

Original Article

Brazilian para-athletes: occupational roles over time

Paratletas brasileiros: papéis ocupacionais ao longo do tempo

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Abstract

Introduction: The engagement of individuals in meaningful occupations throughout life is fundamental. However, involvement in certain occupations may hinder performance in others that are equally important. A Paralympic career can generate great complexity in the lives of para-athletes, making it challenging to reconcile the routine of training and competitions with their other occupations, especially when it comes to para-athletes competing at the international level. **Objective:** The aim was to identify the athletic profile of the para-athlete and their participation in occupational roles over time. **Method:** This is an observational, descriptive study with Brazilian para-athletes. A questionnaire was used to characterize the sample and identify the athletic profile, as well as the Occupational Role Identification List. Descriptive and inferential analyses were used. **Results:** A total of 80 Brazilian para-athletes participated, from 5 Paralympic sport modalities, undergoing training in two Paralympic reference centers. It was observed that para-athletes experienced a decrease in performance in occupational roles when comparing the past and present, and they intend to return to or acquire new roles in the future. **Conclusion:** Some occupational roles with high levels of importance for para-athletes remain latent, making it extremely important to plan the career transition of these individuals so they can engage in new perspectives or resume meaningful occupations.

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

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Resumo

Introdução: O engajamento do sujeito em ocupações significativas ao longo da vida é fundamental. Porém, o envolvimento em algumas ocupações pode dificultar o desempenho de outras igualmente importantes. A carreira paralímpica pode gerar grande complexidade na vida dos paratletas, tornando desafiadora a tarefa de conciliar a rotina de treinos e competições com as suas demais ocupações, principalmente quando tratamos de paratletas que disputam competições a nível internacional. **Objetivo:** Buscou-se identificar o perfil esportivo do paratleta e sua participação em papéis ocupacionais ao longo do tempo. **Método:** Trata-se de um estudo observacional, descritivo, com paratletas brasileiros. Foi utilizado questionário para caracterização da amostra e identificação do perfil esportivo e a Lista de Identificação de Papéis Ocupacionais. Foram utilizadas análises descritivas e inferenciais. **Resultados:** Participaram 80 paratletas brasileiros, de 5 modalidades do esporte paralímpico, em treinamento em dois centros de referência paralímpica. Observou-se que os paratletas perderam desempenho em papéis ocupacionais quando comparados o tempo passado e o presente, e pretendem retornar ou adquirir novos papéis no tempo futuro. **Conclusão:** Alguns papéis ocupacionais com altos níveis de importância para os paratletas ficam em latência, sendo de extrema importância planejar a transição de carreira desses indivíduos para que eles possam se envolver em novas perspectivas ou retomar ocupações significativas.

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

Introduction

Disability is a constantly evolving phenomenon, encompassing various dimensions, and the full participation of people with disabilities in the community depends on society's commitment to promoting inclusion, since disability can be understood as a social construct (Maior, 2017).

In Brazil, the inclusion of people with disabilities in society has been progressively consolidated, supported by a range of actions and public policies, including Law No. 13.146 of 2015, also known as the Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (LBI), which provides for rights and guarantees equal conditions for social participation with the rest of society (Brasil, 2015; Van Petten et al., 2018).

This process is based on the social model of disability, which contrasts with the purely biological model, recognizing that the barriers faced by people with disabilities are not only the result of their physical, mental, or sensory impairments, but rather of a social context that does not offer the necessary adaptations and opportunities for their full inclusion (Verzolla, 2023).

From this perspective, beyond the implementation of public policies and accessibility measures, the goal is to achieve recognition of autonomy and independence for people with disabilities (Maior, 2017). As a result, we have witnessed, albeit slowly, a paradigm shift with the inclusion of people with disabilities in different contexts, and this change in perception has contributed to these individuals gaining access to opportunities and rights that were previously denied to them, such as education, the labor market, and the sports context (Seron et al., 2021).

The participation of people with disabilities in competitive sports, although recent, has been rapidly growing in recent decades, and the opportunities for this population in the field have become increasingly recognized (Berardi et al., 2021). Over the years, sports practice for this group has moved beyond rehabilitation and social integration purposes, allowing people with disabilities to build a career in sports through high-performance sport (Feiten et al., 2023). High-performance sport is characterized by the pursuit of results in sports disciplines governed by universally established rules and linked to national and international sports federations and confederations, in addition to promoting integration between people and communities within the country and with those of other nations (Brasil, 1998).

This investment is reflected in the creation of athlete training centers, implementation of governmental policies and programs in the field of sport, incentives for participation in the Paralympic Games, among others. This process has contributed significantly to the increase in the number of persons with disabilities competing in Paralympic sports, as evidenced by the significant growth in the number of para-athletes across various sports, as well as the number of medals won in Paralympic competitions (Santos et al., 2022; Silva & Mello, 2021; Comitê Paralímpico Brasileiro, 2023), reaching the top 5 at the Olympic Games in France in 2024, and elevating Brazil to the status of an international power (Santos et al., 2022; Silva & Mello, 2021). Furthermore, through Paralympic sport, people with disabilities benefit beyond the physical aspect, as it promotes socio-emotional well-being, provides opportunities for interaction with others, enables the development of a professional career, and strengthens self-esteem and social participation (Seron et al., 2021).

Participation in Paralympic sport as a pathway for building a professional athletic career constitutes an important occupational role. According to the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO), occupational roles are important components of volition and are defined as behaviors assigned, expected, or adopted by individuals, forming a fundamental part of life and attributing a sense of self-identity as people perform them (Kielhofner, 2002). They are essential in providing individuals with a sense of social belonging, as roles define the functions and responsibilities of each individual, organizing the use of time and providing a structure for appropriate behavior in different contexts, such as work, family, and community (Oliveira, 2023).

It is important to highlight that involvement in high-performance sport implies significant changes in different areas of the lives of people with disabilities (Haiachi et al., 2016). For example, we can highlight the rapid transition between entering sport and reaching high-performance levels, even with a late start (older age), as well as the possibility of a prolonged career and consequently delayed retirement (Feiten et al., 2023). Additionally, the difficulty in balancing daily activities with a training routine is a challenge, often leading to social distancing and even loss or abandonment of employment or studies (Teixeira & Cappelle, 2023; Lima et al., 2021).

Although performing this occupational role demands dedication, it cannot be considered an exclusive activity, as it runs parallel to other occupational roles that are part of the individual's daily life. However, at certain times, some roles may become prominent, while others may become peripheral or even nonexistent,

structuring the individual's engagement in society (Savickas, 2013; Super, 1980; Bränholm & Fugl-Meyer, 1994). From this perspective, how is the organization and engagement of para-athletes in different occupational roles after entering a sports career? Does entering high-performance sport imply the abandonment of specific occupational roles? Can factors such as gender or socioeconomic status influence para-athletes' engagement in occupational roles? How is para-athletes' involvement in occupational roles structured over time (before entering the sport, during, and after)? What occupational perspective is perceived by the para-athlete after the end of their sports career?

Answering these questions will help to identify, to some extent, how occupational roles structure these individuals' participation in society, considering behavioral routine patterns, motivation, and environmental influence (Savickas, 2013).

Scientific studies in this field help to understand the demands and specific characteristics of para-athletes, as well as to better understand the influence of the role of sport as part of their occupational repertoire, a field of interest for occupational therapy. Understanding, for example, how sports practice influences athletes' identification with their occupational roles at different life stages is essential for proposing interventions focused on career transition.

Occupational therapy can play a crucial role in this process, helping athletes explore their skills and interests, and develop new competencies that can be transferred to other occupational areas. Moreover, based on the understanding of roles and activity analysis, occupational therapy can intervene to eliminate barriers aimed at improving sports performance (Bullen & Clarke, 2021).

By working in collaboration with athletes, coaches, and the multidisciplinary team, occupational therapists can maximize the potential of individuals with disabilities, promoting their independence, autonomy, and quality of life.

This field of practice and research presents itself as promising and broad for the profession, yet the literature in the area is scarce and underexplored. In Brazil, publications are recent, still incipient, and most focus on the use of Assistive Technology in sport (Teixeira & Alves, 2021; Silva & Alves, 2020; Pavani et al., 2017; Lima & Alves, 2020; Tiele et al., 2017).

Regarding the study of the occupational profile, we can mention the studies by Gomes et al. (2023) and Sousa et al. (2021), which, using the Occupational Role Identification List, seek to understand the influence of a sports career on the occupational performance of para-athletes.

This field presents itself as both conducive and innovative for the profession, especially when it comes to the impact of sport on the performance of occupational roles in para-athletes. There is a significant gap in research in this area, which requires further investigation and understanding. In this sense, this study aimed to identify the participation of para-athletes in occupational roles over time, as well as to identify the sporting profile of para-athletes.

Methodology

This is an observational, cross-sectional, descriptive-exploratory study with a quantitative approach (Prodanov & Freitas, 2013). This research was approved by the Human Research

Ethics Committee (COEP) of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (Federal University of Minas Gerais - UFMG), CAAE No. 46971321.6.0000.5149. Those who agreed to participate in the study signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF).

The sample was selected by convenience, using a non-probabilistic intentional method, composed of Brazilian para-athletes from training centers in Belo Horizonte and São Paulo. The inclusion criteria adopted in the study were: high-performance para-athletes ranked among the top 8 in Brazil in their sport discipline, Brazilian, from any region of the country, participating in any of the 22 Paralympic sports, with physical, intellectual, and/or visual disabilities. As an exclusion criterion, the study defined: para-athletes with impaired cognitive function that prevented them from responding to the research questionnaire.

To collect sociodemographic data and the athlete's sports profile, a questionnaire developed by the researchers of this study was used. The athlete's sports profile was identified through information related to sports category, entry into the sport, training volume, as well as questions related to the practice of high-performance Paralympic sport. The Brazil Economic Classification Criterion (Associação Brasileira de Empresas de Pesquisa, 2021) was also used to estimate monthly family income and identify the socioeconomic strata of the participants.

To collect information regarding the occupational roles performed by the athletes, the Role Checklist (Oakley et al., 1986; Cordeiro, 2005; Scott et al., 2018) was used. This instrument aims to extract information about an individual's participation in occupational roles throughout life (Oakley et al., 1986; Cordeiro, 2005; Scott et al., 2018). The instrument was developed based on the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO), which is centered on the individual's motivation for choosing and engaging in occupations, observing standardized behaviors in their routines and daily activities (Kielhofner, 2002).

It is a standardized questionnaire, administered in interview format, consisting of two parts. The first aims to analyze individual perception regarding performance in 10 (ten) occupational roles ("Student," "Worker," "Volunteer," "Caregiver," "Home maintainer," "Friend," "Family member," "Religious participant," "Hobbyist/amateur," "Participant in organizations," and "Other") in the past, present, and future. The second part of the questionnaire seeks to identify the level of importance attributed by the individual to each occupational role, assigning the values of no importance, some importance, and great importance (Oakley et al., 1986; Cordeiro, 2005; Scott et al., 2018).

The original instrument presents good psychometric indices with reliable and satisfactory results for Test-Retest, with agreement measures ranging from moderate to almost perfect in most results of Part I and Part II of the questionnaire (Oakley et al., 1986). This instrument was validated and translated for use in the Brazilian context and showed similar psychometric results to the original instrument, with agreement between occupational roles ranging from 84% to 91% in Part I and 75% in Part II (Cordeiro, 2005).

According to the instrument's application guidelines, to collect information related to Part I of the questionnaire, the participant must be instructed to indicate, for each role, whether it was performed in the past, is currently performed, and is intended to be performed in the future. The *past* refers to the period up to 7 days ago; the *present* refers not only to today but also to the previous 7 days; the *future* is

considered to be any time from tomorrow onward (Oakley et al., 1986; Cordeiro, 2005). Considering that this study aimed to analyze the impact of a sports career on the performance of different occupational roles, para-athletes were asked to consider the past as the time before starting their sports career and the future as the period after the end of their sports career.

To gather information related to Part II of the questionnaire, the participant is invited to indicate the level of importance each role has for them, even if they have never performed it or have no intention of performing it. The level of importance refers to the value attributed by the participant to each occupational role (Oakley et al., 1986; Cordeiro, 2005).

Data collection was carried out in person with para-athletes training at the Sports Training Center (CTE – UFMG) and at the Brazilian Paralympic Training Center (CPB), from January to April 2023. Initially, the study's purpose was presented to the para-athletes, explaining its objectives, methodological procedures, and relevance, inviting them to participate. Those who agreed to participate signed the ICF, and then the questionnaires were applied in interview format. The full form took an average of 25 to 35 minutes to complete. All procedures were conducted by a single researcher. Once data collection was completed, a copy of the questionnaire with the participant's responses was sent to their email.

Descriptive and inferential analyses were used to analyze the collected data. The Shapiro-Wilk, Mauchly, and Levene tests were used to verify normality, sphericity, and variance assessment, respectively. Absolute and relative frequencies were obtained for each variable, and potential associations between category frequencies for different variables were tested using the chi-square goodness-of-fit test (χ^2).

After analyzing the assumptions, the Friedman test was used for paired comparison of the time periods (past, present, and future) for the frequencies of occupational roles. The Wilcoxon test was also used for pairwise evaluation (past and present; past and future; or present and future). All analyses were performed using the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), Statistics 21, and GraphPad Prism 7.0 (GraphPad Software, Inc., San Diego, California, USA). For all statistical tests, the significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ (Swift, 1997; Arango, 2001; Field, 2013).

Results

Sample characterization

Eighty para-athletes participated in this study, the majority of whom were male, with a mean age of 29.7 years (± 8.44), high school education, family income between 2 and 4 minimum wages, and physical disabilities. Information on their sociodemographic profile is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile of para-athletes.

Variable	Category	N	%
Sex	Female	32	40.00
	Male	48	60.00
Marital status	Married and/or on stable union	11	13.75
	Divorced	2	2.50
	Single	66	8.50
	Widow/widower	1	1.25
Education	Illiterate	1	1.25
	High school	44	55.00
	Higher education	18	22.50
	Primary school	4	5.00
	Middle school	13	16.25
ABEP	A	7	8.75
	B1	8	10.00
	B2	35	43.75
	C1	16	20.00
	C2	11	13.75
	DE	3	13.75
Disability type	Physical	52	65.00
	Intellectual	9	11.25
	Visual	13	16.25
	Multiple	6	7.50
Disability condition	Acquired	27	33.80
	Congenital	53	66.20
	$\bar{X} \pm SD$	Max	Min
Age	29.70 $\pm$ 8.44	55.00	14.00

ABEP = Associação Brasileira de Empresas de Pesquisa (Brazilian Association of Research Companies). N = number (absolute value). % = percentage (relative value). $\bar{X}$ = mean. SD = standard deviation. Max. = maximum value. Min. = minimum value. Source: Research data.

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the para-athletes' athletic profile. Most athletes are track and field athletes, train 1 to 2 hours a day, 5 or more times a week, and participate in individual, international-level competitions.

Table 3 presents the number of participants involved in different occupational roles in the past, present, and future.

Table 4 presents the average number of occupational roles played by para-athletes over time, as well as a comparison between past and present, past and future, and present and future. Regarding the number of occupational roles played by para-athletes over time, there was a reduction in the number of roles performed in the present compared to the past, and an expectation of an increase in roles in the future.

Figure 1 shows the importance para-athletes attribute to occupational roles. Interestingly, most of the attributions focus on the item "very important." This suggests that these athletes deeply value their occupational roles and recognize their relevance in their lives.

Table 2. Characterization of the sporting profile of para-athletes.

Variable	Category	N	%
Modality	Athletics	45	56.25
	Cycling	1	1.25
	Weightlifting	5	6.25
	Swimming	23	28.75
	Parataekwondo	6	7.50
Type of competition	Individual	69	86.30
	Individual and Collective	11	13.70
Competition level	International	29	36.25
	National	21	26.25
	State	7	6.75
	Regional	23	28.75
Training duration (Hours)	≤ 1	4	5.00
	1 to 2	40	50.00
	3 to 4	33	41.25
	≥ 5	3	3.75
Workouts per week	≤ 2	9	11.25
	3 to 4	14	17.50
	≥5	57	71.25
Promotion (Financial return)	Yes	44	55.00
	No	36	45.00

N = number (absolute value). % = percentage (relative value). Source: Research Data

Table 3. Number of para-athletes involved in different occupational roles over time (n=80).

Occupational roles	Past		Present		Future	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Student	75	93.75	38	47.50	65	81.25
Worker	52	65.00	43	53.75	62	77.50
Volunteer	39	48.75	19	23.75	65	81.25
Caregiver	44	55.00	51	63.75	62	77.50
Home maintainer	67	83.75	66	82.50	66	82.50
Friend	65	81.25	65	81.25	69	86.25
Family member	72	90.00	66	82.50	68	85.00
Religious participant	63	78.75	43	53.75	52	65.00
Hobbyist/amateur	66	82.50	58	72.50	67	83.75
Participant in Organizations	31	38.75	26	32.50	47	58.75

n = number (absolute value), % = percentage (relative value). Source: Research data.

Table 4. Average number of occupational roles played by para-athletes over time.

Occupationalrole (Period)	Description				
	$\bar{X}$	SD	Mn	Min	Max
Pastac	7.18	1.90	7.00	1	10
Presentb	5.90	1.60	6.00	2	9
Futurec	7.80	1.70	8.00	4	10

Vs = versus. A, b, and c = demonstrate equality and/or significant differences between groups (ac = c ≠ b). * = statistically significant association (Friedman test or Wilcoxon signed-rank test; α = 5%). $\bar{X}$ = mean. SD = standard deviation. Mn = median. Min = minimum value. Max = maximum value. Friedman test: 45.4 (p<0.001); Wilcoxon: Past vs. Present (p<0.001), Past vs. Future (p=0.02), Present vs. Future (p<0.001). Source: Research data.

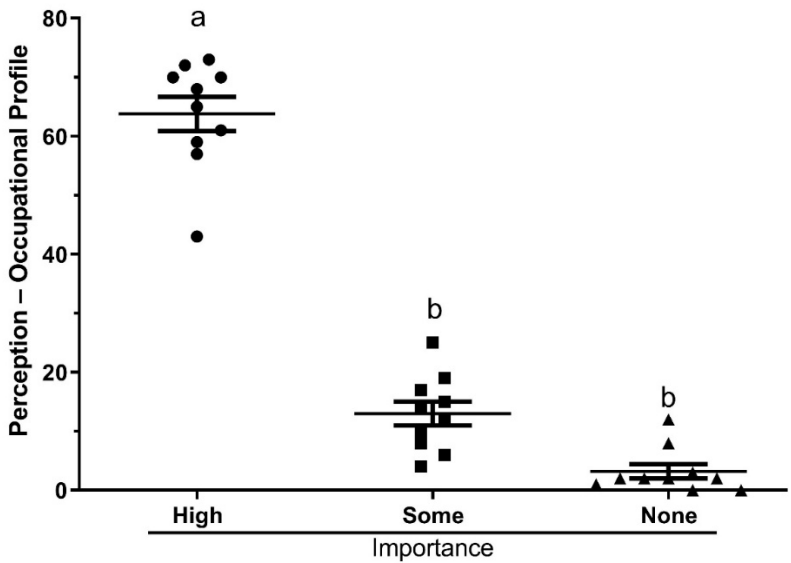


Figure 1. Presents the average frequency of occupational roles and the dispersions in standard deviation for each degree of importance. Legend: a and b represent statistical significance, where a (p<0.05) and b (p>0.05).

Discussion

The results of this study provide support for understanding the occupational performance of Brazilian para-athletes and its relationship with sports practice. A reduction in the number of roles performed in the present time was observed, compared to the past, as well as the expectation of their resumption in the future.

The reduction in the number of roles performed in the present time, when compared to the past (before the start of the sports career), was expected, since participation in high-performance sport is directly related to competing in major competitions and achieving significant results (Barreto, 2016; Tonon, 2019), which requires long periods of training and preparation. Regarding this aspect, this study identified that most para-athletes train between 1 to 4 hours per day, 5 times a week, and when combined with travel time, this significantly reduces availability for performing other activities.

This finding aligns with the studies by Gomes et al. (2023) and Sousa et al. (2021), who found similar results. Campos et al. (2017) discuss the complexity of the high-performance athlete, as dedication and involvement can often weaken social and familial bonds, as well as performance in other activities. That is, the requirement of daily hours and frequency of training, the necessary participation in national and international competitions can lead to difficulty in reconciling sports activity with participation in other roles that make up the athlete's everyday life.

It is important to highlight the main occupational roles that most para-athletes stopped performing after entering a high-performance sports career: student, worker, religious participant, volunteer, and family member. Regarding the student role, it is noted that, despite the abandonment of this role in the present time, most para-athletes indicated the desire to resume it in the future, as well as emphasized its relevance, corroborating the findings of Gomes et al. (2023). In recent decades, access to education at various levels of schooling for people with disabilities has changed substantially, especially with the implementation of special education policy within the perspective of inclusive education (Porto et al., 2023); however, higher education for this population still remains incipient.

It is worth noting that the participants in this study have an average age of 29, and 21.3% of them have completed elementary school, while another 55% have completed secondary school. One may question whether they had access to an inclusive and accessible education system that eliminated the physical and social barriers that result in high dropout rates at different levels of education (Viegas, 2023).

One may also question their interest in attaining higher educational levels, not only from a personal desire but also from significant family encouragement. Regarding this item, one may question the athletes' perception of their own disability condition, as well as that of their families, or whether completing only elementary or secondary school suffices for this population (Van Petten et al., 2018). It is understood that education plays a fundamental role in enhancing opportunities for labor market insertion for para-athletes, especially after their sports career ends. The intention to resume the student role, reported by the participants, is an important indicator. Thus, encouraging the resumption of these occupational roles, aiming for better training and qualification of para-athletes, becomes relevant so they have better conditions for competitiveness in the labor market. In this regard, the Brazilian Paralympic Committee, through the Atleta Cidadão Program, offers courses and partners with universities that enable, to some extent, the reclaiming of the student role (Comitê Paralímpico Brasileiro, 2023). Occupational therapy can be a strong ally in this career transition process, identifying strengths, directing activities, and promoting effective engagement in meaningful activities for these para-athletes, since reconciling occupational roles demands organization of time and routine for their performance.

Regarding the worker role, considering that all respondents are in a sports career as professionals, engaging in activities that comprise this occupation and even receiving financial support for it, it was expected that para-athletes would indicate involvement in the worker role in the present time. However, only 43 (53.8%) of the para-athletes reported performing this role. It is noteworthy that 44 (55%) of the para-athletes receive some form of financial support for their sports activities, and of these 44 athletes who

have income from sport, 13 (29.54%) did not consider high-performance sport as a professional career, even though daily dedication to sport is almost exclusive. Teixeira & Cappelle (2023) discuss that the possibility of professionalization in sport is recent and is still grounded in the individual's self-conception as a sport professional or not. For the authors, the definition of high-performance sport resembles the definition of work, which consists of maximum dedication, as well as physical and time availability to fulfill a given task. Still, sport may not be seen as a profession, leading to the belief that its practice is just an occupation outside the worker role (Campos et al., 2017). These same authors report that "even with extraordinary achievements and financial recognition, high-performance sport remains an activity outside the sphere of work due to its informal specifications and differences from occupational practice" (p. 37). Recognizing the career of a high-performance para-athlete as work implies a paradigm shift and presupposes a medium- to long-term process that involves important macro-contextual issues deserving reflection and new paths.

With regard to the reduction in the number of participants involved in the family member role, the demands of competitions that hinder involvement in this role stand out. However, this is a fundamental role in every individual's daily life, especially for people with disabilities, since family relationships are considered an emotional support for para-athletes and a facilitating component for their sports performance, enhancing their results and contributing to performance and retention in their sports career (Cardoso et al., 2019; Seron et al., 2015; Gomes et al., 2023; Sousa et al., 2021). From this perspective, evaluating the relationship between family and athlete performance, and proposing interventions with both the para-athlete and the family, seems to be an important action for occupational therapy in supporting this population.

Regarding the religious participant role, a reduction of 31.7% in the number of para-athletes engaged in this role was observed. Interestingly, although religious gestures and expressions can be easily observed in sports competitions, as well as in testimonials and interviews (Silva et al., 2023; Pinheiro, 2018), these actions are not considered representative of engagement in this role. It appears that involvement in the religious role may have been understood by them as effective participation in activities offered by their respective congregations, although this role extends beyond that boundary.

These findings clearly illustrate the prominence of some occupational roles that, possibly influenced by the sports career, stand out in occupational performance while other equally significant roles remain latent. It was observed that engagement in occupational roles over time is dynamic and dependent on the objectives and goals present at each moment. Kielhofner (2002) posits in his model that a human being functions as a system that is simultaneously open, complex, dynamic, and constantly changing. He also reports that individuals choose their occupations based on their motivations at that particular moment in life and, therefore, occupational roles are modifiable and greatly influenced by the performance of other roles (Kielhofner, 2002).

All the aspects discussed above cannot be considered without including the importance attributed to occupational roles by para-athletes. They attributed great importance to most roles, especially those of Family member, Worker, and Student. Such importance is directly related to the main roles pointed out with greater expectation of future performance. These data are important when considering the transition phase to retirement. Regarding this point, the Brazilian Paralympic

Committee, through the Atleta Cidadão program, supports para-athletes in all phases of their sports career, including the retirement phase, providing educational and professional development support so the individual can thrive not only in the sports context but also beyond it (Comitê Paralímpico Brasileiro, 2023). The program's strategies include providing lectures, workshops, courses, and vocational preparations to para-athletes, identifying their interests and potential for full development in a post-sport career. Occupational therapy, along with other professionals, can develop actions to raise possibilities, guide access to different levels of education, inform about the rights of people with disabilities, for example.

Thus, even though the recognition of the field of occupational therapy is still recent, the professional's involvement in the Paralympic environment is indispensable, where they can assist in managing routines, preparing for competitions, competitive travel, adapting strategies, and organizing transition phases so that the para-athlete can have better performance in both sports and occupational domains. In addition, through activity analysis, the occupational therapist can assist in the design and adaptation of equipment, considering the individuality of the para-athlete and contributing to a more effective athlete/coach relationship.

Conclusion

The processes of inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in different contexts, especially in sports, have proven to be an essential path toward building a more just and equal society, in which everyone can enjoy the same rights and opportunities, regardless of their abilities or limitations.

The results of this research made it possible to understand the occupational profile of Brazilian para-athletes and observe the complexity of reconciling a sports career with other occupations, through the findings related to changes in the individuals' occupational performance over time. In this way, the loss of roles between the past and the present became evident, as well as the increase in the expectation of role performance between the present and the future. Some occupational roles with high levels of importance for para-athletes remain latent during the phase of dedication to high-performance sports, making it extremely important to plan the career transition of these individuals so that they can engage in new perspectives or resume meaningful occupations.

The relevance of the study lies in its attempt to understand the occupational universe of the para-athlete. Aspects related to socioeconomic status, gender, and level of competition and their influence on involvement in different occupational roles provide support for the proposal of more targeted interventions in the field of occupational therapy. The role of occupational therapy, in partnership with a multidisciplinary team, can assist in preparing and organizing routines, identifying meaningful occupations, and building a retirement perspective. Moreover, the complexity of organizing and managing the training and competition routines of para-athletes competing at the international level is evident, requiring an adjustment in the organizational structure of their careers.

Although similarities were found between the results of this research and those of other studies conducted with similar populations and contexts, it is still not possible to consider them conclusive, given the type of study conducted, the convenience sampling,

and the sample imbalance between different sports modalities. It is further suggested that the same study be conducted with para-athletes from team sports, in order to understand whether there are differences between team and individual sports regarding the relationship between sports careers and the performance of their occupations. It is also suggested to include the population of non-athlete PWDs in order to compare their occupational roles with those of para-athletes.

This study aimed to contribute to the production of knowledge in the field of high-performance sports involving PWDs and the perspectives of occupational therapy within this context. It also highlights the importance of the inclusion of PWDs in the sports context and its social implications, pointing to the possibilities for occupational therapy action in an innovative field. It further contributes to raising awareness of the importance of planning and implementing public policies aimed at the inclusion, participation, and retention of PWDs in high-performance sports, as well as the planning of programs and actions focused on career transition, especially regarding the moment of retirement.

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Problematicization and Conceptualization: Adriana Maria Valladão Novais Van Petten, Jéssica Maciel Figueiredo, Regina Celi Fonseca Ribeiro. Methodology, Data Cleaning, and Statistical Analysis: Adriana Maria Valladão Novais Van Petten, Jéssica Maciel de Figueiredo, Wellington Rodrigues. Participation in the Discussion of the Results: Adriana Maria Valladão Novais Van Petten, Jéssica Maciel Figueiredo, Regina Celi Fonseca Ribeiro, Renato de Carvalho Guerreiro, Andressa da Silva de Mello. Writing; Review and Approval of the Final Version of the Work: Adriana Maria Valladão Novais Van Petten, Jéssica Maciel Figueiredo, Regina Celi Fonseca Ribeiro; Renato de Carvalho Guerreiro, Andressa da Silva de Mello. Acquisition of financial support for the development of the study: Andressa da Silva de Mello. All authors approved the final version of the text.

Data Availability

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

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