



**REASONS FOR TENNIS PRACTICE AMONG PLAYERS IN THE PROVINCE OF
HUELVA: SEX AND AGE DIFFERENCES**

**MOTIVOS DE PRÁCTICA DEL TENIS EN JUGADORES DE LA PROVINCIA DE
HUELVA: DIFERENCIAS SEGÚN SEXO Y EDAD**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to analyze the motives for practicing tennis in the province of Huelva, examining differences according to sex and age. A total of 182 participants (161 men and 21 women) completed the Motives for Physical Activity Measure–Revised (MPAM-R). A non-experimental, cross-sectional, correlational design was applied. Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used after checking the non-normal distribution of the data. Results showed that enjoyment was the most valued motive (men: 5.4; women: 5.8), whereas appearance was the least relevant (3.1 in both sexes). No significant differences were found according to sex, whereas differences across age groups were observed in enjoyment ($p = .010$) and competence ($p = .010$). These findings suggest that, in the sample analyzed, age may be more closely associated than sex with certain motivational dimensions of tennis practice.

Keywords: Motivation, racket sports, amateur, categories.

RESUMEN

El objetivo del presente estudio fue analizar los motivos de práctica del tenis en la provincia de Huelva, examinando las diferencias en función del sexo y la edad. Participaron 182 sujetos (161 hombres y 21 mujeres) que completaron la Escala de Motivos para la Actividad Física-Revisada (MPAM-R). Se realizó un diseño no experimental, transversal y correlacional. Se emplearon pruebas U de Mann-Whitney y Kruskal-Wallis tras comprobar el incumplimiento del supuesto de normalidad. Los resultados indicaron que el disfrute fue el motivo más valorado (hombres: 5.4; mujeres: 5.8), mientras que la apariencia fue el menos relevante (3.1 en ambos sexos). No se observaron diferencias significativas en función del sexo, mientras que sí se hallaron diferencias según la edad en disfrute ($p = .010$) y competencia ($p = .010$). Los hallazgos sugieren que, en la muestra analizada, la edad podría estar más asociada que el sexo a determinadas dimensiones motivacionales de la práctica del tenis.

Palabras clave: Motivación, deportes de raqueta, amateur, categorías.

Introduction

Tennis is a sport that has gained popularity worldwide due to its challenging nature and its ability to improve players' physical and mental health. In recent years, padel has experienced exponential growth in Spain, which has increased scientific interest in racket sports in recreational contexts. Within the field of racket sports, motivation towards sport participation has been related to intrinsic, social, and enjoyment-related factors. In padel players, Rodríguez-Cayetano et al. (2023) observed that the most highly valued motive for participation was friendship/peer group, whereas social status was the least relevant factor. Likewise, the authors noted that players' intrinsic satisfaction was mainly linked to motivation and enjoyment of sport participation. These findings reinforce the importance of analyzing motives for participation in racket sports from a perspective that considers both recreational and social components. Even so, in provinces such as Huelva, participation in this sport remains limited. This may be explained by low participation and the limited availability of facilities. According to the Federación Andaluza de Tenis (n.d.), the province has the lowest number of federated clubs compared with the other Andalusian provinces, with only five clubs. This figure contrasts with other provinces with a similar population, such as Jaén and Almería, which have 19 and 15 federated clubs, respectively.

Motivation is a key element for understanding the initiation, maintenance, and dropout of physical and sporting activity. The reasons that lead a person to engage in sport may be related to factors such as health, enjoyment, competence, socialization, personal improvement, or physical appearance, and may vary according to characteristics such as sex, age, or the type of activity performed (Molanorouzi et al., 2015). In young populations, differences in motives for physical and sporting activity according to sex have also been observed (Jiménez-Torres et al., 2012). Likewise, the progressive loss of motivation, difficulty in combining sport participation with studies or other activities, boredom, or lack of enjoyment have been identified as factors associated with sport dropout (Carlin et al., 2009; Sampol et al., 2005). Therefore, analyzing motives for participation is relevant for better understanding sport adherence and designing promotion strategies adapted to the characteristics of participants.

According to González et al. (2000), the main reasons that lead boys and girls to play tennis are improving their level, physical well-being, exercising, having fun, learning new skills, and social interaction. Other less relevant motives are also identified, such as satisfying the family or achieving

popularity and recognition. On the other hand, these authors indicate that competition-related motives tend to play a secondary role in both boys and girls, with this trend being more pronounced among girls.

By contrast, Sampol et al. (2005) indicate that the main factor driving the initiation of sport participation is the influence of friends, highlighting the fundamental role of fun and leisure in both men and women. Regarding maintaining physical activity, differences according to sex are observed: men show a greater orientation towards competence and social interaction, whereas women tend to focus on a more recreational form of participation.

According to Lope and Antoñanzas (2017), only a small proportion of the population has access to high performance and the possibility of becoming a professional tennis player as their main motivation. In these cases, social recognition plays a particularly relevant role in motivation, especially during adolescence and adulthood. In this regard, Cervelló et al. (2002) indicate that competition is a key element for those aspiring to pursue tennis professionally. These individuals attach great importance to training and, when they perceive a task-oriented motivational climate, they tend to show higher levels of motivation towards sport participation, which favours goal achievement through effort.

According to Moreno et al. (2007), ego is a factor that plays a fundamental role in the motivation of those who wish to pursue professional tennis. The results show that men present a greater ego orientation than women, as do older players compared with younger players. In addition, ego has been shown to have a significant influence on cognitive development. In this sense, and in line with Cervelló et al. (2002), a greater ego orientation is associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing cognitive anxiety.

Despite this, a high dropout rate is observed in this sport. According to Carlin et al. (2009), the main causes of dropout are closely related to the progressive loss of motivation, derived from factors such as low perceived ability, insufficient physical condition leading to poor performance, a negative training climate with peers, the influence of other athletes, and lack of enjoyment during practice. Furthermore, Sampol et al. (2005) indicate that boredom and lack of time, especially due to academic demands, are key reasons for dropout, affecting women to a greater extent than men. Finally, these authors highlight that sport dropout is the result of a decision-making process influenced by the family and social context, rather than a random event.

In Spain, the popularity of tennis has experienced a progressive recovery in recent years, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic period. According to recent data from the Real Federación Española de Tenis, the number of federative licenses has continued to increase since 2021, exceeding 85,000 licenses in subsequent years. However, these figures remain below the historical peak reached in 2011, when more than 108,000 licenses were recorded, after which a downward trend began until 2020.

In the province of Huelva, tennis has also shown growing interest in its practice in recent years, with a progressive increase in people taking up the sport. Even so, in provinces such as Huelva, participation in this modality remains limited. This may be explained by low participation and the limited availability of facilities. According to the Federación Andaluza de Tenis (n.d.), the province has the lowest number of federated clubs compared with the other Andalusian provinces, with only five clubs. This figure contrasts with other provinces with a similar population, such as Jaén and Almería, which have 19 and 15 federated clubs, respectively.

In this context, the aim of the present study is to analyze the motives for practicing tennis in this province, examining differences according to sex and age.

Based on previous literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- Alternative hypothesis (H1): There are significant differences in motives for practicing tennis according to sex and age category.
- Null hypothesis (H0): There are no significant differences in motives for practicing tennis according to sex and age category.

Method

Sample

A non-experimental, cross-sectional, correlational design was used. The sample consisted of 182 tennis players from the province of Huelva (age: $M = 42.4$, $SD = 15.6$ years). Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used; therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution and cannot be generalized to all tennis players in the province.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: being aged 10 years or older, playing tennis at the time of data collection, being linked to clubs, sports schools, or practice groups in the province of Huelva, and accepting informed

consent. The exclusion criteria were incomplete completion of the questionnaire, detection of duplicate responses, or not currently practicing tennis.

The sample included recreational and federated players, although the study did not stratify the analyzes according to competitive level. To analyze differences according to age, participants were grouped into three categories: youth players, aged 11 to 17 years; adult players, aged 18 to 34 years; and veteran players, aged 35 years and older. This division was established as an operational criterion, based on a classification commonly used in tennis practice and competition contexts, and allowed motivational profiles to be compared across different stages of sport participation.

Table 1

Sample characteristics

Variable	N (%)
Sex	
Male	161 (88.5)
Female	21 (11.5)
Age category	
Youth	21 (11.5)
Adult	24 (13.2)
Veteran	137 (75.3)
Practice frequency	
Occasionally	24 (13.2)
A couple of days per week	86 (47.2)
Between 3 and 5 days	62 (34.1)
Practically every day	10 (5.5)

Assessment instruments

The questionnaire that was used was the “Motives for Physical Activity Measure–Revised” (MPAM-R) (Ryan et al., 1997), validated in the Spanish population by Moreno et al. (2007). This instrument consists of 30 items with a 7-point Likert-type response format, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). The scale assesses five dimensions: enjoyment, appearance, social, fitness, and competence. The internal reliability of the instrument showed a Cronbach’s alpha of .972 for the total scale (.952 for

enjoyment, .884 for appearance, .789 for social, .936 for fitness, and .941 for competence). The Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was very high, indicating excellent internal reliability, although this type of value should be interpreted with caution, as it may reflect some overlap between items.

Procedure

The study was approved by the corresponding Research Ethics Committee and was conducted following the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. The questionnaire was administered through Google Forms platform. Before accessing the questions, an information sheet included explaining the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the anonymity and confidentiality of responses.

For adult participants, informed consent was accepted by the participants themselves before completing the questionnaire. For underage participants, informed consent was requested from their legal guardians before completion of the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and the data was processed anonymously and confidentially.

The questionnaire was disseminated online through WhatsApp groups belonging to tennis clubs in the province of Huelva, providing clear instructions regarding the participation criteria. Participants had an approximate period of three weeks to complete the questionnaire.

Statistical analysis

Data analysis was performed using JASP version 0.17.1. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha coefficient were calculated to assess the internal reliability of the instrument. After verifying that the assumption of normality was not met, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyze differences according to sex, and the Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to compare age categories. When the Kruskal-Wallis test was significant, post hoc comparisons with Bonferroni correction were performed. In addition to the p-value, the corresponding test statistics and effect sizes were reported. The significance level was set at $p < .05$. No sex \times age interaction analysis was conducted due to the marked imbalance of the sample and the small number of women in some subgroups, which would have compromised the stability and interpretation of the results.

Results

The following tables (Table 2 and Table 3) show the results obtained for the mean and standard deviation between the MPAM-R questionnaire and the variables of sex and age categories, as well as their significant differences. Regarding sex (Table 2), no significant differences were observed in any of the factors related to motives for practicing tennis. Although no significant differences were observed according to sex, the descriptive data show that enjoyment was the most highly valued motive among both men and women, whereas appearance obtained the lowest scores in both groups.

Table 2

Descriptive analysis and comparison of motives for participation according to sex

	Men (M ± SD)	Women (M ± SD)	W	p	r
Enjoyment	5.4 ± 1.7	5.8 ± 1.4	1874.5	.418	.06
Social	4.0 ± 1.4	4.2 ± 1.3	1935.0	.282	.08
Appearance	3.1 ± 1.5	3.2 ± 1.4	1771.0	.724	.03
Fitness	5.0 ± 1.7	5.3 ± 1.6	1805.5	.614	.04
Competence	4.8 ± 1.7	5.3 ± 1.6	2003.5	.168	.10

Regarding age categories (Table 3), significant differences were found in the motives of enjoyment ($p = .010$) and competence ($p = .010$), and in both cases, the effect size was small. Post hoc comparisons with Bonferroni correction showed significant differences in the enjoyment dimension between adults and veteran players, with higher scores in the adult group. In the competence dimension, post hoc comparisons also showed significant differences between adult and veteran players, with higher scores in the adult group.

Table 3*Descriptive analysis and comparison of motives for participation according to age*

	Youth ^a (M ± SD)	Adult ^b (M ± SD)	Veteran ^c (M ± SD)	H	p	ε ²
Enjoyment	5.7 ± 1.2	6.2 ± 1.1 ^c	5.2 ± 1.7 ^b	9.221	.010	.040
Social	3.9 ± 1.3	4.2 ± 1.2	3.8 ± 1.3	1.561	.458	.000
Appearance	3.1 ± 1.5	3.3 ± 1.5	3.1 ± 1.4	0.389	.823	.000
Fitness	4.9 ± 1.3	5.4 ± 1.5	4.9 ± 1.7	1.488	.475	.000
Competence	5.2 ± 1.4	5.6 ± 1.3 ^c	4.6 ± 1.7 ^b	9.158	.010	.040

Note. ^a Significant differences with youth; ^b Significant differences with adult; ^c Significant differences with veteran. H = Kruskal-Wallis statistic; ε² = epsilon squared. Post hoc comparisons were performed with Bonferroni correction.

Discussion

The main aim of the present study was to analyze the motives for practicing tennis in the province of Huelva, examining possible differences according to sex and age.

The hypothesis proposed the existence of significant differences between these two variables. The results obtained allow the research hypothesis to be partially accepted.

Regarding sex, no significant differences were found in any of the motivational dimensions analyzed, suggesting a similar motivational profile between men and women in tennis practice in the province of Huelva. However, significant differences were observed according to age, especially in the factors of enjoyment and competence. Specifically, players in the adult category presented higher levels of enjoyment, whereas competence showed variations between the different age groups, being lower among veteran players. These results indicate that age appears to be more relevantly associated than sex in shaping motives for participation.

As noted above, regarding sex, no significant differences were observed in any of the factors. Among men, the most relevant motives for practicing tennis, from greatest to least importance, were: enjoyment, fitness, competence, social, and appearance. Among women, the order was:

enjoyment, competence, fitness, social, and appearance. Although differences are observed between the responses of men and women, these are minimal, with the only notable aspect being that men attach greater relevance to fitness compared with women. It should be noted that the difference between competence and fitness among women is very small.

According to Jiménez-Torres et al. (2012), the most highly valued motive among women for engaging in physical activity is health improvement; however, the results of this study indicate that enjoyment prevails over fitness. In the case of men, there is agreement that the main motive for physical activity participation is enjoyment. Likewise, both sexes agree that factors related to appearance, such as weight reduction or image improvement, are the least valued. This pattern partially coincides with that observed by Rodríguez-Cayetano et al. (2023) in padel players, where motives linked to friendship/peer group were the most highly valued, whereas social status obtained the lowest scores. Although the instrument used in that study differed from the one employed in the present research, both studies point towards a lower relevance of external motives, such as image, recognition, or status, compared with motives more closely linked to enjoyment, social interaction, and satisfaction with sport participation. By contrast, Moreno et al. (2007) indicate that both men and women value fitness more highly, a difference that could be explained by the fact that most participants belong to social tennis clubs in Huelva, where interpersonal relationships predominate over physical health.

Similar results have been observed in the study by Pato and Conde (2024). They observed that pleasure and competence development are, together with physical fitness, among the main drivers of participation. In addition, they agree that external factors such as status or social appearance are the least influential for athletes, regardless of sex.

Regarding the age variable, the main motives for practicing tennis were, among youth players: enjoyment, competence, fitness, social, and appearance; among adult players: enjoyment, competence, fitness, social, and appearance; and among veteran players: enjoyment, fitness, competence, social, and appearance. This pattern is consistent with previous literature. Kontro et al. (2022) indicate that, although enjoyment is a central driver of sport participation throughout life, the motives accompanying it evolve with age. In this sense, young people tend to combine enjoyment with factors related to competence, challenge, and personal improvement, whereas among older athletes, enjoyment is more closely linked to maintaining health, physical well-being, and quality of life.

As can be observed, there are significant differences in the enjoyment dimension, specifically between the adult category and the veteran category. This is consistent with several authors, who state that in adulthood, individuals tend to be primarily motivated by internal motives such as fun, personal challenge, and social affiliation (Granero-Jiménez et al., 2022; Molanorouzi et al., 2015); unlike youth players, who, although they value enjoyment, see their participation conditioned by the pursuit of social recognition, competition, and the emergence of external barriers such as lack of time or other obligations (Portela-Pino et al., 2021). On the other hand, the difference with respect to the veteran category is explained by a progressive shift in goals. Whereas the adult player focuses on mastery and the recreational component, in older adults the focus shifts towards health, stress reduction, and the maintenance of physical functionality (Beggs et al., 2014; Steltenpohl et al., 2019).

An interesting aspect to consider is that the fitness factor decreases among veteran players compared with adult players. This does not coincide with Moreno et al. (2007), because in their study this dimension gains importance as participants' age increases.

Another significant difference observed is that veteran players prioritize competence to a lesser extent than players in the adult category. This result could be interpreted in relation to the evolution of sport goals as age increases. In this sample, older players showed a lower orientation towards competence and performance, prioritizing aspects related to health, well-being, and enjoyment of participation. This finding can be explained based on previous evidence. Stenner et al. (2020) and Avello-Viveros et al. (2022) indicate that, as age increases, there is a transition from a competitive orientation focused on ego (beating others or achieving status) towards a more internal orientation, based on personal challenge, individual improvement, and maintaining physical activity, which translates into a lower priority given to competence among veteran players.

From an applied perspective, these results may be useful for clubs, sports schools, coaches, and sports organizations in the province of Huelva. Given that enjoyment appears as the main motive for participation, promotion and retention initiatives should prioritize enjoyable, socially enriching experiences adapted to players' age. In this way, the results may contribute to the design of strategies that are better adjusted to the motivational profiles of tennis participants in the province.

This study presents some limitations that have influenced the interpretation of the results. The small number of female participants limits the statistical power to detect possible differences according to sex. Likewise, the high proportion of veteran players compared with the youth and adult groups may affect the stability of age-based comparisons and requires these results to be interpreted with caution. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized to all tennis players in the province without considering these sample characteristics. However, the results presented provide an initial insight into the motives for practicing one of the sports with the longest history in the province of Huelva.

In addition, the sampling was non-probabilistic and convenience-based, which reduces the external validity of the study. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design prevents causal relationships from being established between the variables analyzed. Finally, although a validated instrument was used, it would be advisable to complement the quantitative data with qualitative methodologies that allow a deeper understanding of motives for participation.

Once the study was completed, different lines of research were identified to expand the project. The first would be to extend the sample to all of Andalusia. The next would be to examine competition motives among people who compete in federated and non-federated tennis, to identify their differences. Finally, and to explore Huelva-based tennis in greater depth, it would be useful to analyze motives for practice and competition by comparing them across the five federated clubs that exist in Huelva, to analyze which motives are most predominant in the province.

These findings allow a better understanding of the factors that influence tennis participation and may be useful for designing promotion and retention strategies adapted to the characteristics of each age group, thereby contributing to the development of this sport in the province of Huelva.

Conclusions

Enjoyment appears as the main motive for practicing tennis in the province of Huelva, regardless of sex and age, whereas appearance shows lower relevance. No significant differences were observed according to sex, although this result should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of female participants. By contrast, differences were found according to age category in the dimensions of enjoyment and competence, especially between players in the adult and veteran categories. These results should be

interpreted with caution due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, convenience sampling, and the imbalance of the sample by sex and age.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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