

Original Article

# Characterization of occupational participation in athletes with disabilities practicing boccia

*Caracterización de la participación ocupacional en deportistas con discapacidad que practican boccia*

Caracterização da participação ocupacional em atletas com deficiência que praticam bocha

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**How to cite:** Hernández-Lanas, O., Molina-Pacheco, F., Lucero-Sánchez, V., Carrasco-Palacios, V., & Bruna-Torres, J. (2026). Characterization of occupational participation in athletes with disabilities practicing boccia. *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional*, 34, e4049. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2526-8910.cto412540492>

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Boccia is an adapted sport for individuals with severe physical disabilities, promoting the development of motor, cognitive, and social skills. However, in Chile, there is limited research on the characteristics of athletes and the factors influencing their occupational participation in this sport. **Objective:** To characterize the occupational participation of athletes with disabilities practicing boccia in Santiago, Chile. **Methodology:** Descriptive, quantitative, and cross-sectional study conducted in 2024 in three boccia clubs in the Santiago Metropolitan Region, Chile. Seventeen athletes with motor disabilities, aged 18 years or older and with at least six months of practice, participated. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). **Results:** The majority of athletes were male, with ages between 35 and 44 years. The primary motivation for starting boccia was the recommendation of healthcare professionals. Athletes trained more intensively in sports clubs (around 5 hours per week) than at home. A strong sense of belonging, commitment, and motivation was noted. Although accessibility and social

Received on Feb. 7, 2025; 1<sup>st</sup> Revision on Aug. 21, 2025; Accepted on Nov. 6, 2025.



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support are important, economic barriers and lack of adapted transportation limit participation. Participants reported satisfaction with their achievements, the social support received, and the lack of involvement in other activities. **Conclusions:** Boccia represents a meaningful occupation for individuals with physical disabilities, contributing to their overall well-being. Training in clubs strengthens commitment; however, economic barriers and limited infrastructure impact the sustainability of the sport.

**Keywords:** Sports for Persons with Disabilities, Occupational Therapy, Para-Athletes.

### Resumen

**Introducción:** La boccia es un deporte adaptado para personas con discapacidades físicas severas, que favorece el desarrollo de habilidades motoras, cognitivas y sociales. En Chile, sin embargo, existen pocas investigaciones sobre las características de los deportistas y los factores que influyen en su participación ocupacional en este deporte.

**Objetivo:** Caracterizar la participación ocupacional de deportistas con discapacidad que practican boccia en Santiago de Chile. **Metodología:** Estudio cuantitativo, descriptivo y transversal realizado en 2024 en tres clubes deportivos de la Región Metropolitana de Santiago, Chile. Participaron 17 deportistas con discapacidad motora, mayores de 18 años y con al menos seis meses de práctica. Los datos se recolectaron mediante un cuestionario estructurado y fueron analizados con SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). **Resultados:** La mayoría de los deportistas eran hombres, con edades entre 35 y 44 años. La principal motivación para comenzar a practicar boccia fue la recomendación de profesionales de salud. Los deportistas entrenan más intensamente en los clubes deportivos que en sus hogares. Se destaca un fuerte sentido de pertenencia, compromiso y motivación. Si bien la accesibilidad y el apoyo social son importantes, las barreras económicas y la falta de transporte adaptado limitan la participación. Los participantes expresaron satisfacción por los logros alcanzados, el apoyo social recibido y la falta de involucramiento en otras actividades. **Conclusiones:** La boccia es una actividad significativa para personas con discapacidades físicas, promoviendo su bienestar integral. El entrenamiento en clubes refuerza el compromiso, pero las barreras económicas y la infraestructura limitada afectan su sostenibilidad.

**Palabras clave:** Deportes para Personas con Discapacidad, Terapia Ocupacional, Paratletas.

### Resumo

**Introdução:** A boccia é um esporte adaptado para pessoas com deficiências físicas severas, promovendo o desenvolvimento de habilidades motoras, cognitivas e sociais. No entanto, no Chile, existem poucas pesquisas sobre as características dos atletas e os fatores que influenciam sua participação ocupacional nesse esporte. **Objetivo:** Caracterizar a participação ocupacional de atletas com deficiência que praticam boccia em Santiago, Chile. **Metodologia:** Estudo quantitativo, descritivo e transversal realizado em 2024 em três clubes de boccia da Região Metropolitana de Santiago, Chile. Participaram 17 atletas com deficiência motora, maiores de 18 anos e com pelo menos seis meses de prática. Os dados foram coletados por meio de um questionário estruturado e analisados com o SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). **Resultados:** A maioria dos atletas era do sexo masculino, com idades entre 35 e 44

anos. A principal motivação para começar a praticar boccia foi a recomendação de profissionais de saúde. Os atletas treinam de maneira mais intensa nos clubes esportivos (aproximadamente 5 horas semanais) do que em casa. Destaca-se um forte senso de pertencimento, compromisso e motivação. Embora a acessibilidade e o apoio social sejam importantes, as barreiras econômicas e a falta de transporte adaptado limitam a participação. Expressaram satisfação com suas conquistas, importância do apoio social recebido e falta de envolvimento em outras atividades. **Conclusões:** A boccia é uma atividade significativa para pessoas com deficiências físicas, promovendo seu bem-estar integral. O treinamento nos clubes reforça o compromisso, mas as barreiras econômicas e a infraestrutura limitada afetam a sustentabilidade do esporte.

**Palavras-chave:** Esportes para Pessoas com Deficiência, Terapia Ocupacional, Paratletas.

## Introduction

Occupational participation is defined as the active involvement of individuals in meaningful activities across various areas of life, such as work, leisure, and activities of daily living, within a sociocultural context (Kielhofner, 2011). This participation is fundamental to well-being and quality of life, as it facilitates the development of skills, autonomy, and community integration (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020). In this sense, physical activity and sport are recognized as key tools for promoting occupational participation, especially among populations at risk of physical inactivity, such as people with disabilities (Bullen & Clarke, 2020).

Adapted sport has gained relevance as a means of promoting social inclusion and improving the quality of life of people with disabilities. Several studies have shown that sports practice positively influences physical health, emotional well-being, and the development of social skills (Martin Ginis et al., 2021; Muñoz-Llerena et al., 2024). Furthermore, sport contributes to strengthening identity and self-esteem, providing a sense of achievement and belonging to a community (Arruda et al., 2023; Biagini et al., 2022). However, participation in adapted sports is conditioned by multiple factors, both internal and external, which may facilitate or restrict engagement in sport (Muñoz Hinrichsen et al., 2020).

These factors can be classified as external, such as family, culture, and society, and internal, related to the alignment between skills, personal satisfaction, and other individual aspects (Gómez Lillo, 2021).

Among the internal factors influencing sports participation, motivation, self-confidence, and individuals' physical, cognitive, and emotional capacities stand out, as they determine the level of involvement and the perception of self-efficacy in sport (Ferreira et al., 2023). External factors include access to adequate infrastructure, social support from family members, coaches, and teammates, as well as the existence of public policies that promote inclusion in adapted sports (Jaarsma et al., 2014). In this context, the availability of accessible spaces and the training of professionals qualified to work with people with disabilities are fundamental elements for enhancing participation in sports activities (Mawena & Sorkpor, 2025).

In particular, occupational therapy plays a crucial role in identifying barriers and facilitators to sports participation, designing adaptations, and implementing assistive technologies that optimize performance and safety. Occupational therapists develop

personalized strategies that enable people with disabilities to participate autonomously, safely, and meaningfully in sports, thereby promoting inclusion across diverse contexts (Navarrete Moriones & Cruz Perdomo, 2025).

Occupational participation can be approached from three fundamental dimensions: satisfaction, which is enhanced through activities such as sports that contribute to improved quality of life and the recognition of individual abilities (Castañares & Alonso-Panizo, 2023); expectations and goals, linked to roles that strengthen identity and self-esteem, particularly within inclusive sports settings (Bogado & Villalba, 2023); and interests, which drive the development of social skills and empowerment, facilitating integration across different environments (Chaves & García, 2022).

Despite the widely recognized benefits of adapted sport, people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to participation. These include limited access to appropriate equipment, a scarcity of inclusive clubs and programs, and attitudinal barriers that restrict opportunities for integration (Muñoz Hinrichsen et al., 2020). In Chile, the Second National Study of Physical Activity and Sport Habits in the Population with Disabilities reported that 60% of this population is physically inactive, highlighting the urgent need for strategies that promote sports inclusion (Chile, 2020).

In the Chilean context, Law No. 20.978 recognizes adapted sport as a tool for inclusion and well-being, establishing guidelines for its promotion and development (Chile, 2016). However, its implementation faces challenges such as insufficient funding, the absence of specific public policies, and the lack of a structured support network for athletes with disabilities (Muñoz Hinrichsen et al., 2020). These limitations generate a gap between regulatory frameworks and practice, hindering equitable access to sport.

Within the disciplines of adapted sports, boccia has gained significant relevance, particularly for individuals with severe physical disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and neuromuscular disorders (Ferreira et al., 2022). It is characterized by its accessibility and its potential to foster the development of motor, cognitive, and social skills. Furthermore, its structure enables participation at different competitive levels, facilitating the inclusion of individuals with varying degrees of disability (Kerguelen & Díaz, 2023).

Boccia is a strategic sport in which players throw or roll colored balls (six red and six blue) with the objective of placing them as close as possible to a target ball known as the jack (Rahayu et al., 2023).

Athletes are grouped into four main sport classes (BC1, BC2, BC3, and BC4), determined according to the type and degree of disability. The BC1, BC2, and BC3 classes correspond to athletes with cerebral impairments affecting all four limbs, whereas the BC4 class includes athletes with non-cerebral impairments affecting all four limbs. Specifically, athletes in the BC3 class require the use of a ramp to deliver the ball and the assistance of a sport assistant (Kataoka et al., 2020). In addition, there is a recreational category known as the Open class, which includes athletes with various disabilities and provides greater accessibility to the sport (Abellán et al., 2018).

Several studies have shown that boccia participation enhances autonomy, improves upper limb function, and stimulates strategic and decision-making skills (Suárez-Iglesias et al., 2020; Koper et al., 2020). It also has a positive impact on socialization by fostering teamwork, communication, and integration within the sports community (Ferreira et al., 2023). However, the literature addressing the relationship between boccia practice and occupational participation remains limited, which restricts a

comprehensive understanding of the sport's impact on the daily lives of its participants (Correa et al., 2020).

From an occupational therapy perspective, adapted sports, and boccia in particular, offer an opportunity to promote autonomy, social interaction, and the development of meaningful skills (Costalonga et al., 2020). Occupational therapists can design interventions that optimize athletic performance, enhance the appropriate use of equipment, and strengthen the inclusion of athletes with disabilities in competitive and community settings (Lima & Alves, 2020).

Given this knowledge gap, the present study aims to characterize the occupational participation of athletes with disabilities who practice boccia in Santiago, Chile, identifying the factors that facilitate or limit their involvement in this discipline.

It is expected that this study will contribute to the development of strategies aimed at the inclusion and promotion of adapted sports, while also recognizing and validating the experiences of athletes with disabilities. In addition, it seeks to generate knowledge that supports occupational therapy practice by promoting the optimization of resources and the implementation of interventions that encourage and enhance greater participation in meaningful sports activities.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a descriptive, cross-sectional, observational quantitative design. Its purpose was to identify the characteristics and profiles of a group of athletes who practice boccia, in order to measure and collect information individually or collectively, without intervening in the phenomenon, limiting itself solely to observing and recording how it manifests (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza Torres, 2023).

Data collection took place between August and October 2024 at three boccia clubs located in the Metropolitan Region of Chile. This region was selected due to its high concentration of people with disabilities who practice this sport, which facilitated access to a representative sample of participants interested in boccia practice (Rozas Assael et al., 2023; Chile, 2020).

The inclusion criteria were as follows: individuals aged 18 years or older who practiced boccia and presented with loss of function in the legs, arms, hands, and trunk due to motor impairments such as hypertonia, ataxia, athetosis, limited range of motion, or muscle weakness. Participants were also required to have at least six months of regular practice in the sport, ensuring sufficient experience in the activity. In addition, participants had to demonstrate sufficient physical and cognitive capacity to communicate verbally or non-verbally in order to safely provide relevant information. All participants provided written informed consent.

On the other hand, the exclusion criteria included severe cognitive impairment that prevented communication, recent injuries affecting health status, inability to follow instructions, disruptive behaviors that compromised safety, medical conditions requiring treatment that could interfere with participation, and failure to meet the requirements for regular participation in sports clubs.

Verification of these criteria was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, medical records and sports participation histories available in club files were reviewed, and when necessary, additional information was obtained through brief interviews with the participant and/or their caregiver. In the second stage, each participant was observed during a typical training session to assess their ability to understand and

follow instructions, as well as the presence of behaviors that could interfere with safety. This observation was supported by a checklist developed by the research team, which included indicators related to attention, comprehension of instructions, and behavior in a group setting.

Direct observation using checklists is a structured method widely used in quantitative research to systematically and reproducibly record specific behaviors, thereby enhancing data reliability (Jones, 2022). In sports contexts, this approach allows behaviors to be recorded in their natural environment, ensuring methodological rigor and adaptability to the context (Anguera et al., 2017).

Based on the eligibility criteria, 17 athletes were recruited from a total of 23 registered across the three sports clubs. This sample of 17 participants is considered adequate and justified for several reasons. First, it is representative, as it includes a significant proportion of club members. Second, it is comparable to previous studies, such as that conducted by Correa et al. (2020), which used samples of approximately 21 athletes, suggesting that this sample size is common in research on this sport. Finally, its proportionality is supported by data from the Chilean Paralympic Boccia Federation, which reports approximately 42 athletes affiliated with clubs across various cities nationwide who participate in the national circuit (Comité Paralímpico de Chile, 2024). Thus, a sample of 17 participants is considered representative of the boccia athlete population in the Metropolitan Region.

Participant selection was conducted using non-probability, purposive sampling, which allows for the selection of specific cases based on predefined criteria rather than on chance (Otzen & Manterola, 2017). This strategy facilitates the identification of relevant and representative cases, selected according to the study objectives and the research team's capacity to choose participants best suited to the research needs.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of closed-ended questions. Some items were designed using a Likert-type scale to measure participants' levels of agreement or disagreement with various statements. Other questions employed an ordinal rating scale that included a neutral midpoint, as well as positive and negative extremes. Response options were numbered from 1 to 5, which facilitated data coding (Matas, 2018). Finally, some items did not use Likert-type scales but instead offered closed-ended response options, thereby simplifying the analysis process.

The questionnaire was developed by the research team using the Google Forms platform and was evaluated by a panel of experts in research methodology, health sciences, and Paralympic sport. This panel provided feedback on the relevance of the items and suggested modifications to improve the instrument's accuracy and reliability (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2022). After incorporating the recommended adjustments, the questionnaire was approved for implementation.

The survey was administered in person during boccia training sessions using electronic devices such as tablets or mobile phones. The estimated completion time ranged from 30 to 35 minutes, ensuring participant comfort. It is important to note that the instrument did not require prior training.

Once the data were collected, a thorough review and organization of the information were conducted to ensure data integrity and facilitate analysis. This procedure was essential to guaranteeing the validity and quality of the research, as it involved identifying potential errors or omissions in the dataset, followed by the coding of responses using a standardized coding system.

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), version 26, which is considered an optimal tool for processing and analyzing both large and small datasets (Field, 2024). The descriptive analysis included frequency distributions and percentages for each item to identify trends and patterns in the responses (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza Torres, 2023). Bar charts were also used, as recommended by Kirk et al. (2016), to facilitate visual comparison and interpretation of the observed trends. These charts were complemented with percentages and numerical values, allowing for a clear and precise presentation of the information.

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Chile (Project No. 112-2024; Minutes No. 96), and written informed consent was obtained from all participants. No conflicts of interest related to funding, sponsorship, institutional affiliation, or authorship were declared in this research.

## Results

The sociodemographic characteristics of the boccia athletes surveyed are presented below (Table 1). Regarding gender, males predominated among participants, representing 82.4%, while females accounted for 17.6%.

**Table 1.** Characterization of Boccia Athletes Surveyed.

Characteristic	Number	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	3	17.6%
Male	14	82.4%
<b>Age</b>		
25 to 34 years old	5	29.4%
35 to 44 years old	7	41.2%
45 to 54 years old	2	11.8%
55 or older	3	17.6%
<i>Average (40 years old)</i>		
<b>Educational level</b>		
Basic	2	11.76%
Middle	9	52.94%
Technical	1	5.88%
Higher	3	17.65%
Special	2	11.76%
<b>Paid Employment</b>		
Yes	7	41.2%
No	10	58.8%
<b>Diagnosis</b>		
Congenital	7	41.2%

**Note:** The table details the frequency and percentage of the characteristics of the surveyed athletes from the three boccia clubs in Santiago, Chile.

**Table 1.** Continued...

Characteristic	Number	%
Acquired	10	58.8%
<b>Initiation into Boccia</b>		
By Recommendation of a Healthcare Professional	12	44.44%
Close Social Circle	8	29.63%
Self-Motivation	5	18.52%
Media or Social Networks	2	7.41%
<b>Time of Boccia Practice</b>		
6 months - 5 years	11	64.71%
6 years - 10 years	1	5.88%
11 years - 20 years	0	0%
21 years - 30 years	4	23.53%
More than 30 years	1	5.88%
<i>Average (11 years of experience)</i>		
<b>Sport Class</b>		
BC1	2	11.76%
BC2	4	23.53%
BC3	4	23.53%
BC4	1	5.88%
Free	6	35.29%

**Note:** The table details the frequency and percentage of the characteristics of the surveyed athletes from the three boccia clubs in Santiago, Chile.

In terms of age distribution, the majority of participants were between 35 and 44 years of age (41.2%), followed by those aged 25-34 years (29.4%). Smaller proportions were observed in the 45-54 age range (11.8%) and among participants aged over 55 years (17.6%), with a mean age of 40 years.

With respect to educational level, more than half of the participants (52.9%) reported having completed secondary education, while 17.6% had higher education. Additionally, 11.8% reported basic education, and another 11.8% indicated special education. The smallest proportion (5.9%) corresponded to those with technical training. Regarding employment status, 41.2% of the athletes reported having engaged in paid work during the previous month, whereas 58.8% were unemployed.

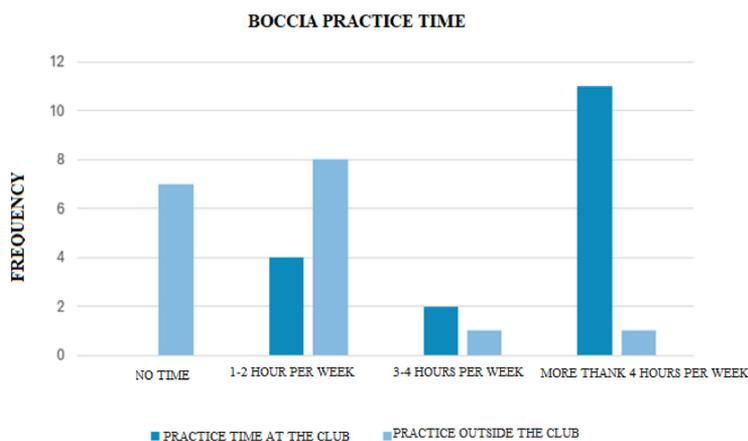
Regarding diagnoses, 41.2% of participants presented with congenital conditions, while 58.8% had acquired conditions. The main reasons for initiating boccia practice were recommendations from healthcare professionals (such as physicians, occupational therapists, kinesiologists, or physical education teachers) and/or involvement with rehabilitation centers (44.4%), followed by peer influence (29.6%), personal interest (18.5%), and media sources (7.4%), including the internet, social networks, or municipal information channels.

Experience in the sport ranged from 10 months to 45 years, with the majority of participants reporting between 6 months and 5 years of experience (64.7%). A further

23.5% reported between 21 and 30 years of experience, and only 5.9% reported more than 30 years, with an overall mean experience of 11 years.

Finally, the distribution by sport class showed participation in BC1 (11.8%), BC2 and BC3 (23.5%), BC4 (5.9%), and the Open class (35.3%), highlighting the functional diversity of the athletes and their inclusion across different boccia modalities.

Regarding the analysis of training hours, significant differences were identified between training conducted at sports clubs and training carried out at the athletes' homes (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Number of Hours Athletes Practice Boccia in Sports Clubs and at Home.

**Note:** The graph compares the frequency of hours dedicated to boccia practice by athletes, distinguishing between training conducted in sports clubs and at home.

At the clubs, 64.7% of participants trained for more than 4 hours per week, 11.8% trained between 3 and 4 hours, and 23.5% trained between 1 and 2 hours. The mean training time in this context was 5 hours per week (SD = 0.87), indicating consistent dedication. This pattern may be explained by the organized structure of sports clubs, where established schedules and the availability of adequate infrastructure encourage more regular practice.

In contrast, training outside sports clubs showed lower frequency and greater variability. Only 5.9% of athletes trained more than 4 hours per week at home, another 5.9% trained between 3 and 4 hours, while the majority (47.1%) trained between 1 and 2 hours, and 41.2% reported not training at home. The mean practice time in this context was 2 hours per week (SD = 1.27), reflecting notable differences in training intensity depending on the training environment.

Regarding the internal factors influencing occupational participation in boccia, a high level of commitment and willingness to engage in the sport was observed, along with a strong sense of belonging to the club (Table 2). With respect to flexibility in attending training sessions and events, 76.5% of respondents strongly agreed that they adjust their personal schedules, 17.6% agreed, and 5.9% remained neutral, reflecting high motivation and willingness to fulfill club commitments.

In terms of participation, 70.6% of respondents considered themselves active members, demonstrating a high level of involvement in team activities, and 64.7% perceived a strong sense of community while practicing boccia, highlighting a positive

**Table 2.** Respondents' preferences regarding internal factors influencing occupational participation in Boccia practice.

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA
Are you willing to <b>adjust your personal schedule</b> to attend club training sessions and events?	0	0	1 (5.9%)	3 (17.6%)	13 (76.5%)
Do you consider yourself <b>an active member</b> in the club's activities and training sessions?	0	0	1 (5.9%)	4 (23.5%)	12 (70.6%)
Do you feel part of a <b>community</b> when practicing boccia in this club?	0	0	2 (11.8%)	4 (23.5%)	11 (64.7%)
Do you feel that your <b>opinions</b> are taken into account in the club?	0	1 (5.9%)	3 (17.6%)	1 (5.9%)	12 (70.6%)
Do you feel <b>valued</b> by your <b>teammates</b> ?	0	1 (5.9%)	1 (5.9%)	0	15 (88.2%)
Do you feel <b>supported</b> by the <b>coaching staff</b> ?	0	0	0	2 (11.8%)	15 (88.2%)
Do you consider that the current <b>training</b> sessions are adequate to improve your <b>performance</b> ?	0	0	0	3 (17.6%)	14 (82.4%)
Do you consider that your <b>disability</b> significantly affects your <b>performance</b> in boccia?	9 (52.9%)	2 (11.8%)	2 (11.8%)	3 (17.6%)	1 (5.9%)
	<b>N</b>	<b>AN</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>AL</b>
Do you get involved in <b>additional club activities</b> , such as events or meetings?	1 (5.9%)	1 (5.9%)	4 (23.5%)	2 (11.8%)	9 (52.9%)
Do you participate in <b>competitions or tournaments</b> organized by the club?	1 (5.9%)	1 (5.9%)	2 (11.8%)	0	13 (76.5%)
	<b>VL</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>VH</b>
How would you describe your level of <b>commitment</b> to boccia practice?	0	0	3 (17.6%)	9 (52.9%)	5 (29.4%)
How would you describe your <b>overall health</b> level since you started practicing boccia?	0	0	4 (23.5%)	7 (41.2%)	6 (35.3%)
	<b>PD</b>	<b>SD1</b>	<b>SD2</b>		
For what <b>purpose</b> do you practice boccia?	15 (29.4%)	15 (29.4%)	8 (15.6%)		

**Note:** SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; N: neither agree nor disagree; A: agree; SA: strongly agree; N: never; AN: almost never; S: sometimes; AA: almost always; AL: always; VL: very low; L: low; M: medium; H: high; VH: very high; PD: personal development; SD1: sports development; SD2: social development.

and supportive social environment. Furthermore, 70.6% of participants indicated that their opinions are taken into account, while 88.2% reported feeling valued by their teammates, and the same percentage perceived support from the coaching staff.

Regarding the suitability of the training programs, 82.4% of participants believed that these programs contribute to improved performance. However, when assessing the perceived impact of their disability on performance, 52.9% did not perceive a significant effect, while 11.8% remained neutral.

With respect to participation in additional activities organized by the clubs, 52.9% of participants reported always participating in events or meetings, and 76.5% consistently participated in competitions or tournaments, demonstrating interest and commitment to the competitive dimension of the sport.

Finally, a high level of dedication to boccia practice was reported by 82.3% of participants. Regarding perceived health benefits, 35.3% indicated a significant improvement since beginning boccia practice, and 41.2% perceived improvements in their physical condition and overall well-being. Concerning the objectives of practice, motivations were distributed among personal development (29.4%), sports development (29.4%), and social development (15.6%).

Regarding the external factors that influence occupational participation in boccia (Table 3), the results highlight aspects related to accessibility and the support available to athletes.

**Table 3.** Respondents' preferences regarding external factors influencing occupational participation in boccia.

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA
I can <b>access my sports facility</b> and all its amenities (restrooms, locker rooms, etc.) <b>without any difficulty</b> .	1 (5.9%)	0	3 (17.6%)	1 (5.9%)	12 (70.6%)
The club has the necessary <b>financial resources</b> to cover expenses for equipment, competitions, etc., to ensure effective practice.	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)	8 (47.1%)	2 (11.8%)	4 (23.5%)
The club has a <b>training program</b> specifically designed to meet my needs as an athlete.	1 (5.9%)	0	2 (11.8%)	3 (17.6%)	11 (64.7%)
	<b>W/WC</b>	<b>APP/T</b>	<b>PT</b>	<b>NAT</b>	<b>AT</b>
How do you <b>get to</b> your training sessions?	2 (11.8%)	3 (17.6%)	5 (29.4%)	6 (35.3%)	1 (5.9%)
	<b>N</b>	<b>AN</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>AL</b>
My <b>family</b> supports me in practicing the sport I enjoy.	1 (5.9%)	0	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)	13 (76.5%)
I have a <b>group of friends</b> who support me in practicing the sport I enjoy.	3 (17.6%)	1 (5.9%)	2 (11.8%)	0	11 (64.7%)
	<b>YES</b>			<b>NO</b>	
Do I have the <b>necessary equipment</b> to train at <b>my club</b> ?	15 (88.2%)			2 (11.8%)	
Do I have <b>the necessary equipment</b> to train <b>at home</b> or any location other than my club?	8 (47.1%)			9 (52.9%)	

Note: SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; N: neither agree nor disagree; A: agree; SA: strongly agree; W/WC: walking / wheelchair; APP/T: mobile applications / taxi; PT: public transportation; NAT: non-adapted transportation; AT: adapted transportation; N: never; AN: almost never; S: sometimes; AA: almost always; AL: always.

Regarding access to sports facilities, 76.5% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they could access them without difficulty, while 5.9% strongly disagreed, indicating

that in some cases accessibility remains a challenge.

In terms of club resources, 35.3% of respondents believe they have sufficient resources to cover equipment and competitions, while 11.8% strongly disagreed. Regarding training, the majority (82.3%) indicated that the programs are adequately adapted to their needs, while only 5.9% indicated the opposite.

Regarding transportation, 35.3% use non-adapted transportation, either their own or that of a family member, 29.4% use public transportation, and adapted transportation is used by only 5.9% of participants. Additionally, 17.6% travel using mobile applications or taxis, and 11.8% walk or use a wheelchair.

As for social support, 76.5% reported always receiving family support, while 5.9% indicated they did not. With respect to friends, 64.7% reported receiving constant support, 11.8% occasional support, and 17.6% none.

Finally, regarding equipment, 88.2% of athletes stated that they had the necessary equipment to train at their clubs, while 11.8% indicated the opposite.

For training outside the club, only 47.1% have adequate resources, while 52.9% lack the necessary equipment.

Occupational participation in boccia demonstrates a positive effect on various aspects of participants' lives, particularly on their athletic performance and progress toward achieving personal goals (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Respondents' perceptions of occupational participation elements in Boccia.

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA
Has your <b>participation in other areas</b> of interest increased since you started practicing boccia?	6 (35.3%)	1 (5.9%)	2 (11.8%)	4 (23.5%)	4 (23.5%)
Does boccia practice meet your <b>expectations</b> regarding your role as an athlete?	0	0	1 (5.9%)	4 (23.5%)	12 (70.6%)
Do you feel that being a boccia athlete has strengthened your <b>personal identity</b> ?	1 (5.9%)	0	0	4 (23.5%)	12 (70.6%)
Does participation in boccia help you make progress toward your <b>personal goals</b> ?	2 (11.8%)	0	3 (17.6%)	5 (29.4%)	7 (41.2%)
	VD	DS	NDS	S	VS
Are you <b>satisfied</b> with your current level of participation in boccia practice?	0	0	3 (17.6%)	6 (35.3%)	8 (47.1%)

**Note:** SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; N: neither agree nor disagree; A: agree; SA: strongly agree; VD: very dissatisfied; DS: dissatisfied; NDS: neither dissatisfied nor satisfied; S: satisfied; VS: very satisfied.

Regarding participation in other areas of interest, 35.3% of respondents strongly disagreed that boccia practice had increased their involvement in other activities, while 23.5% agreed and another 23.5% strongly agreed, reflecting diverse experiences in this area.

With respect to expectations regarding their role as athletes, 70.6% strongly agreed that boccia meets these expectations, and 23.5% agreed, demonstrating a predominantly positive assessment. Similarly, the impact on personal identity was highly valued, with 70.6% strongly agreeing and 23.5% agreeing that playing boccia has strengthened

this aspect, while only 5.9% disagreed, indicating that for most participants, the sport contributes significantly to building their identity.

Regarding progress toward personal goals, 41.2% strongly agreed and 29.4% agreed that boccia has helped them in this respect, although 17.6% remained neutral and 11.8% disagreed, showing that while the impact is generally positive, it is not uniform for everyone.

Finally, in terms of satisfaction with their level of participation in boccia, 47.1% reported being very satisfied and 35.3% satisfied, totaling 82.4% with positive perceptions. Only 17.6% indicated being neutral, with no levels of dissatisfaction recorded in this dimension.

These findings show that the practice of boccia not only has a positive impact on athletic performance but also promotes identity building, the achievement of personal goals, and overall satisfaction with occupational participation.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study show a higher representation of males among athletes who practice boccia, consistent with a historical trend observed in adapted sports and influenced by social and cultural factors (Obande-Ogbuinya et al., 2023). This imbalance can be explained by the persistence of gender stereotypes, which limit both women's opportunities and motivation to participate in sports activities. These stereotypes affect not only women's own perception of their abilities but also the social valuation of their performance and potential in the sports field (Knyazyan & Haytayan, 2024).

Furthermore, women with disabilities face double discrimination, combining prejudices related to gender and disability, which perpetuates structural barriers that restrict their visibility, access to resources, and support in adapted sports (Guerrero & Guerrero Puerta, 2023). Their participation remains limited, despite progress in inclusion in other sectors.

To address this situation, it is essential to implement comprehensive strategies that promote an equitable sporting environment, including public policies and specific programs that foster equal opportunities, increase the visibility of women's participation, and value their contributions. It is also crucial to develop awareness campaigns that challenge stereotypes and promote a culture of inclusion and respect for women with disabilities in sport (Valiente, 2020).

In this study, referrals from disability professionals or close contacts were the main factor motivating participation in boccia, highlighting the need to strengthen the dissemination of these activities. Previous research indicates that, despite the progress of adapted sport, limited outreach remains a significant obstacle (Reyes Rodríguez et al., 2024).

Socioeconomic factors, such as educational level and employment status, play a crucial role in participation in Paralympic sports (Fernández González et al., 2023). These factors not only impact on access to sports activities but also affect athletes' ability to sustain long-term development, as participation requires financial resources, time, and support networks. Job insecurity or low levels of education can limit training opportunities, access to appropriate equipment, and participation in competitions, thereby exacerbating existing inequalities.

High-performance athletes also face the challenge of balancing their academic and athletic commitments. This conflict reflects the lack of flexible structures that enable alignment between educational goals and the demands of training and competition. Pacheco (2023) suggests that implementing adapted educational systems, such as

personalized curricula or distance learning modalities, could facilitate this balance and contribute to the holistic development of Paralympic athletes.

Sporting commitment is a key factor in occupational participation, as evidenced by the time dedicated to training and active involvement in meetings and competitions, which fosters motivation to maintain practice (Vera & Enríquez, 2022). Additionally, a sense of belonging reinforces motivation and commitment to boccia (Fernández, 2023).

Athletes' motivation is primarily focused on personal and athletic development, with less emphasis on social objectives (Encalada Chuncho et al., 2024). Boccia practice has a significant impact on physical, mental, and emotional health, improving self-esteem and confidence, as documented in previous studies on physical activity in Paralympic contexts (Muñoz Jiménez et al., 2017). However, some participants do not experience the same benefits, possibly due to individual factors, psychological barriers, or social influences.

Inclusive sports can generate stress associated with the need to master specific skills, underscoring the importance of designing personalized programs that optimize both physical and emotional benefits (Campos Campos et al., 2023).

Participants consider the training appropriate and, for the most part, do not perceive their disability as a limitation, highlighting the importance of motivation, self-confidence, and self-efficacy for sports participation (Zambrano Palencia & Hincapié Gallón, 2022). Furthermore, adaptability, along with emotional support and a willingness to overcome barriers, is essential for the occupational participation of athletes with disabilities.

This study observed that, while some clubs have sufficient financial resources, the perception of insufficiency in others reflects inconsistencies in fund allocation, particularly regarding infrastructure and specialized programs. Cuevas Galicia (2020) emphasizes the importance of balanced resource management that considers equipment, training, and long-term sustainability. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of equipment among participants with different resource levels reveals persistent barriers to equitable practice, which must be addressed through public policies promoting inclusion and community programs that optimize local resources (Chile, 2023; Instituto Nacional del Deporte, 2024).

Social support, especially from family and friends, was identified as a key factor for occupational participation, contributing to the emotional well-being and social inclusion of athletes (González Casas et al., 2020). The absence of such support can lead to exclusion, highlighting the importance of strengthening support networks to ensure continued engagement in sports.

Finally, transportation emerges as a significant challenge, given that most participants rely on non-adapted means of transport. This underscores the need for public policies that improve transportation accessibility and guarantee equitable participation (Hernández-Lanas et al., 2024). Participation in boccia depends not only on physical accessibility and available resources but also on aligning the activity with personal expectations and the social environment, therefore contributing to participants' overall quality of life (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020).

The practice of boccia promotes social inclusion and well-being, enabling the development of skills that strengthen self-esteem and self-perception (Bogado & Villalba, 2023). However, the sport's social and exploratory impact may be limited in some cases, suggesting the need for future research to optimize the integration of athletes with disabilities.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that boccia is a meaningful activity for people with severe physical disabilities, producing positive effects on the emotional, physical, and social well-being of participants. The perceived satisfaction and expectations associated with this activity underscore its relevance as a core occupation, driven by internal factors such as motivation, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy.

However, the results do not indicate a significant increase in the diversification of occupational participation, suggesting that commitment and dedication to the sport are prioritized over other activities. Training at sports clubs has proven effective in meeting athletes' expectations, reinforcing continued participation and commitment.

Regarding the identified barriers, while physical accessibility is not perceived as a major challenge, financial resources and the lack of adapted transportation emerge as critical limitations for the sustainability of the sport. The neutral perception of available resources may be associated with insufficient knowledge about existing funding mechanisms, highlighting the need for strategies to improve resource management and equitable distribution.

Gender analysis revealed higher male participation, reflecting historical patterns observed in adapted sports. Women with disabilities face structural and social barriers that limit their engagement, emphasizing the importance of specific public policies and awareness campaigns to promote gender equality in sports.

Additionally, socioeconomic factors, such as educational level and employment status, were identified as determinants of access to and continued participation in sports. These factors not only influence participation but also affect athletes' ability to sustain long-term development. The lack of adapted transportation further reinforces the urgency of public infrastructure interventions that ensure accessible and inclusive mobility.

Despite methodological limitations, such as the small sample size and specific geographic focus, the findings highlight the relevance of boccia as an activity that enhances the quality of life of participants while revealing critical areas that require attention to foster an inclusive environment.

As a conclusion, this study provides guidance for characterizing the occupational participation of boccia athletes through analysis of the internal and external factors influencing it. These results can inform inclusive public policies, optimize available resources, and strengthen support networks that promote equity in access to adapted sports. Future research should broaden the scope by including diverse contexts and longitudinal methodologies to explore more deeply the dynamics of participation and the specific needs of people with disabilities.

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### **Author's Contributions**

Jusarah Bruna-Torres, Valentina Lucero-Sánchez, Valentina Carrasco-Palacios and Fernanda Molina-Pacheco carried out the conception of the text, organization of sources and/or analysis, and drafting of the manuscript, and proposed an initial version. Oscar Hernández-Lanas supervised the research, provided theoretical contributions, and wrote the final version of the manuscript. All authors participated in the analysis and discussion of the articles and approved the final version of the text.

### **Data Availability**

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### **Funding Source**

Internationalization Program of the Master's Degree in Occupation and Occupational Therapy, Faculty of Medicine, University of Chile, Santiago, Chile.

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