

## Presentation of “Sport for All” Model at Iranian Universities of Medical Sciences: A Qualitative Study

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### Original Article

#### Abstract

**Introduction:** The stressors of the studentship may negatively change the health and quality of life (QOL) of students. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the stressors and their consequences as well as to adopt appropriate strategies for improving them. Access to public sport facilities, as an imperative factor in students' leisure time, plays an essential role in their physical and mental health that ultimately improves their QOL. The purpose of this study is to present the model of “sport for all” for Iranian students of universities of medical sciences.

**Materials and Methods:** This study was carried out based on the systematic grounded theory. The study participants were sports management experts, sports pioneers and faculty members who were included through purposive snowballing sampling method for semi-structured interviews. The interviews continued until theoretical saturation. At the same time as the data were collected, analysis was performed using the Strauss and Corbin method. The validity of the findings was determined by member matching methods, peer review, and experimental interviews.

**Results:** The results indicated 450 initial conceptual propositions with 14 categories and 41 concepts in the form of six dimensions of the paradigmatic model. The model included causal factors, main phenomenon, strategy, underlying features, environmental conditions, and outcomes with respectively 1, 1, 2, 5, 4, and 1 categories that constructed the paradigm of “sport for all” model for Iranian students of universities of medical sciences.

**Conclusion:** Improving attitude and awareness, motivation, interest, and increased vitality and joy leads to the increased participation of students in the “sport for all” activities and improve the health and wellbeing among them.

**Keywords:** Data grounded theory; Student; Health; Quality of life; Public sport

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#### Introduction

Healthy behaviors include a variety of areas of physical activity, health responsibilities, spiritual growth, nutrition, stress management, and interpersonal relationships (1). The World Health Organization (WHO), in its report entitled “The Second Decade of Life: Improving Health and Growth in Adolescence,” emphasizes the importance of healthy behaviors at this age (2,3). In the meantime, the studentship period is considered an important step in adopting sustainable health habits and behaviors (2). Numerous studies have shown that university age is a dynamic, transient, and sensitive stage in which changes in cognitive, physical,

social, and emotional development occur (2,4,5). University years are critical health years; because students are increasingly acting independently in their lifestyles and health practices (6). To learn and know well, different factors are needed in universities. One of these factors that has proven its role in creating and promoting the mental and physical health of people in society is exercise (7). A major part of sports that is closely related to the health and well-being of society is public sports or sports for all (8). Public sports provide opportunities for participation of individuals in sports activities without any limitations due to social and ethnic status and disability in their leisure time. In other

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words, all people should enjoy sports, and sports are the right of all people (9).

There is ample evidence that regular physical activity leads to an increase in the quality of life (QOL) of students, as the main national asset and a vibrant source of social and economic growth and development (10). Sports activity is one of the effective components of different aspects of life and paying attention to this issue is of special importance in the mental and physical health of students (11). The results of studies in Iran indicate that only 11% of students participate in sports activities (12) and about 31% of them do not exercise at all (13). It seems that in the Iranian university community, and especially among students, unwillingness to play sports has become a pervasive problem. The results of investigations on the prevalence of mental disorders in students have shown that this rate is 44.6% (14) among students of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran, 73.9% in students of Jahrom University of Medical Sciences, (JUMS), Jahrom, Iran, 22.7% in students of Ardabil University of Medical Sciences, Ardabil, Iran, (15) and 67.9% in students of Arak University of Medical Sciences, Arak, Iran (16). In their study, Mehdizadeh and Andam concluded that the lack of social and organizational managerial support has the greatest impact on explaining the barriers to sports participation in the academic community (17). The results of some studies show that medical students have little physical activity and do not perform the recommended physical activity. In a study of (sedentary) lifestyles of medical and non-medical students in Malaysia, Ansari et al. concluded that medical students (49%) were more sedentary than non-medical students (35%) (18,19). Undoubtedly, the establishment of a healthy society depends on the mental and physical health of the members of the society and owes to the efforts of healthy, efficient, and thoughtful human resources. In this regard, the health of the future generation of the country is important for playing individual, scientific, and social roles, and doing sports activities along with acquiring knowledge can have a significant impact on their learning. Careful examination of the dimensions and variables related to student participation in order to spread participation in public sports activities, both in terms of promoting health and increasing social health or in terms of culture-building and providing the conditions to increase overall participation in society, is necessary. Accordingly, it is necessary that strategies for the development of public sports in universities be presented from the perspective of people who deal with sports in some way and be used to improve and develop it.

If the students of the country's universities of

medical sciences are called health preachers, special attention should be paid to the development of public sports in these universities so that they can eventually transfer health, mobility, and dynamism to the society, but studies show that more than half of the students of medical sciences are physically inactive due to the busy schedule of the university program (18). Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to research related to the participation of medical students in public sports activities. In this way, using the qualitative method, it is possible to identify the capacities and influential factors with a deeper look and while identifying the underlying factors of a phenomenon, give a special nature to the subject. The available quantitative studies have tried to identify the factors affecting participation in sports activities and have been successful only in identifying some of these factors. Considering the gaps in the study, through interviews with experts, the researcher intended to design and explain the factors affecting the participation of students of universities of medical sciences in public sports activities based on the grounded theory and in the form of a paradigm of causal, axial, and intervening factors, as well as context, strategy, and consequences.

### Materials and Methods

This was a qualitative study performed with inductive approach. The study was fundamental in terms of orientation, because it sought to identify and explain the dimensions of public sports in universities of medical sciences, and since it did not have a deep understanding of the subject, it was exploratory in nature. Since the present study emphasized the formation of a conceptual framework or theory, and required to reveal the tacit knowledge of experts in this field, it used the “grounded theory” strategy. In other words, achieving this goal requires techniques that can be used to organize, adjust, and analyze the collected data and provide a theory based on reality. This type of theory is called grounded theory (20). In accordance with the qualitative methods, the purposive snowball method was adopted for sampling. The participants consisted of sports management specialists and experts, sports pioneers, and faculty members of medical and non-medical universities. After stating the objectives, all subjects participated in the study with informed consent and were assured that at the time of publication of the results, all their personal information would remain confidential. In addition, it was emphasized that they were free to leave the study at any stage of the study due to unwillingness to continue cooperation. The tools used were in-depth and exploratory interviews.

All interviews were conducted by the researchers and then, the content of the interview was handwritten and implemented verbatim. Data analysis was performed according to the method proposed by Corbin and Strauss (21,22), after the first interview, and led to the production of new concepts and questions, and as a result, more information. This process continued cyclically up to data saturation. It should be noted that theoretical saturation was obtained after interviewing 15 people, but for more certainty, 5 more interviews were conducted. The analysis process included three types of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (23).

**Results**

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the interviewees of the present study. all participants had a degree of PhD.

The results of analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews included presenting a paradigmatic model of public sports development at universities of medical sciences consisting of 14 categories and 41 concepts in the form of six dimensions including causal factors (1 category), main phenomenon (enhancing student participation), strategy (2 categories), underlying characteristics (5 categories), environmental conditions (4 categories), and outcome (1 category). The steps for analyzing the interview data are as follows.

*Open coding:* In the present study, the interviews conducted, after implementation, were reviewed line-by-line and paragraphed, and each was listed in a table. Then, the extracted concepts were recorded and the open coding process was performed. Finally, 450 open codes were extracted from the analysis of 20 implemented interviews. Table 2 provides an example of an open coding process for an example.

*Axial coding:* In the axial coding stage, by carefully examining the identified categories and the similarities and differences, the discovered categories

were subdivided into the main categories. In the present study, in the axial coding stage, 41 concepts and 14 categories were identified. An example of the axial coding is provided in table 3.

**Table 1.** Demographic information of the interviewees

Gender	Age (years)	Experience (years)	Specialty
Male	55	20	Sports management
Male	49	12	Sports management
Male	41	14	Sports physiology
Male	46	19	Sports management
Male	45	14	Sports management
Female	43	16	Sports management
Male	50	14	Motor Learning
Male	45	15	Sports management
Male	58	18	Sports management
Male	52	13	Sports management
Male	50	16	Sports management
Male	39	10	Motor Learning
Male	47	12	Sports physiology
Male	60	24	Sports management
Male	56	15	Sports management
Male	36	5	Sports management
Male	37	10	Sports management
Male	47	20	Sports management
Male	47	16	Sports management
Male	42	15	Strategic sports management

*Selective encoding:* After all the data experienced open and axial coding, they were grouped. The research findings take the form of theory when the categories are integrated and refined, then the categories are incorporated to form a larger theoretical design (22).

In integration, the categories are arranged around a concept with the power to explain (21). Several techniques can be used to integrate categories, including “writing the course of the story, using diagrams, arranging and reviewing notes, and using computer programs” (22).

**Table 2.** Sample of extracted concepts and open codes

Row	Extracted concepts	Open codes
PA1	Our cities are of low safety for sports activities.	Low urban safety
PA2	The rate of traditional and industrial drug addiction has increased in our country.	Increased rate of addiction in society
PA3	One of the factors of lack of public sports development at the universities of medical sciences is the lack of a public sports specialist.	Lack of specialized personnel
PA4	There is no comprehensive database of faculty members and staff of physical education at the universities of medical sciences to take advantage of their expertise.	Lack of a comprehensive database of human resources for physical education
PA5	The expansion of various public sports festivals is proposed in a structured and health-oriented manner.	Organizing public sports festivals
PA6	In this regard, there is a lack of educational programs to increase the knowledge of the academic community.	Lack of training courses in the field of public sports

**Table 3.** Sample categories identified in axial coding

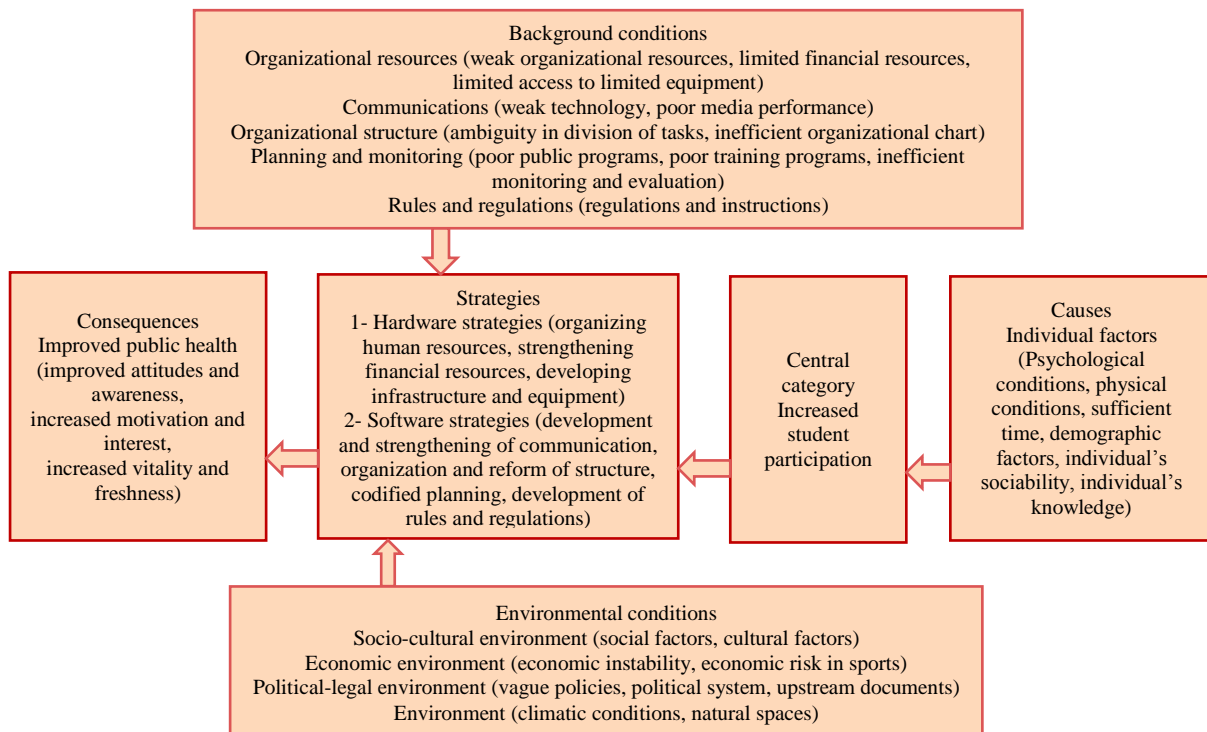
Open codes	Concepts	Category
Prevalence of inactive life among individuals in the community	Social factors	Social-cultural environment
Low participation of women in sports		
Low security in cities		
Increasing the rate of addiction in society		
Lack of institutionalization of sports in the society	Cultural factors	Economic environment
Women’s cultural restrictions		
High inflation rate	Economic instability	
Fluctuations and changes in currency prices in the market		
Economic sanctions		Political environment
Lack of attention to privatization in sports		
Low profit of sports compared to other activities	Economic risk in sports	
Reluctance of companies to support student sports		
Lack of sports subsidies		Political system
Uncertainty of student sports development policies	Vague policies	
Lack of a comprehensive view of student sports		
Political dismissals and appointments		
Political view of politicians toward sports		

In the present study, in the selective coding, the researcher identified the main and sub-categories by integrating the categories discovered from all the interviews, and developed a theory using the technique of writing the course of the story.

The conceptual model extracted in the present study represented the “sports for all model” of the country’s universities of medical sciences, which was

obtained based on the study findings. Then, the conceptual model of the present study was presented as figure 1.

Based on the Corbin and Strauss model (22), given the coding pattern from right to left, causal conditions affect the axial phenomenon, the axial phenomena and contextual and intervening conditions affect strategies, and strategies affect outcomes.



**Figure 1.** Paradigmatic model of public sports at universities of medical sciences

### Discussion

In the present study, a model was presented for the development of public sports in the country's universities of medical sciences, which was extracted and designed based on the results of data analysis and theoretical literature and interviews. Based on this model, it is possible to analyze the process of student public sports at universities of medical sciences and achieve a new classification based on the views of the country's public sports elite. Therefore, the study model is a suitable and indigenous framework for studies in this field and it seems that it can be an introduction to the popularization of sports among students of the universities of medical sciences, in addition to providing a comprehensive understanding on the basis of identification of the factors affecting public sports and their interaction.

In this model, effective and influential factors on the development of sports in the country's universities were identified, which included "causal, contextual, and intervening factors, strategies, and consequences." In the causal factors section, some items were extracted from the data that affected the central phenomenon of the study, including individual knowledge, psychological conditions, physical condition, sufficient time, demographic factors, and individual's sociability. In a study, Pourranjbar et al. emphasized the desirable role of facilitators (individual, psychological, etc.) on the level of participation in sports activities of female students in Kerman University of Medical Sciences (24), which is consistent with the results of the present study. Additionally, Hefzollasan and Yadollahzadeh in their study model on public sports in Iranian public universities, found that the level of behavior included variables in the field of cognition, knowledge, attitude, and behavior that had a significant impact on the development of public sports in Iranian public universities and led to higher student participation in sports activities (25).

The central phenomenon in this model was the increased participation of medical students in public sports activities of the university and other categories were organized based on a paradigmatic model around it. The study model indicated that human, material, and financial resources explained the organizational resources of universities of medical sciences to develop public sports and, consequently, increase student participation in these universities. Given the proposed model, physical education and public sports development department of the country's universities of medical sciences are facing a lack of human resources in the field of public sports.

Professional and efficient manpower is the most important asset of any organization and society (26). Human resources in the public sports sector include managers, staff, coaches, and volunteers who can play an important role in the promotion and development of public sports at the university and, ultimately, its institutionalization in the country. Asefi and Asadi Dastjerdi introduced human resources as one of the factors in institutionalizing public sports along with other factors (7). Shabani et al. also reported that the most important weakness of the country's public sports is the lack of employment of specialized and expert manpower (27), which was in agreement with the findings of the present study. The universities of medical sciences of the country, like other institutions and organs, face the weakness of specialized human resources in the field of public sports, and in this regard, they should consider specialization and meritocracy, as well as the use of sports specialists and volunteer forces.

Taking into account the study model, one of the factors effective on the development of public sports at universities of medical sciences is the material resources of the universities. Obviously, more desirable tools and facilities facilitate the teaching and learning process. Using the right sports equipment and having easy access to them allows learners to better learn basic skills. Moreover, appropriate sports facilities and spaces can be an effective factor in creating the right motivation (24). In their study, Araghi and Kashef identified the lack of facilities as the most important obstacle and problem in the development of public and recreational sports (28), which was similar to the results of the present study. Therefore, due to the high importance of facilities and infrastructure for the development of public sports, it is expected that the relevant authorities address the shortage of material resources to increase the participation of academics in public sports activities.

Considering the proposed model, the university's financial resources play an important role in increasing student participation in public sports activities. Since the implementation of sports plans and programs requires financial resources, these resources can be considered as a factor in the development of sports. Asefi and Asadi Dastjerdi concluded in their study that allocating an adequate and sufficient budget to public sports can help to institutionalize it in society (7). By examining the pathology of sports for all in the country, Sameenia et al. declared the low budget allocated to public sports as one of the major weaknesses in this field (29).



Thus, it can be said that if adequate fund is assigned to the development of sport in universities, both in the construction and establishment of facilities and the implementation of sports programs, undoubtedly, we will witness progress and development of sport for all at universities of medical sciences.

The category of communication, as one of the underlying factors, was effective in increasing the participation in public sports activities of the university. Weak technology and poor performance of the university media showed the importance of the communication category in the model. Most of the interviewees cited the poor performance of the university's internal media as one of the factors involved in students' low participation in public sports activities. Accordingly, the lack of innovative ideas to persuade individuals, the lack of attention to the promotion of public sports programs, the poor performance of public relations of university centers, and the small share of public sports in student news were indicative of the very poor performance of domestic media at universities of medical sciences. In their study, Mehdizadeh and Andam showed that the lack of proper information and publicity about sports and sports activities of the university was one of the most important factors preventing participation in sports activities (17). Shabani et al. also noted the small contribution of the media in promoting public sports as one of the important challenges of public sports (27). Therefore, considering the role of recreational and public sports on the physical, mental, and social health of the community, the university physical education department is expected to pay special attention to providing accurate and timely information on sports and extracurricular activities and programs.

Another category identified in the study model was planning and monitoring. Most of the interviewees admitted that the general physical education programs of the university were limited and unorganized and the physical education training programs in the field of public sports were very weak; this highlights the importance of paying attention to planning in the physical education of the university. In this context, the results of investigations have indicated that one of the reasons for the stagnation and lack of development of sports in universities as well as the unwillingness of students to participate in physical activity during leisure time was inadequate attention in sports programming of the university as well as the poor quality of sports programs. In a study, Asefi and Asadi Dastjerdi concluded that the lack of consistent and proper policy and strategy, lack of appropriate vision, lack of proper and long-term goals, and lack of proper

and operational annual programs, hindered the development of sport for all at public universities in Tehran (7); this was consistent with the findings of the present study. The results of the current study suggested that the lack of appropriate educational programs for sports for all, lack of proper education system to train qualified individuals to teach sports for all, and the lack of appropriate educational classes in the field of sports for all hinder the development of public sports at universities. By providing the necessary training in the field of sports and increasing students' knowledge, universities can greatly contribute to the development of participation in public sports (30). Therefore, sports authorities should design and implement proper training methods for the development of sports.

Lack of proper monitoring of performance indicators of public sports in universities, weak monitoring system of participation in public sports, and lack of physical fitness centers indicate the poor monitoring framework in sports of universities of medical sciences, which highlights the need for careful monitoring and evaluation of public sports programs. The results of a study by Javadipour and Rahbari revealed that the existing shortcomings in the policy-making process in the country's public sports include factors such as poor supervision and control, poor planning and implementation, etc. (31). With regard to this issue, it seems necessary to develop indicators of monitoring and evaluation of the performance of physical education of universities of medical sciences in the field of public sports, retraining of physical education managers in this field, and forming a monitoring and evaluation committee.

On the basis of the model proposed in the current study, legal requirements and position of sports at universities of medical sciences will help to develop it. Asefi and Asadi Dastjerdi stated in their investigation that the development of appropriate and binding laws and regulations in the field of public sports can be effective in its institutionalization (7). Therefore, when the rules do not provide the necessary support for the development of sport for all at universities of medical sciences and there are no appropriate guarantees for the law enforcement, no doubt the development of sport will face difficulties.

Environmental conditions include conditions such as external providers or external contexts in which strategies are effectively implemented. One of the environmental conditions that affect the development of public sports at universities of medical sciences is the socio-cultural environment. Poor culture of sports in society, and especially the cultural limitations of

women, can have a negative impact on the maximum participation of people in society. This finding is consistent with the results of the study by Mehdizadeh and Andam (17). Therefore, it is necessary to try to establish a culture of sports and physical activity and to eliminate some negative attitudes towards participating in such activities, especially for women.

Based on the model suggested in the current study, one can analyze the process of public sports at universities of medical sciences and achieve a new classification based on the opinions of public sports experts. The development of public sports programs at Iranian universities of medical sciences, due to the increase in student admission capacity, can cover a large target community. For this purpose, it is necessary to increase the population covered by public sports and healthy recreation, indigenous and local games, and Zurkhaneh and ancient sports at this university by using the solutions presented in the present study model. As a result, the development and promotion of the culture of sports for all can enrich students' leisure time and provide them with health and vitality. By observing the strategic categories of the study model, one can witness improvements in attitude and awareness, increase in motivation and interest, increase in vitality and joy, and finally, an increase in participation in public and recreational sports programs and an improvement in students' health in Iranian universities.

### Limitations

One of the limitations of the present study is the low cooperation of some professors and experts in conducting qualitative interviews, lack of access to them, and conservatism in answering some questions while reassuring the interviewees about confidentiality.

### Recommendations

It is suggested that future studies address the design and implementation of executive model of public sports among students, the identification of barriers to public sports with a qualitative approach, and a

comparative study of developed countries in relation to student public sports.

### Conclusion

Given the ever-changing needs of the student community and their expectations in the field of sports, it seems that the model presented in the present study is able to provide the ground for the growth and development of public sports at universities of medical sciences and enable sports administrators to follow this model to evaluate their position in the process of developing sports for all in a favorable way.

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### Authors' Contribution

Javad Taherzadeh-Nooshabadi: executive services, selection and screening of subjects, conducting studies, attracting financial resources for study; Rasool Nazari: study design and ideation, executive services, selection and screening of subjects, conducting studies, data analysis, performing statistical services, manuscript preparation, confirmation and submission of the article, correspondence; Jamshid Hemati: conducting studies.

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### Conflict of Interest

None.

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