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A Thematic Analysis of Challenges and Solutions for the Development of Sports Culture at Home (Case study: Birjand City During the COVID-19 Epidemic)

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Abstract

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The purpose of this research is to perform a thematic analysis of challenges and solutions for the development of sports culture at home (Case study: Birjand city during the COVID-19 epidemic). Thematic analysis was used as a tool for qualitative research. Experts in the field of sports, including professors of sociology and sports administration, are the socio-statistics for the current study. Sampling was done on purpose. The interview was the research instrument in which 13 subjects participated. The interviewees and subsequently the expert academics analyzed and validated the study instruments (the interview), and the reliability was assessed using the intra-subject agreement technique, which yielded a reliability value of 0.81. The data were analyzed using a thematic approach. According to the findings of the semi-structured interviews, the obstacles and solutions for the development of sports culture at home are influenced by a number of elements. In the portion of the challenge, which includes 6 concepts and 26 open codes, they were divided into two primary groups such as information challenges and macro problems. Three primary categories—media focus, instruction, and human resources development—were noted in the section on solutions. Thirty-seven open codes and 8 ideas are divided across these three categories. The research's findings demonstrated that in order to foster a culture of sports at home during epidemics, we need to pay close attention to the categories extracted. This will help us plan more effectively for the growth of public sports in the future during epidemic illness periods.

Keywords:

Challenges, Covid-19, Solutions, Sports at home, Sports development

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Introduction

With the abrupt arrival of the Covid-19, the globe is currently dealing with a new predicament. The pace of change in the world is extremely rapid, and all facets of human life—including lifestyle, culture, business, and politics—are undergoing radical change. Society has become confused and afraid as a result of these changes, and industries are attempting to adjust to the situation and resume regular living circumstances ([Safania & Brahmand, 2019](#)). The Covid-19 outbreak is regarded as the largest worldwide calamity since World War II. Because it has altered people's social connections and habits, the Covid-19 epidemic has posed a very severe problem for all cultures. Many businesses' educational and physiological frameworks have undergone significant modifications due to the Covid-19's widespread distribution. One of the sectors impacted by Covid-19's situation is the sports industry. The practice of practicing sports and engaging in customary sports activities has encountered challenging circumstances as a result of the construction of quarantine and social separation around the world and the fundamental alteration of activities ([Safania et al., 2019](#)). According to recent studies, exercise improves and develops our immune system, which in turn increases and improves our capacity to combat viruses and bacteria. However, some research suggests that exercise intensity and kind may have an impact on how the immune system responds to the activity. Increased physical activity is not necessary to improve physical condition, and sports activities should be played with balance ([World Health Organization., 2020](#)). According to the situations described, the proliferation of Covid-19 has led to several physiological issues in people of all ages due to inactivity. This virus has altered the primary and well-known forms of activity by causing changes in economic, social, cultural, and political situations. As a result, the globe is today dealing with problems that have both good and bad elements.

The sports industry is a part of one of these industries. Sports are a cultural activity that allows individuals to express themselves, learn new skills, demonstrate their abilities, engage with others, and enjoy their health and well-being. Sports encourage influence, community involvement, and social responsibility, and they greatly advance social development ([Gholizadeh et al., 2015](#)). Sports include any forms of bodily physical exercise that people might engage in on a regular basis, unofficially or irregularly, in order to increase their fitness or for fun ([Yeung & Johnston, 2019](#)). Sports can be played in a competitive setting, in which case one or more winners should be chosen based on a set of universally accepted rules. In such sports, the competitors must possess some level of skill pertaining to that field, particularly in the upper ranks. Individual sports and team sports are the two broad categories into which sports fall ([Gil-Arias et al., 2020](#)). The research of [Costa et al. \(2020\)](#), which looked at studies in the fields of sports and Covid-19, revealed that the suspension of sporting events had caused an irreversible crisis in the sports community. In their study titled "The return of fans after the Covid-19," [Bond et al. and colleagues \(2022\)](#) evaluated the impact of the Covid-19 on sports and sporting events and found that management was unable to handle such a crisis at the time. The findings of this study demonstrated that Covid-19 has fundamentally altered how well sports organizations function in general. The evaluation of risks has also been cited as one of the most crucial elements, and it has been said that with adequate risk assessment and management, greater performance may be attained in dealing with comparable situations. According to [Cho et al. \(2023\)](#), numerous nations have taken action to address the issue for the sports community. Their study is titled "The Impact of the Covid-19 Crisis on the Major Spectator Sports Industry in the United States and South Korea: Challenges and Prospects." For instance, in order to help the destroyed sports facilities, the Swedish government has given loans to the impacted industries. Non-governmental groups have offered their assistance to these departments as well. In this study, it was found that the post-Covid19 period in the sports sector places a high value on civic engagement and government support. In their study "Changes in the kind of sports activity due to the Covid-19," [Choi and Bam \(2020\)](#) came to the conclusion that the present emphasis on limiting the transmission of the virus is only through social distance and other conventional health measures. For this reason, sports activities should be performed in line with the offered health protocols, and it is preferable to apply innovation in sports activities in order to coordinate with the current conditions. In their study titled "Social-Economic Effects of Covid-19," [Nikola et al. \(2020\)](#) also noted that the sports business is currently experiencing a severe crisis and is dealing with several financial issues.

According to research by [Hamami et al. \(2022\)](#), one of the effects of the Covid-19 is that it has altered the overall nature of sports. With the implementation of home quarantine, the primary environment for engaging in sports activities is now the home. For this reason, Hamami et al. have chosen the research slogan "staying active at home." Therefore, it is important to emphasize the value of exercising at home. This relevance is increased when taking into account the existing constraints. This route undoubtedly contains difficulties, and those problems should be recognized so that solutions may be offered. As a result, this study aims to provide an answer to the following question: What are the difficulties associated with creating a home sports culture as a result of the Covid-19's proliferation, and what remedies are available?

Research Methods

Thematic analysis, a qualitative research technique, was employed in this study to gather information. Experts in the field of public sports in Birjand City (professors of sports management and sociology, experts and veterans) make up the statistical population of the current study. The sample size will be equal to the population size due to the population's limitations. Some scientists believe that a group of specialists should consist of 10 to 15 members, provided that their backgrounds in science and experimentation are complementary ([Mohammadi Askarabadi et al., 2020](#)). In this study, 13 participants were questioned. Repetition in the data collected was noticed after the 10th interview, and saturation was achieved after the 13th interview. In-depth and semi-structured interviews with experts are undertaken to complete the study after developing the broad questions and creating the interview methodology. Semi-structured interviews with statistical samples were done after careful planning and scheduling. Following the conclusion of each interview, the interviews will be extensively documented on paper, and initial data coding will be carried out to extract the fundamental ideas. Following the conclusion of the interviews, a more thorough review of the theoretical underpinnings and prior research was carried out in order to move on to the further phases of data analysis by fusing the earlier ideas, the researcher's experiences, and the opinions of the experts. The interviewers themselves acknowledged the validity of the study findings (interviews), and then the professors were informed about the interview procedure, how to code and analyze the data, and how to use the professors' points of view in rectifying the required situations. Additionally, the reliability of the conducted interviews was determined in the current study using the intra-subject agreement technique. A Ph.D. student in statistics was asked to participate in the study as a research associate (coder), and the necessary training and methods for coding the interviews were transferred to them. This was done in order to calculate the reliability of the interview using the intra-subject agreement method of two coders (evaluators). The codes that are comparable in the opinions of two persons are labeled "agreement" in each interview, whereas the codes that are not similar are labeled "disagreement." The percentage of agreement within the subject, which is used as the reliability index of the analysis, was calculated using the following formula by the researcher and this research partner using the number of three coded interviews, which is equal to 37, and the number of agreements, which is equal to 15. This formula determined that the reliability value was equal to 0.81. ([Rezaei & Salehipour, 2018](#)).

$$\text{Intra-thematic agreement percentage} = \frac{\text{the number of agreements} + 2}{\text{total number of codes}} \times 100\%$$

Table 1- The results of reliability

No	Survey No	Number	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Total percentage
1	3	12	5	2	83
2	7	14	6	2	86
3	12	11	4	1	73
Total	Total	37	15	5	81

This led to the confirmation of the test's dependability. The data were analyzed using a thematic approach. In this study, there were two steps. The open coding approach is used in the first phase to conceive the data and evaluate the information so that the data may be categorized into several groups. Concepts from the deep of the data are brought to the surface during the open coding stage. The analyst also considers how categories

are created and what makes them unique. The procedure of axial coding was completed in the next stage. The process of transforming ideas into components is called axial coding. The theorist chooses a concept from the open coding stage's collection of ideas as a category for this use and, while doing so, links additional concepts with the same meaning. Due to the fact that it revolves around an axis of a study category, this coding is regarded as central (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Findings

Table 2 displays the descriptive results of the statistical sample.

Table 2- Personal characteristics of the interviewees

Gender	Academic level	Field of study	Job Position
Male	PhD	Sport Management	faculty member
Male	PhD	Sport Management	faculty member
Male	PhD	Sports biomechanics	faculty member
Male	PhD	Sport physiology	faculty member
Female	PhD	Sport physiology	faculty member
Female	PhD	Sport Management	faculty member
Female	PhD	Sport Management	faculty member
Male	PhD	Sport Management	Researcher and scholar
Female	PhD	Sport Management	Researcher and scholar
Male	PhD	Sociology	faculty member
Male	Ph.D. student	Sport Management	Researcher and scholar
Male	PhD	Sociology	faculty member
Male	Ph.D. student	Sport Management	Researcher and scholar

As shown, 10 Ph.D. students and 3 Ph.D. students who had all mastered the topic were included in the statistical sample. In addition, 4 of these individuals had experience and expertise in the South Khorasan province's sports executive body and had sports-related degrees. The inferential results will be discussed in the sections that follow (interview coding).

Table 3 shows an example of the initial coding of the interviews and how to extract the initial codes.

Table 3- An example of raw coding of interviews

Part of the interview: S1 Associate Professor of Sports Management Department of Birjand University	
Interview test	Extraction of raw codes
Regarding the growth of a sports culture at home, I must state that the university's sports and youth department and the more experienced coaches they have on staff, the better. This will also help the culture of sports spread through communication channels and online forums. This in and of itself demonstrates that in order to be ready to offer answers in this area during the Covid-19 pandemic, the authorities have not given sufficient attention to the promotion of individual and societal knowledge as well as research on this subject. Unfortunately, on a larger scale, the University of Medical Sciences was unable to establish positive working relationships with the sports department, and our provincial network was unable to raise community awareness of the advantages of participating in sports. This can be interpreted as a reflection of the attitude of the authorities toward sports. However, some of these difficulties listed have to do with people's lack of technology and software at home. The sports and youth department, as the keeper of the issue, should have more proper	Lack of sports pages and channels at home in cyberspace Poor interaction between the medical system and the exercise system at home Lack of research projects in the field of sports at home Lack of trained and expert trainers with experience in home sports Weakness of individual knowledge about sports Poor attitude about sports Society's low awareness of sports

planning in this sector. As a result, the authorities should make efforts in the fields of educating the public and developing a sports culture, especially in the women's section.

Lack of awareness about the benefits of exercise
 Appropriate planning of the sports and youth department and the government
 Lack of support from government and private bodies for women's sports

Part of the initial coding of the 1S interview

- Developing vision and long-term plan for sports participation at home
- The presence of prominent coaches in the media and the promotion of sports at home
- Holding special sports festivals at home virtually
- Using graduates trained in the home gym training
- Supporting sports start-ups at home
- Providing motivational workshops and business skills through exercise at home
- Taking assistance from the popular faces of the province to encourage sports at home
- Making sports educational television programs for (women)
- Implementing strategic and operational marketing plans at different levels of sports at home
- Increasing the share of sports in household expenses

The results of Table 3 show how the primary codes were extracted from the interviews, and Table 4 shows the results of coding the information obtained from the interviewed people in the challenges section.

Table 4- Coding results of information extracted from interviews (challenges)

Open codes	Themes	Main category
Reduction of consultations with experts in the field of exercise at home	Communication obstacles	Information challenges
Lack of sports pages and channels at home in cyberspace		
Weak interaction between the medical system and the sports system in the country		
Little communication in the field of sports at home with university centers		
Lack of research projects in the field of sports at home	Educational obstacle	
Reducing attention and special importance to sports at home in schools and universities		
The low level of knowledge of managers in the field of sports marketing at home		
Lack of trained and expert trainers with experience in home sports	Individual obstacles	
Weakness of individual knowledge about exercise at home		
Poor attitude about exercise at home		
Individual psychological issues regarding exercise at home		
Weakness of will regarding exercise at home	Cultural bias	
Not having the science of coaching and the principles of training at home		
The emergence of problems and diseases caused by poor mobility		
Society's low awareness of exercise at home	Macro challenges	
The possibility of abusing home exercise		
Media restrictions related to women's physical activities		
Not accompanying family and friends in sports activities		
Lack of awareness about the benefits of exercise		
Prevalence of monotonous life in the society		
Lack of suitable space for exercise in apartments		Lack of infrastructure
Lack of software and hardware suitable for sports at home		Support
Lack of video coverage of women's sports competitions in the media		
Lack of proper planning by the Ministry of Sports and Youth		

Lack of support from government and private bodies for women's sports

The lack of applied research in the field of exercise at home and its effects

Based on the results of Table 4, various factors affect the challenges of developing sports culture at home. Challenges were categorized into two main categories. The main categories include information challenges and macro challenges, which are divided into 6 concepts (communication obstacle, educational obstacle, personal obstacle, cultural bias, lack of infrastructure and support) and 26 open codes. Table 5 shows the coding results of the information extracted from the interview in the strategies section.

Table 5- Coding results of information extracted from interviews (strategies)

Open codes	Themes	Main category
Creating exercise sites at home	Structure	Resources development
Establishing home-based sports business consulting firms		
Creating sports marketing organizations and agencies at home		
Supporting sports start-ups at home		
Using the capacity of sports donors to develop sports at home	Planning	
Developing strategic plans to attract people to exercise at home		
Developing vision and long-term plan for sports participation at home		
Preparing the short-term programs for the participation of the elderly		
Holding special sports festivals at home	Manpower	
Using experts to produce promotional content for home exercise		
The presence of prominent trainers in the media and the promotion of sports at home		
Using graduates trained in the home gym training		
Using the capacity of fan centers and volunteer movements for the development of sports	Education	
Holding sports training classes at home in universities		
Providing motivational workshops and business skills through exercise at home		
Publication of scientific and sports news publications with an emphasis on sports at home		
Imitating the successful models of developed countries in the matter of exercising at home	Acculturalization	Teaching
sports institutionalization		
Emphasis on sports at home as a pillar of sports participation		
Cultivating sports at home and placing them in the household basket		
Preparation of health and care packages		
Taking assistance from the popular faces of the province to encourage people to exercise at home		
Trusting sports equipment to families to spend leisure time at home		
Increasing research in the field of elderly sports	Research	
Activating the research and development department of elderly sports in the departments		
Carrying out research projects of the General Federation focusing on the elderly		
Holding virtual competitions and emphasis in the media	Promotion	Media emphasis
Using creative and capable forces in the field of sports marketing at home		
Using neuromarketing to develop sports at home		
Implementation of strategic and operational marketing plans at different levels of sports at home		
Understanding the market and characteristics of successful sports marketers		
Production of programs in virtual space by sports teams		

Broadcasting women's sports competitions on television channels	Advertisements
Making sports educational television programs for (women)	
Using modern facilities in the production of women's sports advertisements	
Buying and selling equipment and goods with the logo of professional clubs (women)	
Using creative entrepreneurs to achieve virtual tourism applications	

Based on the results of Table 5, various factors have an impact on the development of sports culture at home. The strategies were categorized into three main categories. The main categories include the development of human resources, teaching, and emphasis on media, which are divided into 8 concepts (structure, planning, manpower, education, Acculturalization, research, promotion, and advertising) and 37 open codes. In total, there are 82 codes of challenges and solutions for the development of sports culture at home, as well as categories and concepts.

Discussion

Information and macro issues are among the difficulties in fostering a culture of sports at home brought on by the Covid-19's widespread distribution. Communication, educational, and personal obstacles are a few examples of information problems. The lack of pages and channels dedicated to exercise at home in the virtual world, the weak interaction between the medical system and the country's exercise at-home system, and the lack of communication in the field of exercise at home with academic centers are all examples of communication barriers. The manner in which trainers interact with participants has undergone fundamental modifications. For instance, due to the distance between the athlete and the coach and the educational framework, it has been difficult to monitor participants' athletic performance, injuries, and other comments regarding training. Participants often find it difficult to ask the coaches their questions. These are some of the difficulties that virtual sports and, in a certain sense, sports played at home faced during the Covid-19 outbreak. There are several more issues for which governments' sole recommendations are quarantines, and these quarantines can be advantageous if the correct solutions for exercising at home are offered, and a suitable culture is developed. Education-related barriers to options include a lack of research projects in the area of exercise at home, a decrease in the importance placed on exercise at home in schools and universities, a lack of managers with experience in the field of marketing exercise at home, and a shortage of trainers with relevant experience. The emergence of issues and diseases brought on by inactivity is referred to by the lack of knowledge of coaching and the principles of training at home. Other personal obstacles include things like weak personal knowledge about exercise at home, weak attitude toward exercise at home, weak will regarding exercise at home, and weak psychological issues regarding exercise at home. In a study titled "Investigating the Effective Inhibiting Factors on the Participation Rate of Female Teachers of Three Levels of Education in Sports Activities in Marand City," [Ghahrmami et al. \(2013\)](#) came to the conclusion that as the variety of inhibiting factors increases, the amount of participation in sports activities decreases and women teachers are prevented from participating in sports. Because of this, the government's focus on minimizing these variables through targeted programs and ethical rules may encourage women's engagement in sports activities and offer the tools for the development and advancement of society. Cultural prejudice, a lack of infrastructure, and inadequate assistance are the main difficulties. Cultural prejudice is defined as a lack of knowledge about home exercise, the potential for misuse of home exercise, constraints on women's physical activity in the media, a lack of family and friend participation in sports, and a lack of knowledge about the positive effects of sports on society. In a study conducted by [Azimi \(2014\)](#), the researchers looked into the factors influencing Kermanshah women's non-participation in sports activities. The study's findings revealed that environmental issues and socio-cultural issues are the biggest barriers to Kermanshah women's participation in sports. In a study titled "Identification of Cultural Possibilities and Problems of Mazandaran Province's Sport," [Ahmadzadeh et al. \(2014\)](#) found 45 factors connected to challenges and 21 variables related to cultural opportunities in the sport of the province. The most significant challenge and cultural opportunity for the sport of Mazandaran province was the waning of spirituality among athletes from the perspective of the coaches, as well as the cheeriness and joy of the people in achieving victory from the perspective of the managers. They suggested familiarizing more athletes with religious and religious foundations, holding joint meetings between athletes and clergy, and appreciation of spirituality by officials can increase spirituality among athletes to some extent. The component of inadequate infrastructure relates to the absence of suitable exercise areas in apartments and of gear and software necessary for at-home exercise.

As a result of their investigation into the reasons why female students in Bafq City do not participate in physical activity and sports, [Fatahi and Karimi \(2011\)](#) came to the conclusion that the most significant reasons for non-participation that should be taken into account by the municipality are the lack of sports facilities near the place of residence, the lack of sports facilities specially prepared for women by the municipality, lack of time, the lack of experienced coaches according to the specific needs of women's sports, the lack of women's parks in different parts of the city, the lack of transportation, and the cost of sports facilities. According to [Mansouri & Farzan \(2015\)](#), the physiological component is the least important and the absence of sports facilities, and inadequate facilities are the most critical barriers prohibiting Tehran University students from participating in leisure time activities with a sports approach. Additionally, the ranking of the elements that are most important for resolving issues with sports participation revealed that building enough sports facilities ranks higher than finding solutions to physical and mental health issues. The absence of effective planning by the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the lack of support from the public and private organizations for women's sports, and the lack of applied research in the area of sports at home and their consequences are all examples of the support component. The techniques comprise elements of resource creation, education, and media emphasis based on the findings. The terms structure, planning, and human resources all refer to the development of resources. The construction of home sports websites, home sports business consulting businesses, home sports marketing organizations, and agencies, the assistance of home sports startups, and utilizing the ability of sports donors to grow sports at home are all examples of what the structural component means. The planning aspect includes things like creating strategic plans to encourage people to exercise at home, creating a vision and long-term plan for sports participation at home, creating short-term plans to encourage participation among the elderly, and organizing specialized sporting events at home. Based on this scientific evidence and a study by [Maugeri et al. \(2020\)](#) on the effect of physical activity on psychological health during the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy, it is essential to continue a regular exercise regimen and a fundamental strategy for physical and mental health during a period of rest. The use of experts to create advertising content for home sports, the appearance of well-known coaches in the media and the promotion of home sports, the use of graduates with training in-home sports instruction, and the use of fan centers and volunteer movements are all examples of the human resource component. The terms "teaching component" and "educational and cultural aspects" are interchangeable. Education includes conducting exercise classes at home in universities, providing training, motivational workshops, and business skills through exercise at home, publishing sports and scientific news with an emphasis on exercise at home and emulating the successful domestic sports models of developed nations. In order to build a culture, it is important to institutionalize sports, emphasize the importance of sports at home as a pillar of sports participation, create a culture of sports at home and include it in household budgets, prepare health and care packages, assist well-known figures in the province in promoting sports at home, give families access to sports equipment so they can spend time playing sports at home, and increase research in the area of sports for the elderly. The research component includes activities like launching the General Federation's senior-focused research programs and establishing the administration's research and development section for sports for the aged. Promotion and advertising are priorities for the media. Promotion includes holding virtual competitions, placing emphasis on the media, utilizing creative and capable forces in the field of home sports marketing, utilizing neuromarketing for the development of home sports, implementing strategic and operational marketing plans at various levels of home sports, knowing the market, and producing virtual programming by sports teams. Utilizing the latest equipment in the production of women's sports advertisements, buying and selling equipment and goods with the logos of professional clubs (women), and hiring creative entrepreneurs are carried out in order to achieve virtual tourism applications. Women's sports competitions are broadcast on television channels, sports educational television programs are produced for (women), and women's sports advertisements are produced.

Conclusion

In order to reduce communication barriers, it is suggested to increase consultation with experts in the field of exercise at home and to increase the interaction between the medical system and the exercise system at home in the country. Production of programs in virtual space by sports teams is one of the effective communication strategies with audiences. In order to reduce educational barriers, it is suggested that specialized courses be held at home to increase the number of seasoned and expert trainers with experience in sports. One of the most effective measures in this field is holding motivational workshops and business skills through exercise at home. In order to reduce individual barriers, it is suggested to provide training and public awareness to people to encourage them to participate in sports. In order to reduce cultural bias, it is suggested to create a suitable environment for sports culture among the people and remove media restrictions through sports

coverage at home. One of the most important actions in this field is the help of the popular figures of the province to encourage people to exercise at home. In order to reduce infrastructural obstacles, suitable space and equipment should be entrusted to families. Also, providing health and care packages for families is essential. Also, the use of expert staff can increase sports participation. Therefore, using the capacity of fan centers and volunteer movements for the development of sports is effective in this regard. Regarding support barriers, it is suggested that the video coverage of women's sports competitions in the media and the increase of applied research in the field of sports at home and its effects will provide a suitable support environment for sports at home. Support for sports at home can also come in the form of supporting home sports start-ups and using the capacity of sports donors to develop home sports.

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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