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# FACTORS AFFECTING THE PRESENCE OF WRESTLING IN SCHOOL PROGRAMS

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## ABSTRACT

This work is part of a broader research that attempts to analyse the presence of combat sports in secondary education. The study investigates the presence of Olympic wrestling in the curricula of teacher preparation programs, as well as the factors influencing the choice, based on the knowledge, perspective and the needs about these disciplines. Eighty-one active physical education (PE) teachers of Valencia's secondary schools completed an online questionnaire (51 men and 30 women). Results highlight that most of the teachers select team sports such as basketball, handball and volleyball; however, only a few included combat sports in their program, with judo being the most frequently selected. The main factor justifying the scarcity of combative sports, refers to the fact that teachers are not able to provide an instructional unit, and that these activities are considered dangerous, risky and unsuitable to instructional values. These viewpoints indicate that more specialized instructional tools for basic education in the fundamentals of combative sports, including wrestling are needed.

**Key Words:** Olympic wrestling, physical education, high school education, formation, didactic tools.

## INTRODUCTION

Physical struggle and combative activities have been a permanent feature in human life, whether interpreted as ritual, game (34), exercise or sport, and with several purposes (utilitarian, recreational, or leisure). Today, this physical struggle fits into conventional forms of modern sport including several Olympic sports (boxing, fencing, judo, Olympic wrestling, and taekwondo).

Wrestling has a limited presence in secondary schools. When selecting the content to design the class program in secondary school curricula, several studies indicate that the block of "Games and Sports" represents, together with "Health and Fitness," the highest percentage of working time for teachers (18, 21, 23, 32, 34, 43 and 44). Among the most selected sports disciplines (35), there are "classic team" sports, such as volleyball, basketball and handball. Teachers select sports according to the domain and their knowledge of the disciplines (24).

Teachers' perception about combat sports, regarding their perceived danger and violence, prevents them from being considered suitable for the development of positive values and attitudes associated with sports practice. Furthermore, for many centuries, messages related to women's sport practice have always been negative: physical exercise is harmful to women's health, women do not have the aptitude nor the interest for it, and that sports masculinize women (13, 38). However, combat sports are exercises that, for a proper execution, need the collaboration and cooperation of the participants (11) and they are also activities and disciplines suitable for the development of numerous skills and abilities on the physical, psychomotor, cognitive, emotional, social and ethical areas in the school context (9, 11, 15, 36). These positive outcomes are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Advantages of combat sport.

Advantages	Authors
It values work	2, 8, 15, 16, 29, 34.
Anger management, stress relief and integral formation	1, 2, 3, 6, 27, 34, 36.
Improvement of social relationships and integration	2, 5, 9, 16, 15, 34.
Improvement of basic motor skills	
Respect for rules and colleagues	2, 15, 16, 27, 34.
Improvement of physical condition, increase of responsibility and motivation, and all around achievement in the school program	2, 15, 27, 34.

Of course, we cannot forget the difficulties expressed by teachers when introducing these sports in schools. Accordingly, we grouped causes for these viewpoints, based on research that has studied what teachers know, think and need.

### **What They Know**

*Academic teacher training:* 72-83% of PE teachers have studied PE (17, 39). This is due to the fact that anyone with a university degree, can participate in the specialty admission test without having the academic qualification of the mentioned specialty. Thus, it can be stated that there are PE teachers without sufficient academic training to teach combat sports (4, 34).

*Staff experiences and interests:* The content block of games and sports is the one that acquires most importance, and therefore is chosen by PE teachers during the first two years of secondary school (25). Teachers select most of the content, and combat sports do not appear, since teachers choose not to teach them in class (24). The most frequently selected disciplines are the team sports, followed by individual sports and finally by the adversary ones, with judo being the most practiced combat sport (25, 42).

### **What They Think**

*Violence is generated by sport:* Such discrimination towards combat sports is mostly caused by unjustifiable reasons such as a perceived lack of collaboration between the adversaries and continued competition being dangerous and violent (1,6, 8, 10, 30, 41). Since their origin, these sports were conceived with the purpose of destroying the enemy's body and inflicting injury to the adversary (19). Combat sports are deceptive if not known, in that only seeing or hearing the word "fight" or "battle" reminds them of violence and mutual pain; however, in the context of sports it is quite the opposite. In Olympic wrestling there is no violence or scuffle, but respect and techniques with no malice. It is true that direct contact with the adversary is involved, but there are several security mechanisms in place to prevent serious injuries to participants. These include a number of referees and judges, strict regulations with safety rules and, most importantly, there is mutual respect between the athletes.

*"Defeminisation" of women:* Combat activities have traditionally been considered to be a sport for men (6); this is because of its historical function of "turning a boy into a real man" (14) and lastly, the fact that these are sports just for men who want to prove their value (19). This masculinized perspective on wrestling activities has generated negative stereotypes about women practitioners, such as their lack of femininity or their masculinization (36). This vision must be overcome and there is a need to stop differentiating these disciplines according to the practitioner's gender (33). PE teachers should not ignore combat sports because of the conception of masculinity, and wrestling should not be considered by students as a male sport (39).

*Demands and interests of the students:* The faculty of PE considers several factors in order to conduct the didactic/curricular planning, among these are the students' characteristics and preferences (43). Nevertheless, a study (43) shows that students want to practice combat sports, but these do not appear in the programming. On the other hand, students are influenced by the media, sports organizations (24) and their parents, who, in one way or another, "guide" their child to one sport or another (9). Finally, the low demand of combat sports cause students not to receive stimuli related to them, leading to a lack of awareness, and hence, a lack of requests for these sports to be practiced (11).

### **What They Need**

*Facilities and materials available in the school:* The availability of the equipment and the space to deliver content facilitates its inclusion. Many teachers consider the materials (40, 41) and the space (4) with which they teach are insufficient or unavailable. Therefore, if the materials, most often mats, and the space to teach combat sports are not available, teachers will not choose this content. Sports installations in schools are built to practice certain traditional sports like football, basketball and handball (4). Most of the schools have a covered space or room and outdoor spaces in which we come upon the playground and sports courts where we find indoor soccer goals and basketball hoops. In a school it is hard to find the equipment needed to conduct sports such as combat ones due to the specificity of their material; thus, it is good to offer alternative materials with which to carry out practice (31). Using materials built by students (20) allows them to perform sports almost unfamiliar to them, because the use of these materials is innovative and motivating.

*Shortage of educational proposals:* Increasingly, one can find instructional materials for combat sports, but these are often aimed at an audience with previous experience (24). For many teachers aiming to start practicing these sports in order to teach them in class do not have the minimum level of understanding these instructional units. At the same line (4, 31) finding appropriate materials from an educational-formative model is difficult.

The purpose of the study was to investigate what teachers think about Olympic wrestling within the PE curriculum. Our background research allowed us to know what teachers think, know and need regarding the presence of Olympic wrestling in their programming for PE classes. In order to explore the questions raised so far, we developed a questionnaire from the various causes identified in the background studies examined (24, 28).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Participants

The target population of the study were secondary education PE teachers. The research involved 81 teachers in service during the course of the 2013-2014 school year (51 men and 30 women). They had an average age of 41.3 years old (SD = 39.4), and an average teaching experience of 15.5 years (SD = 9.9).

### Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of 19 closed-ended items, with a Likert scale response ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 “strongly agree.” The Cronbach Alpha method was applied to establish a reliability analysis for the three categories. The instrument demonstrated an acceptable internal consistency, with an overall value of 0.89 for the full scale (22), which is considered suitable for research on attitudes. In addition, we saw that the reliability coefficient increased with the elimination of the item 11. The 3 subscale were: a) what the teacher knows about Olympic wrestling (items 1, 2, 3, 15 and 19); b) what the teacher thinks about the Olympic Wrestling (items 4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 and 17); and c) what they need to include Olympic Wrestling (5, 6, 9, 13, 18) in the curriculum. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ ) of the three subscales was 0.78, 0.81 and 0.67 respectively.

### Statistical Data Analysis

The preliminary statistical analysis (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) shows a normal distribution of variables. Frequency analysis and comparative analysis are performed using as sample statistic the t-Student test for comparison between groups by gender. To reduce the accumulated error (type I error), the Bonferroni correction factor has been applied to the 2 t-tests performed on each of the differential analysis. Thus, the significance level is set at 98%. An analysis of one-way ANOVA was performed only for subjects who have received some training in combat sports, in order to determine the role of training on teachers’ knowledge, thinking and needs. Statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS 20.0 program licensed by the Catholic University of Valencia.

## RESULTS

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistical analysis of the study variables (mean and standard deviation), as well as the differential analysis (t-test) performed on the variables by gender (men and women). The differential analysis shows that men score higher than women in the “What they know” ( $t = -2.28, p < 0.02$ ) and “What they think” ( $t = -2.24, p < 0.02$ ) subscales. Women score higher in the “What they need” subscale ( $t = -2.37, p < 0.01$ ), and are shown in Table 2.

The one-way ANOVA analysis confirmed the presence of significant differences between those who received combat sports training and those who did not, with the former showing a higher scores in the “What they know” ( $F = 28.410, p = .00$ ) and in the “What they need” ( $F = 8.071, p = .00$ ) subscales. On the other hand, the “What they think” subscale showed no significant differences between groups.

Table 2. Subtest scores.

	Women		Men		T
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	
<i>What they know</i>	3.17*	0.78	3.39	0.75	-2.14
<i>What they think</i>	3.52*	0.39	3.80	0.81	-1.76
<i>What they need</i>	2.22	0.661	2.36	1.06	0.63

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on results obtained, we made the following observations from the following features, what they know, what they think and what they need.

### **What They Know**

This subscale analysed teachers' knowledge about Olympic wrestling. Teachers state that in general they are unfamiliar with the fundamentals of fight (78.3%) (4, 41). Men are those who think they feel able to develop this content. No survey respondents practiced this sport during their time as students, but this does not preclude them from thinking that it is easy to explain to and to be understood by their students (56.7%). They disagree with the possibility to design the practice material, especially women (73.1%), which precludes their practice (23, 24, 39, 40). Therefore we consider the correct combination of the binomial "education and training" as one of the keys for the domain and selection of wrestling in school.

### **What They Think**

The "What they think" subscale provides information about their beliefs and prejudices, considering how these are powerful influences when selecting PE in school. In general, teachers think that wrestling is dangerous (6, 8, 10, 30, 42) for their students, especially women (64.2%). This belief reduces significantly ( $p = 0.03$ ) if the teacher interviewed belongs to the group that received training. Teachers believe that the sport of wrestling is risky (74.5%), although they believe that this sport does not encourage aggressiveness among students (67.1%). Female teachers believe that wrestling masculinizes its practitioners (36), while male respondents are indifferent to this issue (58%). Teachers generally do not think that it is an expensive sport to practice at school (51.6%) nor that it holds a very motivating content for students (67.9%), and lastly that the content is not appropriate for the values in PE classes (58%); this is contrary to what has been found by different authors (15,16, 31).

### **What They Need**

Generally teachers think that, even possessing equipment for the practice, they are not prepared to include the contents of wrestling in their class (51.9%), although this percentage significantly decreases ( $p = 0.00$ ) when teachers are trained in fighting sports. However, they consider that there should be more educational material for the introduction of wrestling adapted to the PE (70.3%) (4, 24, 29); in the case of women the percentage is up to 88.2%. Generally they show a willingness to invest time to learn and understand the fundamentals, where once again women present a higher valuation. Teachers who have received formation also affirm that they would like to receive more training ( $p = 0.01$ ).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Among the conclusions of this study, we should highlight are that a large percentage of teachers who reported a lack of knowledge about the basics of Olympic wrestling and that they do not feel qualified to teach an instructional unit designed by experts.

Men think that this sport is risky, but carries no danger to students, especially those who have received initial training; women consider it dangerous. However, in general it is not perceived as a sport that generates violence. Teachers do not think that Olympic wrestling encourages the development of educational values, contrary to what several studies affirm. Generally teachers show that they would be favourably available to invest their time in the necessary training allowing them to teach these activities, and they consider it appropriate to create teaching materials for its inclusion in secondary education.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

The present study offered critical information to improve the situation of Olympic wrestling in PE classes based on what teachers think, know, and need. With these results it is possible to open new lines of research to improve the weaknesses that teachers reported, such as the lack of knowledge about these disciplines and the lack of teaching materials addressed to people with no prior experience with wrestling.

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