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Original Article

FORCES IN SPORT PROGRAM: STUDY OF AN AIR FORCE UNIT IN SOUTHERN BRAZIL

PROGRAMA FORÇAS NO ESPORTE: ESTUDO DE UM NÚCLEO DA FORÇA AÉREA NO SUL DO BRASIL

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RESUMO

O presente estudo teve por objetivo identificar o perfil dos participantes do Programa Forças no Esporte (PROFESP), desenvolvido em um núcleo militar da Força Área Brasileira, bem como analisar se atende a população em situação de vulnerabilidade social. Com uma abordagem mista explanatória, foram coletados e analisados inicialmente os dados quantitativos e, posteriormente, os dados qualitativos, obtidos por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com um gestor do programa e sete diretores das escolas participantes. Os resultados mostraram que, durante o ano de 2023, o programa atendeu 327 crianças e adolescentes de 8 a 15 anos, de ambos os sexos, sendo a maioria com 09 e 10 anos e matriculados nos 4° e 5° anos de escolar públicas, conforme as diretrizes indicadas na política. Com base na análise dos gestores educacionais foi observado que, embora haja interesse em atender crianças ou escolas de outras regiões em situações mais vulneráveis, nem sempre é possível devido as questões logísticas, como distância e tempo de deslocamento entre as escolas até o núcleo militar que oferece o programa. Por fim, recomenda-se a ampliação do PROFESP para outros núcleos militares do município investigado a fim de garantir e assegurar à sociedade o acesso aos direitos constitucionais do esporte e demais atividades educativas.

Palavras-chave: Programas Sociais. Esporte Educacional. Política Pública. Forças Armadas do Brasil.

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to identify the profile of participants in the Forces in Sport program, developed at a military base of the Brazilian Air Force, and to analyze whether it serves the population in situations of social vulnerability. Using an explanatory mixed-method approach, quantitative data were initially collected and analyzed, followed by qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews with a program manager and seven school principals. The results showed that in 2023, the program served 327 children and adolescents aged 8 to 15 years, of both sexes, with the majority being 9 and 10 years old and enrolled in the 4th and 5th grades of public schools, according to the policy guidelines. Based on the analysis of educational managers, it was observed that, although there is an interest in serving children or schools from other regions in more vulnerable situations, it is not always possible due to logistical issues, such as distance and travel time between schools and the military base offering the program. Finally, it is recommended to expand PROFESP to other military bases in the investigated municipality to ensure and secure society's access to constitutional rights to sports and other educational activities.

Keywords: Social Programs Educational Sports. Public Policy. Brazilian Armed Forces.

Introduction

In recent decades, academic discussions of social programs and projects have attracted the interest of several researchers[1,2,3,4]. Among the different analyses, there are studies that defend these initiatives on the basis of the promotion of the formation of values and human development, which are aimed mainly at guaranteeing that children and adolescents have different social demands, and others that criticize the interpretation of the transfer of responsibility from the State to civil society[1,4,5].

Some authors[4,6] note that social sports projects began in Brazil between the 1970s and 1990s, when they were driven by the movement of political and democratic opening in the country[4,6]. Therefore, with the celebration of the Federal Constitution of 1988 as a political and social milestone of relevance for Brazil, public policies aimed at children and adolescents, in various areas, began to receive greater attention on the political agenda[4,6,7.]

In article 217 of the normative document of the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, sport is advocated as a social right that plays a crucial role in reversing social vulnerability and that serves as an instrument for promoting human development and improving quality of

life[8,9,10]. Since then, the use of sports as an instrument of social inclusion has been the agenda and movement of government officials for the formulation of public policies, especially through projects and programs aimed at children and adolescents who are in situations of vulnerability and/or social risk[11,12.]

In view of this, with the establishment of the Ministry of Sports, in 2003, several actions were debated and conceived by the Brazilian government to establish public policies for sports and leisure, which aimed at the social inclusion of children, adolescents and young people. One of these actions is the Segundo Tempo Program, implemented in 2003 by the Ministry of Sports, with the objective of democratizing access to the practice and culture of educational sports[10,13], promoting the integral development of children and adolescents as an essential part of the formation of citizenship and the improvement of quality of life, especially those who are in areas of social vulnerability[12,13,14.]

The strategic design of the Segundo Tempo Program is based on terms of technical cooperation and contracts[15], as well as the decentralization of federal resources through agreements with educational institutions and governmental and nongovernmental agencies[12,13,16]. These resources enable the implementation and maintenance of the program centers, in which activities are carried out with beneficiaries during the after-school period[12,13,16,19].

In 2003, with the goal of expanding the care of beneficiaries in the activities of the PST[17], the Ministry of Sports entered into a partnership with the Ministry of Defense to create the Forces in Sport program (*Programa Forças no Esporte - PROFESP*) as a branch of the PST to be developed within the scope of the armed forces—the Air Force, Army and Navy of Brazil[12,18]. PROFESP was implemented with the purpose of democratizing the access of children and young people – from 06-18 years of age – to the practice of educational sports as a factor of citizenship formation and the reduction of social risk through access to sports activities, healthy food, lectures and educational, professional development and citizenship actions, and school reinforcement during the after-school period[12,18,19].

The operationalization of activities occurs under the adhesion of the Military Organization through sectoral partnerships, with Cooperation Agreements formalized with municipal or state secretariats, universities, and segments of sports systems, among other public or private institutions[20]. The resources are made possible by Decentralized Execution Terms, resulting from interministerial partnerships or by Parliamentary Amendments centralized by the Ministry of Defense and transferred to the military organizations, which adhere to the Program, for the acquisition of sports materials, food and medical care for the participants, in addition to improvements in infrastructure[20,21].

According to data published by the Ministry of Defense[22], in 2019, PROFESP served approximately 29,500 children and adolescents distributed in 202 Military Organizations belonging to the three Brazilian Armed Forces: Army, Navy, and Air Force, located in 123 cities in the country, including remote areas such as the interior of the Amazon and indigenous communities[12,22]. Among the beneficiaries of the Program in this period, 9,892 were in the Southeast Region, 6,465 in the Northeast Region, 4,447 in the North Region, 4,474 in the Midwest Region and 4,280 in the southern Region of Brazil. In the southern region, 610 children and adolescents were assisted by the Navy's military organizations, 2,640 by the Army and 1,030 by the Brazilian Air Force[22].

In view of the above, this study aims to identify the profile of the participants of the Forces in Sports Program (PROFESP), which was developed in a military nucleus of the Brazilian Air Force, as well as to analyze whether it serves the population in situations of social vulnerability.

Methods

The present study has a mixed sequential explanatory approach of the type of quantitative → qualitative. This method occurs when quantitative data are collected and analyzed in the first stage of the research, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data developed on the basis of the initial quantitative results[23].

Participants

The study included a sample of 327 students enrolled in a PROFESP center located in the municipality of Curitiba, southern Brazil (these participants consisted of children and adolescents who were involved in the program during the year 2023), a manager from the Municipal Department of Education, and seven professionals who worked in the schools served.

Procedures

The information regarding the development and operationalization of PROFESP was obtained through a consultation with the Municipal Department of Education (responsible for the selection of schools and availability for the transportation of students participating in the program). The relationships between students and schools served by a certain center located in the municipality of Curitiba, southern Brazil, were subsequently identified.

In addition, a survey of the Human Development Index of the neighborhoods of the schools served was carried out through consultations in the databases of the Municipal Human Development Index (MHDI)[24]. The data consulted consist of the latest published data, referring to the period from 01/01/2000 to 12/31/2010. In addition to the Human Development Indices of the neighborhoods, the scores of the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) of the schools in which the PROFESP participants were enrolled were collected. For this purpose, data published at the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), equivalent to the results of the 2019 and 2021 evaluations, were consulted (this cut in the survey is justified considering that two of the seven schools analyzed did not participate in the last evaluation). The average IDEB is calculated from school approval (obtained by the School Census) and performance averages in the Basic Education Evaluation System, and the index varies from 0-10. According to the INEP, Brazil aimed to reach an average of 6 in 2022, which corresponds to a quality educational system.

After the quantitative data were collected, an interview was conducted with open questions with the manager of the Municipal Department of Education, who was responsible for the contact with the schools participating in the program and the management of the actions with the nucleus studied, and with seven professionals who worked in the schools, one of whom was the director of each school unit. The survey was carried out in April 2024 via *Google Forms,* with the invitation and guidance sent via email. In the questionnaire, the purpose and importance of their participation in the research were clarified to the participants, ensuring the confidentiality of their data. The consent of the free and informed consent form was subsequently obtained with the CAAE protocol: 88770618.4.0000.0102, opinion number: 5.414.934 (Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Paraná).

Statistical analysis of data

Initially, descriptive statistics were performed to present the data via IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 (IBM Corp, Armonk, New York) and GraphPad Prism Version 8.2.1 software. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test revealed that the data related to the IDEB and HDI of the school neighborhoods did not present a normal distribution[25]. Thus, to identify relationships between the variables, Spearman's correlation test was performed, and the

significance level of the tests was maintained at $p<0.05$[25,26]. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative data obtained were analyzed and interpreted together with the theoretical basis to respond to the objective of the present study.

Findings

Among the 327 beneficiaries who went through the PROFESP nucleus analyzed in 2023, approximately 48.6% were female and 51.4% male.

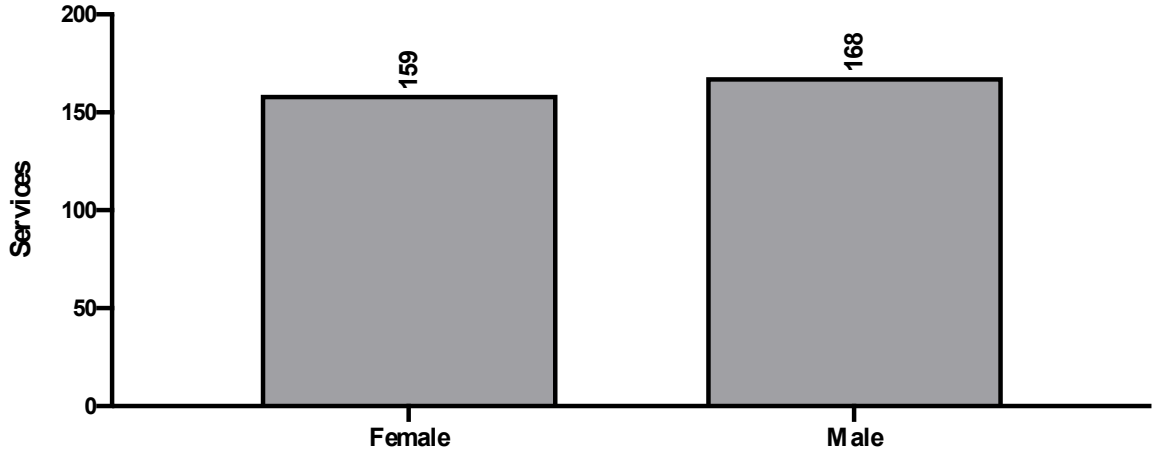

Figure 1. Participants in the core of the Forces in Sport program served in 2023.
Source: authors

The male public (n=168) is slightly more common than the female public (n=159). According to the PROFESP manual, which was made available by the Ministry of Defense in 2021, it is recommended that Military Organizations serve 50 to 100 beneficiaries in their activities. In this case, it is evident that the investigated nucleus meets a much greater number in relation to the orientation of the program.

The following figure shows the age distribution of the students served.

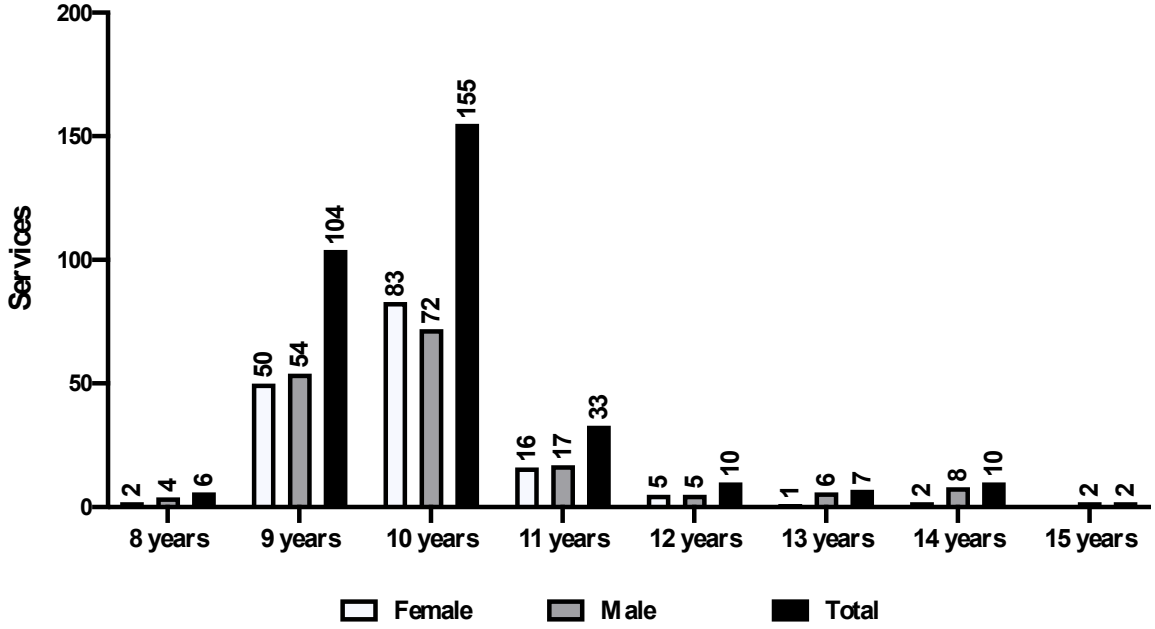

Figure 2. Age of beneficiaries participating in PROFESP activities
Source: authors

Notably, most of the students in the analyzed period were between 9 and 10 years old (n=155), representing approximately 79.2% of the total number of consultations performed. On the other hand, only 0.6% of the consultations were carried out with 15-year-old students (n=2), 1.8% with 8-year-old students (n=6), 2.1% with 13-year-old students (n=7), and 3.1% with both 12-year-old (n=10) and 14-year-old students (n=10).

When this variable was analyzed, the manager of the Municipal Department of Education was asked if there was any direction to the schools in relation to the choice of age or school year of the participating students. As a result, students in the final years of elementary school I – 4th and 5th grades – and elementary II – 6th and 9th grades – are prioritized according to the demand for projects offered by the school unit. In this way, students with less participation in other projects are prioritized. The directors of the school units highlighted that the criteria for selecting the choice of age or school year take into account the fact that students in the 4th and 5th grades, or from the 6th to the 9th grades, have more autonomy to spend the after-school period outside the school, even with school professionals accompanying them. In addition, students are close in age for the activities. Among other justifications for the selection process of the participants, the participation of parents or legal guardians in meetings to present the project stands out, along with the delivery of signed authorization. According to a report by the management of one of the schools, 150 students interested in 44 vacancies were available.

The following figure shows the distribution of the school years of the students, with a predominance of 36.1% of the students in the 4th year of the curriculum and 52.0% in the 5th year. On the other hand, the 3rd, 7th and 9th years correspond to only 2%, and the 6th and 8th years correspond to 3% of the students.

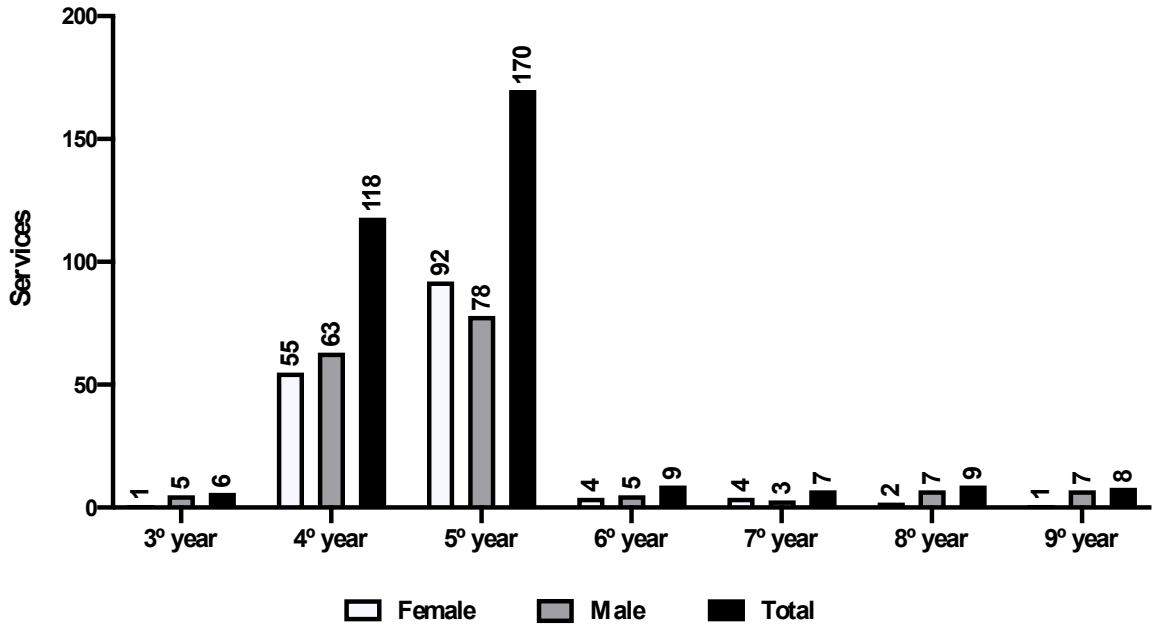

Figure 3. Academic year of beneficiaries who participate in PROFESP activities
Source: authors

After analyzing the school year of the beneficiaries, another variable investigated in this study was the period during which the students participated in the program's activities. Given that attendance in the Program must be in the after-school shift, approximately 52.0% (n=168) of the students attended the activities in the morning, and 48.0% (n=159) attended them in the afternoon. As shown in the following figure.

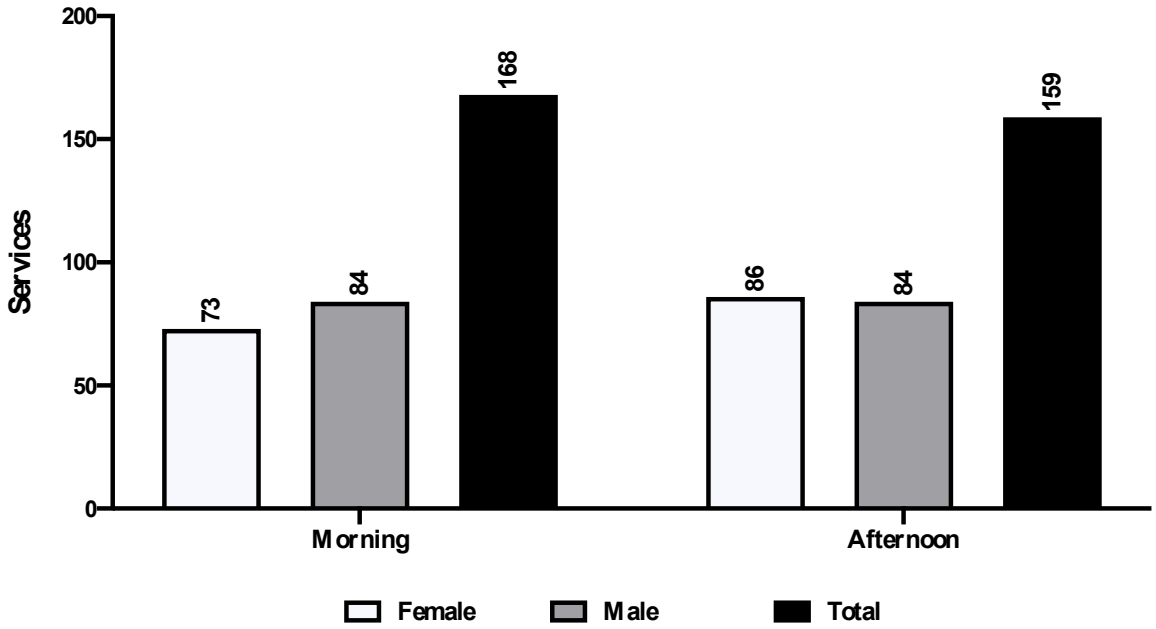

Figure 4. Period in which beneficiaries participate in PROFESP activities
Source: authors

Taking into account that one of the objectives of the program is to support the educational reinforcement of students/beneficiaries, privileging the subjects of mathematics and Portuguese[20], this variable sought to analyze the educational levels of the schools in which the students are enrolled. This analysis was carried out on the basis of the scores of each institution in the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB). The IDEB is an educational indicator that presents the level of quality of basic education in municipalities and schools in Brazil; its measure ranges from 0-10 and is calculated from the Tests of the subjects of Portuguese and mathematics together with the school's approval rates together with the grades obtained in the Basic Education Evaluation System (SAEB)[27]. Therefore, identifying whether the indices of these students' schools are close to the national average (grade 5.8) becomes relevant, considering that, in this way, it is possible to characterize the different educational establishments attended by the students served by the PROFESP. The following figure shows the distribution of attendances according to the grade obtained by the school in which they are enrolled.

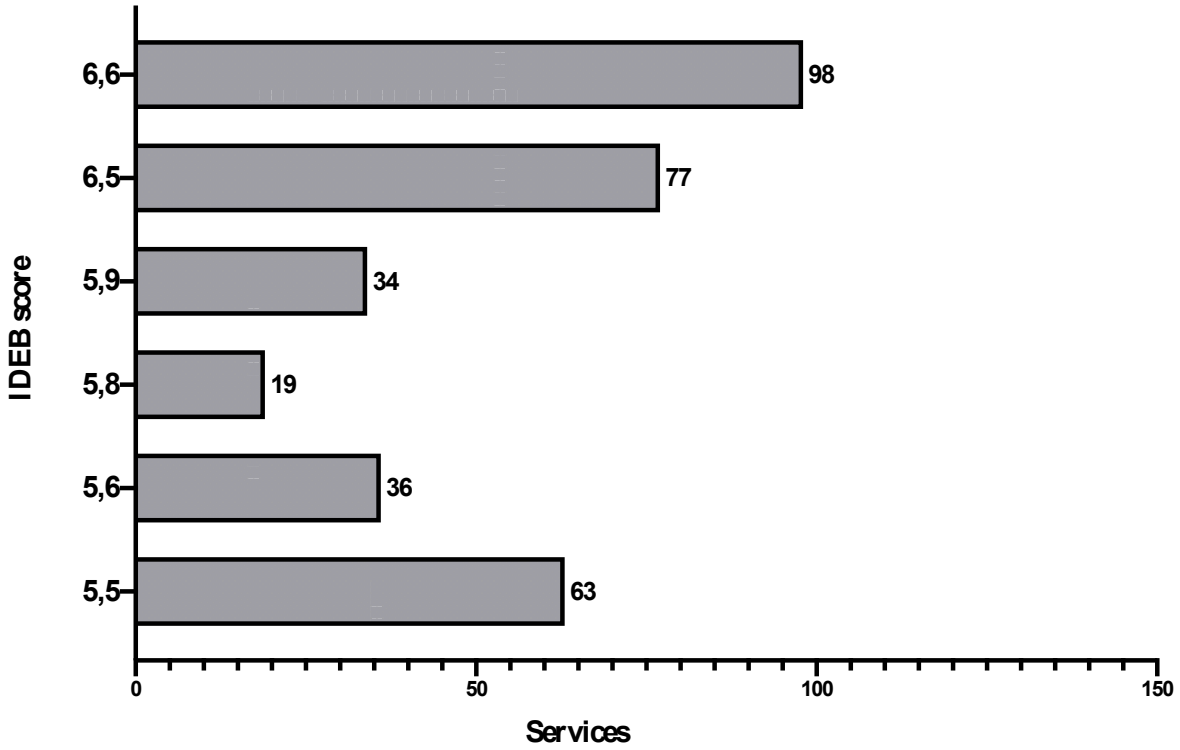

Figure 5. Distribution of services according to the score obtained in the IDEB
Source: authors

In general, the schools of the students served by the PROFESP in 2023 were average of the general IDEB score. In addition, most students studied in schools above the national average, with scores of 6.6 (30% - n=98), 6.5 (24% - n=77) and 5.9 (10% - n=34). On the other hand, the school with the lowest average IDEB of 5.5 represents 19% (n=63) of the students. Within the sample of this study, the participants of the program were enrolled in seven different schools; of these, two obtained the same grade (6.5). Notably, the scores of five schools refer to data from the 2021 IDEB evaluation, and those of two other schools refer to data from the 2019 evaluation.

Regarding this variable, the manager of the Municipal Department of Education and the principals were asked if there was any criterion for choosing the participating schools regarding their performance in the IDEB. As a result, it was evident that there is no preliminary evaluation as a criterion. In the manager's view, the school directs its effort to help students who have learning difficulties, and its participation in PROFESP favors the awareness of the importance of studying for the future. It was also identified, in the words of the principals, that, regardless of school performance, all students have the opportunity to participate in the program.

With respect to the profile of the beneficiaries of the center investigated in the present study, we sought to analyze the distribution of students served according to the HDI of the school neighborhoods. The following figure shows the levels of human development according to the location of each school.

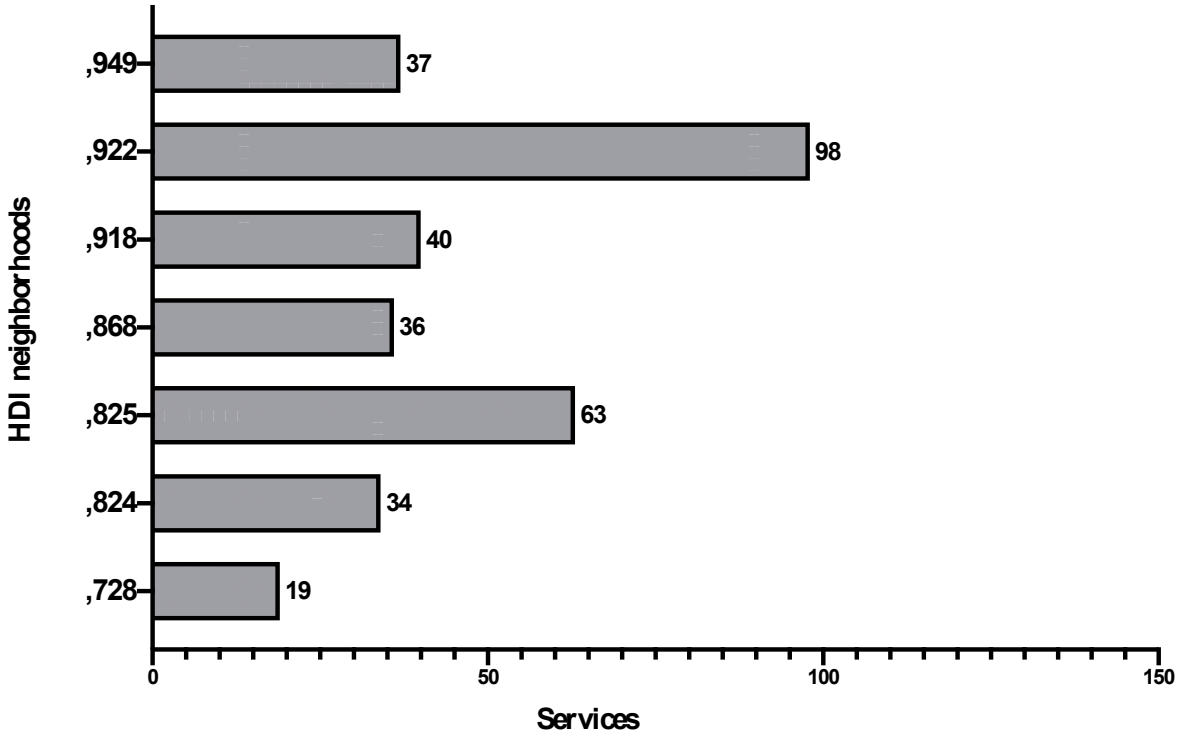

Figure 6. HDI of the regions where the schools are located
Source: authors

Considering that the average HDI of the investigated municipality is 0.823, when analyzing this distribution, it is clear that the students studied in regions with HDI above the municipal average. This is because, of the attendances in the sample analyzed, only one school was located in a region with an HDI lower than the municipal average.

In view of these data, the manager was asked if there was any direction to schools regarding the criterion of social vulnerability of the participating students. It was evident that it is not always possible to serve the school that is in this criterion of greater vulnerability because of the distance and time for travel between the school and the military unit. However, school managers are advised to prioritize children who are in more vulnerable situations; for example, children from nursing homes were mentioned among other beneficiaries of the program.

To identify relationships between the number of attendees, the IDEB score and the HDI of the regions of the schools, Spearman's correlation test was performed[25,26]. The following table presents the results obtained in the test.

Table 1. Correlation test between the IDEB and HDI of the schools analyzed

	IDEB School		***HDI School Region***	
Number of attendances	*R*	*p*	*r*	*p*
	.015	.781*	.047	.395*

Note: No statistically significant values were detected (*p>0.05).*
Source: authors

From the test, no statistically significant values were identified between the number of attendances, the IDEB score and the HDI of the regions of the students' schools. Only when performing the correlation test directly between the IDEB and the HDI of the regions of the

schools can statistically significant values be observed ($r=.744$; $p<0.01$), showing that the higher the HDI of the region of a school is, the higher the score obtained in the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB). This factor reflects the influence of socioeconomic factors on the basic education indices in the country.

The fact that most of the sample analyzed was in schools with good IDEB scores and in neighborhoods with relatively high HDI may have been a preponderant factor for this result, indicating the absence of schools with low rates in the sample (total attendance provided by the center analyzed in 2023).

Finally, the manager of the Municipal Department of Education and the directors of the school units were questioned about the suggestions for the development of PROFESP with the students of the Municipal Education Network or their specific schools. The program satisfactorily meets its main objectives. According to the answers of the two directors, the following stand out:

> *[...] The way it has been happening in school for some years has generated good results[...]*
> *[...] Our community had excellent acceptance and participation. Only compliments[...]*

Among the main suggestions of the principals, the increase in the number of vacancies in schools stood out, considering that there are students on the waiting list to participate in the program. This was corroborated by the manager of the Secretariat, who observes a waiting list of other schools interested in participating, in addition to the interest in service in other regions of the municipality, including the possibility of implementing the program in other military centers.

Discussion

When analyzing the profile of the participants of a PROFESP center located in the southern region of Brazil, it is evident that the number of the sample with 327 children and adolescents of both sexes is quite significant. This stands out owing to the guidelines in the Program's manual, which suggests that each military organization serves between 50 and 100 students[15]. In an analysis of PROFESP as a factor of social inclusion and development in sports, the authors[27] analyzed the development of the Program in 82 military centers during the year 2019. Among these, 61% work with 50 to 100 students, whereas 39% are centers that serve more than 100 students. In another study[13], when presenting data from the Program in the border region between Brazil and Bolivia, the authors mention that, in 2021, the Navy nucleus located in the municipality of Ladário, state of Mato Grosso do Sul, had 277 beneficiaries enrolled. These data were also presented in research[28] on the Navy's nucleus, which is located in the city of Rio de Janeiro and serves approximately 500 young people in the Program.

With respect to the age of the participants, even though the investigated center serves children and adolescents between 08 and 15 years of age, the data show that 9- and 10-year-olds stand out in relation to the others, which is justified by the orientation of the secretariat to schools to prioritize students in the final years of elementary school, owing to their autonomy to leave school, or even because the municipal education network of Curitiba is composed mostly of schools responsible for teaching the initial years (1st to 5th school years). At the national level, in 2019, 84.1% of the PROFESP centers served the public from 06-12 years of age, whereas 67.1% served young people aged 13-18 years[8]. In this regard, even in different proportions in relation to age, it is evident that the investigated nucleus fits into the two categories of national analysis.

This age result reflects the school year of the participants, showing that the 4th and 5th grades accounted for 86% of the students. Students are enrolled in seven municipal public schools, in which they are accompanied by teachers from the respective schools during the period of activities and receive the support of the municipal education department of the municipality with the availability of transportation between the school unit and the military organization. In an analysis of the PST, Santos[15] mentioned that this design of sectoral partnerships in decentralized programs is fundamental for the development of activities with beneficiaries. According to Silva[29,] "it is up to the partner state/municipal agencies to transport the PROFESP participants to the responsible". However, in another study, this cooperation agreement for transportation did not occur in all the centers of the program, such as the center located in the city of Corumbá (MS), where students reach the military organization by their own means[12].

An analysis of the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) reveals that the grades of the participating schools vary between 5.5 and 6.6. The IDEB score is considered one of the main indicators used to assess the quality of basic education in a country[27,30]. Its grade is composed of the average of the tests of the Portuguese and mathematics subjects together with the approval rate of the students of each school. Notably, the investigated municipality has an average value of 6.0, which ranks third among the capitals of the country in the early years of elementary school[31]. In this example, four of the seven schools are below the average of the municipality. Such data may be an indication for the Program to develop strategies in an attempt to contribute with educational reinforcement support activities to students/beneficiaries, privileging the subjects of mathematics and Portuguese, as pointed out by the PROFESP[20] manual.

Another significant point evidenced in the results was the human development index (HDI) of the neighborhoods where the schools are located. This analysis revealed that the municipality has an HDI of 0.823, which is considered high in comparison to the country's average[31]. In view of this, it was found that only the students from a single school analyzed in this study had human development levels below the municipal average (0.728) participating in the program. The others are enrolled in schools with an HDI above, which varies between 0.824 and 0.949. This is justified by the logistics of serving the schools closest to the military organization, located in a neighborhood with an HDI of 0.868, that is, above the average of the municipality. Even though schools in other regions with low HDI in the investigated municipality are interested in participating in the program, some issues, such as the displacement of students, prevent them from being served. This is because the distance between the schools and the military unit makes it impossible for students to make journeys on time and participate in food reinforcement activities (breakfast and lunch or lunch and snacks), sports practices and other cultural or educational practices during the after-school period. However, as pointed out by the manager, school principals are instructed to prioritize the inclusion of children and adolescents in more vulnerable situations; for example, students who are enrolled in schools located in regions with HDI above the municipal average but coming from nursing homes were obtained. This result indicates that certain schools located in neighborhoods with high HDI in the municipality analyzed in this study do not guarantee, by themselves, the absence of social inequalities or structural inequities among students.

In a study on the decentralization of the Segundo Tempo Program to municipal governments, Santos[15] reported that the implementation of the PST did not reach the most vulnerable municipalities according to human development levels (HDI). According to the author, even if there is a desire to guarantee the democratization of educational sports, to guarantee equity, the program's incentives for decentralization do not always reach the most vulnerable regions15. In view of this, authors such as Ferreira et al.[32] mention that military

organizations are not always located in regions of high vulnerability, and to facilitate the movement and access of beneficiaries, the Program serves students who live nearby.

The correlation between these HDI and IDEB variables indicated that socioeconomic factors influence the school performance of the participants. The results indicate that schools located in neighborhoods with the highest HDI have the highest IDEB scores; that is, the higher the socioeconomic profile is, the better their school performance. These data are important for reinforcing one of the objectives of the Program to serve individuals from less favored areas so that, in fact, this policy can contribute to social and educational improvements[21]. Along these lines, the author Teixeira[28] noted that, on the basis of the problems that plague many regions of vulnerability, PROFESP can contribute to reducing the risks of children and adolescents being involved with illicit experiences or decisions.

Although it presents relevant results, the present study has the limitation that it analyzed the services of a single military nucleus of the Brazilian Air Force. Thus, other discussions related to this theme should be held to address the findings of this study.

Conclusions

The present study aimed to analyze whether the services of a military nucleus of the Brazilian Air Force occurred in a population in a situation of social vulnerability. In this analysis, it was evident that the nucleus, together with municipal cooperation, proposed meeting the objectives of the Program by receiving beneficiaries with characteristics indicated in the policy: children and adolescents between 8 and 15 years old, all of whom were enrolled in public schools, and who participated in the activities during after-school hours.

The process of serving beneficiaries in the program revealed that the military nucleus is composed of students from the nearest schools. This selection process is carried out by the Department of Education, taking into account the travel time between journeys in the after-school period. Through the analysis of the HDI of the neighborhoods, it was evident that most schools are located in regions with high human development indices in relation to the municipal average and have good scores in the IDEB evaluation; in view of this, the managers of the school units prioritized the access of children and adolescents with greater social vulnerability and who did not participate in other projects of their school.

Although there is interest in serving children or schools from other regions in vulnerable situations, it is not always possible because of logistical issues, such as distance and travel time between schools and the military nucleus that offers the program. In view of this, it is recommended that the Forces in Sports Program be expanded to other military centers in the municipality investigated.

Finally, the analysis of educational managers highlights the relevance that the program represents for the participating children and adolescents. These testimonies reinforce that this initiative is essential to guarantee and ensure that society, according to its demands, has access to the constitutional rights of sport and other educational activities.

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