An Ex Post Facto Process of Data Acquisition from Former Participants of Basketball Preparatory Schools

Způsob dodatečného získávání dat od bývalých hráček basketbalových přípravek

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Abstract

This paper attempts to share experience of the data acquisition process in a study related to the dropout of early school-age girls of organized physical activities (OPA). As methods are traditionally focused on theoretical principles of data collection, I am trying to pass on my personal experience gained in the process of an ex post facto data acquisition from girls, former participants of basketball preparatory schools (prep schools), at the age of 6–10 at that time. Hardly were there any other ways to obtain data but interrogation methods after a time delay of 4–10 years. The following three problem areas were identified and explored:

a) An access to data, and/or a database: how and where to get the data and, consequently, the question of its verification and difficulties arisen from the time gap since the end of the girls' participation in the prep schools.
b) The underage issue and ethical consent (direct contacts and interviews).
c) The actual execution of data collection.

The paper gives an account of the state of acquired data from our participants within the intentions of the research project.

Abstrakt

Článek nabízí zkušenosti z procesu získávání dat ve studii zkoumající odchody dívek mladšího školního věku z organizovaných pohybových aktivit (OPA). Jelikož metodiky se obvykle zaměřují na teoretické principy sběru dat, předávám zde vlastní zkušenosti z procesu získávání dat metodou ex post facto od dívek, bývalých účastnic basketbalových přípravek v danou dobu ve věku 6–10 let. S časovým odstupem 4–10 let nešlo použít k získání údajů jiné než dotazovací metody. Ty byly vymezeny a rozebrány ve třech problémových okruzích:

a) Přístup k datům, dostupnost databáze: jak a kde data získat, následně jak ověřit jejich pravdivost a potíže způsobené časovým odstupem od ukončení účasti dívek v přípravkách.
b) Otázka neplnoletosti a etického konsensu (přímý kontakt a rozhovory).
c) Faktické provedení sběru dat.

Příspěvek sděluje stav získaných dat od respondentů v intencích předloženého výzkumného projektu.

Keywords: *transition, early school age, girls, sports preparatory schools, data acquisition*

Klíčová slova: *přechod, mladší školní věk, dívky, sportovní přípravky, získávání dat*

INTRODUCTION

Considerations on transitions mainly in the fields of chemistry and physics have accompanied science or pseudoscience since the old times dealing with changes to different states, chemical reactions, and, in the modern times, radiation, molecular physics and many others. The concept of a transition as a transitional stage in our personal and professional lives has been discussed in more details since the end of the last and notably at the beginning of our century. As Schlossbergg (2011) puts it:

> Everyone experiences transitions, whether they are events or nonevents, anticipated or unanticipated. These transitions alter our lives – our roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. Transitions such as beginning one's first job, changing jobs, or taking early retirement appear to have little in common, but all change a person's life. (p. 159)

She points out to the irreversibility of transitions that "transitions take time, and people's reactions change – for better or worse – while they are underway" (p. 160). According to Goodman, Schlossberg and Anderson (2006), a transition is "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 33). To understand the meaning that a transition has for a particular person requires considering the type, context, and impact of the transition (Goodman et al., 2006).

Most research in the theory of transition confines to a period of adulthood and its transitions the adults have to cope with such as a job loss or a loss of a partner, or the periods students are facing during secondary school or the university, and gives comparatively thorough and comprehensive system of basic theories including more culturally oriented models (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

Movement, and/or directly sports oriented studies in the Czech literature about a transitional phase of early school-age children at primary schools possibly going on to older-age ones covering OPA confine to descriptions, records, interventions, and a development of physical activities, or they explore reasons to continue in OPA at best. A search of the literature revealed few studies which would trace the opposite view, i.e., markers for discontinuation and a dropout of children. Then inevitably comes a question what implementing principles to apply at the first stage of a primary movement expansion due to a spontaneous, natural inclination towards movement at this age along with undeniable positive effects of physical activities in general (Válková, 1990).

It is unnecessary to repeat a list of positive effects of doing regular physical activities on physical and mental health as well as to enumerate benefits of doing sports especially for children and youth in many forms. Apart from studies focussing specifically, there are large surveys reporting on positive effects of physical activities and movement, such as Strong et al. (2005), Warburton (2006), and many others (Hallal, Victora, Azevedo, & Wells, 2006; Geidne, Quennerstedt, & Eriksson, 2013).

The more it hurts when as a coach of youth teams I have been facing many early-school children in the longer term who enter prep schools relatively in large numbers in the period of Grades 1–3 under the influence of the primary movement expansion, and then they discontinue sports activities, or withdraw from sports in equally large numbers as depicted by Burton and Martens (1986), Gould (1987), Coté and Hay (2002), Lemyr, Roberts and Ommundsen (2002), Roberts and Treasure (2012). A more alarming fact is that children leave OPA rather for good than they would change over from their previous engagement freely to another sport following their self-fulfilment. Their sports involvement discontinuation or a dropout has in most cases a character of leaving through resistance. They evaluate whether the sport makes them happy, a credit attributed to the sport by themselves or by their reference groups, or consider what they gain or lose by do-

ing sports, or whether they are made to give up OPA because of reasons which go beyond their capacity to solve them satisfactorily (injuries, increased costs, or time conflicts). This is reflected, for example, in studies already offering comprehensive theories and integrated constructs (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Klint & Weiss, 1986; Leonard, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2007; Ntoumanis, 2012; Quested et al., 2013). Others authors try to search for solutions and address specific motives which influence dropouts of OPA such as Orlick (1974), LeBlanc and Dickson (1997), Jõesaar, Hein and Hagger (2012) or again Quested et al. (2013). However, quantitative data per se cannot apparently cover the variety of variables and the context. Thus the aim of the paper is to show a particular route how to obtain more truthful, and/or deeper statements about the explored area in an adequate number so that a follow-up sorting and solution of problem issues related to an access to data, underage issue, and an actual data collection can be carried out.

METHODS

While methods traditionally incline to mention the theoretical principles of data acquisition, I pursue practical experience gained in the process of an ex post facto data acquisition from girls, former participants of prep schools, aged 6–10 that time. Along with a note from Chráska (2016) that this sort of research is "in certain cases an only feasible way", we found no other ways to obtain data but interrogation methods after a time delay of 4–10 years. Three problem areas are defined in this case influencing the data collection between the first and the second stage of the motivational structure development of the individuals involved in OPA:

1. An access to data and securing a database.
2. The underage issue and ethical consent.
3. The actual execution of data collection.

1. An access to data and securing the database.

Although a hypothetical experiment in a group versus control group may have been possible, we went for the corroboration of the dropout phenomenon of OPA with school children and conducted a practical ex post facto research with the use of a larger sample of children, previously participating in OPA, whose data would consequently be analyzed (Chráska, 2016) and their sports involvement in the subsequent years confirmed. Along with a research strategy we found necessary to define limits of accessibility of the explored sample, obtain a sufficient number of participants in the sample predicting a future elimination of inaccessible or dismissive responses, and subsequent data cleansing. We also had to determine the parameters of the sample homogeneity for further processing of answers and their categorial sorting which is, however, another part of the whole dissertation.

The sample encompassed a purposive sample of 421 girls aged 6–10 and their following answers recorded 4–10 years after they quit a prep school at one of the six primary schools (Table 1), almost half of the total number of fourteen public primary schools in the regional town of Olomouc (100, 000 inhabitants). A group of eight girls labelled 'Others' were added to the general sample. These girls met the age criteria and concurrent participation in OPA, but they were not registered as the prep school participants. The data was acquired from their application forms during their active involvement from September 2006 to June 2012. The prep schools were oriented towards general movement preparation based on ball games in order to recruit new players of basketball. Incomplete or missing information was continuously asked from the parents and updated during the whole child's participation in the prep school. The data was used to keeping files, communication with parents, and for emergency reasons.

Tab. 1: Numbers of pupils at schools and participants of prep schools

PS	∑ pupils	∑ girls in preps	∑ answers	∑ % answers
PS1	546	71	51	71.83
PS2	367	96	67	69.79
PS3	475	51	37	72.55
PS4	202	25	18	72
PS5	419	87	57	65.52
PS6	592	83	61	73.5
Others	8	8	8	100
Total	2609	421	299	71.02

Note. PS = primary school with a prep school; *Others* = added girls meeting the age and concurrent participation in OPA criteria not registered in the prep school; ∑*pupils* = total number of pupils acc. a School Year's Report in one of the years of 2010–2014; ∑*girls in preps* = total number of girls in prep schools after data cleansing; ∑*answers* = number of acquired answers from interviews with parents at respective schools; ∑*% answers* = rate of acquired answers.

The time interval of 4–10 years since the girls left their prep schools and lost a direct contact with the researcher was a true challenge in terms of how many people were going to answer and, even more, if the telephone numbers would still exist. This could have substantially affected a future direction of the dissertation regarding the quantitative examination and categorial sorting changing for in-depth interviews in qualitative research due to a lower number of acquired answers.

***Instruments used for interrogations and interviews*.**

a) A record sheet with the parents' telephone numbers and the years of the girls' participation used for direct telephone interviews and to record answers based on an original Excel table for respective prep schools. The horizontal headings of the table columns consisted the following data:
   # – ordinal number of the participant
   family name – in an alphabetical order reduced acc. years spent in a prep school
   name
   b. – a date of birth
   school – a three-letter code of a primary school
   telM – a telephone number of a girl's mother
   telF – a telephone number of a girl's father
   from-to – years spent in a prep school
   SMS – a date an initiating SMS was sent before one of the parents was called to
   free space – a space to write down notes when making a telephone call
   bb, do – notes from the original Excel table that a girl moved on to a basketball club, or she dropped out
b) A mobile phone Samsung Galaxy A3 for calling and recording.
c) Writing, data recording, data storage, and transportation accessories. A separate email address to contact girls whose parents gave consent to a follow-up email communication.
d) A coding system for immediate notes using initial letters, abbreviated forms, and symbols to catch up with a running interview. Colours to highlight numbers that responded to the initiating SMS or numbers available for a futher interview with a girl or only to send questions via email.

2. The underage issue and ethical consent.

A question of social distance between the researcher and the interrogated families, and the girls in particular being underage, appeared to be very delicate and it largely affected the number of received answers. Only 64 answers were acquired consequently from the girls of all the interviews made with their parents (299). I did not have any direct access to the girls but a connection granted by their parents. Naturally I was given a parental consent for the second stage of eliciting the answers directly from the girls. Though I had a direct access to a group of girls thank to my own database as their coach and the contacts of my fellow coaches, ethical consent and mutual trust between the parents and me sticking to the standards we kept during our cooperation were the borderlines not to be overstepped.

Even though some girls were adult, it was a standard procedure to ask their parents first for an agreement to address their daughter to be interviewed and recorded, or to obtain their email in order to ask them questions. It was not rare, though, that they referred me to them directly ("Call her directly, you know Linda, don't you?")

The situations when, after having the parents'agreement, I could independently communicate with the girls, make appointments, and record the interviews in the end, made this phase of data collection easier. A principle of familiarity was used utilizing a psychological phenomenon that people prefer other people or things only because they are known to them although it has no logic foundation (Fournier, 2016; Ward, 2016). The frequency of contacts with the coach, now the researcher, and his responsibility made the door open for me in quite a few families. However not even the familiarity principle could overcome the barriers of the families' commitments and marginal interest so I failed to get to contact the girls even in a higher number despite their promises or already agreed appointments.

3. The actual data collection.

Getting conditions ready before a telephone call.

Owing to the fact that people are reluctant to answer, reject unknown numbers, or may be busy to be disturbed with junk calls and, last but not least, a longer time interval of 4–10 years since the last contact with the interviewer, there was a need to make conditions ready to refresh the families' memory and remind them of the fact that they would be called to.

Each family was sent a brief SMS (Table 2) made up of 44 words (230 characters) in the Czech version, reintroducing the calling person, explaning the reason for an upcoming call, promising undemanding time commitments, and asking for a call and the time that would suit the interviewed person. The SMS was a great help at the beginning of the following interviews both with the families which responded to it and even more with those which did not. The addressed parents recalled they had been addressed with the SMS and they apologized in some cases that they had not responded.

Tab. 2: Text of the initiating SMS

"Hello. I coached your daughter in a basketball prep school called 'Offsprings' a few years ago. Currently I have been working on a project that studies conditions of movement activities for children. Could I make a call to you and ask a couple of questions? If yes, when would it suit to you? Thank you, coach Štěpán Válek."

RESULTS

15 % of the addressed families (out of the cleansed data) responded to the initiating SMS in no time, a large majority of them agreed to be called to, only two families wrote back they did not want to be called, "having no interest". 299 answers remained after the data cleansing from the original set of 421 girls, see Table 3. Almost a third of the telephone numbers did not exist, were unavailable, or did not answer the repeated calls. There were a few cases that the telephone number went over to another owner. On the contrary, 71.02% families responded to a call and I received at least a basic answer which could be categorially quantified then.

Tab. 3: General data of girls from prep schools at 6 primary schools

	Total	Dead data	Acquired answers	Directly girls	Follow-up interviews emails	
Number	421	122	299	64	44	20
%	100	28,98	71,02	15,2	10,45	4,75

Note. Dead data = the called number did not exist, was unavailable, or nor mother nor father answered the call repeatedly within 3–5 days; *Acquired answers* = directly made phone interviews with one or the other parent; *Directly girls* = interviews acquired subsequently right from the girls either in a direct interview, or received by email.

DISCUSSION

An access to data is more or less taken for granted in majority of studies with no closer focus on what number and quality of data can be acquired then. Questionnaires are handed out and collected in clubs, or sent to dropout athletes with no given response rate (Boiché, & Sarrazin, 2009), or they are presented with prescribed statements and without going beyond the limits of their studies, that is where the dropout athletes eventually end up (Nache, Bar-Eli, Perrin, & Laurencelle, 2005). A more particular, subtler look on what obstacles can get in the way of data acquisition in a direct way is needed as follows.

Moms-first-then-Dads rule to address families.
It is a strong Czech tradition that they are still the mothers who despite the social and gender development take care of the children's time table and organization of their after-school programme. This, consequently, very often influences their children's direction towards potential free time activities. Concerning the girls, their daughters, this fact comes out even more apparently in the area of their physical activities and orientation towards sports.

Following this proven model I called the mothers of the girls first with three telephone calls at different times within three to five days following the first call, then the fathers to make a final attempt to elicit or refuse a contact with the participant's family. This strategy worked very well with except for two sorts of exceptions when I had to call the fathers:

a) The mother's number did not exist or she did not answer the calls.
b) Personal negative experience of different sorts – the mother responded but she quickly redirected me to the father saying that "I don't want to have anything in common with this club.", or "the kids are with the Dad", indicating a divorce, etc.

A majority tendency of the fathers to rely on their wives concerning the organization of their children's free time was confirmed by several fathers stating, "This is my wife's deal. Hold on,

I will hand over." In fact, there were only twelve calls to the fathers which made up for only 4% of the whole set.

Emotional mothers, instrumental fathers.
There was a clear difference when there was a call to a father opposed to a mother. Although the initiating SMS and the order of questions were the same, mothers were offering broader emotional background whereas fathers were largely more instrumental, factual, sticking to yes/no answers such as, "She was there from the year X to the year Y" or "Now she is doing nothing". Mothers used to answer the same questions in a more empathetic way such as, "You know, she was not quite happy in there that time.", "Things did not go well for her.", or "Yes then, she goes out for a ride now and then or they go skating with her mate." They used to come in full circles back to what had already been said bringing no new fact or qualitatively deeper information. However they gave more plastic picture of the conditions, situations, or periods their daughters went through thus giving more potential to exploit the information.

Operating difficulties before making a call.
The unnatural position as a call centre operator.
It was rather a challenging task to cover the whole general sample of 421 families both with the initiating SMS and particularly the subsequent direct calls. The difficulties were arising from practical accessibility, sometimes going up to dillemas rooted in the past relationship between the researcher and the family, and from the large number to be addressed which went up to some 1 500 made calls in total as a sober estimation of all the dialled numbers. It occurred almost as a common rule that hardly anybody answered the phone for the first time so a good third of calls had to be repeated three times at different times within 3 to 5 consequtive days including the other parent.

A double-edged character of the calls had to be understood during the running communications. A demand from my side eliciting information I wanted to make the best of it, the information being unique and authentic, and as such precious and expensive. I was aware of the fact that I virtually had to pay for the access to the information by expressing thanks, appreciation, or empathetic listening, possibly giving an advice if asked for it. Closely along with it came the other aspect of the caller as an intruder penetrating a private zone. I realized that, no matter that there was a certain relationship with the family and the child in most cases positively perceived, I was but another of many calls and SMS messages a man is disturbed these days. A fixed framework, neutrality, humbleness, let-them-talk and thank-you-anyway approach were absolutely fundamental.

The customer is always right.
All communication with the parents had to respond to the needs and requirements of the other side including their whims, willingness to cooperate ("Speak, let us have it over."), and to recall their memories. Also the conditions of the conversation made the difference whether I got into contact with a person who was in a hurry or at ease, just driving a car, having small children around her, etc. ("Well, well, hurry up, I have a customer here.", or "So let's get to it, a hockey game starts.").

My personal and time plan had to adjust to the references of the called party such as, "Would you call after 5 p.m./ Saturday afternoon/ next week right after we are back from vacation...?", or "I'll hand you over, it's my wife who deals with these things. She's coming in the evening." Any expert or other remarks from my side were strictly excluded in order to keep authenticity and not to go beyond the scope of the call as some of the parents felt like consulting the state and engagement of their children with a physical activity expert and a former coach of their child in one.

Clustering SMS messages.
There were situations when more SMS texts came at one moment calling on me to call back immediately ("You can call.", or, "Call now.") or needed a prompt answer not to lose the momentum. I had to be flexible in deciding whether to go on teaching or to go out of the classroom and make a call back, or to stop a car when driving and so on.

It was not always clear who had left the message or who was just calling. It was absolutely necessary to instantly keep records carefully onto the record sheet. There were 32 names a sheet along with 64 nine-digit telephone numbers, one of which had to be placed quickly to a particular name on the line followed by notes from an interview in addition. It happened only once that I called an already called person because of my careless record and a large cluster of concurrent calls.

Potential positive references leading to a chance to consequently address a daughter in order to be later interviewed were saved in the telephone memory using a coding system as described above. The number "+420 123 456 789", looked up in the name list as "the primary school XY, 18. NOVÁKOVÁ Jana", was then transcribed in the phone directory as "XY18 Novakova Jana intv". The download was kept till an appointment was made and happened, or the interview was refused.

5-beep rule.
The first batches of dialled calls revealed a pragmatic practice of five ringins (beeps) to be the most effective. Three were not enough, more than five had no sense as the other party could not or did not want to answer.

Limitations when calling.
Each call followed a fixed framework starting with a set introduction and a reminder of the former cooperation (the familiarity principle) which was, along with the initiating SMS, fundamental for the parents to respond to the call at all, and consequently to answer the questions during an interview ("Oh yes, that was you who had the practice." or "Yes, I remember, you can talk."). A best practice had to be found to keep neutrality owing to emotional bias had it arisen due to different personal or family experience with physical activities and OPA, and could affect the quality of answers.

The families were recollecting that period of exercising and naturally associated the good and bad with the researcher who was felt as a key trigger for their daughter to enter that sport activity (basketball) no matter that his role ended up a long time ago and he had nothing in common with any further developments in the girls'sporting career. When the girls moved to Grade 4 they had to leave the prep school for a regular sport club, choose another sport or they decided not to follow the coach' advice where to go for doing sports. ("No, I don't think she'd like to talk to you.")

I let the parents talk and followed the prepared question template without stepping in the process unless their answers were short and they said little so that the acquired facts could not be further analysed, or on the contrary, in case of eloquent or rather talkative individuals who did not advance the information.

Past not to be forgiven.
There was a wide range of reactions when being called. The interviews ranged in variety of answers from an absolute acceptance, positive reminiscences, and willingness to talk to an utter refusal and hanging up ("Mr Válek, we are very glad to remember you were doing it.", "When you were doing it, it was organized and our daughter enjoyed it." opposed to "Go to hell, coach. Ciao!"). The answers differed by length and depth and by expressed relationships and attitudes towards OPA that time or subsequent OPA, setting a frame of the interview.

CONCLUSION

The data acquisition process represents a key moment for any scientific contribution concerning the future quality of the data, and/or its sufficient amount for further sorting and processing. The paper reveals several recommendations on the procedure of practical feasible data acquisition from general early-school girls' prep schools.

With a view to a better planning and statistics it is advisable, and/or necessary to:

Make and keep records in clubs for a training process control and safety reasons.

Keep and update data, and store it within ethical standards; don't let the third parties an access to the data without parents', and/or children's permission.

Prepare the ground for the follow-up call with a prearranged SMS and make the call at the earliest convenience when the other side is still ready to recall who the caller is.

Respect the fact that the framework of the inquiry process and its limitations are set by the other side but the investigator, who has to respond to the unforeseen changes.

Address mothers first as they are seemingly readier to deal with children's commitments. Only 4 % of answers were obtained from fathers.

Be patient without jumping to conclusions as for the existence of the called numbers. However, there is need for the researcher to understand the limits when the other side is not willing to get into contact, and stop asking.

Gain the parental consent before asking the underage participants in order to avoid later problems, no matter that there may be good relationships between the interviewer and the participants.

Keep to the designed questions and not to offer any comments unless asked for – we want the data and not to advise the other side.

With all that as a paradigm more than 70% anwers can be elicited out of the original sample in a direct interwiew.

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