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ATHLETES' PERCEPTION OF CHESS AS A SPORT

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Information	Abstract
History: Submitted; January 2026 Revised; February 2026 Accepted; March 2026 Keywords: Athlete; Perception; Chess; Sport.	This study aims to examine the stigma attached to chess as a sport, focusing on the perceptions of the community, and sports players. Although chess has been officially recognized as a sport by various national and international institutions, many parties still doubt its status as a physical activity worthy of being called a sport. This case study uses a qualitative approach with in-depth interview techniques, observation, and documentation studies of several informants, including chess athletes, coaches, PERCASI administrators, and the public. The results of the study indicate that the stigma against chess arises from the assumption that sports must involve intense physical activity. However, the data also reveal that chess has competitive, strategic aspects, and significant cognitive benefits. This study recommends the need for public education and integration of chess into the physical education curriculum to reduce stigma and increase appreciation of chess as a complete sport.

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INTRODUCTION

Stigma is an attribute that can damage a person's self-image and significantly impact their personality. Stigma prevents a person from behaving normally due to the label or mark attached to them by society. According to Goffman (1963), stigma is given in the form of a sign intended to indicate or inform society that the individual bearing the mark is different or considered deviant, for example, as a criminal, a slave, or a traitor.

Social stigma is formed from societal prejudice against individuals who possess an identity (Suhastini & Fitriana, 2022). Furthermore, (Suhastini & Fitriana, 2022) also state that according to (Sukmawati Varamitha & Sukma Noor Akbar, Neka Erlyani; 2014), the stigma process occurs due to several interrelated processes: cues, labeling (stereotypes), prejudice, and discrimination. Thus, stigma tends to refer to attributes that worsen a person's image. The process of stigmatization can ultimately lead to a person losing their social identity, leading to ostracization or exclusion from social circles (Dayanti & Legowo, 2021).

On the other hand, sport has a broad meaning. According to Husdarta (2010:133), sport is an energetic muscular activity in which athletes demonstrate their motor abilities and will to the maximum. The Council of Europe (1980) defines sport as a spontaneous and free activity undertaken during leisure time. The term "sport" is not limited to officially organized competitive sports but also encompasses simple physical activities such as gymnastics and fitness training (Husdarta, 2010:134). Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure (Reza et al., 2021).

Giriwijoyo (2005:30) adds that sport is a series of bodily movements performed consciously, regularly, and planned with the aim of improving the body's functional abilities. There are five criteria/characteristics that must be present in a sport: involving physical activity, practiced for recreational purposes, involving elements of competition, having an institutional organizational framework, and general acceptance (e.g., by the media or sports agencies) as other important criteria for an activity to be considered a sport (Reza et al., 2021). Based on these various definitions, it can be concluded that sport is a physical activity that contains elements of play, struggle, and a specific goal, whether for health or achievement.

Chess is a game played on an 8x8 grid board by two players. Each player is given three pieces that must be arranged horizontally. Each player is only allowed to move one piece per turn. Players are not permitted to move pieces onto a space where another piece already exists. Victory occurs when one of the two players successfully arranges their pieces in a straight line, either horizontally, vertically, or diagonally. For a horizontal win, the arrangement of the pieces must be different from the initial arrangement in the horizontal row (Utama, 2017) in (Sari et al., 2023). Chess is a sport that emphasizes strategy, concentration, and sharp thinking.

Chess is officially recognized as a competitive sport by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and has an international federation, the Fédération Internationale des Échecs (FIDE). In Indonesia, chess is part of national sporting competitions, from the Student Sports Week to the National Sports Week (PON). However, some people often consider chess not a "real sport" because it does not involve intensive physical activity like soccer, badminton, or athletics. This perception has given rise to a social stigma against chess as a sport that is considered less challenging, less popular, and often perceived as merely an intellectual game.

In Buleleng Regency, chess remains actively developed through various activities, including extracurricular activities at schools, inter-student competitions, and coaching by official organizations such as Percasi. However, it is still unclear how the Buleleng community views chess athletes and whether they perceive any stigma or stereotypes affecting their social standing. The main issue addressed in this study is the social stigma surrounding chess as a sport in Buleleng Regency. This stigma stems from the perception among some communities that sports must involve intense physical activity, leading to chess, which places greater emphasis on the physical aspect.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. This qualitative study aimed to understand the meaning, perspectives, and subjective experiences of informants regarding the stigma experienced in chess. This approach was chosen to allow researchers to gather in-depth information based on the context and realities experienced by the research subjects (Basrowi & Suwandi, 2008). This research was conducted in June 2025 at the Bhuana Patra Sports Center in Singaraja and the surrounding area in Buleleng Regency. The target group was individuals directly involved in the sport of chess. The research subjects consisted of nine informants: three members of the public who frequently exercise at the Bhuana Patra Sports Center in Singaraja, two chess coaches who are also members of the Buleleng Chess Association (Percasi Buleleng), and four active chess athletes in Buleleng Regency. Informants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique, selecting informants deemed capable of providing relevant information according to the research needs.

The research procedure was carried out through several stages: preparation, including the creation of interview instruments and obtaining research permits; data collection through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation; and data analysis, which took place during and after data collection. The data collection process concluded with the drawing of conclusions and the preparation of a research report. The types of data used in this study were qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide; direct observation of social interactions and behaviors within the chess environment; and documentation in the form of archives, photographs, and written documents relevant to the phenomenon of stigma in chess. The primary instrument in this study was the researcher herself, assisted by an interview guide and observation sheets.

Data collection techniques included qualitative interviews to explore the experiences and perspectives of informants in depth (Creswell, 2014); participant observation to observe behavior and situations directly (Bogdan & Biklen, 2017); and documentation study to supplement the data through relevant documents or archives (Creswell, 2014). Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This analysis process took place simultaneously with the data collection process to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding. The validity of the data in this study was tested using source and technical triangulation techniques, namely by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data obtained.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Results

Based on interviews and observations conducted with informants, it was discovered that the stigma against chess as a sport is no longer directly found in the Buleleng community. An athlete with the initials KY stated, "The response from my community, especially my parents, was very positive. Because chess itself allowed me to receive scholarships from junior high school through high school, which helped somewhat reduce my school expenses." KY stated that his community, especially his parents, responded positively to his choice to become a chess athlete. This support is evident in the benefits KY has received, such as receiving scholarships from junior high school through high school. Informant MA stated that his family and neighbors are proud of his achievements in district and provincial chess championships. His neighbors even became interested in chess after frequently discussing the game with MA. Meanwhile, his friends have provided positive feedback, albeit in the form of simple words.

Coaches and administrators of the Buleleng Cusi Association (Percasi Buleleng), GK and SD, stated that during their involvement in the administration, they have never heard of any negative views from the community or any institution toward chess as a sport. Athlete KY also

emphasized that he never felt inferior or heard negative stigmas about chess. On the contrary, he felt that chess had a positive impact on his ability to make decisions through careful consideration.

However, several athletes, such as GA and AD, revealed that they had heard the stigma that chess wasn't a sport, but they didn't hear it directly from their environment, but rather from social media. In an interview, GA stated, "I have heard the stigma that chess isn't a sport, but not directly; I heard it on social media. But I believe chess is a sport because it's officially competed in the Provincial Sports Week (Porprov), the National Games (PON), and even international competitions. Furthermore, I've seen on social media that there are also supporting factors that suggest chess is a sport, including competitions, coaching, etc., which makes it a sport. Despite hearing this stigma, I personally never felt belittled. I believe chess is the same as other sports. For example, during Provincial Sports Week (Porprov) competitions, the bonus I receive is the same as in other sports, so I never felt belittled."

GA athletes emphasized that chess remains an officially recognized sport in various events such as Porprov, PON, and international competitions. AD athletes also added that the public's perception of the definition of sport is now expanding and not only limited to physical activity. "I know that chess is a sport, and I also agree that chess is considered a sport even though it doesn't involve much physical activity but is more of a brain sport," said a member of the public with the initials IK when interviewed at Gor Bhuana Patra. Interviews with members of the public, such as RK and IK, showed that they understand and recognize chess as a sport, although it emphasizes the brain's performance aspect more than physical activity. Based on observations and interviews, it can be concluded that the stigma against chess as a sport in the Buleleng community is rarely encountered directly, although some athletes still often hear about it through social media.

Tabel 1. Summary of Informant Responses to the Stigma of Chess as a Sport

Informant Family	Family Environment	Community Environment	Social Media	Personal Views
KY	Positive	Positive	There is no	Proud, chess is beneficial
MA	Positive	Positive	There is no	Proud, chess is contagious to neighbors
GA	Positive	Unknown	There is a stigma	Chess is an official sport
AD	Positive	No stigma	There is a stigma	Chess remains a sport
GK	Positive	Positive	There is no	No stigma in society
SD	Positive	Positive	There is no	No stigma in society
RK	Positive	Recognition of chess as a sport	There is no	Chess is a brain sport
IK	Positive	Recognition of chess as a sport	There is no	Chess is a brain sport

Discussions

Based on the research results, the family environment, surrounding community, and the Buleleng Percasi (Casi Buleleng Association) management provide positive support to chess athletes. This finding indicates that the stigma surrounding chess as a sport in the Buleleng community is starting to diminish. These results align with the opinions of Chu & Zhang (2019) and Keegan et al. (2010) in Sinulingga et al. (2020), who stated that social support, especially from parents, is crucial in shaping athletes' motivation and success. This support positively impacts athletes' self-confidence, motivation, and mental health.

These findings are further reinforced by Hurlock (1991), who emphasized that social support from others can help individuals cope with pressure, anxiety, and stress. Furthermore, Phukan (2022) in Andriansyah et al. (2025) emphasized that athlete performance is significantly

influenced by support from family, friends, and the social environment. However, although direct stigma in society is becoming less common, the influence of social media remains a challenge for chess athletes. Several athletes, such as GA and A, stated that the stigma of "chess is not a sport" still frequently appears on social media.

This aligns with Rahayu's (2012) opinion in Daffa et al. (2021b), which states that social media has a negative side that can affect athletes' psychological well-being and even lead to online bullying. Daffa et al. (2021b) also revealed that negative comments on social media can affect athletes' moods and performance if not managed properly. Therefore, concrete efforts are needed, such as digital literacy education for athletes and the public, so they can be more discerning in their responses to social media content and avoid being easily influenced by unfounded stigma. Furthermore, athletes also need psychological support to stay focused and resist external pressure. This support can be provided by parents, coaches, peers, and the chess community.

In addition to social support, it is important to promote and campaign positively about chess as a sport through the media, both print and social, as well as holding open events to increase public awareness and appreciation of chess. Prasetyo & Yunarta (2023) emphasized that social support from parents, coaches, and peers significantly influences athletes' motivation to achieve. This finding is also supported by Ardianto & Supriyono (2021), who stated that internal and external factors, such as family support, sports organizations, and the surrounding environment, are crucial in supporting athletes' success in achieving success.

Thus, the results of this study indicate that although the stigma against chess in the Buleleng community is decreasing, the influence of social media remains a challenge that must be addressed together. Preventive measures such as education, psychological support, and positive promotion can be a solution to building the image of chess as a sport on par with other sports.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that in general, there is no direct stigma found among the Buleleng community towards chess as a sport. Most respondents, including athletes, coaches, Percasi administrators, and the public, responded positively to the existence of chess. However, some athletes still hear stigma or negative assumptions through social media, such as the assumption that chess is not a sport because it does not involve physical activity. The development of information technology, especially social media, has also influenced public perception and the psychological state of athletes. Therefore, digital literacy education, psychological support for athletes, and more extensive promotion of chess are needed to eradicate the remaining stigma and create a more supportive social environment for chess athletes. It is hoped that Percasi Buleleng will continue to consistently produce young athletes who are able to compete and bring honor to the region and the nation.

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