

## Wheelchair Basketball Athletes' Participation in Sports: An Examination within the Scope of the Social Model

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### Abstract

*This study was conducted with the aim of examining the factors that hinder, facilitate, and benefit the participation of wheelchair basketball athletes in sports within the framework of the social model. Employing a phenomenological research design, fitting for the nature of the inquiry, the study utilized qualitative research methods. The sample comprised thirteen (13) wheelchair basketball players competing in the top league in Türkiye. Data collection employed a semi-structured interview format, with face-to-face interviews conducted with the athletes. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data, revealing three (3) main themes and twelve (12) sub-themes. Findings suggest that structural barriers pose the most significant hindrance to wheelchair basketball players, while individual facilitators enhance participation, and psychological benefits are predominantly derived from sports engagement. In conclusion, despite encountering numerous inhibiting factors, wheelchair basketball athletes persist in sports participation and attain personal development, facilitated by environmental, structural, and individual factors.*

**Keywords:** *Physically Disabled, Wheelchair Basketball, Athlete*

### INTRODUCTION

The genesis of the social model can be traced back to the 'Fundamental Principles of Disability' document published by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in 1976. However, scholars argue that its roots extend further to the Disability Rights Movement, which unfolded in Europe and the USA during the 19th century (Ghosh, 2016). This model emerges from the struggles of disabled individuals for human rights, social justice, and independent living (Barton, 2009), with its application believed to significantly enhance the lives of many disabled individuals (Smith and Bundon, 2018). Indeed, it has been effectively employed in numerous instances to challenge discrimination and exclusion, enabling disabled individuals to claim their rightful position in society. The social model posits that disability is not inherent to the individual but rather constructed by societal norms and attitudes (Waldschmith et al., 2017; Ünlü & Çeviker 2022). Within this framework, disability is viewed not as an individual's impairment, but as the 'societal barriers' imposed upon them (Özgökçeler and Alper, 2010; Siebers, 2008). The 'Fundamental Principles of Disability' document, as articulated by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in 1976, posits that disability is essentially a social construct imposed upon individuals by society. Thus, society is thought to label physically disabled individuals as disabled (UPIAS, 1976). This perspective underscores the pervasive influence of the social model, evident across various domains, from personal assumptions to institutional discrimination, inaccessible public infrastructure to impractical transportation systems, segregated educational settings to exclusionary employment arrangements. In essence, the social model encompasses *'everything that imposes restrictions on disabled individuals'* (Hughes, 2019).

It is observed that besides the barriers encountered by physically disabled individuals in many areas of life, they also encounter various inhibiting factors in the field of sports. A review of the literature reveals several such impediments, including transportation challenges (Esatbeyoğlu and Karahan, 2014; Durmuş and Sarol, 2023; Kumcağız and Çayır, 2018; Küçük, 2024; Uzun et al., 2023), negative attitudes (Argan et al., 2021; Koçak et al., 2023), economic constraints (Murphy et al., 2008), health issues stemming from physical disabilities (Jaarsma et al., 2014a; Jaarsma et al., 2014b; Sarol, 2024), lack of energy (Jaarsma et al., 2015), and time constraints (McLoughlin et al., 2017). Moreover, inadequate training of trainers (Shields and Synnot, 2014; Ünlü et al., 2024), inappropriate facilities and equipment for disabled individuals (Caracci, 2019; Columna et al., 2017; Sarol,

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2024; Shields and Synnot, 2016; Çeviker, 2017), and societal unawareness (Arnell et al., 2020; Ballas et al., 2022) have been identified as additional inhibiting factors affecting sports participation. Furthermore, in sports, which are considered as indicators of the social model, regulations and rules are established for the sports branches that interest disabled individuals. If these regulations are not tailored to the abilities of disabled individuals, compliance with the rules and participation in competitions may become challenging (Pearce, 2017; Yağcı & Seydioğlu, 2023).

Literature also offers studies employing disability models to analyze sports participation among disabled individuals. For instance, Martin (2013) conducted a study that highlighted various barriers—personal, social, and environmental that support the social disability model in disabled individuals' engagement in sports. These barriers significantly impede individuals' participation in physical activity. Similarly, Darcy et al. (2017), in their study within the framework of the social model, highlighted that factors such as institutional/community support, time constraints, economic resources, availability of suitable equipment, personal capabilities, interpersonal relationships, and transportation accessibility affect disabled individuals' engagement in sports, contingent upon their specific disability type or required level of support. Additionally, Darcy et al. (2020) underscored the importance of raising awareness and enhancing existing financial resources to dismantle barriers to sports participation among disabled individuals.

Drawing upon the experiences of physically disabled individuals in sports participation, these behaviors directed towards them can be analyzed within the purview of the social model. However, studies utilizing disability models in the sports participation of disabled individuals are scarce in Türkiye. Particularly, there appears to be a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the application of the social model to the sports engagement of physically disabled individuals. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the participation of physically disabled individuals in sports through the lens of the social model.

## METHOD

### *Research Design*

This study adopted a qualitative research design known as phenomenology, specifically a phenomenological study. Phenomenology aims to explore the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell et al., 2007) and to gain a profound understanding of these experiences through firsthand accounts (Norlyk and Harder, 2010). The focus was to deeply understand the experiences of physically disabled athletes within the framework of the social model.

### *Research Group*

The study employed the criterion sampling method, a form of purposive sampling, to select participants for our study. Criterion sampling allows researchers to select participants based on predetermined criteria (Patton, 2014; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). Accordingly, the criteria for participant selection were as follows:

- a) Being 18 years of age or older,
- b) Having participated in the top league of wheelchair basketball for at least one year,

Consequently, our research group comprised thirteen (13) athletes engaged in wheelchair basketball matches. Details regarding the study group are presented in **Table 1**. Analysis of the information regarding the study group reveals that the participants fall within the age range of 26-51 and have been involved in wheelchair basketball for 1-23 years.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study group**

| Wheelchair Basketball Athletes |     |        |                |                   |                   |               |                         |
|--------------------------------|-----|--------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Participant                    | Age | Gender | Monthly Income | Education Status  | Disability Status | Year of Sport | Classification (points) |
| P-1                            | 28  | Male   | 70.000         | Associate Degree  | Amputation        | 5             | 3                       |
| P-2                            | 36  | Male   | 25.000         | Bachelor's Degree | Amputation        | 18            | 4                       |
| P-3                            | 40  | Male   | 50.000         | Bachelor's Degree | Paraplegia        | 15            | 1                       |
| P-4                            | 51  | Male   | 40.000         | High School       | Femur Fracture    | 20            | 4                       |
| P-5                            | 29  | Female | 45.000         | Bachelor's Degree | Amputation        | 5             | 4                       |

|             |    |      |        |                   |            |    |     |
|-------------|----|------|--------|-------------------|------------|----|-----|
| <b>P-6</b>  | 27 | Male | 50.000 | Bachelor's Degree | Paraplegia | 1  | 2   |
| <b>P-7</b>  | 29 | Male | --     | Bachelor's Degree | Paraplegia | 9  | 1   |
| <b>P-8</b>  | 26 | Male | 40.000 | Middle School     | Paraplegia | 2  | 3.5 |
| <b>P-9</b>  | 35 | Male | 60.000 | High School       | Amputation | 6  | 4   |
| <b>P-10</b> | 49 | Male | 67.000 | High School       | Paraplegia | 23 | 1   |
| <b>P-11</b> | 49 | Male | 50.000 | High School       | Orthopedic | 23 | 1.5 |
| <b>P-12</b> | 30 | Male | 45.000 | Associate Degree  | Amputation | 11 | 3.5 |
| <b>P-13</b> | 26 | Male | 20.000 | Bachelor's Degree | Paraplegia | 10 | 2   |

## **Data Collection Instruments**

### ***Demographic Information Form***

To ascertain the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, researchers developed a demographic information form. This form aimed to gather details such as gender, age, education level, disability status, classification, and similar pertinent information.

### ***Semi-structured Interview Form***

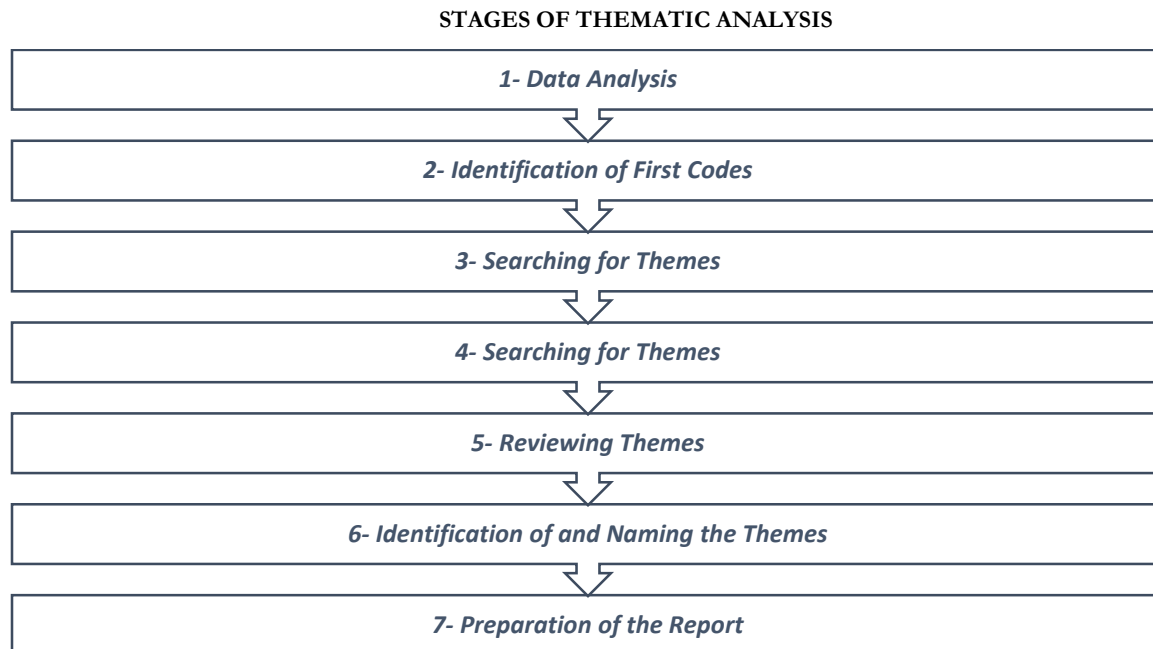
For conducting in-depth interviews, a semi-structured interview form was prepared as part of the study. During the formulation of the semi-structured interview form, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. Drawing insights from studies focusing on the sports participation of physically disabled individuals using the social model, questions were crafted to explore the barriers (Afacan & Afacan, 2018) and facilitators (Ballas et al., 2022) encountered by disabled individuals in sports engagement, as well as the perceived benefits of sports participation for this population (Darcy & Dowse, 2013). Additionally, questions addressing the potential discrimination or exclusion experienced by disabled individuals in sports, as suggested by the essence of the social model, were incorporated into the semi-structured interview form. In line with this, a question bank was prepared by the researchers to examine the participation of physically disabled individuals in sports within the scope of the social model, considering the aim of the study. The prepared questions were evaluated in collaboration with an academician proficient in qualitative research, and the final version of the questions was determined. Below are some examples of the questions prepared within this context:

1. Can you please elaborate the reasons for participating in this sports program?
2. What are the main factors that motivate or discourage your participation in the sports program?

The interviews were conducted individually with each participant in a quiet and private environment, following the semi-structured interview form that was prepared. Prior to the interviews, all participants were fully informed about the research objectives, and their consent was obtained for audio recording to facilitate analysis based on voluntary participation. Each interview session lasted approximately 30-35 minutes. Additionally, detailed notes were taken during the interviews, focusing particularly on the key points emphasized by the participants. Following the interviews, to safeguard against data loss, the audio recordings were transferred and securely stored in a computerized environment.

### ***Data Analysis***

Thematic analysis was employed as the method for analyzing the data in this study. The stages of thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), are depicted in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1:** *Stages of Thematic Analysis*

In this process, the data were analyzed by initially extracting codes from the interviews conducted with the participants using semi-structured interview forms. Once the codes were identified, efforts were made to identify and review overarching themes, resulting in the emergence of themes. Within this framework, three (3) main themes and twelve (12) sub-themes were identified. Following the identification of themes, metaphorical titles were assigned and reported for each theme.

### ***Validity and Reliability (Credibility, Transferability, Consistency, and Confirmability)***

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are often assessed through the lens of credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability (Creswell et al., 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1982). To enhance the credibility of the study, participants were thoroughly briefed about the research objectives and the process involved. Additionally, opinions were sought from an academician specialized in qualitative research and an expert who had years of experience in both sports and coaching during the research process. For transferability, detailed information about the study was provided to the research group, and detailed explanations were given about the data collection processes. To ensure consistency, data obtained from an expert in qualitative research, apart from the researcher, were separately coded, and the coding generated from this process was compared. Furthermore, participant quotes were included and presented to the reader to enhance confirmability. For the confirmability of the study, all procedures conducted during the study were recorded and stored in a computerized environment.

## **FINDINGS**

This qualitative study investigated the obstacles, facilitators, and benefits of sports participation among wheelchair basketball players within the framework of the social model. Three (3) overarching themes emerged from the analysis, categorized as 'Despite Everything, Obstacles Exist' (Table 2), 'Disability Couldn't Disable Me' (Table 3), and 'A New Life Through Sports' (Table 4). Within these main themes, a total of twelve (12) sub-themes were identified.

**Table 2: Obstacles Encountered in Sports Participation**

| Theme  | Sub Theme                          | Codes   |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| Obstacles<br>'Despite Everything, Obstacles Exist' | Structural Blockers                | Inadequate facilities                                       |
|  |                                    | Expensive equipment   |
|  |                                    | Limited access to facilities                                |
|  |                                    | Financial difficulties                                      |
|  |                                    | Lack of government support                                  |
|  |                                    | Club facilities   |
|  |                                    | Inadequate public transportation                            |
|  |                                    | Lack of sidewalks   |
|  |                                    | Inadequate ramps  |
|  |                                    | Lack of elevators   |
|  |                                    | Inadequate hotels   |
|  | Personal Obstacles                 | Financial difficulties                                      |
|  |                                    | Lack of personal transportation                             |
|  |                                    | Negative psychological states                               |
|  |                                    | Adaptation to social life                                   |
|  |                                    | Distance to facilities                                      |
|  |                                    | Sports injuries   |
|  |                                    | Transition to/within professional life                      |
|  | Social Obstacles                   | Lack of awareness   |
|  |                                    | Exclusion   |
|  |                                    | Overprotective family approach                              |
|  |                                    | Being perceived as needy individuals                        |
|  |                                    | Lack of acceptance  |
|  |                                    | Prejudiced attitudes  |
|  |                                    | Peer bullying   |
|  |                                    | Making differences felt                                     |
|  |                                    | Lack of respect   |
|  | Lack of value given to sports      |   |
|  | Obstacles Stemming from Disability | Use of prosthetics  |
|  |                                    | Acquired disability   |
|  |                                    | Health problems   |
|  | Institutional Obstacles            | Negative attitude of managers                               |
|  |                                    | Comparison of performance of disabled employees with others |
| Lack of initiative                                 |                                    |   |
| Obstacles Stemming from Sports Club                | Lack of meritocracy                |   |
|  | Financial inadequacy               |   |
|  | Inability to find sponsors         |   |
|  | Lack of interest from coaches      |   |
|  | Lack of qualified coaches          |   |

**Obstacles (*Despite Everything, Obstacles Exist*)**

Within the context of the findings, a main theme emerged, titled "Obstacles: Despite Everything, Obstacles Exist," comprising six (6) sub-themes: 'Structural,' 'Personal,' 'Social,' 'Disability-related,' 'Institutional,' and 'Sports Club-related.'

Primarily, concerning the obstacles encountered by wheelchair basketball players in sports participation, participants primarily faced structural obstacles. Under the sub-theme of 'Structural Obstacles,' issues such as inadequate facilities, expensive equipment, limited accessibility to facilities, and economic challenges were

prevalent. Participants also highlighted the lack of government support as a significant hindrance. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the absence of club facilities, inadequate public transportation, and structural obstacles like inaccessible sidewalks, ramps, and elevators for disabled individuals, all of which negatively impacted sports participation. Related participant testimonies are as follows:

*"The factors hindering our participation are mostly the unsuitability of sports facilities for us. Locker rooms, showers, this place is entirely a facility made specifically for us, but when we go to away games, in other cities, we encounter problems in terms of general sports facilities" (P-12).*

*"These chairs are very expensive for us. The chair I am currently using costs £6000. It comes from the UK, £6000. If we convert it to the current currency, it's around 250 thousand. There are a few companies in Türkiye that make them, and even they cost an average of 80,000-100,000 Turkish liras. Now clubs are trying to cover it, but even that is very difficult. It's already difficult to cover individually" (P-13).*

Under the sub-theme of 'Personal Obstacles,' participants engaged in discussions regarding the adverse effects of economic challenges, lack of personal transportation, and the psychological impact of disability on their sports participation experiences. Additionally, they highlighted the geographical distance of their homes from sports facilities as a significant barrier to their participation:

*"Access to sports requires economic resources. Without financial means, it's challenging for individuals to engage in healthy activities" (P-3).*

*"Transportation poses a significant challenge. The only problem for people with disabilities is transportation related to these sports" (P-11).*

Within the sub-theme of 'Social Obstacles' in sports participation, participants shed light on the lack of social awareness and experiences of marginalization. They also explored the protective stance of traditional family structures towards disabled individuals and the prevailing perception of disabled individuals as dependent, creating social barriers to sports participation. Additionally, participants highlighted instances of prejudice, peer bullying, which contribute to feelings of otherness among disabled individuals, and the societal undervaluing of sports as key social hurdles:

*"In our country, you are always exposed to situations where there are no stairs in some places. This is discrimination. You go somewhere, someone takes your disabled parking spot, and you become a victim. It means being subjected to discrimination for individuals like us who cannot find solutions to these things. Whenever it cannot find a solution, it means being subjected to discrimination" (P-3).*

*"They may treat you differently due to your circumstances. For instance, in terms of services... There have been instances where they attempted to restrict me from tasks, I was perfectly capable of performing, you know?" (P-10).*

When discussing the challenges stemming from their disabilities, participants emphasized the impact of prosthetics, acquiring disabilities later in life, and health issues associated with their conditions on sports involvement. One participant articulated:

*"Health concerns are a major factor. When you become paraplegic, it's not solely about mobility; there are numerous health issues, such as infections and frequent urinary tract infections. On top of that, falling ill when already disabled can compound the difficulties." (P-11).*

Under the sub-theme of institutional barriers in sports participation, participants highlighted the detrimental attitudes of managers and the absence of meritocratic principles as significant hurdles. One participant recounted:

*"We've consistently faced issues within the institution where we're employed. Despite there being legislation in place, we're still subject to administrative discretion. If the administration is willing, they permit; if not, they deny. Unfortunately, denials are frequent. These bureaucratic hurdles significantly impede our ability to engage in sports as we desire" (P-2).*

In the final sub-theme addressing obstacles originating from sports clubs, it was evident that the financial limitations of clubs and the struggle to secure sponsors adversely affect the involvement of disabled athletes.

Furthermore, the scarcity of coaches competent in working with disabled individuals and the apathy of some coaches towards athletes were cited as impediments to sports participation. One participant articulated:

*"The financial constraints pose significant barriers. Delays in acquiring necessary equipment, such as wheelchairs, due to the club's financial constraints, directly impact us. When the club faces financial difficulties, it inevitably affects our access to essential resources"* (P-8).

*"...The challenges are overwhelming. From securing suitable venues to finding supportive mentors or educators, the hurdles seem insurmountable"* (P-3).

**Table 3: Facilitators in Sport Participation**

| Theme  | Sub Theme                  | Codes                           |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Facilitators<br>'Disability Couldn't Disable Me' | Environmental Facilitators | Family support                  |
|  |                            | Coach support                   |
|  |                            | Teammate support                |
|  | Structural Facilitators    | Transportation to the facility  |
|  |                            | Facility usability              |
|  | Individual Facilitators    | Economic opportunity            |
|  |                            | Independent living              |
|  |                            | Having your own vehicle         |
|  |                            | Acceptance                      |
|  |                            | Awareness                       |
|  |                            | Breaking monotony               |
|  |                            | Sufficient time                 |
|  |                            | Adaptation to life              |
|  |                            | Sports habits                   |
|  |                            | Freedom                         |
|  |                            | Interest in basketball          |
|  |                            | Social communication            |
|  |                            | Being an example                |
|  |                            | Academic development            |
|  |                            | Desire to be a national athlete |
| Success  |                            |                                 |
| Athlete identity                                 |                            |                                 |

### Facilitators (*Disability Couldn't Disable Me*)

The findings of the study reveal three sub-themes and one main theme (Facilitators: Disability Couldn't Disable Me) in the facilitators of sports participation.

Based on the study findings, the first sub-theme of 'environmental facilitators' is addressed, emphasizing the pivotal role of support from family, coaches, and teammates in enhancing participants' sports engagement.

*"My family was a source of immense joy; my mother could perceive my happiness during that time. I was unattached then, and my mother could discern my contentment through our conversations, my actions, and the elation I exhibited upon returning home. Therefore, my parents were incredibly instrumental in providing me with support"* (P-2).

*"Contrary to my family, my friends have been exceptionally supportive, expressing pride in my sporting endeavors and reaffirming their backing"* (P-5).

The second sub-theme, 'structural facilitators' in wheelchair basketball players' sports involvement, underscores the significance of facility accessibility and suitability for disabled individuals in facilitating participation:

*"The presence of such facilities within this hospital setting is paramount. Instead of merely navigating from the hospital bed to the cafeteria, we have the opportunity to practice here."* (P-6).

"In terms of physical infrastructure, the sports hall is well-suited for our needs. Having a club that offers this activity is crucial. Frankly speaking, there are scarcely any options outside of Ankara" (P-13).

The last sub-theme of the facilitators theme is 'individual facilitators'. There are opinions suggesting that individual factors such as having economic means, desire for independent living, and owning a vehicle facilitate participation. Additionally, it has been reported that with the participation of disabled individuals in sports, they are accepted, awareness of people around them increases, and breaking away from a monotonous lifestyle facilitates participation.

"I wasn't active before starting sports, but I became active after starting sports... I come to be able to become a better basketball player in the future, to earn money, to sustain my own life, to be self-sufficient" (P-12).

"I became disabled; I used to participate in sports before. Would I just sit at home or continue with sports? That's the question my mother and I often exchanged looks about. Eventually, spurred by their encouragement, I made the decision to continue. I'm glad I did; otherwise, I wonder how I would have lived. I wouldn't be able to handle it. Now, my family sees me as sociable, independent, and happy, free from the worries I once had" (P-11)

**Table 4: Benefits of Sports Participation**

| Theme  | Sub Theme                 | Codes                                  |
|--|---------------------------|--|
| <i>Personal Development:<br/>A New Life Through Sports</i> | Physical Benefits         | Weight control                         |
|  |                           | Increase in muscle mass                |
|  |                           | Increasing body resistance             |
|  |                           | External appearance                    |
|  |                           | Vigor                                  |
|  | Psychological Benefits    | Being strong                           |
|  |                           | Self-actualization                     |
|  |                           | Change of perspective                  |
|  |                           | Increased self-confidence              |
|  |                           | Feeling free                           |
|  |                           | Outward expression of feelings         |
|  |                           | Letting off steam                      |
|  |                           | Stress management                      |
|  |                           | Motivation                             |
|  |                           | Enjoyment                              |
|  |                           | Relaxation                             |
|  |                           | Happiness                              |
|  |                           | Success                                |
|  |                           | Desire to start over                   |
|  | Social/Community Benefits | Family atmosphere,                     |
|  |                           | Improvement in social communication,   |
|  |                           | Increase in adaptation to social life, |
|  |                           | Increase in awareness,                 |
|  |                           | Athlete identity                       |
|  | Acceptance                |  |

### **Personal Development (*A New Life through Sports*)**

The third main theme of the study is 'Personal Development'. Under this main theme, three sub-themes have been identified, culminating in the overarching theme of 'Personal Development: A New Life Through Sports'.

These themes encompass findings related to physical, psychological, and social benefits. Within this framework, participants highlighted various physical advantages accrued through sports participation, including weight management, increased muscle mass, enhanced body resilience, and heightened vitality.

"Actually, for me, it's both a hobby and I used to be quite overweight, like obese I used to be quite obese. Now, thanks to sports, I've lost quite a bit of weight, gained muscle, and strengthened myself" (P-9).



*"For the purpose of keeping my body fit... I quit basketball, I quit smoking, I started smoking... I gained weight, went up to 98 kilograms. Now I weigh 73 kilograms. I went up to 98 kilograms" (P-10).*

Within the main theme addressing the motivations behind increased sports participation, the psychological benefit's sub-theme reveals that participants' involvement in sports is primarily driven by their pursuit of psychological well-being. Furthermore, it is evident that participants engage in sports to bolster their self-confidence, alongside motivations such as the desire for success, increased motivation, and a willingness to overcome challenges

*"I feel more at ease when I'm feeling a bit tense; usually, engaging in sports helps. I became more confident about going out. I used to worry about what others would think, but that concern lessened when I realized there were others like me." (P-14).*

*"Basketball has truly had a positive impact on us. I wasn't as psychologically or physically resilient before I started playing basketball. I used to fear falling off the chair, or that something would go wrong. Basketball taught me to confront my fears and showed me that I could accomplish things independently. That's why we're experiencing success here as well..." (P-8).*

Under the sub-theme of social benefits, it is evident that the establishment of a familial atmosphere within sports clubs, enhancement of social communication skills, and improved adaptation to social life play significant roles in motivating participation. Participants have conveyed that heightened awareness, the development of a sports identity, and acceptance within society are among the key factors driving participation for social benefits. Related participant testimonies are as follows:

*"Within a social context, there's a strong sense of camaraderie akin to a family environment within the sports club. It's truly enriching. We regard all our friends, both old and new, as part of our extended family. This familial atmosphere is a major draw for me" (P-13).*

*"Engaging in basketball has had a positive impact on my social circle. It has changed people's perceptions of me for the better since I started playing basketball" (P-12).*

## **DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION**

The findings of the study investigating the participation of wheelchair basketball players in sports within the framework of the social model are discussed and interpreted in this section, categorized under specific headings.

### ***Obstacles to Sports Participation***

Under the theme of "Despite Everything, Obstacles Exist", it is evident that various structural factors significantly impede sports participation. These include inadequate facilities, the high cost of equipment, limited accessibility to facilities, and insufficient government support, all of which negatively impact sports engagement. Moreover, personal barriers such as economic hardships, lack of personal transportation, the psychological repercussions of disability, and challenges in social adaptation also pose significant barriers to sports participation. In line with the findings of this study, Sarol (2024) similarly reported that structural issues such as transportation, equipment, accommodation, and financial constraints faced by clubs were primary barriers for participants. Additionally, it is noted that the use of prosthetics, susceptibility to infectious diseases associated with disability, and difficulties in limb mobility further hinder individuals' participation in sports. Consistent with existing literature, various structural factors including transportation, economic resources, and inadequate facilities have been highlighted as significant barriers to sports participation among disabled individuals (Esatbeyoğlu and Karahan, 2014; Durmuş and Sarol, 2023; Kumcağız and Çayır, 2018; Murphy et al., 2008; Caracci, 2019; Columna et al., 2017; Shields and Synnot, 2016).

Furthermore, this study conducted within the social model underscores the impact of social barriers on sports participation, including lack of social awareness, exclusion, and the protective attitudes of families. The social model of disability presents disability as a difference rather than a deficit and underscores discriminatory behaviors such as mockery or belittlement that impede physical activity or sports participation (Martin, 2013). According to this model, disability is regarded as a consequence of societal structures and attitudes (Smith and Bundon, 2018). These varying societal perspectives on disabilities are encapsulated by the concept of 'ableism', which encompasses the ways in which individuals with disabilities are perceived and evaluated by others.

Ableism encompasses a range of beliefs, processes, and practices that shape how an individual's abilities, body, and relationship with their environment are perceived based on their abilities and how they are judged by others (Wolbring, 2008). Essentially, ableism manifests across multiple levels, including institutional policies and practices, cultural norms and representations, individual beliefs, and behaviors (Ostiguy et al., 2016). In light of these theoretical frameworks, the study's findings suggest that societal evaluations of participants can be illustrative of ableism. Moreover, negative attitudes encountered from others (Argan et al., 2021; Koçak et al., 2023) and a lack of social awareness (Arnell et al., 2020; Ballas et al., 2022) are identified as influential factors in the sports participation of individuals with disabilities.

Additionally, the study concludes that challenges associated with using prosthetics, acquiring disabilities later in life, and health issues stemming from disability significantly impact sports participation, findings supported by existing literature (Jaarsma et al., 2014a; Jaarsma et al., 2014b; Sarol, 2024). Furthermore, it is highlighted that participants face negative attitudes from their supervisors due to their employment status and that comparing the performance of disabled individuals with other employees has adverse consequences. It has been reported that the lack of interest and opportunities from managers, as well as the pains/health problems of disabled individuals, are effective in their participation in physical activity (Martin, 2013). Finally, it is noted that economic challenges encountered by sports clubs and the struggle to secure sponsors pose significant barriers to sports participation. Shields and Synnot (2014) conducted a study highlighting the substantial influence of trainers/coaches on the sports participation of individuals with disabilities. Similarly, Kean et al. (2017) found in their research that sponsorship and financial support have significant impacts on the participation of individuals in wheelchair basketball.

### ***Facilitating Factors in Sports Participation***

Under the theme "Disability Couldn't Disable Me," participants emphasized the pivotal role of support from family, coaches, and teammates in facilitating their sports participation. Sarol (2024) similarly emphasized in their study that the club environment, akin to a family, along with recognition and support from family, friends, and neighbors, serve as significant sources of motivation for sports participation. Likewise, McLoughlin et al. (2017) concluded in their study that social support plays a crucial role in facilitating sports participation. Additionally, Wareham et al. (2018) highlighted the pivotal role of coaches as fundamental facilitators of sports participation. Moreover, participants in the study underscored the importance of structural factors such as transportation accessibility and facilities tailored for disabled individuals in facilitating sports engagement. This finding resonates with Kean et al. (2017), who concluded that accessible facilities and transportation are critical for participation in wheelchair basketball. Furthermore, participants' economic empowerment, aspirations for independent living, and access to personal means of transportation were cited as facilitators of sports participation. For instance, Moss et al. (2020) found that participation in wheelchair basketball led to an increase in independence and self-confidence among participants, positively impacting their daily lives. Additionally, the study identified personal facilitators such as serving as role models, academic development, achieving national athlete status, and establishing a sports identity as contributing positively to participants' sports involvement. In line with these findings, Yaşar (2017) concluded in their study that individuals are drawn to wheelchair basketball with aspirations of achieving success, representing the national team, and cultivating a sports identity.

### ***Benefits of Sports Participation***

Within the overarching theme of 'A New Life Through Sports', participants derive numerous physical benefits from their engagement in sports, including weight management, increased muscle mass, and enhanced body resilience. Moreover, participants underscored the manifold psychological benefits gained through sports participation, such as stress relief, self-realization, shifts in perspective, and heightened self-confidence. Sarol (2024) similarly concluded that individuals participating in wheelchair basketball experience a transformation in identity and outlook on life, leading to an improvement in their overall quality of life. Furthermore, participants highlighted the positive psychological impacts of wheelchair basketball, such as the opportunity to express inner emotions, release tension, and experience a sense of liberation. For instance, Aitchison et al. (2022) concluded in their study that individuals with disabilities derive various psychological benefits, including feelings of happiness, pride, and liberation, through participation in sports. Additionally, the study found that participants

also accrue social benefits from sports involvement, such as the establishment of a familial atmosphere, enhanced adaptation to social life, increased awareness, the acquisition of an athlete identity, and consequently, acceptance by peers. Similarly, in a study conducted by Martin (2013), it was found that individuals with disabilities derive cognitive, emotional, physiological, and social benefits from engaging in physical activity. Furthermore, the study revealed that perceived support from the environment, coupled with positive attitudes and behaviors from their surroundings, serves to enhance motivation for sports participation. In this regard, the recognition, role modeling, and support provided by individuals in their environment, such as family and friends, play a crucial role in fostering participation. These findings align closely with those of the study conducted by Sarol (2024).

In summary, within the framework of the social model, which encompasses factors that constrain the lives of individuals with disabilities, this study concludes that wheelchair basketball players encounter various barriers to sports participation, including structural, personal, social, institutional, sports club, and disability-related barriers. Despite these obstacles, participants are observed to engage in sports through environmental, structural, and individual facilitators. It is evident that participants derive numerous benefits, encompassing physical, psychological, and social dimensions, through their participation in wheelchair basketball.

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*Wheelchair Basketball Athletes' Participation in Sports: An Examination within the Scope of the Social Model*

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