

Motives for Sports and Exercise Therapy during the Treatment of Depression

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Objectives

Studies indicate the effectiveness of physical activity in the treatment of depression [1]. Taking individual conditions into account, sports and exercise therapy (S&ET) can be used as a stand-alone or complementary treatment during part-time or full-time inpatient treatment. However, current data indicate that only 23 % of patients in Germany make use of it during their treatment [2]. Thus, there is a need for further research on motivational psychological aspects for S&ET participation. It can be assumed that it is important for the initiation and maintenance of physical activity to take individual patient preferences into account. Furthermore, women and men differ in their motivation for sports and exercise [3]. The present study therefore investigates gender differences in motives for S&ET during part-time or full-time inpatient treatment of depression.

Methods

In a psychotherapeutic and psychosomatic hospital motives for S&ET of female and male patients aged 35 to 64 years with the main diagnosis of depression (F32/F33) have been recorded using the Bernese Motive and Goal Inventory in Leisure and Health Sports (BMZI) [4] since May 2021. The survey was conducted within 7 days after admission to the part-time or full-time inpatient setting.

Table 1: Description of sample.

Characteristics	Men ♂ n = 91	Women ♀ n = 49	p
age M (SD)	47,98 (8,06)	50,67 (7,55)	.0500 ^a
setting			
full-time	19 (21 %)	21 (43 %)	<.006 ^{b**}
part-time	72 (79 %)	28 (57 %)	

Note: ^a Mann-Whitney U-Test; ^b χ^2 -Test; ** $p < .01$

Results

Motives		M	SD	p
contact	♂	2,74	0,95	.220 ^a
	♀	2,53	1,02	
body/ appearance	♂	3,42	1,16	.979 ^b
	♀	3,37	1,33	
competition/ performance	♂	2,19	1,93	<.001 ^{b***}
	♀	1,60	0,77	
distraction/ catharsis	♂	3,72	0,87	.648 ^b
	♀	3,80	0,88	
health	♂	4,29	0,72	.283 ^b
	♀	4,37	0,79	
fitness	♂	4,20	0,85	.531 ^b
	♀	4,20	0,95	
aesthetics	♂	2,40	1,07	.437 ^b
	♀	2,27	1,16	

Of all motives, the most important for both men and women are health, fitness and distraction/ catharsis due to the highest mean scores. Compared to women ($M = 1,60$, $SD = 0,77$) men ($M = 2,19$, $SD = 1,93$) reported significantly higher mean scores for the competition/ performance motive (Mann Whitney U-Test; $z = 3,987$; $p < .001$). There were no further significant gender differences.

Table 2: Mean scores of motives according to BMZI of men (n = 91) and women (n = 49).

Note: ^a t-Test; ^b Mann-Whitney U-Test; *** $p < .001$

Conclusion

Significant gender differences were found only for the motive competition/ performance, although this motive rated lowest on average. The absence of further gender differences could be due to the fact that gender differences could be of less importance for S&ET in the treatment context. On average health, fitness, and distraction/ catharsis were rated highest by both genders. This is consistent with typical symptoms during depression, which involves distraction from negative thoughts as well as recovering physical fitness to cope with everyday life. Further studies should investigate other motivational psychological variables influencing participation in S&ET during treatment.

