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**Original**

## FACTORES LIMITANTES EN LA PRÁCTICA DEL DEPORTE PARALÍMPICO: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO DE QUETZALTENANGO

## LIMITING FACTORS IN THE PRACTICE OF PARALYMPIC SPORTS: A CASE STUDY OF QUETZALTENANGO

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## RESUMEN

Recientemente ha incrementado el interés por la participación deportiva de personas con discapacidad en Guatemala que cumplan con los criterios de elegibilidad establecidos por el Comité Paralímpico Internacional (CPI). Limitada investigación ha sido realizada que permita evidenciar el grado de accesibilidad de para-atletas para realizar sus prácticas deportivas. El propósito de este estudio es describir los factores limitantes de la práctica del Para deporte de los para-atletas del departamento de Quetzaltenango. Por medio, de un estudio de caso de diseño cualitativo se obtienen datos de once para atletas activos e inactivos: goalball (7) y para atletismo (4) entre las edades de 18 a 52 años. Las estrategias de recolección de datos incluyen entrevistas semiestructuradas, observación y diario de campo. Los resultados muestran que las principales limitaciones son la falta de entrenadores, escasos recursos económicos y barreras de accesibilidad a los distintos espacios de práctica deportiva. El estudio evidencia que aún no se tienen las condiciones necesarias que garanticen su acceso de forma igualitaria en relación con los atletas convencionales lo cual genera desarrollo limitado del movimiento Paralímpico en Quetzaltenango.

**Palabras clave:** Inclusión, Accesibilidad, Para-atletas, Discapacidad, Guatemala

## ABSTRACT

Recently, interest has increased in the participation in sports of people with disabilities in Guatemala who meet the eligibility criteria established by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). Limited research has been carried out that allows to demonstrate the degree of accessibility of para athletes to carry out their sports practice. The purpose of this study was to describe the limiting factors in the practice of para sport by para-athletes from the department of Quetzaltenango. Through a case study of qualitative design, data is obtained from eleven active and inactive athletes: goalball (7) and athletics (4) between the ages of 18 to 52 years. Data collection strategies include semi-structured interviews, observation, and field journal. The result show that the main limitations are the lack of coaches, scarce economic resources, and accessibility barriers to the different sports practice space. The study shows that they still do not have the necessary conditions to guarantee equal access in relation to conventional athletes, which generates limited development of the Paralympic movement in Quetzaltenango.

**Keywords:** Inclusion, Accessibility, Para-athletes, Disability, Guatemala



## INTRODUCTION

Sport for people with disability (PWD) lies not only in its potential to make extraordinary events known to spectators but is also considered a path that dignifies the person and contributes to valuing diversity (Mauerberg-deCastro et al., 2016). Participation in physical activities is important to improve health levels (Rimmer et al., 2004). The participation percentages of people with disabilities are low and even more during the adolescence (Mckenzie et al., 2023). A previous study has identified that there are limited opportunities for PWD to practice sports compared to conventional people (Torralba et al., 2017).

Several studies demonstrate the limitations that exist for people with disabilities in participating in physical activity and sports. A systematic review was focused on studying the barriers and facilitators of participation in physical activities for young people and adults with disability, identifying that social and environmental conditions play an important role in their lives (Mckenzie et al., 2023). The environmental barriers and facilitators of physical activity among university students with disabilities in Spain have been analyzed highlighting the huge influence that the environment generates (Monforte et al., 2021). A qualitative study carried out in Australia with children with disabilities mentions that social barriers are among the most influential in preventing them from participating in physical activity (Shields & Synnot, 2016).

A group of young university students with disabilities in the United Kingdom, barriers to social activities, access to university career services, and participation in sports activities were revealed (Chipchase et al., 2023). In sport a study out in Brazil mentions that people with disabilities who start a sport face a variety of conditions, which can be a limitation or favor their participation in the sporting context (Vieira et al., 2021). This study focused on para-athletes with national and international participation, and the main barriers mentioned were: physical wear and injuries; lack of appreciation and recognition of athletes as sports professionals; lack of sponsorship; accessibility difficulties; and lack of media coverage (Vieira et al., 2021). The results demonstrate that there are a multitude of barriers and facilitators that can have an impact on the accessibility of people with disabilities (Rimmer et al., 2004).

The Paralympic movement in Guatemala is relatively new considering that the Guatemalan Paralympic Committee (GPC) was recognized until 1998 by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). Since then, Guatemala has participated in different events related to para-sports. Para-athletes from Quetzaltenango had been part of these games, specifically in sports such as goalball and para-athletics. Compared to conventional sports, para sports in Guatemala are developing, and there are not a significant number of registered participants. In Quetzaltenango, the number of para-athletes is low; no growth has been observed in these groups, and desertion is very visible (COPAG, 2022). This relates to the World Health Organization (WHO) statement that highlighted that people with disabilities still face barriers to the development of their participation in sport (WHO, 2011). The need to forge cultural changes that expand spaces in different environments for the social inclusion of people with disabilities is also highlighted (Ruiz, 2012). Due to this situation, it is necessary to identify the factors that generate barriers to participating in para sports. Considering that the reality of athletes with disabilities may vary depending on the sociocultural context in which they find themselves (Vicente et al., 2021) and PWD are bearers of human rights. There is evidence of the need for these rights to be respected, for society to be inclusive, and for them to be allowed active participation in recreational, cultural, and sports practices (Tarqui et al., 2022). This study aims to interpret the limitations that para-athletes experience in accessing sports practice. The study was guided by the following research question: What are the factors that limit para-sport practice in Quetzaltenango?

## METHODS

Based on this purpose, an interpretative case study with a descriptive characteristic using purposive sampling was chosen to allow the authors to make choices regulated to the attributes of the participants. Para-athletes must live in Quetzaltenango and join voluntary participation in the study. The age of the participants was between 18 and 52 years. The study was based on the use of questionnaires through semi-structured interviews previously validated by a group of experts in the field combining observations and a field journal.



### Study context

The study was carried out in Quetzaltenango, a department located in the southwestern region of Guatemala. In the last Paralympic Games, a para-athlete from Quetzaltenango participated in Para athletics events, which is one of the most practiced Paralympic sports in the area; among others that have been practiced we can mention: goalball and cycling. The Para Athletics group trains at the facilities of the Quetzaltenango Sports Complex and maintains systematic training; however, the number of para-athletes is reduced. Goalball represents a larger group of people with visual disabilities who belong to different municipalities of Quetzaltenango and who only train one day a week at the Quetzaltenango Sports Complex. This group does not have a sports coach, they usually meet to practice mainly with a recreational focus.

### Procedures

The study was regulated based on the Declaration of Helsinki (Hong Kong, September 1989). The strategy was to apply the script of questions to the participants in Quetzaltenango. The second author trained the first and third authors to apply the interview to minimize bias in the process. The first author explained the conditions to the participants, emphasizing that the process would be anonymous, the data obtained would be kept confidential and only used for research purposes. A consent form was provided and signed by the participants, and the interview was successfully conducted.

### Participants

The study consisted in a sample of eleven para athletes (11): i) seven goalball participants (7) and ii) four Para athletics participants (4). Corresponding to an age of 18 to 52 years.

### Semi-structured interviews and questionnaire

Qualitative research is usually versatile; in this case, the data collection was conducted through a semi-structured interview questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the instrument for collecting data because they allow people to answer with complete freedom, avoid conditioning, and embrace the perspective of the interviewees (Horton et al., 2004; Smith & Caddick, 2012). The interviewers interact with the interviewees, and one of their characteristics is that the questions are

subject to modification during the interaction (Lopezosa, 2020). A script of questions was prepared as an instrument to help the interviewer collect the data required in the study and validated it through expert judgment.

### Instrument validation and expert judgment

Rugosity and validity are essential aspects, mainly in the qualitative approach were thoughts and experiences are considered (Cabero & Llorente, 2013). For securing this process, the validation of the script of questions was carried out through expert judgment. The three experts selected for this process had close to five years of experience in the subject. Expert judgment consists of the evaluation and recompilation of the criteria of a group of professionals about a subject of study and obtaining a concrete opinion that finally leads to the approval of the instrument (Cabero & Llorente, 2013). Through the experts judgments highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the instrument to redesign the questions according to their judgment (Galicia Alarcón et al., 2017).

### Data analysis

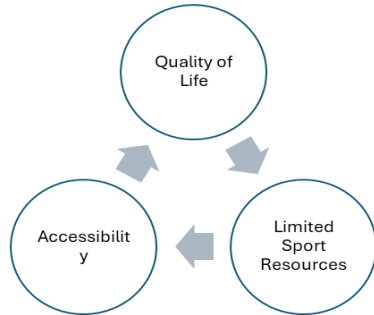
The data collected were categorized and organized to be analyzed systematically. The process considered the following steps: i) obtain the information, ii) transcribe the interviews, iii) codify the themes, and iv) integrate the information (Urbano, 2016). The recorded data lasted between 20 and 40 min and were translated from Spanish to English in entirety. Thematic and axial coding of the transcript was based on the validated set of questions. A code was assigned manually for the transcription and codification of the interviews to maintain anonymity (Ñaupas Paitán, Mejía Mejía, Novoa, & Villagómez, 2014; Smith & Caddick, 2012).

### RESULTS

Three major themes emerged from the axial coding of the participants interviews related to the factors that limit the practice of paralympic sports: i) quality of life, ii) accessibility and iii) limited sport resources (Figure 1). The codes were established based on an a priori review of the body of knowledge. A code was provided to participants to protect their anonymity (Table 1).



**Figure 1.** Classification of limiting factors in the practice of para-athletics.



**Table 1.** Coding of participants

No.	Sport	Sex
P1	Goalball	Men
P2	Goalball	Men
P3	Goalball	Men
P4	Goalball	Woman
P5	Goalball	Woman
P6	Goalball	Woman
P7	Goalball	Men
P8	Para athletics	Men
P9	Para athletics	Woman
P10	Para athletics	Woman
P11	Para athletics	Woman
P12	Boccia	Men
P13	Boccia	Woman

**Quality of life**

The first theme describes the challenges that face the participants in their daily lives. The subthemes were the followings: i) economic and ii) environmental.

**Economic**

P1 stated that the absence of economic resources is the main limitation for those who practice sports, considering the transport costs, sports implements in addition to covering personal needs outside of sports practice must be paid by themselves.

*P1 "The number one factor for not being able to practice sports is economic which involves transport, moving outside for attending training facilities".*

P5 declared that the economic situation of para-athletes is complicated because the cost of inputs has risen significantly, so resources to invest in sports practice are scarce, which affects the frequency of training.

*P5 "Economically, everything is difficult. Now everything is expensive, everything is going up, and we must prioritize other things".*

P10 also states that he does not have sufficient economic resources to invest in transportation to sports facilities, which has been a major barrier to systematically attend sports practices.

*P10 "Sometimes I don't have money, I would like to train all week, but I have to travel far, and I can't anymore".*

**Environmental**

P5 stated that the environment is not always pleasant for PWD mainly because the attitude of society has been a barrier, in their daily life they face discrimination, since the population does not know about the disability issue.

*P5 "More than all the absence of knowledge, many times there is a lot of discrimination",*

P11 also highlights the importance of society's education to relate to PWD, the structure in general is not suitable for the inclusion of PWD, this situation is a limitation for their social activity.

*P11 "The structure is not made for people with disabilities, and neither is the education of the people around us".*

P3 reported that external sounds have a negative impact on their sports practices, impairing their performance during the game. The environment is not the most adequate for this type of practice.

*P3 "It is another barrier also because the noise is very harmful to us, blind people".*

**Accessibility**

The second theme describes the factors that limit effective mobility and access to different sports facilities. The subthemes were the following: i) urbanistic, ii) architectural, iii) transport, and iv) communication.

**Urbanistic**

P4 stated the insecurity he feels when walking on the streets when he goes to practice sports, the structure of the pedestrian areas is not designed to be used by people with disabilities and some are in poor condition, which makes it difficult for him to move around.

*P4 "You can't use the sidewalks and they are not good there are many slopes, there are drains, bleachers and poles" "I can't walk safely".*





P11 affirms the insecurity and risk faced by PWD when moving around, urban areas are not accessible and produce limitations for wheelchair users.

P11 *"There are many barriers to move my wheelchair on the streets, the unevenness, the sidewalks, even parts where I cannot pass because they are too narrow, and I have to use the street where cars pass"*.

P5 makes known that there have been accidents when moving on the streets, when repairs are made in pedestrian spaces accessible signage is not placed and people with visual impairment are affected.

P5 *"sometimes they are fixing the streets, there are holes in the ground, and no one notifies us, there have been accidents with certain colleagues because they do not warn them, and they are gone"*.

#### **Architectural**

P6 stated that sometimes there are difficulties in the use of sports facilities, even though they can only use the space once a week it is not guaranteed, the group does not have other adequate facilities to train.

P6 *"The only thing that has affected us a lot lately is that they have given us the court on Wednesdays, but, just like eight days ago we all came and here it was occupied"*.

P8 reports that the infrastructure of the sports facilities is not accessible, which affects the mobility and autonomy of wheelchair users, who depend on other people for access.

P8 *"When someone with a wheelchair arrives, we have to carry them on the bleachers to go to the gym"*.

P12 expressed the situations he faces as a wheelchair user, mobility within the facilities is limited, spaces such as bathrooms and hallways do not have adequate measures for their use.

P11 *"The issue of bathrooms, for example, for training I have to change clothes and sometimes I can't, because the places are too small"*.

#### **Transportation**

P6 stated that the use of public transportation causes insecurity for PWD, it does not have accessible spaces for everyone.

P6 *"It is difficult to use public transportation, sometimes it is scary, it is not so accessible"*.

P11 stated how complicated it is for PWD to use public transportation, in addition to the fact that there is no accessible structure, the negative attitude of the people who provide the service is detrimental to PWD.

P11 *"It is difficult because we can't fit in the minibuses or the vans or they don't want to take us", "it is not a walk but a martyrdom, it is a real odyssey to go out on the street"*.

P3 expresses some aspects that should be modified in public transportation to eliminate physical barriers. Specific places should be determined for people with disabilities and there should be ramps to facilitate the mobility of those who need it.

P3 *"I would like the bleachers to be replaced by ramps and a specific place for people with disabilities"*.

#### **Communication**

P3 stated that it is important to improve communication within the facilities for people with disabilities, the signage is not enough, it is necessary for the staff to guide them to improve their experience so that they can use the facilities properly and without limitations.

P3 *"A person who is aware that, although the signs are there, it is complicated to find where they are"*.

#### **Limited Sports Resources**

The third theme elaborate on the limitations of the participants to get resources for practicing sports. The subthemes were the following: i) professional training, ii) daily life and iii) pandemic.

##### **Professional training**

P5 stated that they do not have the support of a professional to direct training, thus technical progress is minimal.

P5 *"here we do not have a coach to help us improve techniques"*.

P7 confirms that the lack of a coach is a limitation since training is not developed systematically. A qualified person is needed to make the practice more demanding and to transform recreational activities into competitive ones.

P7 *"there is no stronger demand to say that here we are going to raise the level" "we do not have a good training, we only come to play and each one at home does the exercises he/she can"*.

P12 expressed his interest in continuing with sports practices, however, he affirms that there is no professional to train them in sports. He also mentions that there is a lack of knowledge about sports in the locality.

P12 *"I don't know where we can compete and play, I want to learn more techniques, I want to go"*



*compete", "nobody came to train us, and nobody here knows how to play".*

#### **Daily Life**

P6 stated that sometimes it is difficult to attend training due to his daily activities, mainly because of his business which remains closed when he attends sports practices.

P6 *"the weather affects, as well as today several people are looking for me, at the store they are going to leave orders for me, and I am not there".*

P8 also expressed that sometimes he has given up practicing sports, considering that his priority is education, the time to practice sports is limited.

P8 *"I have stopped training due to study and sometimes personal issues because it is not only sport, but also study".*

P10 also expresses that one of the limiting factors is the time needed to move from one place to another for sports practice. Due to the disability, his mobility is usually slower, and he needs to invest more time.

P10 *"Sometimes it is hard for me to go out because I walk slowly, it takes me a long time and I need to leave very early to get there on time",*

#### **Pandemic**

P8 stated that the COVID 19 pandemic was a major constraint, as sports activities were completely suspended for an extended period.

P8 *"because the pandemic came to affect in many occasions because we came to train and then the pandemic arose and from there, it was like they closed the country. We were several months without training, almost six months".*

P12 and P13 reported that due to the pandemic, sports activities were suspended and were not resumed.

P12 *"because of the pandemic we didn't continue playing, we didn't go to the competitions".*

P13 *"because of the pandemic we didn't continue".*

## **DISCUSSION**

The objective of this study was to identify the limitations faced by people who practice para-sports in Quetzaltenango. There are a diversity of barriers and facilitators related to the participation of PWD in sport (Monforte et al., 2022; Rimmer et al., 2004; Vieira et al., 2021). The findings in this research study revealed nine factors, that were classified into three categories: i) quality of life, ii) accessibility, and iii) limited sport resources. The most relevant

factor within the quality of life that refers to the challenges faced by the para-athletes in their daily lives and the other is the scarcity of economic resources to practice para-sports. Previous studies have also identified this finding, considering it one of the main barriers for the practice of para-sports (Blauwet & lezzoni, 2014; McLoughlin et al., 2017; Rimmer et al., 2004).

The economic factor influences the purchase of sport equipment, covering transportation costs in addition to other personal needs of para-athletes. PWD make large investments to travel to sport facilities (Jaarsma et al., 2014). Some participants do not have the necessary resources to pay for transportation and affects their regular participation because the resources of PWD to invest in sports are limited (Lape et al., 2018). This study shows that as economic resources are limited, constant participation is widely affected as it is not economically accessible.

PWD face other difficulties that are considered environmental; these are related to the attitudes and environment promoted by society (WHO, 2011). This means that PWD are victims of discrimination and exclusion in social spaces. This agrees with research that describes that negative attitudes in society limit the access of PWD to sport (Blauwet & Lezzoni, 2014). To facilitate the access of PWD to sports, it is necessary to focus on education the population to improve attitudes towards PWD (Bantjes & Swarts, 2018).

Regarding accessibility, barriers were identified in the urban area. People with disabilities are limited in their movement to sports facilities due to obstacles, an absence of ramps, and adequate spaces to move without problems. This shows the limited accessibility that exists in the areas, streets, and public places. A previous study mention that people with disabilities who practice sports face accessibility difficulties, architectural barriers, and the use of transportation (Rimmer et al., 2004). The results show that sports facilities are not completely accessible for PWD, and their frequent use also represents a difficulty. The limitation of accessibility to the infrastructure (Bantjes & Swartz, 2018), the absence of existence of sport facilities (Jaarsma et al., 2014) and the inadequate conditions limit the development of para-sport (Nhamo & Sibanda, 2021).



The use of public transport represents a significant challenge for people with disabilities, as it is not accessible mainly for wheelchair users and people with visual impairments. Public transportation does not have ramps or exclusive places for people with disabilities, and it is also one of the main environments where participants indicated being victims of discrimination and/or exclusion. This findings agrees with previous studies that consider transportation as an important environmental and accessibility barrier for the participation of PWD in sport (Jaarsma et al., 2014; Ruiz, 2012) and represent a more important challenge for wheelchair users and people with visual impairment when they go to practice sports.

Regarding communication, it was identified that there is no accessible information; therefore, there is a need to receive information about the use of sports facilities and attention from the personnel in charge of the facilities to enable access to them and more PWD find difficult to access to sport (Lape et al., 2018). The limited adequate information is one of the main limitation for PWD and their access to sport (Darcy et al., 2011). Another, factor was the difficulty in the time management on of the most important barrier when PWD practice sport (Abellán & Januário, 2017). Among other factors is the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as time, which has not been pronounced among the most relevant limitations. Despite this, it did represent a great difficulty for some para-athletes who have not currently resumed sports training; this factor was not found in previous research studies.

The most important barrier in this study is the absence of professional sports training for PWD, para-athletes do not have specialized personnel to carry out sports training. There is no support that contributes to the improvement of sports performance, considering that the role of coaches is fundamental for the development of sport (McLoughlin et al., 2017). The participation of PWD in sport is limited by the training equipment and the role of the coach (Nhamo & Sibanda, 2021). The absence of sports coaches negatively influences the sports performance of para-athletes (Jaarsma et al., 2014) where it is mentioned that the shortage of qualified supervision is a barrier (Bantjes & Swartz, 2018). They also make it known that not having adequate training is a barrier for people with disabilities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The participants are still economically dependent, there are cases where they do not have the financial resources to purchase sports equipment. The limitations resulting from limited financial resources cause difficulties to practice para-sports in optimal conditions. The physical and social barriers of their personal environments affect their ability to actively participate without difficulties in the practice. The scarce information about the opportunities to practice a para-sport is a limitation to involve a greater number of people, which results in a limitation for the promotion of sports development. Public transportation is a significant constraint because of the discrimination that participants experience from people who are not sensitized to disabilities. The infrastructure of sports facilities is inadequate and limited for para-sport training. The facilities designed exclusively for the practice of goalball, since they require certain specificities for their practice, are generally adapted to the facilities used to practice other sports. The accessibility of the participants evidence problems of mobilization within the city that can cause accidents and harm the participants. The scarcity of accessible urban areas increases dependency and makes it more difficult for them to function in society. The absence of coaches or specialists decreases the range of sports development of the participants, increasing the possibility of suffering injuries during training. Future research studies could replicate this model in other regions of the country to see if our findings can be generalized with respect to the limitations of the practice of para-sports.

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