

ASPECTS REGARDING QUALITY OF LIFE AND STRESS LEVELS IN FORMER POLO MASTERS PERFORMANCE ATHLETES

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Abstract. *Quality of life is closely linked to concepts such as standard of living and lifestyle. The standard of living represents the degree of satisfaction of the material and spiritual needs of the population of a country, of certain classes or of a person. Throughout history, people have had a deep understanding of the concept of quality of life. Since ancient times, it has been closely associated with an individual's level of happiness. Former professional water polo masters often face a transition period after retiring from their competitive careers. Withdrawal from sports can often lead to a sense of loss and difficulty adjusting for athletes. In contrast, engaging in recreational motor activities can have a positive impact on their mental well-being. These activities provide a sense of purpose, structure, and accomplishment, helping to improve self-esteem and mental resilience. Sport as an activity, the involvement of master players can really be an important activity in the lives of former professional athletes. For people who have dedicated a significant amount of their lives to competitive sports, transitioning from this lifestyle can be challenging.*

Keywords: *quality of life; former professional athletes; masters level players.*

Introduction

Playing water polo in your free time can be a great way to stay connected to the sport and enjoy its many benefits. Whether you're a former athlete or simply an enthusiast, dedicating your time to water polo can provide a satisfying and rewarding experience.

One of the most important advantages of playing water polo in your free time is maintaining physical condition. Regular involvement in sports improves cardiovascular health, strengthens muscles and bones, and improves overall endurance.

Aging causes changes in each biological system, each organism having its own aging rhythm, the speed of this process being conditioned by heredity, temperament, acquired factors (lifestyle, extreme conditions, diet). All these dimensions and indicators of quality of life influence each other, forming a system. When it comes to the field of physical education, we focus mainly on physical well-being, which, in turn, has physical capacity at the forefront.

The state of health, defined as the absence of disease, can be maintained or improved with the help of various practical sports activities in free time (Bălan & Marinescu, 2014). These activities must be selected, individualized and adapted to the interests and motivation of those who practice them. Only under these conditions, they can help reduce stress, induce well-being, with direct effects on respiratory, cardiovascular, endocrine and nervous function. Thus, health "can act in multiple ways on the general quality of life" (Bălan & Marinescu, 2014).

Quality of life includes the following dimensions: physical, functional, social, economic, psychological and spiritual well-being. Well-being is subjective, not quantifiable, but it can be understood as a product influenced by several objective factors (Eurostat, 2016).

Developing a strong athletic identity is beneficial in boosting motivation and performance, the associated cost is that its loss is deeply felt when an athlete leaves their profession in ways that can be dangerous to health and well-being (Haslam et al., 2021).

In addition, studies in Europe show that income inequality reinforces the link between subjective social status and life satisfaction, suggesting that greater disparities increase the process of social comparison and negatively affect well-being

Health-related quality of life (HRQoL) has been shown to be associated with various socioeconomic factors and variables related to health behavior, such as alcohol consumption and smoking (Ellina et al., 2019).

This is directly influenced by the level of involvement in physical activity and is a prerequisite for physical, psychological, spiritual and social well-being. In this regard, there are a lot of studies that have proven the relationship between physical condition and quality of life. Specifically, they have shown that physical activities have led to improvements in physical condition and, of course, in quality of life in general (Medrano-Ureña, et al., 2020).

Fitness is widely recognized as a strong indicator of health-related outcomes and as an important determinant of current and future health status (Appelqvist-Schmidlechner K. et al. 2020).

Quality of life is about the balanced achievement of personal aspirations and desires. It focuses on individual experiences, perceptions, and spiritual needs, rather than solely on external conditions or measurable aspects of well-being (Peráčková & Peráček, 2020).

Mental health is a state of well-being that allows us to cope with the stresses of life, achieve our skills, learn well and work well, and contribute to our community (World Health Organization, 2022).

Healthy sleep is essential for physical and mental health and social well-being; however, across the globe, and especially in developing countries, public health agendas rarely consider sleep health (Lim et al., 2023).

People sleep about a third of their lives, and sleep is not simply a state of tranquility, but many biological and cognitive functions are served by its complex structure. Sleep disorders include a large number of different conditions that affect not only sleep and its homeostatic pattern, but also on mood, cognition and personality traits (Mogavero, 2024).

Methodologies

The purpose of this study is to examine aspects of quality of life and stress levels in former performance athletes, with a focus on continuing to practice this game at the masters category. By capitalizing on the experiences of water polo players, this research aims to gain insights into their stress levels and quality of life.

Quality of life assessment: the study aims to assess different stages of quality of life among former professional athletes, focusing in particular on players at masters level.

This includes examining their physical, emotional, social and psychological well-being, as well as their perceived satisfaction with different aspects of life after retiring from sport. By understanding quality of life issues, one can identify potential areas where former athletes may face challenges or have positive outcomes.

Identifying stress levels: The research aims to investigate the stress levels faced by former water polo players.

Participants: The sample included 41 people from Bucharest aged between 25 and 45 years. Compared to their distribution by age groups: three 26-year-old subjects, five 27-year-old subjects, nine 28-year-old subjects, six 29-year-old subjects, two 34-year-old subjects, two 36-year-old subjects, one 40-year-old subject, one 41-year-old subject, two 43-year-old subjects, two 44-year-old subjects, and one 45-year-old subject.

Our study was conducted between April 21 and May 12, 2023. – The testing tools were the "IAPQ" (International Physical Activity Questioning) and "JSS" (Job Satisfaction Survey) questionnaires that were completed online, through the Google Form application.

We opted for the "IAPQ" questionnaire because the Eurobarometer report on physical activity in Europe (2016) recommended this questionnaire to assess the frequency, duration and intensity of physical activity of respondents in the last seven days. This questionnaire is a tool developed and validated to record the physical activity level of adults. It was designed as a questionnaire in two versions: a long version, consisting of 27 questions, and a short version, comprising only 7 questions.

The second questionnaire (JSS - Job Satisfaction Scale) was applied to assess the level of stress at work of former athletes. Through this questionnaire we aimed to collect complete information on various aspects related to the stress level of former athletes playing water polo. By collecting this data, we can gain insight into sources of stress in the areas in which they currently operate.

To answer the items contained in the JSS questionnaire, participants must complete all 30 questions of the questionnaire.

The information obtained can contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by retired athletes, which can lead to improved support systems and measures to be taken to increase their overall well-being and quality of life.

Results

In order to assess the current degree of involvement of respondents' individuals in physical activity, we administered the questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire are presented in the table. This table provides a comprehensive overview of the physical activity levels reported by participants, allowing for a deeper analysis of their involvement in different types of physical activity.

The results of the research suggest that the physical activity performed by former water polo players plays a significant role in contributing to improving the quality of life (Table 1). These people continue to participate in different forms of exercise, whether it is engaging in other sports, maintaining a regular fitness routine, or simply staying active through recreational activities.

In tables 1 and 2 we can see the number of former athletes who practice high-intensity physical activity 7 days a week.

Table 1. Centralization of topic results to IPAQ questions

Subjects	Question number							Score
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1.	1	30	1	60	3	30	180	541
2.	3	10	3	35	5	30	60	829
3.	4	35	2	20	7	25	60	1777.5
4.	1	25	7	25	7	20	80	762
5.	2	50	7	30	3	15	180	468.5
6.	3	60	3	40	7	10	90	1831
7.	1	90	1	90	7	5	120	1195.5
8.	4	15	6	15	4	40	150	1068
9.	3	40	3	60	6	60	90	2388
10.	2	10	2	90	7	120	120	3292
11.	1	180	3	50	7	60	180	2026
12.	1	120	6	60	1	10	30	1266
13.	5	25	1	15	5	120	30	3040
14.	4	5	2	90	7	60	180	1906
15.	3	25	3	120	3	80	40	1872
16.	3	50	3	90	7	20	120	2022
17.	1	15	4	15	6	30	150	774
18.	4	30	2	180	2	90	60	2274
19.	1	120	4	20	1	10	180	1073
20.	1	10	1	90	3	5	150	489.5
21.	3	10	2	25	7	60	30	1448
22.	6	20	6	90	7	70	160	2601
23.	6	15	3	10	5	30	180	1239
24.	3	10	1	90	4	25	10	1294
25.	2	20	4	60	7	40	120	1260
26.	5	45	5	90	5	15	180	2067.5
27.	3	40	2	30	7	20	150	1430
28.	6	15	5	25	6	10	180	938
29.	1	60	1	60	5	10	120	349
30.	5	20	5	60	7	20	30	1282
31.	2	10	2	60	4	20	60	432
32.	7	10	5	20	7	35	120	1388.5
33.	3	30	6	30	7	40	150	1668
34.	6	15	2	15	5	50	10	1553
35.	2	15	6	30	7	35	60	1072.5

36.	3	10	5	50	6	25	80	755
37.	7	30	2	60	7	20	120	2150
38.	2	15	2	20	4	5	50	314
39.	1	90	5	90	7	10	30	971
40.	3	10	2	30	7	20	180	710
41.	1	120	2	40	5	30	120	1463

The results obtained from the application of the IPAQ questionnaire show that people in the IT, sales and department head fields showed significantly low levels of exercise practice in the last 7 days. In contrast, subjects in areas such as fitness/swimming coaches and physical education showed the highest levels of exercise involvement (Table 2).

Table 2. Averages of the IPAQ questionnaire results by fields of activity

Field of activity	IPAQ
Programmer	314
Sales	432
Coach	710
Officer	541
Club President	468.5
Fitness	755
Swimming coach	938
Engineer	432

In order to highlight the scores obtained, we present, in figures 1-12, the results of the respondents to the questionnaire items.

Of 41 subjects, 68.3% practice high-intensity physical activity on several days per week, where 26.8% do not practice intense physical activity, and 4.9% responded with "I don't know/am not sure" if they practice intense physical activity in a week (Figure 1).

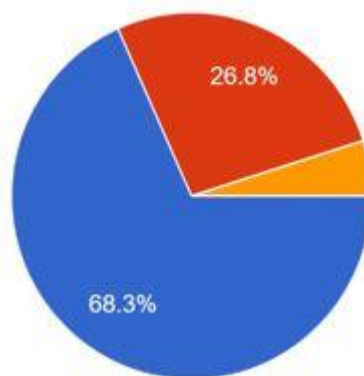


Figure 1. High-intensity physical activity/number of subjects

Figure 2 shows the number of days in a week that respondents are engaged in strenuous physical activity.

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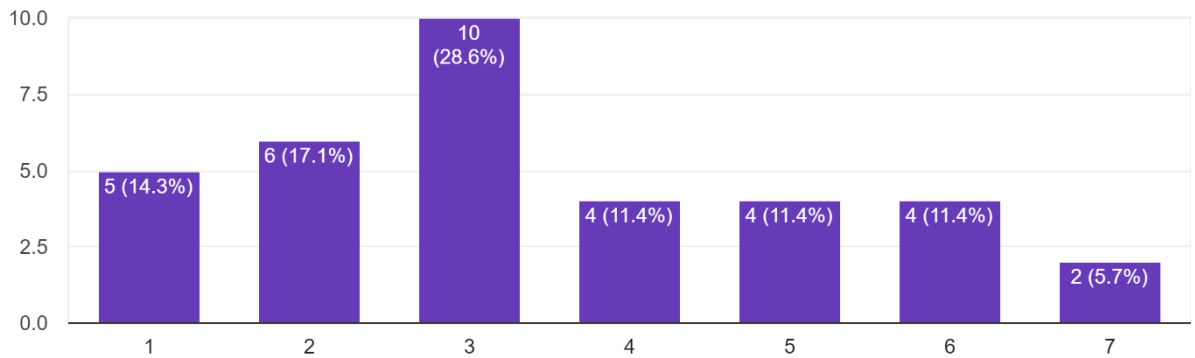


Figure 2. Number of days per week – intense activities

The number of hours or minutes you engage respondents in strenuous activities throughout the day is shown in Figure 3. Thus, it is observed that 48.8% of the people surveyed practice intense physical activity for several hours a day, 14.6% do not exceed one hour of intense activity, and 7.3% refuse to answer this question.

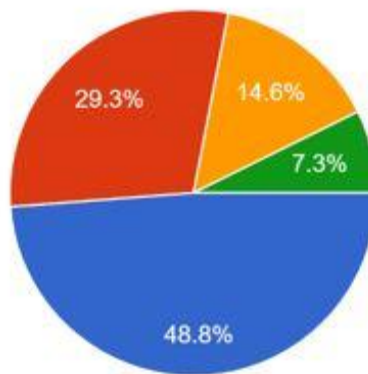


Figure 3. Hours/minutes spent in high-intensity physical activity per day

Of the 48.8% subjects who practice high-intensity physical activities per day, 29.3% subjects practice 1-2 hours, 9.8% subjects practice 2-3 hours, and 9.8% practice 3+ hours.

Of the respondents who practice high-intensity physical activity expressed in minutes per day (29.3%), 17.1% practice less than 10 minutes of high-intensity physical activity, 14.6% practice up to 30 minutes per day, and 19.5% of subjects fall within the limit of 31-60 minutes of high-intensity physical activity (Figure 4).

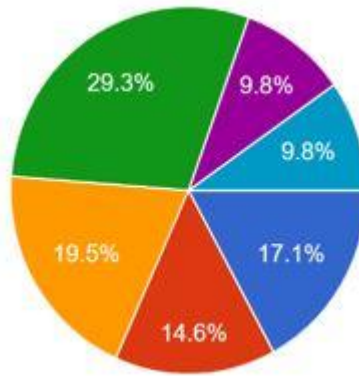


Figure 4. Degree of intense physical exercise for active respondents throughout a day

Regarding the moderate physical activity, they performed over the course of a week, out of the 41 subjects, only 82.9% stated that they practiced moderate physical activity on the days of a week, 9.8% did not practice such activities, and 7.3% did not know how to answer or were not sure that they practiced such activities (Figure 5).

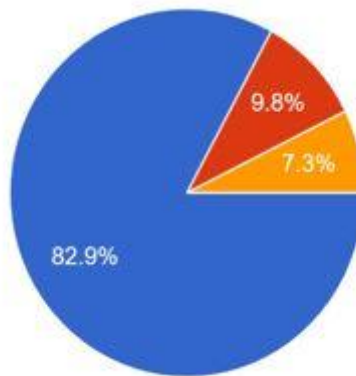


Figure 5. Moderate-intensity physical activity/number of subjects over the course of a week

Figure 6 shows the number of days in a week when respondents are engaged in moderate physical activity. We mention that these are only the subjects who declared in the previous question that they practice moderate motor activities in a week – 82.9%.

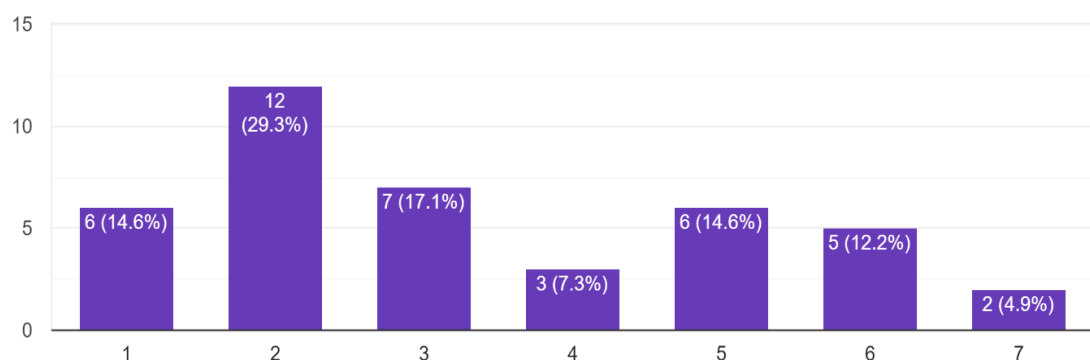


Figure 6. Number of days of moderate practice for active subjects – 82.9%.

Figure 7 shows the percentage of moderately active athletes, expressed in hours and minutes of physical activity in a day.

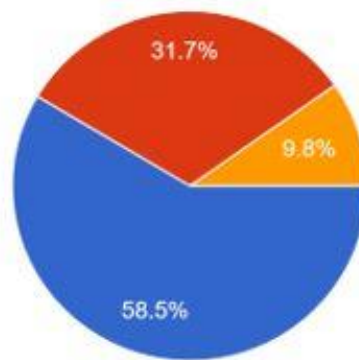


Figure 7. Hours/minutes performed in moderate-intensity physical activity during a day

Of the 58.5% of the subjects, 43.9% of them practice between 1 – 2 hours of moderate intense physical activity during a day, 9.8% subjects practice between 2 – 3 hours of moderate intense physical activity per day, 4.9% subjects practice 3+ hours of moderate intense physical activity per day, out of 31.7% subjects, 22% subjects practice 31 – 60 minutes per day, 12.2% of the subjects practice 11-30 minutes during the day, 7.3% of the subjects practice between 1-10 minutes during the day (Figure 8).

The number of hours and minutes exercised moderately in a day is detailed in Figure 8, only for respondents who said they practiced moderate physical activity in a week.

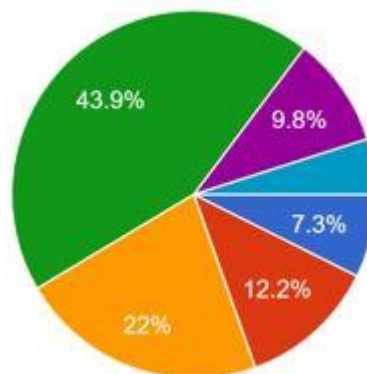


Figure 8. The number of hours/minutes of moderate practice during a day.

Of the motor activities that a person has available to be practiced over the course of a week, the questionnaire investigated the simplest form of movement – walking. From the answers received from the 41 subjects, it is observed that 92.7% practiced walking for at least 10 minutes during the week and only 7.3% answered with "I don't know/I'm not sure" (Figure 9) / they didn't know how to answer the question or were not sure about the answer.

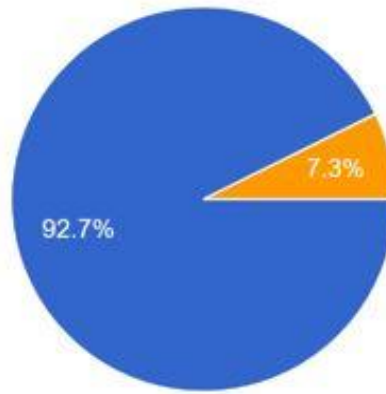


Figure 9. Walking for at least 10 minutes / *number of subjects*.

Over the course of 7 days per week, of the 92.7% subjects who gave an affirmative answer to the previous question, 46.3% subjects walked at least 10 minutes for one week, 19.5% walked at least 10 minutes for five days, 9.8% walked in three, four, and six days, respectively, and 2.4% walked between one and two (Figure 10).

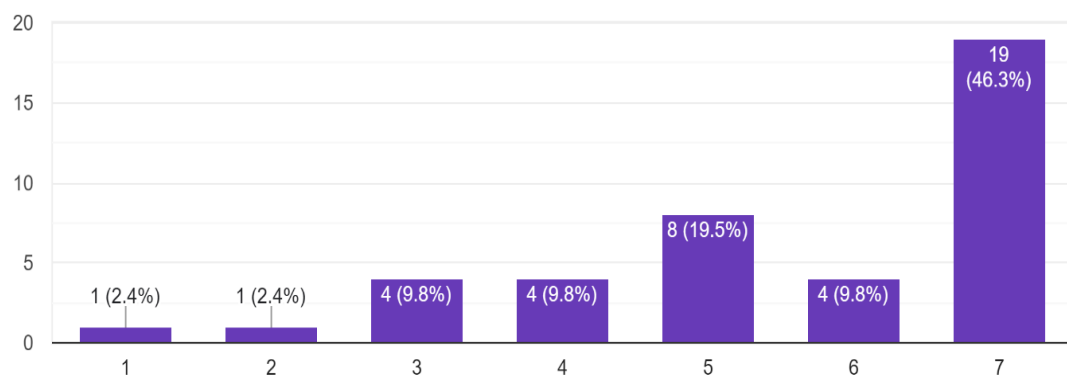


Figure 10. Number of days of walking for 10 minutes

If we refer to the number of hours spent sitting in a week, it is observed that 30 subjects (73.2%) spent more hours sitting in a week, 8 subjects (19.5%) appreciated that they sat for more minutes, and 3 respondents (7.3%) did not know how to answer the question or were not sure of the answer (Figure 11).

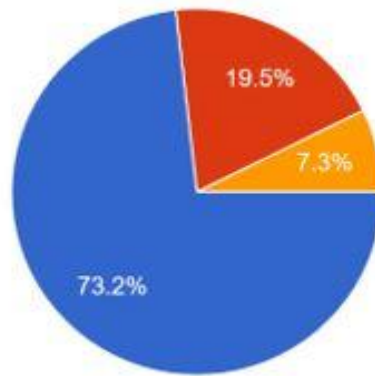


Figure 11. Number of hours spent sitting, per subject

Of the 73.2% of subjects, 34.1% spent 3+ hours in a sitting position in the last 7 days, 22% spent between 2 - 3 hours, 24.4% spent between 1 - 2, 7.3% spent between 31 - 60 minutes, also 7.3% spent between 11 - 30 minutes, and 4.9% (Figure 12).

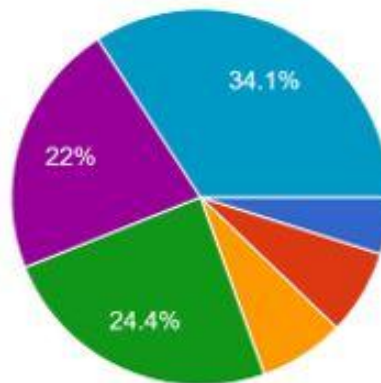


Figure 12. The number of hours/minutes spent sitting.

In order to assess the stress level of former water polo players, we gave them the JSS (Job Satisfaction Scale) questionnaire to fill in. Through this questionnaire we aimed to collect complete information about the stressors that affect their current activity.

These scores reflect the level of experienced job satisfaction of each participant (Table 3):

Table 3. Recording the results of the JSS questionnaire application

1.	79	2.6
2.	73	2.4
3.	161	5.3
4.	67	2.2
5.	68	2.2
6.	85	2.8
7.	30	1

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8.	189	6.3
9.	65	2.1
10.	144	4.8
11.	54	1.8
12.	102	3.4
13.	90	3
14.	124	4.1
15.	65	2.1
16.	116	3.8
17.	73	2.4
18.	167	5.5
19.	79	2.6
20.	30	1
21.	203	6.7
22.	217	7.2
23.	78	2.6
24.	150	5
25.	77	2.5
26.	154	5.1
27.	93	3.1
28.	158	5.2
29.	105	3.5
30.	166	5.5
31.	191	6.3
32.	147	4.9
33.	129	4.3
34.	108	3.6
35.	61	2
36.	56	1.8
37.	114	3.8
38.	115	3.8
39.	124	4.1
40.	126	4.2
41.	79	2.6

After administering the JSS questionnaire, Figure 13 illustrates that a significant proportion of former athletes experience low to moderate levels of stress.

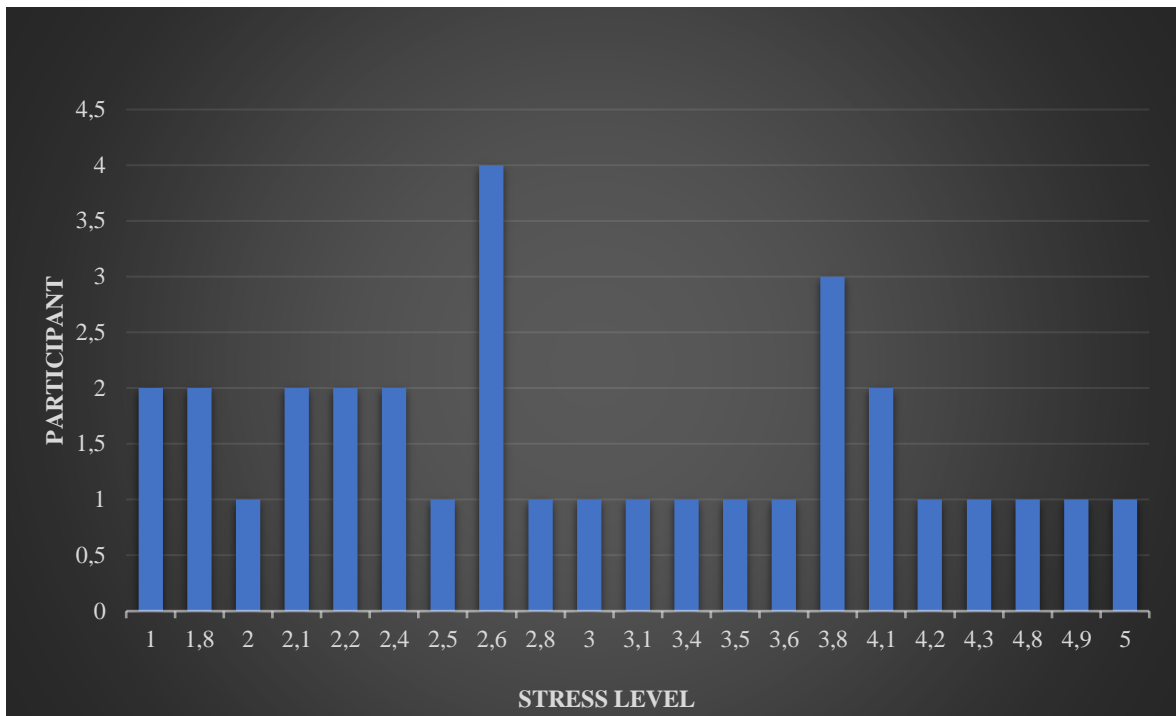


Figure 13. Stress level in 31 former athletes.

In Figure 14, a small group of former professional athletes may see high levels of stress.

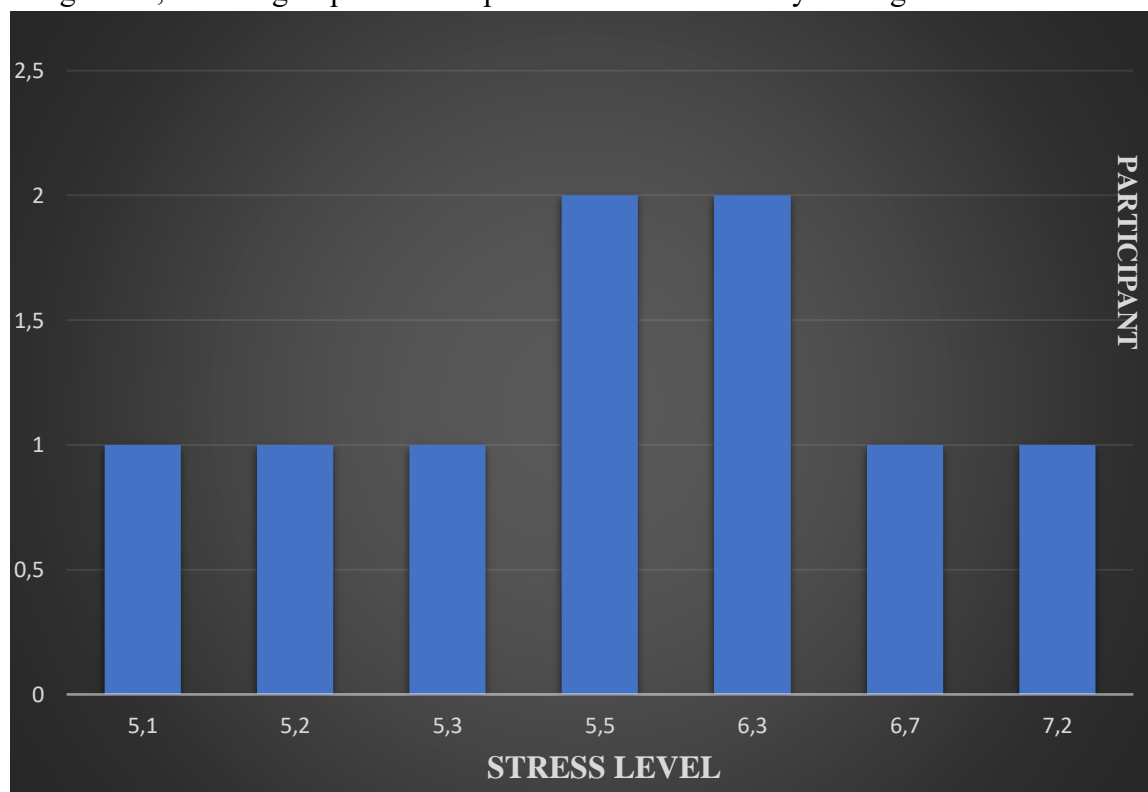


Figure 14. Stress level in 9 former performance athletes

From the data presented in table 3 we realize that coaches / instructors have the lowest degree of stress. On almost all scales, the stress levels reported by individuals in this area are consistently low.

Otherwise, they are located at a medium and low level of stress due to time pressure, inadequate salary, tasks with increased responsibilities, lack of recognition of good performance or non-performance of tasks by colleagues.

Unlike people in the coaching category, those who work in IT or marketing demonstrate a visibly different model. In these areas, there is a relatively lower level of reported exercise, and stress levels tend to range from moderate to slightly high.

Table 5. Descriptives test between IPAQ and JSS

Descriptives				
	IPAQ	Score IPAQ	JSS	Score JSS
N	30	30	30	30
Missing	1	1	1	1
Mean	15.5	1493	15.5	3.59
Median	15.5	1288	15.5	3.05
Mode	1.00 ^a	349 ^a	1.00 ^a	2.60
Sum	465	44804	465	108
Standard deviation	8.80	753	8.80	1.68
Minimum	1	349	1	1.00
Maximum	30	3292	30	7.20
Skewness	0.00	0.590	0.00	0.517
Std. error skewness	0.427	0.427	0.427	0.427
Kurtosis	-1.20	-0.0908	-1.20	-0.707
Std. error kurtosis	0.833	0.833	0.833	0.833
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.957	0.959	0.957	0.936
Shapiro-Wilk p	0.266	0.290	0.266	0.070

^a More than one mode exists, only the first is reported

Paired Samples T-Test

Table 7. Normality test between IPAQ and JSS

Paired Samples T-Test					
			statistic	df	p
Score IPAQ	Score JSS	Student's t	10.8	29.0	< .001

Note. $H_a \mu_{\text{Measure 1}} - \mu_{\text{Measure 2}} \neq 0$

Table 6. *T-Test samples between IPAQ and JSS*

Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)			W	p
Score IPAQ	-	Score JSS	0.959	0.287

Note. A low p-value suggests a violation of the assumption of normality

Plots

Score IPAQ – Score JSS

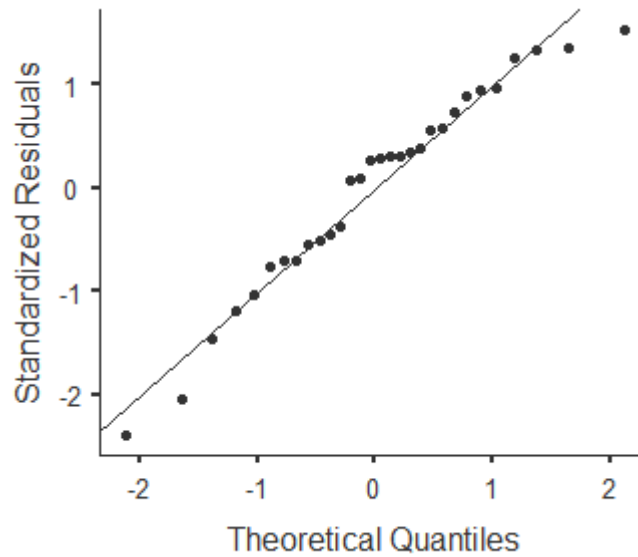


Figure 15. Paired Samples T-Test between IPAQ score and JSS score

Correlation Matrix

Table 8. *Correlation Matrix between IPAQ and JSS*

Correlation Matrix		Score	Score (2)	Subjects	Subjects (2)
Score IPAQ	Pearson's r	—			
	df	—			
	p-value	—			
	Spearman's rho	—			
	df	—			
	p-value	—			
	Kendall's Tau B	—			

Correlation Matrix

		Score	Score (2)	Subjects	Subjects (2)
Score JSS	p-value	—			
	Pearson's r	0.325	—		
	df	28	—		
	p-value	0.080	—		
	Spearman's rho	0.331	—		
	df	28	—		
	p-value	0.074	—		
	Kendall's Tau B	0.248	—		
Subjects IPAQ	p-value	0.056	—		
	Pearson's r	-0.026	0.330	—	
	df	28	28	—	
	p-value	0.893	0.075	—	
	Spearman's rho	0.054	0.369	—	
	df	28	28	—	
	p-value	0.778	0.045	—	
	Kendall's Tau B	0.030	0.248	—	
Subjects JSS	p-value	0.832	0.056	—	
	Pearson's r	-0.026	0.330	1.000	—
	df	28	28	28	—
	p-value	0.893	0.075	< .001	—
	Spearman's rho	0.054	0.369	1.000	—
	df	28	28	28	—
	p-value	0.778	0.045	< .001	—
	Kendall's Tau B	0.030	0.248	1.000	—
	p-value	0.832	0.056	< .001	—

The descriptive tests were done in the Jamovi application on a number of 30 former athletes.

The results of our research suggest that the physical activities performed by former water polo players play a significant role in helping to improve their quality of life.

These people continue to participate in different forms of exercise, whether it is engaging in other sports, maintaining a regular fitness routine, or simply staying active through recreational activities.

The present study opens up various avenues of discussion regarding the relationship between physical activity and quality of life, especially for athletes who are transitioning from competitive sports to leisure time sports.

The role of physical activity in mental health is another crucial aspect. Exercise is known to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression while improving mood and cognitive function. For former athletes can struggle with symptoms induced by the cessation of sports activity, staying physically active can provide a sense of purpose and routine, contributing significantly to mental well-being.

For many athletes, sports identity is closely linked to their sport. When retiring from sports life, maintaining physical activity can help maintain a sense of identity and self-esteem. Discuss how continuing to engage in sports-related activities, even if not water polo, can help former players maintain a connection to their athletic identity and boost their self-esteem.

Conclusions

Encouraging and promoting the continuation of physical activity after retirement from sports can have significant positive implications for the well-being of former water polo players.

The results indicate that the transition from being a water polo player to a new professional environment generally leads to a positive stress profile for most people. This suggests that the skills, attributes, and endurance developed during their athletic careers contribute to their ability to adapt effectively and manage stress in their new job roles.

Our study demonstrates that former water polo players who engage in physical activity in their free time enjoy an increased quality of life. These activities contribute to their physical health, mental well-being, and social engagement, all of which are vital components of a fulfilling and fulfilling life.

However, it is important to identify and support the minority facing high levels of stress by providing targeted assistance to help them cope and thrive in their new work environments.

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