



# Opportunities and barriers to involving persons with health limitations and disabilities in physical education and sports

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## Abstract

**Objective of the study** was to analyze the factors that promote and hinder the involvement of people with health limitations (disabilities) in systematic physical education and sports.

**Methods and structure of the study.** An all-Russian sample survey was conducted: of the population with health limitations, aged from 18 to 80 years and older (604 respondents with health limitations, including disabilities, of which: 22.2% with the first disability group, 31.5% - second, and 38.2% - third, there is no disability, but 8.1% of respondents have health restrictions); survey of coaches and instructors working in the field of adaptive sports: sports of the deaf, sports of the blind, sports of the LMS (persons with lesions of the musculoskeletal system), sports of PID (persons with intellectual disabilities) (323 experts, among whom 67.8% have work experience in adaptive sport for over five years). The online survey was conducted using specially designed questionnaires. More than half (58.2%) of the surveyed coaches and instructors work with both adults and children. The categories of disabled people with whom coaches and instructors work include persons with the following types of nosologies: musculoskeletal disorders (65.3%), hearing impairment (41.8%), visual impairment (25.7%), mental disorders (35.6%).

**Results and conclusions.** It has been established that a significant number of people with disabilities (disabilities) are aware of the importance of physical activity for maintaining and strengthening health, for improving psychological well-being and more successful socialization, and they are actively involved in physical education and sports. Three groups of barriers have been identified that impede the involvement of this category of the population in the field of physical education and sports: individual barriers; barriers related to the availability of physical culture and sports infrastructure; barriers caused by dissatisfaction with existing conditions for physical activity.

**Keywords:** *persons with health limitations and disabilities, physical education, sports, activity, opportunities, barriers.*

**Introduction.** Physical culture and sports play an important role in the formation of a healthy lifestyle of the population. For people with health limitations and disabilities, their importance cannot be overestimated, since, as a number of authors note, they are one of the main ways of physical and mental rehabilitation, as well as social integration [1, 2, 3, 4].

According to Rosstat, as of January 1, 2023, there were 10,933 thousand citizens in the country with various disability groups, including disabled children. According to preliminary estimates, in 2023 there will be 74.7 disabled people per 1000 people in the Russian Federation. At the same time, as noted in the report

of the Ministry of Sports of the Russian Federation at a meeting of the Council for Disabled People under the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on April 5, 2023, as of January 1, 2023, the share of disabled people involved in physical education and sports amounted to 21% of the total number disabled people who do not have medical contraindications for the relevant activity [5, p. 12].

Creating favorable conditions for physical education and sports for people with health limitations and disabilities, as well as their involvement in physical culture and sports activities are the priority objectives of a number of strategic documents at the national lev-



el, including the federal project “Sport is the norm of life” and the national project “Demography”, national programs of the Russian Federation “Development of physical culture and sports” and “Accessible environment”, “Strategy for the development of physical culture and sports in the Russian Federation for the period until 2030”, Action plan to create conditions for physical culture and sports for disabled people and persons with health limitations and disabilities, including disabled children until 2030.

According to the state program “Development of Physical Culture and Sports”, by 2030 the proportion of people with disabilities who are systematically involved in physical culture and sports should increase to 30% of the total number who have no medical contraindications for this type of activity [5, p. 23].

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to study the needs of people with disabilities in physical education and sports, their behavioral patterns in this area, and also to identify factors influencing the decision to participate in physical education and sports activities, which determines the relevance of this study.

Objective of the study was to analyze the factors that promote and hinder the involvement of people with health limitations (disabilities) in systematic physical education and sports.

**Methods and structure of the study.** The main methods for collecting primary information were a nationwide sample survey of the population with disabilities aged 18 to 80 years and older, as well as a nationwide sample survey of coaches and instructors working in the field of adaptive sports: sports of the deaf, sports of the blind, sports of the LMS (persons with lesions of the musculoskeletal system), sports of PID (persons with intellectual disabilities). An Internet survey was conducted using specially designed questionnaires, and two focus groups were conducted.

604 respondents (55.5% women and 44.5% men) with health limitations, including disabilities, took part in the Internet survey. Among them, 22.2% have the first disability group, 31.5% have the second, and 38.2% have the third group. There is no disability group, but 8.1% of respondents have health restrictions. Among the respondents, 42.7% were representatives of young people (18-39 years old), 36.0% of the middle generation (40-59 years old) and 21.3% of the older generation (60 years old and older). Among the respondents, 30.0% have incomplete and complete secondary education, 29.1% have primary and secondary vocational education, and 40.9% have higher

education. 12.6% of respondents live in megacities (Moscow and St. Petersburg), 16.7% live in cities with a population of over a million, 11.4% live in large cities with populations ranging from 500 thousand to 950 thousand residents, and 11.4% live in medium-sized cities (100 – 500 thousand) – 11.4%, in small towns (less than 100 thousand) – 18.8%, in urban settlements – 6.5%, in rural areas – 13.1%.

323 experts answered the questionnaire for coaches and instructors, of which 67.8% have more than five years of experience in adaptive sports, 58.2% work with both adults and children. The categories of disabled people with whom coaches and instructors work include persons with the following types of nosologies: musculoskeletal disorders (indicated by 65.3% of respondents), hearing impairment (41.8%), visual impairment (25.7%), mental disorders (35.6%).

**Results of the study and discussion.** The majority (78.6%) of respondents with disabilities engage in physical education and sports in one form or another, while 52.3% reported that they do this as part of a special program of adaptive physical education and sports, and of these, a total of 64.0 % exercise regularly at least three times a week.

More than half (54.1%) of respondents attend sports clubs, and 70.1% responded that in 2022-2023. participated in sports competitions. The top 5 types of sports and physical exercises they engage in include: swimming (32.5%), physical therapy (31.9%), training on exercise machines (30.3%), walking (30.1%) and general physical fitness (25.3%). According to coaches and instructors, in those settlements where they work with people with disabilities, competitions are most often held in swimming (47.4%), table tennis (47.4 %) and athletics (41.5%). At the same time, 53.6% of experts are confident that people with disabilities show a very high interest in physical education and sports. 17.4% of respondents do not engage in physical education and sports, of which every third (31.4%) reported that the reason for this is disability, and 21.0% of respondents do not engage in physical activity due to medical contraindications.

The presence of sports facilities adapted for them in the locality was noted by 61.1% of respondents, while 26.3% reported the absence of facilities. Surveyed persons with disabilities believe that they have opportunities for: developing their physical capabilities (67.7%), participating in competitions (62.4%), engaging in adaptive physical education (60.3%), feeling attention, care and help from other people



(59.1%), practicing the desired sport (51.2%), receiving special sports training (49.2%), comfortable use of stadiums and sports facilities (49.0%), convenient use of transport to sports and recreational facilities (45.2%) and receiving all required assistance and support from authorities and local governments (42.1%). But at the same time, just creating conditions is not enough; internal motivation is needed to encourage people with disabilities to engage in physical activity.

Based on the results of a survey of people with disabilities, a rating of motives was compiled that actualize their need for physical education and sports, the first line of which is occupied by the motive of maintaining and strengthening health (70.1%). In second and third place by a large margin are the motives for creating a healthy lifestyle (32.9%) and improving mood and enjoying activities (30.7%).

It is noteworthy that, according to the surveyed coaches and instructors, the following rating of significant motives of people with disabilities to engage in physical activity was obtained: to achieve certain sports results (48.7%), maintain and improve health (46.5%), communicate with friends (41.9%), increase the level of physical fitness (38.7%), test one's strength, overcome psychological barriers (29.7%), improve well-being (21.6%), improve mood, enjoy activities (15.5%), expand the circle of acquaintances (14.8%), reduce neuro-emotional overload (4.8%), maintain and improve the figure (3.2%), relieve fatigue, maintain performance (1.0%).

According to the majority of respondents with disabilities involved in the field of physical education and sports, physical activity greatly helps them: maintain physical fitness (73.2%), develop motor abilities (73.0%), form and strengthen a positive attitude towards active forms of recreation (62.9%), form correct ideological views on a healthy lifestyle (56.8%), develop a sense of pleasure (55.8%), develop moral-volitional and moral qualities (60.3%).

Based on survey data, we can identify three groups of factors that hinder the involvement of persons with disabilities in physical education and sports:

1. Individual barriers caused by the state of health, work schedule and lifestyle of a person, as well as his attitude to physical education and sports: medical contraindications, lack of free time, heavy workload, increased fatigue, fear of seeming ridiculous, laziness, lack of willpower. Experts also noted the presence of other interests and hobbies among people with disabilities.

2. Barriers associated with the availability of sports infrastructure adapted to the needs of people with disabilities: 40.6% of coaches and instructors and 14.3% of people with disabilities noted the absence or inconvenient location of sports facilities. For 17.2% of respondents from among persons with disabilities, an obstacle is the lack of free sections, classes or their high cost.

3. Barriers due to dissatisfaction with the existing conditions for physical activity: 42.0% of respondents with disabilities responded that they were not satisfied to one degree or another with the conditions for physical education and sports existing in their locality, and also drew attention to the insufficiency conditions in specialized organizations - the lack of additional services (massage, solarium, steam room and others) for people with disabilities (33.5%), the lack of a flexible lesson schedule that takes into account the physical capabilities of people with disabilities (20.8%); to the lack of specialized equipment, inventory (27.3%) and individual training programs taking into account the existing nosology (25.7%).

Almost two-thirds (64.4%) of coaches and instructors believe that in the locality where they work, there are rather insufficient and absolutely insufficient sports facilities that people with disabilities need, and 27.2% - that sports organizations providing services people with disabilities are not sufficiently provided with trainers and instructors.

Removing barriers that do not depend on the individual life circumstances of people with disabilities will contribute to an increase in the level of involvement of this category of the population in physical activity. For example, in the next year, 26.7% of respondents would start physical education and sports if all factors beyond their control were eliminated, and another 35.2% would "rather start." The removal of barriers, according to focus group participants, can be facilitated by the popularization of sports, including by participants in the Paralympic movement, as well as educational work about the role of physical education and sports in people's lives in the media, including social networks.

**Conclusions.** The results of the study indicate that a significant number of people with disabilities are aware of the importance of physical activity for maintaining and strengthening their health, for improving psychological well-being and more successful socialization. Moreover, they are actively involved in physical education and sports. The opportunities for people with disabilities to engage in such activities are



expanding. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the factors that impede this.

To improve conditions and overcome barriers to the involvement of people with disabilities in the field of physical education and sports, it is very important to hear the voice of those for whom these conditions are created. Judging by the survey data, the preferred forms of organized physical activity for this category of the population are training on exercise machines in various centers, swimming, and table tennis. It is no coincidence that a significant portion of respondents expressed a desire to have a swimming pool (43.5%), a fitness center/gym/gym (35.9%), and a sports ground with exercise equipment (32.8%) in their locality. The need to develop a sports infrastructure for people with disabilities was indicated by 48.1% of respondents with disabilities, and 40.6% recommended strengthening efforts to popularize sports.

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