

# Brazilian Runners' Motivation

Subjects: Sport Sciences

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Due to differences in runners' profiles, which can be related to sociodemographic characteristics, motivations for running can vary.

Keywords: running ; Brazil ; runners' profiles ; health ; performance

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## 1. Introduction

Number of people aiming to improve health and fitness components through running is constantly growing all over the world, and became a social phenomenon <sup>[1]</sup>. These people lead a physically demanding lifestyle, have better mental condition and usually belong to running subcultures <sup>[2]</sup>. Some of the health benefits associated with running that have been highlighted include a decrease in the risk of developing cardiovascular disease and mortality, and improvements to important aspects of mental health (e.g., well-being, depression, and anxiety disorders) <sup>[3][4][5][6]</sup>. Development of sport for all is a part of a philosophy of sustainable development which focuses on improving quality of life, tackling social exclusion, increasing access, preserving the environment, and expanding the pursuit of excellence—running can serve as an example <sup>[7]</sup>. At an international level from 1986 to 2018 data covering different countries and continents showed an increment of 57.8% in the number of runners <sup>[8]</sup>. Data comprising 3961 athletes indicated that 28.76% started running also during the COVID-19 pandemic (perhaps because this sports discipline does not require close contact with other runners, which may pose a risk of contracting the virus <sup>[9]</sup>), with 72% reporting health as their main motivation for doing so <sup>[10]</sup>. In Brazilian context, data covering two of the most famous race events in the country indicated an increase in the number of enrolled runners between 2007–2015 <sup>[11]</sup>.

Since participation in endurance events has greatly increased, understanding why those athletes get involved in different races has become one of the main research questions in literature on the subject <sup>[12]</sup>. Therefore, recent research has tended to be focused on trying to understand the motivation behind athletes in different endurance races such as the triathlon, ultramarathon, cycling or different distance running events <sup>[13]</sup>. Research into running has increased with much being carried out worldwide in relation to diverse factors linked to this practice, e.g., physical health benefits <sup>[14][15]</sup>, physiology and nutrition <sup>[16][17]</sup> and psychological aspects of running <sup>[18][19][20][21]</sup>. Running is a worldwide phenomenon, and research into this topic has been developed in different countries, e.g., United States <sup>[22][23]</sup>, Spain <sup>[24]</sup>, Poland <sup>[25]</sup>, and Greece <sup>[26]</sup>. Some studies have also recently compared types of motivation behind running cross culturally, in an attempt to ascertain whether there are any differences in reasons for participating between United Kingdom and Indian runners <sup>[27]</sup>.

Previous studies usually reported health as an important factor associated with involvement in running, in a non-professional context <sup>[28][29]</sup>. Among Brazilian runners, similar results have been observed, with runners pointing to “health” and proxy factors as driving their motivation to begin running <sup>[28][30][31]</sup>. Regarding the socioeconomic status, we found that high income was inversely related to performance in non-professional runners <sup>[32]</sup>. In the reported paper, we proposed a theoretical model to explain results found, understanding that runners with lower income may become involved in running with the purpose of achieving social and financial support <sup>[30]</sup> and, as consequence, they also presented higher chances to point out looking for performance improvement as their main motivation for the practice, and also a higher training commitment. However, in the cited study, differences according to place of residence were not considered.

## 2. Individual and Economic Characteristics as Determinants of Brazilian Runners' Motivation

In Brazil, studies that involve physically active population need to consider these differences, since Brazil is one of the biggest countries in the world (i.e., in both, dimension and population size), split in 26 states, which are organized into five regions (Southeast, South, Northeast, North, and Midwest). In addition, there are inter-states differences related to urban

design, cultural, economic, and sociodemographic characteristics, as well as in sports investment, number of running events and distribution of the best elite athletes, that can lead to differences in runners' profiles, that can be linked to sociodemographic characteristics and motivations for running practice (or another sports practice) [31].

Based on previous studies, we hypothesized that runners with high-income levels and the elderly would be less likely to point performance as their main motivation for running practice. The results found were in agreement with this hypothesis, since the oldest athletes and those with the highest income levels presented a lower likelihood of reporting performance as their main motivation for taking part in running. These results are in accordance with published studies that pointed age as an important factor for motivation [33][34]. In this sense, young runners are more focused on getting "better results" in sports practice, while older ones take part in practice with the aim of improving their social interactions, mental health, and well-being [26].

In the research field that deals with the social class as determinants of sport practice, it is not observed many studies about running [35]. In our study, regarding income level, results showed that increasing the income level, decreases the chances of getting involved in practice with a focus on improvements in performance. Similar results were found in a previous study, where this variable was negatively associated with performance among Brazilian runners [32]. These results can be associated with changes in runners' profiles observed during recent decades [36]. Marathon statistics between 2008–2018 showed an increment of 49% in the number of participants, but a reduction in running pace of 3:55 min [37]. Data covering 70 thousand events from 1986 to 2018 showed a slowdown of ≈40min in time taken to complete a Marathon, with an incremental increase in mean age (from 35.2 years in 1986 to 39.3 years in 2018). These variations are associated with changes in motivation for participating in running - from achieving personal bests to improving health, well-being, and social factors [9]. Furthermore, these data can be confirmed through the number of runners who travel to take part in race events [38], the rising in the number of thematic events, and the economic tourism associated with participation in these events [39].

Regarding income levels, a different scenario is observed among African runners, as the motivation to become an elite athlete is associated with a desire to raise the income level and economic conditions [40]. These results are associated with specific conditions and cultural aspects observed among African athletes. On the other hand, in Brazil, for the most of non-professional athletes, running is associated with being a recreational leisure practice, while soccer is perceived as the main sport associated with economical-social ascension [41].

According to Stempel (2005), the highest economic classes in the United States use such sports as recreational running to build barriers to differentiate them from those from the lowest classes. Based on the ideology of healthism in Western societies, the distinctive feature is care for the body, health and physical condition, which makes it possible to distinguish itself from inactive and lazy lower classes [42][43]. In the Western countries, subjects from the middle- and upper-classes are the primary participants at non-elite level distance running [44].

Differences between sexes were also observed, with men more likely to indicate performance as their motivation for running. These results are similar to those observed in a recent systematic review, where authors reported the same sex difference with men scoring higher on competition and challenge or achievement reasons in comparison to women [45]. Results from Polish marathon runners indicated that among female marathoners weight concern, affiliation, coping psychologically, life meaning, and self-esteem were the factors most cited as their motivation. Results for male runners showed a higher motivation for competition [46]. Another significant difference between sexes appeared in the reasons of desire to get away from everyday life and its prevailing fashion, which were more important for women than for men [47]. These differences can partially explain the differences in performances between sexes, given that athletes motivated by competition tend to present more commitment to training, leading to better performance [32].

### **3. Conclusions**

The results of the present study point that in Brazil, most runners reported "health" as their main motivation for running. When running performance motivation was analyzed considering state as a cluster, we showed that women, older runners, and those with higher income levels were less likely to point to improvements in the performance as their main motivation for taking up running. Future studies could investigate motivations for running practice and participation in events, considering differences between events that are free of charge and those that require payment to take part. Besides that, information on different levels could be considered, for example, differences in runners' profiles according to club participation, country, or continent of practitioners' origin or residence.

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