group of questions related to "if sports competitions were held without fans, what would be your interest in watching events online?" (Table 2), we received answers: 29% of respondents stated that their interest would be completely lower, 22% of respondents stated that their interest would be partially lower, 25% of respondents stated that their interest would be neither lower nor higher, 11% of respondents stated that their interest will be partially higher, and 9% of respondents stated that their interest will be completely higher (Table 2).

In the question "How much do we miss sports and sports activity?" (Table 3), respondents stated answers that are quite scattered: 37% of respondents state that they miss them very much, 25% of respondents state that they miss them, 18% of respondents state "same as before", 14% of respondents state that "we occasionally miss it", and 10% of respondents state "I don't miss it at all" (Table 3).

In the question related to the actual physical activity during the pandemic (Table 4), the following answers are given: 64% are significantly engaged, 25% of respondents stated the answer "same as before, but in another media", while 11% of respondents stated that they are less involved than before. From the previously mentioned results, it is evident that the respondents are still active in the field of sports only through adapted activities in accordance with the situation (Table 4).

To the question "Does the possibility of holding online training affect your satisfaction and improvement of motor and functional abilities?" (Table 5), we received the following answers: 64% of respondents clearly stated that it affects, 25% of respondents were undecided, and only 11% of respondents stated "no" as answer. These answers are expected given that some of the respondents are members of the so-called modern generation who use digital technologies in everyday life (Table 5).

**Table 5:** Presents results of the question - Does the possibility of holding online training affect on your satisfaction and improvement of motor and functional abilities?

It Does not Affect	Same as Before but only in another Media	I Practice Physical Activity Significantly
11%	25%	64%

The response of the respondents from the survey questionnaire came from the desire and motivation of the respondents who actively participate in the sports life of the City of Zadar. Of course, with the fact that they are connected with the Sports Community of the City of Zadar, with which they cooperate through various forms. Based on the conducted research and the results of the survey questionnaire completed by the respondents, some more topics were opened that should be examined in the future. Some of them are: "Under what conditions will sports competitions continue after the COVID-19 pandemic?", "Status of amateur sports in the City of Zadar after the Covid-19 pandemic", "Withdrawal of young athletes in the so-called virtual communities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic", etc.

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 virus pandemic changed our lives in just a few months. A comparative review of the available literature and research conducted tried to determine in what form COVID-19 influenced the psychosomatic status of athletes and other stakeholders in Zadar sports. What used to be quite common has become unthinkable, for the entire population, including members who play sports, work in the sports systems and for those who watch sports. It is clear to everyone how professional and amateur sports have become huge victims of this pandemic, and this is one of the reasons for conducting research on this paper. According to the set research goals and established results, it is evident that due to the lack of regular sports activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychosomatic status of athletes and stakeholders in Zadar is disturbed and that online training is only partially an appropriate substitute for regular training process, and that there is also less interest in sports competitions without the presence of fans. The moral lesson in our society about this culture of exploiting others is summed up in the sentence of an athlete from Italy who has recovered from an infection.: „The hardest thing for me is the thought that I could infect one of my colleagues“. These words of the Italian athlete permeate the necessary solidarity, care, empathy that the whole sport and all its stakeholders will have to respect if they want to move forward. Considering that there is still not enough research on this topic, and they are important for all athletes and stakeholders in Zadar, it is expected that the results of this paper will alert the population and contribute to the development of new guidelines in this area on a theoretical level. While in practice it is expected to serve as a platform for further research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychosomatic status of athletes and sports stakeholders and on online training as a substitute for a regular training process and interest in holding sports competitions without fans. Therefore, we hope that sports and sports activities in

the Republic of Croatia and in the City of Zadar are "tough tissue" that will survive in any format, ie that it can be adapted to any place of performance, so it is thought that our sport will get out and proceed further in any modified form and media. Let us all be aware that this makes us a part of history, the authors of the paper believe that in the end everything will be fine, and if it is not, it will not mean that it is the end!

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## Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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