

# Measuring Sport Participation Among The Poor

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## **Aim of the research**

Sport has become a popular public policy tool for social interventions among particular at risk populations, including individuals living in poverty. The use of sport to achieve non-sport objectives is evident in sport policy documents in Flanders — the Northern, Dutch-speaking region of Belgium — that represents the context for this research. It is not the purpose to refute the underlying reasoning of this policy approach, as it is well documented that sport participation presents valuable personal and social benefits for individuals and society as a whole (e.g., Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011). The purpose of this research is to examine the sport participation behaviour among individuals living in poverty by using data from the Participation Survey 2014 (hereafter referred to as PaS 2014). The following research question has guided this research: how do different measures of poverty influence our understanding of sport participation among individuals living in poverty?

## **Literature review**

The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions — an instrument that is used to develop public policy in Belgium — investigates the risk of poverty based on income, material deprivation, and employment. Research shows that sport participation in Flanders is socially stratified, as family income and socio-economic status according to the parents' education level influence sport participation (Theeboom, Nols, Derom, De Bosscher, De Martelaer, Willem, & Scheerder, 2015; Vandermeerschen, Vos, & Scheerder, 2015). Individuals with lower income or lower educational attainment are not only less active in sport when compared to their counterparts, they also participate in a different manner — more recreationally, in an individual context, and in the outdoors (Theeboom et al., 2015). One study investigated income poverty and educational attainment as important determinants of club-organized sport participation among children and adolescents in Flanders (Vandermeerschen et al., 2015), whereas another study examined the sport participation profile of individuals who occupy a more vulnerable position in society by using subjective poverty or educational attainment as important determinants (Theeboom et al., 2015). Previous research in Flanders has used only one dimension of poverty (income poverty or subjective poverty, independent from one another) to examine the sport participation behaviour of individuals living in poverty. This is problematic as poverty is known to be a multidimensional construct that considers more aspects than income alone (Aue, Roosen, & Jensen, 2016).

## **Methodology, research design, and data analysis**

The Flemish government administered the PaS 2014 among a sample of adults between the ages of 15 and 85. Data were collected via interviews with individuals (N = 3.949) representative of the Flemish population in terms of gender, age, and educational attainment. Individuals were selected using postal codes and government register numbers. Measures related to income poverty and subjective poverty were included in the survey. Based upon these measures, samples of individuals living in poverty were compared using chi-square tests. Firstly, using the merit approach, the individuals at risk of income poverty (the income poor) were compared with the non-poor and the individuals who identified themselves as subjective poor were compared with the non-poor. Secondly, using the cumulative approach, individuals who are poor on two dimensions (income poor and subjective poor) were compared with the non-poor (Bradshaw & Finch, 2003). Comparison covers socio-demographic, socio-economic, and sport participation characteristics.

## **Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions**

The data from the PaS 2014 on sport participation of individuals living in poverty highlight issues of reliability and validity when measuring poverty. The findings show that income poverty and subjective poverty, two measures of poverty, produce statistically different samples in terms of various characteristics. As an example, those who are classified as income poor are more often older when compared to the subjective poor. As such, it is not safe to rely solely on one measure of poverty as different measures produce different samples (Bradshaw & Finch, 2003). Although the participants of the PaS 2014 are representative of the Flemish population in terms of gender, age, and educational attainment, the findings emphasize that this is not the case in terms of poverty. Only three percent of the PaS 2014 sample can be classified as poor on both dimensions of poverty. Significant findings between the poor and the non-poor were reported, but the small size of the remaining sample makes it difficult to interpret these differences. Although the

purpose of the PaS 2014 was to measure barriers to non-participation and although it is known that people living in poverty are overrepresented as non-participants, the survey failed to reach and include these non-participants in the sample.

## References

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