

Sportsmanship attitudes in young adolescents from post-communist countries

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Introduction. Students' moral development is one of the main educational goals of physical education curricula. **Aim of Study.** This study is an attempt at identifying what attitudes toward sportsmanship behavior are held by young adolescents from post-communist countries. **Material and Methods.** The sample included data from 547 boys and girls, aged 13-15, selected from schools in Poznan (Poland), Kustandil (Bulgaria), and Pristina (Kosovo). The study concerned sportsmanship dilemmas in three areas of moral development: judgment, reasoning, and intentions. The level of moral development was determined using the Horrocks Prosocial Play Behavior Inventory. **Results.** No significant effect was found in moral judgment, reasoning, and intentions between the teenagers from the examined countries. **Conclusions.** The findings suggest that the level of moral development of students in the three countries is similar.

KEYWORDS: sportsmanship, moral development, young adolescents, physical education.

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What is already known on this topic?

Sport may play a fundamental role in enhancing moral development, specifically in physical education and school sport context. There have been other studies on moral development and sport involvement of young people, carried out in Western democratic states, but no data have been available on the situation in countries with previous communist regimes. Generally, if not enhanced, traditional physical education does not have any effect on pupils' moral growth, whereas moral education programmes, mainly Olympic education, produce promising effects in this domain.

Introduction

Arnold [1] claims that when seen as a valued human practice, sport is a form of moral education and can also provide foundations for the teaching of moral education in schools. However, Carr [2] questions whether a school game of hockey or gymnastics itself is a form of moral education and asks what moral educational significance it might have, if at all, when [2]: "the moral-educational significance of physical education (school sports) stands in serious need of disambiguation". According to Carr [2], it is not the subject of physical education (PE) that provides moral significance (therefore in this sense it should not differ from other school subjects). It is rather teachers, including PE teachers, who might be regarded as moral educators according to the means they employ and the educational contexts they create. Physical education, together with

other school subjects, is expected to contribute to the social and moral development of children, yet there is little scientific evidence that underpins the positive contribution of PE to this development [3]. As Shields and Bredemeier [4] argue though, PE can probably be the most important physical activity (PA) context for promoting moral development.

The foundations for research in this area have been laid by Piaget's [5] and Kohlberg's [6] models of the moral development of children. Piaget believed that when a child develops the ability to think abstractly and hypothetically, it frees the individual from the restrictions of concrete sense perception, and the conventional interpretations of these perceptions; whereas Kohlberg argued that socio-moral reasoning constitutes an area of structural development, which parallels, requires, and builds upon the development of logical and scientific reasoning [7]. The idea of progression from lower to higher stages of moral development first articulated by Piaget, later developed by Kohlberg, has been "regarded as an evolution governed by an inherent need for equilibrium" [5] between the individual and society. Kohlberg [6] established the outline of moral development, which includes six stages on three levels. Each stage is homogenous in its moral cognitive structure or moral reasoning strategy, and builds upon the previous one, while it provides new perspectives and criteria in order to enable the individual to make more adequate moral evaluations. To progress from one stage to another a child needs to be faced with a morally enhancing situation, placed in an educational setting. Patterns of moral behavior originate in school and are reinforced through social support, especially in the Physical Education and Sport (PES) context. This context can, and according to curricula in many countries, should offer moral dilemmas encouraging a pupil to make own judgment, and reasoning, as well as making him or her consider their sportsmanship like behaviors in the future, should such situations appear. Research findings [3], indicate, that PES can have certain significant implications for the cultivation of moral attitudes or the development of a young person's moral character.

Thus, PES settings are considered an appealing context for moral development work on the most fundamental concepts related to morality such as sportsmanship, fair play, empathy, social responsibility, role taking and pro-social behaviors [8]. Sport programs for young people mention sportsmanship as an intricate part of

participation. Sportsmanship might add to the moral development of an individual in terms of judgment and reasoning which, in turn, may influence a person's decisions in the future.

Moral judgment is an individual's decision as to whether something is considered ethical or unethical (right or wrong). The content of someone's moral reasoning reveals moral values, attitudes and beliefs, and concerns different problems and conditions; whereas moral intention deals with the probability of certain behaviors occurring in a specific context [9]. This is the theoretical framework for the works of Horrocks, who conducted one of the first studies linking moral reasoning with pro-social behaviors. Horrocks [10] found a positive correlation in young people between pro-social behaviors and perceptions of sportsmanship when relating them to the stages of moral development. Children in this study who were classified as high in life moral reasoning were rated higher in pro-social behaviors than those lower in moral reasoning.

The situation may appear to be a little different when we shift our focus onto young adolescents' sport. Basing her research on Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development, Hall [11] found that athletes in intercollegiate sport (of both genders) generally scored lower in their stage of moral reasoning than those college norms reported by Kohlberg. On the other hand, studies by Shields and Bredemeier [4] revealed no differences in moral reasoning between high school basketball players and non-athletes; it indicated higher and more mature moral reasoning in females in general, although the sample was small.

In his review Bailey [12] found that numerous studies demonstrated that appropriately structured and presented activities can make a contribution to the development of pro-social behavior and even combat anti-social and criminal behaviors in youth. Some disagreement among physical educators about the choice of effective teaching strategies led to notable contributions by practitioners to research studies in Fair Play for Kids project in Canada [13]. The most important issues in the development of manuals for teaching sportsmanship in children focused on the following aspects: respect for the rules, respect for the officials and their decisions, respect for the opponent, providing individuals with an equal chance to participate, and maintaining self-control at all times. Results of that experimental project led to an optimistic conclusion. PE was observed to be effective when enhanced with moral education context in other studies [8, 14].

Conversely, the hegemonic performativity culture of school sport that strongly emphasizes winning at all costs may cause several problems. In a study by Shields and Bredemeier [4] cheating was approved by 14% of the teenagers, 32% thought it was fine to argue with officials, 22% accepted trash-talking as simply part of the game, 29% approved booing, 12% agreed that faking an injury is acceptable, 41% accepted flashy, egotistical celebration. There is a great deal of controversy about competition in school sport; however, as Arnold states [15] “competitive sport is not per se a form of mis-education. It can be rather, if taught with understanding and skill, a form of education in which moral values are not only inherently demanded but are encouraged in practice”.

Recently, in a study concerning teaching sportsmanship values in Spanish youth, Lequin and Oliden [16] found that the least important value was that of winning the game (for both genders), whereas the most important one differed for boys who valued having fun, and girls who considered playing fair as the most important one. Baron, Apocado Urgnijo, Etxebarria Bilbao et al. [17] found that the principal variable in predicting internalized behaviors in girls was maternal affection, whereas for boys it was maternal emotional communication and transmission of values. Meta-analyses of research studies on sex differences in moral characteristics in youth [18] showed a more empathic response in girls than boys of the same age, and a growth in those differences with age.

Poland, Bulgaria, and recently Kosovo, have undergone major political and social transformations in recent years. Poland held its first democratic elections in 1989, Bulgaria in 1991, whereas Kosovo self-declared independence only in 2008. In all three countries democracy has brought changes in their education systems, but the changes occurred at different rate. In all three countries education now is supposed to be pupil-centered, but changing teaching routine, styles and modeling methods may take years. This especially concerns PES, which plays an important role in shaping the moral attitudes of children and young people. For the majority of PE curricula, including those in Poland, Bulgaria, and Kosovo, sportsmanship is a direct objective of school sport participation [19, 20]. Although the national curriculum often provides guidelines that define social and moral development, PE teachers in the investigated countries tend to employ controlling and command teaching styles in their work partly because they are not formally trained in the didactics of social and moral development.

One also ought to mention differences in educational contexts. While education in Poland and Bulgaria has been open and accessible for every child for a number of years, In Kosove until recently it has been different. In an atmosphere of high ethnic tensions, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, education was politicized: for Kosovar Albanians, a ‘parallel’ education system was a crucial element in the process of maintaining and strengthening their separate national identity [21]. Segregation in schools, which started as a result of the demands put forward by Kosovar Serbs for physical separation from Albanians due to the insecurity they felt in Albanian dominated schools, had a tremendous negative effect in the years to come, as it strengthened inter-group interaction to the detriment of intra-group one and brought about a kind of civic and social empowerment among Kosovar Albanians [21]. During the conflict years the Kosovar children were denied the right to learn in schools, and the ‘underground’ separate education and health systems were established [22]. This was carried out with limited infrastructure (or severely damaged), and teaching only selected subjects. PE was first introduced as an optional, and became mandatory in 2006. In 2012 the subject was renamed into Health – Wellbeing and PE, and reduced from 3 to 2 hours a week for all pupils in all grades, with one class in a sport gym and another in a classroom as a theoretical class [23]. It is 2 hours a week of PE in lower secondary schools in Bulgaria, whereas in Poland, 4 hours a week of PE are compulsory for age category 13-15.

We are also aware of differences in dominant religions (Bulgarian Orthodox, Muslim in Kosovo, and Roman Catholic in Poland), which could influence education and social consequences for young people. However, this issue has is not studied within this research.

The goal of this paper is to investigate whether there are differences in capabilities of moral judgment, reasoning, and intentions between young people in Poland, Bulgaria, and Kosovo.

Material and Methods

Participants and procedure

The study sample included data from 547 boys and girls (279 boys, 268 girls), aged 13-15. Participants were recruited from middle-high schools in Poznan, $n = 122$ (Poland), Kustandil, $n = 125$ (Bulgaria), and Pristina, $n = 300$ (Kosovo). The three cites differed in population size (Poznan 550,000, Pristina 190,000, and

Kustandil 45,000), but their selection was made on the basis of their cooperation in an international project (no 2010-1-PL1-COM13-11564 1) on Olympism and integration of young (able and disabled) people through education. Three schools were selected in each city based on their principal's interest in the study. In those schools all grades were examined. Detailed data are presented in Table 1. The study protocol was approved by the Local Bioethics Committee of the Poznań University of Medical Sciences (decision no. 973/11).

Table 1. Number of participants (boys and girls) from the three countries under study

	POL <i>n</i> (%)	BUL <i>n</i> (%)	KOS <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i>
Boys	71 (58.1)	59 (47.2)	149 (49.6)	279
Girls	51 (41.9)	66 (52.8)	151 (51.4)	268
Total	122 (100.0)	125 (100.0)	300 (100.0)	547

Measures

The Horrocks [10] Pro-social Play Behavior Inventory (HPPBI) is a scale developed for assessing moral reasoning and pro-social behaviors. Pupils are presented with 10 pro-moral dilemmas often occurring in the PES context: arguing, showing off, teasing, sharing equipment, abiding by the rules, winning without 'gloating', accepting defeat without complaining, offering consolation, accepting the referee's decision, and accepting constructive criticism and suggestions from peers. The 10 behaviors featured in the survey were used to structure items for moral judgment, reason and intention. Judgment and intention scores ranged from 1 to 3, and reason scores ranged from 1 to 5 points on a Likert-type scale, and for each of the moral areas (judgment, reasoning, intentions) a mean of 10 dilemmas was calculated. Horrocks [10] study's rating had a moderate correlation with moral reasoning ($r = 0.55$), evidencing moderate construct validity, but was recognized as having acceptable psychometric

qualities for measuring pro-social behaviors [13]. Descriptive characteristics of mean values (M) and standard deviation (SD) are presented in Table 2.

Research design

We examined whether the levels of moral judgment, reasoning and intentions differed between youth and the countries. To compare the differences the Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA with statistical significance set at $p \leq 0.05$ was carried out and post-hoc test were employed where significant differences occurred. All statistical analyses were conducted using Statistica 10.0 software.

Results

Results are reported in two sections. The first presents the general aspects of moral development. A comparison of the mean scores in response summaries are deliberately presented with only minimal analysis. There were no significant differences in the analysis of effects between the countries and mean scores of the examined teenagers. No statistically significant differences were noticed in judgment ($p > 0.05$) and reasoning ($p > 0.05$). There were some differences in intentions ($p = 0.0401$). In that case there was statistical significance of differences between the scores of Bulgarian and Kosovar adolescents ($p = 0.0387$) (Table 2).

In a detailed analysis of particular moral dilemma items (Table 3) some significant differences were noticed within each of the three areas of moral development (judgment, reasoning, intentions). In moral judgment, pupils from Kosovo presented a significantly higher level in accepting the referee's decision ($p \leq 0.0001$), taking turns ($p \leq 0.0001$), and accepting constructive criticism and suggestions than their peers ($p = 0.0020$) from Poland and Bulgaria. The highest level of moral development in judgment was presented by pupils from Poland and Bulgaria in the capacity for offering consolation when a group member makes a mistake. For

Kosovar students this was so in the case of abiding by the rules, although there were no statistically significant differences between the countries. The respondents in Poland and Bulgaria reported the lowest values in accepting constructive criticism and suggestions

Table 2. Descriptive characteristics of mean values and SD in three moral areas

Moral area	Country			<i>p</i> value
	POL (<i>n</i> = 122)	BUL (<i>n</i> = 125)	KOS (<i>n</i> = 300)	
	M ± SD	M ± SD	M ± SD	
Judgment (1-3)	2.47 ± 0.35	2.42 ± 0.36	2.47 ± 0.22	0.8939
Reasoning (1-5)	3.37 ± 0.90	3.47 ± 0.87	3.38 ± 0.41	0.8026
Intentions (1-3)	2.39 ± 0.49	2.40 ± 0.45	2.47 ± 0.20	0.0401

M – mean value, SD – standard deviation, $p \leq 0.05$

Table 3. Significance of differences in each of the ten dilemmas between teenagers from Poland, Bulgaria and Kosovo

Moral dilemmas	Moral areas		
	Judgement	Reasoning	Intentions
	<i>p</i> value (post hoc)		
1. Avoids arguments	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001	Ns = 0.8002	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001
2. Wins without “gloating”	Ns = 0.4506	Ns = 0.7020	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001
3. Accepts defeat without complaining	Ns = 0.1942	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0015	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001
4. Offers consolation when a group member makes a mistake	Ns = 0.2408	Ns = 0.0366	Ns = 0.2151
5. Shares equipment readily	Ns = 0.3633	Ns = 0.4943	2 vs 3 \leq 0.0050
6. Abides by the rules of the game	Ns = 0.0194	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001	Ns = 0.1478
7. Shares the game activities	Ns = 0.0992	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001
8. Accepts the referee’s decision	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001	Ns = 0.1686	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001
9. Takes turns readily	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001	Ns = 0.0360	Ns = 0.0916
10. Accepts constructive criticism and suggestions from peers	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001	1 vs 2,3 \leq 0.0001

1 – Poland, 2 – Bulgaria, 3 – Kosovo

from peers. Pupils from Kosovo scored significantly lower than their peers from Poland and Bulgaria in avoiding arguments ($p \leq 0.0001$).

In moral reasoning, students from Kosovo presented more capacity for accepting defeats without complaining ($p = 0.0015$), as well as in accepting constructive criticism from their peers ($p \leq 0.0001$) from Poland and Bulgaria. In moral reasoning concerning abiding by the rules ($p \leq 0.0001$) and sharing the game’s activities ($p \leq 0.0001$), students from Kosovo demonstrated less mature attitudes than peers from Poland and Bulgaria. The highest level of moral reasoning was presented by the Polish students in sharing the game activities.

With regards to moral intentions, the teenagers from Kosovo scored lowest in avoiding arguments ($p \leq 0.0001$). Interestingly, the pupils from Poland and Bulgaria also presented less mature attitudes towards this particular moral dilemma. The teenagers from Kosovo also scored lowest in the ability to win without ‘gloating’ ($p \leq 0.0001$), whereas the Polish and Bulgarian teenagers demonstrated significantly higher intentions in this area. The Polish and Kosovar groups scored high in readiness to share the equipment, and the students from Bulgaria scored lower ($p = 0.0050$) than the Kosovav teenagers. Students from Kosovo were more willing to accept the referee’s decisions ($p \leq 0.0001$), and indicated intentions of accepting constructive criticism and suggestions from peers should such situations appear in the future ($p \leq 0.0001$). The differences were significant compared to peers from Poland and Bulgaria.

Discussion

School education (especially PES) as well as the level of parental education and the socio-economic environment determine the moral development of young people. An initiation into sport, like other aspects of moral education, involves such processes as judging, caring and acting. Since sport with its virtues is a valuable sphere of human practice it ought to be integrated into school education as a part of curriculum [24]. In the present study, the lack of statistically significant differences in the moral aspects of judgment reasoning and intentions in young people from three counties examined may raise some concerns. It may point to the similarity of the teaching patterns of sportsmanship behavior in those educational systems. This especially concerns the PES context, which seems to have a limited impact on the development of this concept in the examined youth. Although the Polish and Bulgarian teenagers presented more mature attitudes in some of the sportsmanship dilemmas, in general, the findings indicate that boys and girls from Poland, Kosovo and Bulgaria demonstrated similar levels of moral development. It was difficult to observe the examined teenagers scoring the highest rates on moral development, indicating principled thinking in any of the national contexts.

In the case of societies based on a strong *collectivist* (all European countries of the ‘Eastern Block’, including former Yugoslavia, and thus Kosovo) identity is based on social networks to which one belongs, and harmony (no direct confrontations) should be maintained. Children are taught in terms of

'we' and are not expected to have their own opinions. In the case of PES, in the abovementioned countries teaching practice still involves the excessive use of command and practice teaching styles and training-like methods. There might be other issues as well: poor funding, low social status of teachers and low morale undermining the system, particularly in vocational training. Adherence to traditional teaching methods has weakened the development in some fields, specifically in PE. It is well known that a traditional authoritarian style of education makes teachers prefer a single-handed decision-making teaching style. There is little space for the development of pupils' autonomy, and most of the behavior exhibited is usually tightly controlled [19, 20]. This is also reflected in a performativity culture that values performance and victory as major aims of PES. This context, at least for some, provides negative experiences and promotes inactivity as such an approach makes them feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, rejected, excluded, devalued, and harassed [25]. It can thus be a source of frustration and bad behavior.

Studies have found that performance-oriented goals (i.e. goals focused on normative competences) were positively related to several moral variables, such as the legitimacy of injurious acts, approval of unsportsmanlike behavior, verbal/physical aggression [26], and antisocial judgments and behavior [27]. Performance-based goals are common in the PES teaching context in Poland, Bulgaria and Kosovo. In contrast, mastery goals (i.e. focus on task-based or interpersonal competence) are linked to sportsmanship, less tolerance for aggression and cheating, respect for social conventions, rules and officials and pro-social judgments [27]. In a study by Hodge and Lonsdale [28] an autonomy-supportive coaching style was associated with pro-social behavior toward teammates, which was mediated by autonomous motivation. On the other hand, controlled motivation was linked with antisocial behavior (towards both teammates and opponents), and these relationships were mediated by moral disengagement. This is in accordance with the results of earlier studies, which also examined the development of moral reasoning [13].

Nonetheless, PES can also generate poor sport behavior depending on the contents (proportion of contact sports to non-contact activities), and teaching style (authoritarian v. democratic). This may also be connected to PES curricula, which tends to favor stereotypical 'boys' sport, and does not deliver diversified content for boys and girls. In the case of anti-social behavior,

findings from a study by Trillo and Redondo [29] supported the adequacy of including gender identity in the explanatory models of delinquency. Trillo and Redondo [29] suggested the need to reconsider the role of conventional settings in the socialization of masculinity as an important factor in the genesis of adolescent delinquency in both sexes. They claimed that deviant behavior of both sexes derive from differences in learning processes in their socialization setting (family, friends, school). Males have more opportunities to learn and show antisocial behavior due to the lower control exerted over them by conventional contexts and to their higher contact with unconventional groups. Women's traditional attachment to conventional settings, especially the family, and their greater commitment to conventional norms derived from this attachment, are assumed to be determinants explaining women's lower rate of delinquency [30], but also lower participation in sports. In case of Kosovo this may be due to the cultural tradition of patriarchal familial relations remaining the basis for social functioning and solidarity [31], which is not so strong in Bulgaria and even less so in Poland. The research data show that people change the way they make moral judgments long into adulthood [32]. Moreover, moral development does not stop with the onset of puberty and the years following may bring dramatic changes. Therefore, this requires educational action (interventions) to be taken at this level. Findings from our own research indicate that the education systems in the three examined countries (Poland, Bulgaria, Kosovo) may be failing in their responsibility to develop the individual moral capacity. One of the reasons may be found in the tradition of teaching methods and styles. In the examined countries, teaching, especially in PES, has been teacher-centered and oriented towards performance goals for a long time. The results of meta-analyses of over 50 moral education studies [33], when comparing the pre-test and post-test gains of the treatment and the control groups, showed that dilemma discussions produced the greatest effects, followed by personality development treatment. Transformations in PES teaching philosophy towards a more democratic and pupil-centered style are slowly taking place in these countries [19, 20], and could bring positive changes in the area of moral development.

Conclusions

The results of the present study did not reveal any differences between the moral development of young

adolescents in any of the three areas (judgment, reasoning, intentions). There was no statistically significant interaction effect of the country of origin. There were only a few differences noticed in some selected points. These facts indicate that teenagers from Poland, Bulgaria and Kosovo present a similar level of moral development in general terms. The strength of the present study is that it was carried out in a PES environment, as much of students' social, moral and emotional development takes place in school setting. The research can serve a further development of both PE curricula, and pre-service PE teacher training in these countries, which currently lack appropriate competences and skills to stimulate moral development of school pupils. It is important to develop this kind of capacity in every individual throughout their school education in order to produce societies that think rationally and move in morally reasonable directions, especially in post-communist countries.

The limitation of the study was that it only measured declared moral behaviors. In order to avoid this limitation in the future it is suggested that additional observation sheets be used to record students' actual behaviors during PE actions. It would be of scientific value to carry out a comparative study on the moral development of today's children born in countries, with no longer any socialistic social order, including those from societies which are more developed in their patterns of socio-democratic behavior. Further research recommendations also concern comparative cross-cultural studies to investigate the mediating role of culture (education system) on moral development. Yet another study, a longitudinal design, could be recommended to analyze, according to Kohlberg's model, the levels and stages of the moral development of school children participating in PES at different stages of education.

What this paper adds?

There have been other studies on moral development and sport involvement in young people carried out in some countries (Greece, Norway, Canada). Relatively little research on the moral development of youth and sport has been carried out in the former communist countries (Poland, Bulgaria and Kosovo). Although the study design was cross-cultural the findings suggest there are no major differences in the overall level of moral development in young adolescents from countries heavily 'touched' by authoritarian

regimes, more in-depth studies are needed. Culture/ethnicity and socio-demographic factors should be taken into account with the use of trans-contextual and socio-ecological frameworks.

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