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Article original

## Understanding injuries in sports: Self-reported injury and perceived risk of injury among adolescents

*Comprendre les blessures en sport : blessure auto-rapportée et risque de blessure perçue chez les adolescents*



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 13 January 2017

Received in revised form 9 October 2017

Accepted 9 October 2017

#### Keywords:

Sports injury

Motives

Perceived risk

Mechanisms of injury

Organized/informal sports

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction.** – Although exposure and perceived risk of injury in sports among adolescents is a well-known phenomenon today, their understanding remains poorly explored.

**Objective.** – This study examines the relationships between demographics, sport motives, and sport-related characteristics in a sample of French adolescents involved in sports.

**Methods.** – The sample included 394 adolescents involved in sports, between 13 and 19 years old. The adolescents filled out a questionnaire requesting information about their age, sex, sport motives, sport-related characteristics, the number of injuries, and perceived risk of injury in their preferred sport.

**Results.** – The findings showed that the number of injuries was related to age, sex, type of sport and the participant's motives. The will to play to the limit increased with the exposure to injury. Participation in risky sports and the will to play to the limit were predictors of the adolescents' risk of exposure to sports injuries. Time devoted to sports appears to be a confounding factor. Moreover, boys exhibited higher number of injuries than girls, and they perceived their preferred sport as riskier.

**Conclusion.** – Exposure to the risk of injury in sports and the exacerbated perception of that risk may provide a means of enhancing one's self-image, procuring an emotional experience, and constructing one's masculinity.

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### RÉSUMÉ

**Introduction.** – L'exposition au risque de se blesser en sport et la perception de ce risque chez les adolescents sont des phénomènes bien connus. Néanmoins, leur compréhension reste peu explorée.

**Objectif.** – Cette étude s'intéresse aux relations entre les variables démographiques, les motifs de la pratique sportive et les caractéristiques rapportées du sport pratiqué dans un échantillon d'adolescents qui s'adonnent à cette activité.

**Méthodes.** – L'échantillon comportait 394 sportifs âgés de 13 à 19 ans. Les adolescents devaient renseigner un questionnaire, recueillant des informations sur leur âge, leur sexe, les motifs de leur pratique sportive et les caractéristiques de cette activité, le nombre de blessures subies et la perception du risque de se blesser dans leur sport préféré.

**Résultats.** – Ils montrent que le nombre de blessures est lié à l'âge, au sexe, au type de sport et aux motifs de la pratique. Le motif de jeu aux limites augmente avec l'exposition au risque de blessure. La participation à des activités sportives à risque et la volonté de jouer aux limites sont des prédicteurs de l'exposition des adolescents au risque de se blesser en sport.

#### Mots clés :

Blessure en sport

Motifs d'agir

Risque perçue

Mécanisme de blessure

Sport en club/hors club

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erap.2017.10.002>

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*Conclusion.* – L'exposition au risque de blessure en sport et la perception exacerbée de ce risque pourraient représenter un moyen d'améliorer l'image de soi, de générer une expérience émotionnelle et de construire sa masculinité.

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A sport injury is defined as a “physical damage caused by a sports-related incident and reported as such by the respondent” (Backx, Rich, Kemper, & Verbeek, 1989). The question of risk-taking in this field has been approached from three angles: (a) sports injuries related to demographics (e.g., age, sex) and the characteristics of the sport played (e.g., soccer, racket sports, swimming, gymnastics, climbing); (b) the participant's personality and perception of risk; and (c) the motives of the player in terms of voluntary risk-taking. These approaches are generally addressed separately, without looking at the relationships between observed or self-reported injuries, and the participant's risk perceptions and motives for engaging in the sports activity. In sum, the relationship between exposure and perceived risk remains under-explored.

The prevalence of sports injuries in France is of 10% (Thélot, Darlot, Nectoux, & Isnard, 2001). The risk of injury increased with the amount of weekly sport practice (Rose, Emery, & Meeuwisse, 2008), competition and single-sport specialization at young ages (DiFiori, 2010). Children's and youth sports are associated with potential for acute injury (Caine, Maffulli, & Caine, 2008). The frequency of injury increased with age until the age of 16 years and then decreased (Michaud, Renaud, & Narring, 2001). A look at which body areas are injured and the degree of seriousness of the injuries gives a more detailed picture of the injury-generating nature of each sport (Baarveld, Visser, Boudewijn, & Backx, 2011; Ekstrand & Gillquist, 1983; Habelt, Hasler, Steinbrück, & Majewski, 2011; Inserm, 2008; Mattila, Parkkari, Koivusilta, Kannus, & Rimpelä, 2009). However, the results that interest us the most concern the mechanisms underlying injuries. The most common mechanisms are colliding (being hit or running into something) and falling (Conn, Anest, & Gilchrist, 2003; Nicholl, Coleman, & Williams, 1995). A comparison of different sports shows that some sports are more dangerous than others. For example, roller skating exposes the individual to falling, while soccer involves players in close contact (Ekstrand & Gillquist, 1983; Michaud et al., 2001). These results suggest that sports can be classified into those that involve a risk of colliding/falling (i.e., soccer, rugby, basketball, boxing, judo, gymnastics, etc.) and those that do not expose the player to such risks (e.g., swimming, tennis, badminton, volleyball, etc.). The first category includes contact sports where participant can be struck by other object, falling, or colliding with furniture (Nicholl et al., 1995).

A participant's perception of risk can be considered from at least three viewpoints. In the first, it is hypothesized that certain situations are inherently risky and that the desire to experience those situations reflects a personality type. This was the approach taken by Zuckerman in the Version V of his Sensation-Seeking Scale (Zuckerman, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1978). The desire to engage in activities such as deep-sea diving, parachute jumping, mountain climbing or water-skiing, is thought to reveal certain personality traits. What this implies for these authors is that participation in certain sports is synonymous with the search for strong sensations, regardless of what the subject states about his/her intentions, or what he/she actually does. Showing that different high-risk activities satisfy different motives, Barlow, Woodman, and Hardy (2013) noted that it is important to remember that mountaineering and other high-risk endeavors (polar expeditions, ocean rowing) are devoid of sensation provision. The authors conclude that “sensation seeking is clearly a fruitless theoretical standpoint from which

to understand the motives for such experiences” (p. 459). This conflating premise was corrected in the 1993 version of the scale (Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Joireman, Teta, & Kraft, 1993). The more recent version is based on daily-life situations that are marked by a given kind of sensation, or are experienced in a very intense way (“I love to work or play sports until I'm exhausted”). Neither of these instruments allows one to control for the influence that past experience in risk-taking is likely to exert on the subject's dispositions.

The second view is based on the principle that mental representations and feelings vary across individuals and affect risk perception. Taking this approach, Slovic (1987) advanced the idea that risk perception allows the person to adapt to environmental constraints. For this author, the psychometric paradigm is particularly useful for placing risk-related attitudes and representations on cognitive maps. Sports such as skiing and bicycling show up in this scheme as activities that are not feared, and where the risk is known. Conversely, parachuting and automobile racing involve dangers that are also well-identified but are feared to a greater extent. In addition, the author shows that the perception of risk varies across groups and according to the participant's level of experience. Risk related to nuclear power, for example, arouses an extreme aversion among college students, and indifference from experts (Slovic, 1987). We note in this regard and hypothetically, that the perception of risk may also be different among victims of an injury. The author describes two ways in which people think of risk: the experiential, holistic, and effective mode is conducive to immediate action; the analytic, logical mode is based on an abstraction and is better suited to deferred action (Slovic, Finucane, Peters, & MacGregor, 2004).

The third view is the interactionist approach. Here, a given person's level of experience cannot be understood without taking the social environment into account. Voluntary risk-taking motives arise from interactions between individuals in the world of sports. Such motives are expressed by way of vocabulary words. In an ethnographic study of a group of parachutists, Lyng and Snow (1986) identified three phases of motive building in that sport. During the first phase, sensations linked to falling appear to be of utmost importance. This motive is gradually replaced in the second phase by the feeling of belonging to a counterculture. Finally, by dint of repeated participation in “edgework” – a term borrowed from the journalist Hunter S. Thompson (Lyng, 1990), that refers to “intentional participation in life-threatening or anomie-producing activities” (Lyng and Snow, 1986) – involving fear and excitement – parachutists arrive at the conviction that they possess a rare talent, that they have exceptional abilities. The pursuit of a feeling of being all-powerful becomes the focus of the activity. The concept of edgework helped Lyng understand how people might seek the experience of risk for its own sake. Risk-taking appears as a response to social constraints (Pound & Campbell, 2015). In a society that strives by any means to minimize exposure to danger, voluntary risk-taking gives rise to a feeling of self-determination (Lyng, 1990).

Although human phenomena become meaningful in relation to social structures, making sense out of reality is based on the subject's perception of it in a given context. Adopting this theoretical view means situating one's work in a comprehensive perspective (Weber, 1971). Our approach attempts to determine the link

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