

National Survey of Fitness Trends in Greece for 2023

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Abstract A global study is being carried out by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) to determine trends in the health and fitness industry since 2007. The aim of the present study was to identify the most important health and fitness trends in Greece for the second time and to examine any potential changes in this field compared to 2021 nationwide and 2022 worldwide. An online survey was sent to 4,981 professionals who worked in the health and fitness sector using the methodology of similar ACSM's regional and worldwide studies. A total of 809 responses were collected with a response rate of 17.4%. The ten most important in Greece for 2023 were Personal training, high-intensity interval training, small group training, functional fitness training, exercise for weight loss, high-intensity functional training, body weight training, fitness programs for older adults, exercise is medicine, and group exercise training. Health-related trends appear to be popular while technology- and mind & body fitness-related trends seem not to be very attractive. Traditional exercise modes are still attractive and relevant, but digital services are currently experiencing low popularity after the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Results also showed that fitness programs widely offered in boutique fitness studios demonstrate exceptional popularity nationwide. The present outcomes of this study are in line with those reported for Greece in 2021, but not for Europe in 2022. Such observations may highlight the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Greek health and fitness industry and show a smooth return to normality.

Keywords Greek Fitness Survey, Fitness Sector, Trends, Top Programs, Top Services, ACSM Survey

1. Introduction

The health and fitness industry has shown an enormous growth in the past decades in Europe [1] and worldwide [2], demonstrating a substantial increased number of operators, employees, members, and facilities. Although disruptions persist for the global sport, leisure, and physical activity sector due to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), promising data and important trends have been recently reported, showing the value of fitness clubs and studios and the quality of in-person services offering engaging on-site exercise experiences [2]. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges both for people and society in the past two years, demonstrating significantly difficult times for business, professional development, and consumer behavior among entrepreneurs, employees, and customers [1,2]. Nevertheless, the European health and fitness sector has been considered a vibrant and innovative business area for new concepts and promising professional opportunities, showing great potential for continuous growth [3], despite the fact that the large majority of consumers characterized by physical inactivity and unhealthy weight. More specifically, 31% of the adult population are sedentary [4] while 52% are overweight [5] worldwide.

In Greece, it has been estimated that there are approximately 2,500 companies offering on-site fitness services, including multipurpose gyms, boutique gyms, fitness (personal training and mind-body) studios, and CrossFit-like clubs. However, recent national industry data regarding the market size, annual revenue, and penetration rate are limited [6,7]. Greece demonstrates one of the best health statuses among other European countries [8]; however, the prevalence of lifestyle-related chronic diseases is systematically increasing at an alarming rate

nationwide adversely affecting the quality of life and life expectancy compared to the mean of the European Union (EU) countries [9]. Interestingly, 60%, 27%, 9%, and 26% of the Greek adult population have overweight, obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, respectively [8]. In addition, sedentarism shows significantly increased levels among Greek citizens and therefore Greece appears to be one of the most inactive countries in the EU [10,11].

On the other side, the dynamic role of regular physical activity and exercise in the fight against the most common chronic diseases that vastly impact public health nowadays has been widely reported [12]. Additionally, the critical role of qualified exercise professionals working in both the fitness and clinical settings has been documented as a strategy that promotes the connection between the medical and fitness industries in order to disseminate the value of active lifestyle in health and well-being among the masses [13]. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) as the global authority on sports medicine and exercise science has launched a worldwide annual survey on health and fitness trends since 2006 aiming to identify the most attractive, valuable and safe physical activity and exercise types among all industry stakeholders [14]. Such a study may support users of fitness services to have engaging exercise experiences while developing important professional development opportunities for fitness trainers, building innovative business concepts, and boosting service quality, loyalty, and customer retention in the fitness facilities [14].

2. Objectives

The state of fitness trends in Greece has been studied once, surveying in-depth the most popular health and fitness for 2021 [15]. On the other hand, the ACSM's survey has been including data from different regions providing insights into regional and international comparisons [16,17]. Moreover, a European survey examining the top health and fitness trends by collecting data from 40 different countries is not able to provide secure explanations for Greece because of their diverse sample sizes and the limited recruitment of Greek respondents [18]. Thus, the present study aims a) to identify the most important health and fitness trends in Greece for 2023 and b) to examine any potential changes in this field compared to 2021 nationwide and 2022 worldwide. The results of this survey may contribute to decisions made in the health and fitness, sector supporting all key stakeholders to fight against the obesity and inactivity epidemics nationwide.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Study Design

This study implemented the ACSM's methodology

using exactly the same criteria with those that have been widely used since 2006 in the worldwide [14], North American [16,17], European [18], Chinese [19], Brazilian/Argentinian [20], Spanish [21], Mexican [22], and Colombian [23] surveys of fitness trends. The survey was designed to identify the trends (not fads) that are considered popular because they may have a positive impact on the national health and fitness sector while showing high attractiveness among industry stakeholders who are based in Greece serving various types of clients. As such, a distinction between a "fad" and a "trend" according to dictionary was included in the introduction of the survey to help participants understand the difference between these two key words. Briefly, a team of experts in commercial, community, corporate, and clinical health and fitness sector as well as academia was recruited by ACSM to help identify a list of previously identified trends as well as some new emerging trends [14]. Thus, an electronic-based questionnaire using an online survey platform (SurveyMonkey) was developed including 44 applicable trends in the health and fitness sector that were identified from various sources and from the personal experience of some experts. Each potential trend was accompanied by a short explanation that provided respondents with a basic description in English as previously reported [15]. The questionnaire also included 10 demographic questions and was designed to be completed in 15 minutes or less and all information was provided in English without any change from the original edition developed by ACSM. The research was conducted electronically from May 21 to August 1, 2022 (10 weeks) and no incentives were offered to help increase participation in the survey. The submitted responses on the potential trends were assessed using a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (least likely to be a trend) to 10 (most likely to be a trend) as previously described [14].

3.2. Participants

Databases of contacts of local universities i.e., Schools of Physical Education and Sport Sciences across the country as well as the Panhellenic Union of Physical Education Teachers, Panhellenic Gyms Association and the European Register of Exercise Professionals (only Greek registered members) were mainly used to recruit respondents for this survey. The online survey was sent electronically to 4,655 individual contacts in total. All contacts were health and fitness industry stakeholders who lived and worked in Greece such as exercise professionals of any employment status, university students (undergraduate and postgraduate level), faculty and teaching staff members, gym owners, managers and program directors. Likewise, the survey was posted on web sites and social media accounts of all involved parties nationwide.

Table 1. Demographics of the Greek survey respondents

		N	%
<i>Gender</i>			
	Female	357	44.1
	Male	452	55.9
<i>Age (yrs)</i>			
	18–21	111	13.7
	22–34	320	39.6
	35–44	244	30.2
	45–54	102	12.6
	55–64	27	3.3
	65+	4	0.5
<i>Region</i>			
	Attica	206	25.5
	Central Macedonia	119	14.7
	Thessaly	102	12.6
	West Greece	87	10.8
	Central Greece	69	8.5
	East Macedonia and Thrace	65	8.1
	Peloponnese	60	7.4
	Crete	45	5.6
	Epirus	32	3.9
	West Macedonia	9	1.1
	Ionian Islands	7	0.8
	North Aegean	5	0.6
	South Aegean	3	0.4
<i>Education</i>			
	Vocational Education Training	123	15.2
	Bachelor's degree	343	42.4
	Master's degree	308	38.1
	Doctorate degree	35	4.3
<i>Occupation</i>			
	Personal Trainer	176	21.8
	Gym Owner/Operator	119	14.7
	Undergraduate Student	97	12.0
	Fitness Instructor	92	11.4
	Group Fitness Instructor	72	8.9
	Gym Manager	47	5.8
	Pilates Instructor	46	5.7
	Yoga Instructor	39	4.8
	University Professor	37	4.5

Table 1 Continued

	Physical Education Teacher	29	3.6
	Graduate Student	19	2.3
	Exercise Physiologist	17	2.1
	Vocational Educator/Tutor	15	1.9
	Clinical Exercise Physiologist	4	0.5
<i>Experience (yrs)</i>			
	0–5	177	21.6
	6–10	124	33.9
	10–20	136	28.2
	20+	105	16.3
<i>Work status</i>			
	Full-time	330	48.7
	Part-time	179	32.1
	Hourly basis	33	19.2
<i>Career choice</i>			
	First job	361	55.4
	Second job	141	33.7
	Third job	40	10.9
<i>Annual Salary (€)</i>			
	<20,000	695	85.9
	20,000–29,999	49	6.1
	30,000–39,999	23	2.9
	40,000–49,999	15	1.8
	50,000 – 59,999	9	1.1
	60,000 – 69,999	7	0.9
	70,000 – 79,999	6	0.7
	80,000 – 89,999	2	0.3
	90,000 – 99,999	2	0.2
	>100,000	1	0.1

Table 2. Comprehensive ranking of fitness trends in Greece for 2023

#	Trend	Score \pm SD
1	Personal Training	8.32 \pm 2.09
2	High-Intensity Interval Training	8.11 \pm 2.23
3	Small Group Training	8.06 \pm 2.00
4	Functional Fitness Training	8.02 \pm 2.03
5	Exercise for Weight Loss	7.86 \pm 5.00
6	High-Intensity Functional Training	7.75 \pm 2.05
7	Body Weight Training	7.68 \pm 2.18
8	Fitness Programs for Older Adults	7.55 \pm 2.28
9	Exercise is Medicine	7.52 \pm 2.47
10	Group Training	7.54 \pm 2.29
11	Pilates	7.39 \pm 2.37
12	Boutique Fitness Studios	7.26 \pm 2.37
13	Strength Training with Free Weights	7.20 \pm 2.37
14	Outdoor Activities	7.14 \pm 2.52
15	Circuit Training	7.13 \pm 2.41
16	Licensure for Fitness Professionals	7.12 \pm 2.40
17	Health/Wellness Coaching	7.11 \pm 2.62
18	Employing Certified Fitness Professionals	7.10 \pm 2.44
19	Wearable Technology	7.09 \pm 2.46
20	Core Training	7.06 \pm 2.72
21	Home Exercise Gyms	6.97 \pm 2.72
22	Post Rehabilitation Classes	6.94 \pm 2.41
23	Clinical Integration/Medical Fitness	6.90 \pm 2.31
24	Yoga	6.80 \pm 2.58
25	Walking/Running/Jogging/Cycling Clubs	6.76 \pm 2.45
26	Online Live & On-Demand Exercise Classes	6.72 \pm 2.35
27	Online Personal Training	6.66 \pm 2.54
28	Pre- and Post-natal Fitness	6.57 \pm 2.83
29	Children and Exercise	6.38 \pm 2.51
30	Low-cost and Budget Gyms	6.29 \pm 2.56
31	Mobility/Myofascial Devices and Recovery	6.19 \pm 2.71
32	Stretching Training	6.08 \pm 3.16
33	Mobile Exercise Apps	6.06 \pm 2.33
34	Balance and Stabilization Training	6.03 \pm 2.80
35	Worksite Health Promotion Programs	6.01 \pm 3.54
36	Lifestyle Medicine	5.92 \pm 2.59
37	Worker Incentive Programs	5.17 \pm 3.08
38	Outcome Measurements	5.15 \pm 3.50
39	Long-term Youth Development	5.11 \pm 2.75
40	Dance-based Workouts	5.08 \pm 2.73
41	Virtual Reality Exercise Training	5.05 \pm 3.09
42	Electrical Muscle Stimulation	5.02 \pm 2.48
43	Aquatic Exercise	4.78 \pm 3.17
44	Mind-Body Movement	4.77 \pm 3.17

SD, standard deviation

Table 3. Comparative analysis of top 20 fitness trends in Greece (2021 vs. 2023) and the world (2022)

#	Fitness Trends in Greece for 2021 [15]	Fitness Trends in Greece for 2023	Worldwide Fitness Trends for 2022 [14]
1	Personal Training	Personal Training	Wearable Technology
2	Exercise is Medicine	High-Intensity Interval Training	Home Exercise Gyms ³
3	High-Intensity Interval Training	Small Group Training	Outdoor Activities
4	Small Group Training	Functional Fitness Training	Strength Training with Free Weights
5	Functional Fitness Training	Exercise for Weight Loss	Exercise for Weight Loss
6	Body Weight Training	High-Intensity Functional Training	Personal Training
7	Exercise for Weight Loss	Body Weight Training	High Intensity Interval Training
8	Circuit Training	Fitness Programs for Older Adults	Body Weight Training
9	Strength Training with Free Weights	Exercise is Medicine	Online Live/on-demand Exercise Classes ³
10	Fitness Programs for Older Adults	Group Training	Health/Wellness Coaching
11	Wearable Technology	Pilates ²	Fitness Programs for Older Adults
12	Group Training	Boutique Fitness Studios	Exercise is Medicine
13	Health/Wellness Coaching	Strength Training with Free Weights	Employing Certified Fitness Professionals
14	Children and Exercise ¹	Outdoor Activities	Functional Fitness Training
15	Employing Certified Fitness Professionals	Circuit Training	Yoga ³
16	Outdoor Activities	Licensure for Fitness Professionals	Mobile Exercise Apps ³
17	Post Rehabilitation Classes	Health/Wellness Coaching	Online Personal Training ³
18	Clinical Integration/Medical Fitness	Employing Certified Fitness Professionals	Licensure for Fitness Professionals
19	Boutique Fitness Studios	Wearable Technology	Lifestyle Medicine ³
20	Licensure for Fitness Professionals	Core Training ²	Group Training

¹appearance only in Greece for 2021; ²appearance only in Greece for 2023; ³appearance only in the 2022 worldwide fitness trends

3.3. Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics are presented as a proportion (%) for demographics and as a mean score (0–10) ± standard deviation (SD) for the trends ranking.

4. Results

The online survey collected 809 responses, which represents a return rate of 17.4%. Demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1. Survey participants were from 13 different regions nationwide. Demographics data from the survey included 44% females and 56% males across a wide spectrum of backgrounds and experiences, with 45% having more than 10 years of experience in the industry and 16% with more than 20 years of experience. Additionally, 57% of respondents currently work as exercise professionals distributed to

various specialties (primarily as personal trainers) and 85% hold an academic degree in exercise science or related field. Full-time occupation and first career choice were reported by 49% and 55%, respectively. Lastly, 86% of participants stated an annual salary under €20,000 euro.

All candidate trends were ranked from highest (most popular trend) to lowest (least popular trend) and are illustrated in Table 2. A comparison of top 20 fitness trends among Greece 2021, Greece 2023 and World 2022 is shown in Table 3. Trends were also organized in the following six different represented groups as it has been articulated elsewhere [24]: 1) trends related to fitness professionals, 2) trends related to fitness activities, 3) trends related to training modalities, 4) trends related to programs oriented to specific populations, 5) technology-related trends, and 6) specific health-related trends. Table 4 presents the grouped approach of the comparative analysis of top 20 fitness trends in Greece (2021 vs. 2023) and the world (2022).

Table 4. A grouped approach of the comparative analysis of top 20 fitness trends in Greece (2021 vs. 2023) and the world (2022)

#	Fitness Trends in Greece for 2021 [15]	#	Fitness Trends in Greece for 2023	#	Global Fitness Trends for 2022 [14]
<i>Trends related to fitness professionals</i>					
15	Employing Certified Fitness Professionals	18	Employing Certified Fitness Professionals	13	Employing Certified Fitness Professionals
20	Licensure for Fitness Professionals	16	Licensure for Fitness Professionals	18	Licensure for Fitness Professionals
<i>Trends related to fitness activities:</i>					
3	High-Intensity Interval Training	2	High-Intensity Interval Training	7	High-Intensity Interval Training
5	Functional Fitness Training	4	Functional Fitness Training	–	
6	Body Weight Training	7	Body Weight Training	8	Body Weight Training
8	Circuit Training	15	Circuit Training	–	
9	Strength Training with Free Weights	13	Strength Training with Free Weights	4	Strength Training with Free Weights
16	Outdoor Activities	14	Outdoor Activities	3	Outdoor Activities
–		6	High-Intensity Functional Training	7	High-Intensity Interval Training
–		11	Pilates	–	
–		20	Core Training	–	
–		–		15	Yoga
19	Boutique Fitness Studios	12	Boutique Fitness Studios	–	
–		–		2	Home Exercise Gyms
<i>Trends related to training modalities:</i>					
1	Personal Training	1	Personal Training	6	Personal Training
4	Small Group Training	3	Small Group Training	–	
12	Group Training	10	Group Training	20	Group Training
13	Health/Wellness Coaching	17	Health/Wellness Coaching	10	Health/Wellness Coaching
<i>Trends related to programs oriented to specific populations:</i>					
7	Exercise for Weight Loss	5	Exercise for Weight Loss	5	Exercise for Weight Loss
10	Fitness Programs for Older Adults	8	Fitness Programs for Older Adults	11	Fitness Programs for Older Adults
14	Children and Exercise	–			
<i>Technology-related trends:</i>					
11	Wearable Technology	19	Wearable Technology	1	Wearable Technology
–		–		9	Online Live/On-Demand Exercise Classes
–		–		16	Mobile Exercise Apps
–		–		17	Online Personal Training
<i>Specific health-related trends:</i>					
2	Exercise is Medicine	9	Exercise is Medicine	12	Exercise is Medicine
17	Post Rehabilitation Classes	–		–	
18	Clinical Integration/Medical Fitness	–		–	
–		–		19	Lifestyle Medicine

In brief, personal training was selected as the most popular trend in the Greek health and fitness industry for 2023. Specifically, four trends related to fitness activities (#2 high-intensity interval training [HIIT], #4 functional fitness training, #6 high-intensity functional training [HIFT], #7 body weight training), three related to fitness modalities (#1 personal training, #3 small group training, #10 group training), two related to programs oriented to specific populations (#5 exercise for weight loss, #8 fitness programs for older adults), and one related to health (#9 exercise is medicine) are included in the list of top 10 most attractive fitness trends nationwide. Comparing the top 20 Greek fitness trends for 2023 with those reported for 2021, there is only one trend from 2021 (#11 children and exercise) is not included in the present list, while two trends (#11 Pilates and #20 core training) appear for the first time in the list for 2023. Comparing the top 20 Greek fitness trends for 2021 and 2023 with the global ones published by ACSM for 2022, there are six trends that are included only in the worldwide list (#2 home exercise gyms, #9 online live and on-demand exercise classes, #15 mobile exercise apps, #16 online personal training, #17 yoga, #19 lifestyle medicine).

5. Discussion

5.1. Main Results in Brief

A survey of fitness trends in Greece was conducted for the second time aiming to help all industry stakeholders explore the current status of the health and fitness trends associated with specific services and programs. Furthermore, it may support gym operators/managers, exercise professionals, and educators to elevate customer engagement and experience through good practices and evidence-based strategies within the physical activity, exercise and leisure sector. In Greece, personal training, high-intensity interval training, small group training, functional fitness training, and exercise for weight loss, were identified as the top 5 trends for 2023, respectively. Interestingly, 50% of top 20 selections are trends related to fitness activities associated with various types of exercise and facilities. Trends related to fitness modalities were the second most attractive category of trends, while technology-, health-, and specific population-oriented trends were selected as less attractive. Likewise, some mind & body fitness-related trends such as yoga and tai chi, which are considered as a subgroup of those trends related to fitness activities, were not included in the top 20 demonstrating low popularity in Greece. However, Pilates was ranked 11th for 2023, despite the fact that it was not included in top 20 list for 2021 nationwide.

5.2. Personal Training: The King!

The results of the second-ever Greek survey on fitness

trends using the ACSM's methodology [14] display many similar points with other recently published studies examining fitness trends in various regions [16-24]. More specifically, personal training was ranked #1 in the present study, which is a finding fully aligned with the outcomes reported for Greece in 2021 and Europe in 2020 [15,16]. Furthermore, this specific trend seems to be attractive globally as the sixth most popular fitness trend [14] while it was ranked #8 in the USA, #1 in Brazil, #3 in Mexico, #3 in Europe, #7 in Australia, #17 in China, and #4 in Spain [16]. Fitness programs based on personal training services appear to be exceptionally attractive for Europeans and thus almost 75% of the offered fitness services are focused on a traditional training model characterized by one-on-one exercise sessions [25]. Additionally, the profession of personal trainer has been documented as the second most promising occupational role among fitness professionals in Europe [26]. Personal training includes goal setting, fitness assessment, and exercise programming with a trainer in one-on-one settings. Such an approach provides exercise technique instruction, monitor progress, and progress workouts with each client encounter and based on the client's progress. The present outcomes may confirm that the evolution of the health and fitness industry is associated with personal training services that seem to be able to improve the customer engagement through individualized exercise experiences [3]. Hence, fitness businesses are likely to promote personal training services in order to improve customers' satisfaction and loyalty [3].

On the other hand, group training involves instructors teaching and leading individuals through in-person group classes (defined as more than 5 participants). Such exercise sessions are designed for different fitness levels utilizing a variety of equipment to teach many types of classes, from cardio-based and indoor cycling to dance-based and step classes. This particular trend appears similarly popular in Greece for 2021 and 2023; however, group training seriously had been affected by COVID-19 in 2022 and thus it was ranked high on the list of top 20 fitness trends across the globe [14-17]. Additionally, dance- and aquatic-based workouts show significantly limited applicability in Greece since both were ranked 40th and 43rd, respectively.

5.3. What is Trending in Fitness Activities?

HIIT (#2), small group training (#3), functional fitness training (#4), HIFT (#6), body weight training (#7), Pilates (#11), and circuit training (#15) are trends that appear to be popular not only in Greece for 2021 and 2023 but also across the world [14,16]. Their attractiveness may be steadily increasing in the worldwide fitness industry because these particular trends are considered the main services in boutique fitness studios (#19), which have been reported as an emerging type of fitness facilities [27].

Notably, such studios principally offering targeted services are also reported as a workspace for European exercise professionals with the greatest potential [261]. However, this fitness setting does not appear as popular in other regions since it is not included in top 20 fitness trends for 2022 [14,16]. Nevertheless, recent evidence shows that the fitness industry is facing a new landscape significantly affected by innovation, local socioeconomic status, and the level of competition [3] but also epidemiological status after the challenging period 2020-2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic [1,2]. Noteworthy, business models and marketing strategies have changed in the past decade in Greece due to a long-lasting socioeconomic crisis since 2009 [28]. Therefore, personal training and boutique fitness studios seem to be some new options on customer engagement and experience within a competitive business environment [27,29].

Aiming to explain the popularity of the aforementioned trends related to fitness activities from a scientific standpoint, a large and convincing body of evidence reveals that a HIIT may be an injury-free, efficient, time-effective, and enjoyable type of exercise for improving metabolic health, physical fitness, and well-being in populations with unhealthy weight representing the vast majority of the adult population worldwide nowadays [30-32]. Additionally, emerging research demonstrates that hybrid-type exercise programs incorporating HIIT, functional fitness and body weight training into a single session performed in a small-group setting induce positive alterations in various psychophysiological markers [33-37] among overweight and obese populations. Interestingly, these particular populations are clearly highlighted in the present study since exercise for weight loss was ranked #5 for 2023.

On the other side, large multipurpose gyms with large facilities are still popular in Greece [6,7]. This fact may explain the observation that conventional training modalities such as strength training with free weights (#10) and group training (#13) are reported popular in Greece for 2023 but they also seem attractive options around the globe [14,16,17]. Interestingly, group training classes delivering HIIT, functional fitness, and bodyweight programs have been documented as some of the primary fitness services of the European health and fitness clubs [38]. Moreover, resistance training has been widely recognized as a foundational piece of the exercise programming puzzle for various populations of all ages [39].

5.4. Are Underserved Markets Hot Enough?

In this Greek survey, two out of top 20 selections are trends related to programs focusing on specific populations such as exercise for weight loss (#5) and fitness programs for older adults (#8), as well as one trend

related to health (#9 exercise is medicine) indicating an interaction among physical exercise, overweight/obesity, health, and aging. These findings underline the potential of these areas for gym operators, managers, and fitness professionals since several cardiometabolic health-related chronic diseases are currently on the rise in Greece [9]. Additionally, these findings are aligned with those reported in similar studies investigating the top fitness trends locally, regionally, and globally [14-24]. Taking these observations into consideration, it appears that there is an interaction between some top Greek fitness trends and common health issues as previously described [40].

Observing the increased popularity of personal training in the Greek survey for 2021 and 2023, it is a finding highlighting the emerging need for individualized fitness services adapted for the masses. Considering that a big majority of adults in Greece demonstrate several lifestyle-related chronic conditions, poor musculoskeletal health, and physical limitations [9], private training sessions may offer adequate supervision and promote a positive exercise experience. This is maybe the magic bullet of personal training compared to other trends related to fitness activities and modalities, since an inclusive environment has been considered a key communication strategy for increasing customer engagement in the health and fitness sector [29].

5.5. Is Technology a Game-changer?

Interestingly, trends related to technology such as online personal training, mobile exercise apps, virtual training, online live and on-demand exercise classes, and electrical muscle stimulation training were not in the top 20. Only wearable technology (#19) shows a noteworthy popularity that corroborates findings recently reported from similar surveys conducted in various regions [14,16,17]. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly changed the established landscape of the health and fitness sector through the digitalization, the transformation of the conventional fitness services never happened in an absolute way in Greece. More specifically, Greek fitness professionals seem to understand the importance of implementing technology for their services; however, only few actually take advantage of this opportunity to elevate their quality and innovation of fitness services and to better organize their businesses [41]. Digital services neither appear as a first-line nor an emerging trend in the Greek health and fitness sector. This observation is in agreement with the main results of the first-ever Greek survey of fitness trends in 2021 [15], demonstrating that technology-oriented fitness trends are not widely used nationwide. This finding cannot be explained here; however, lack of financial resources due to the current economic crisis in Greece may play an important role in digital transformation of the local fitness industry [42].

5.6. What is Wrong with Mind-body Fitness?

Another one finding from the present study that should be into account is low popularity of trends related to mind & body fitness such as yoga and tai chi. These particular trends were absent from the top 20 not only for 2023 but also for 2021. This is an outcome absolutely aligned with results recently reported in other national and regional surveys [16-18,23]. Such alternative types of exercise may need a greater adaptation for the large majority of the adult population in order to engage unexperienced customers potentially facing various controlled health issues while demonstrating poor functional capacity and movement dysfunction. However, Pilates seems more inclusive compared to other trends related to mind & body fitness appearing more attractive in Greece for 2023 (#11) than 2021 (#22). In contrast, Pilates presents low attractiveness among industry stakeholders in other countries and regions [14,16-23] and this is an observation that may need further investigation in the future.

5.7. The Role of Fitness Professionals

Moreover, trends related to fitness professionals such as licensure for fitness professionals (#16) and employing certified fitness professionals (#18) appear to establish their popularity, since both are included in top 20 for 2021 and 2023. Of particular importance is that these particular trends have recently gained a substantial popularity not only in Greece but also in several other countries and regions around the world [14,16,17]. The rationale for qualified fitness professionals is constantly increasing because of the rapidly increased prevalence of people impacted by various health issues that negatively affect quality of life and life expectancy nowadays worldwide [5,8]. Given that non-apparently healthy adults belong to underserved markets [43], trends related to programs oriented to specific populations such as fitness programs for older adults (#8) and exercise for weight loss (#5), as well as health-related trends such as exercise is medicine (#9), require very well-equipped fitness trainers to support these populations by offering personalized services and adapted fitness programs [44,45]. Interestingly, the occupational role of personal trainer has been reported as one of the most impactful specialties among exercise professionals [26,46] and personal training sessions have been documented as high-demand services among customers in Europe [25]. These findings clearly corroborate the present (for 2023) and past (for 2021) results of the Greek survey indicating that personal training is #1 fitness trend in Greece. These facts highlight the vital role of exercise professionals in public health [47] and the impact of their work on the fight against the most common chronic diseases in close collaboration with physicians and allied healthcare practitioners [48], making exercise prescription a reality [49]. Lastly, the

second-ever Greek survey of fitness trends may underline the demand for regulation and licensing requirements for fitness professionals as widely used by other professions both nationwide and worldwide, aiming to elevate the bar in the health and fitness industry, upgrade fitness services, and protect public health.

5.8. Potential Impact of COVID-19

Considering that 2023 will be a period for continued recovery from the global pandemic crisis [1,2], it is critical to identify the magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 on the state of the health and fitness industry and its trends. It is obvious that the industry's adaptation took place in a very aggressive and rapid way globally. In Greece, gyms closed for 5.5 months in 2021 and another 5 months in 2022. When gyms opened offering services indoor, they faced numerous challenges due to comprehensive hygiene measures with respect to COVID-19. More specifically, face masks, social distancing, ventilation, capacity restrictions, and restrictions with respect to wellness areas, discouraged customers to join the facilities while modifying their exercise preferences and behavior for safety reasons according to international medical guidelines. This fact may explain the increased popularity of home exercise gyms and outdoor activities not only in the present study but also globally [14,16,17]. Since either proof of vaccination, proof of recovery or recent negative COVID-19 test was required from those who used indoor gym facilities, the exceptionally increased popularity of non-conventional exercise approaches reflect the effects of COVID-19 in the health and fitness industry. However, outdoor activities were also popular in Greece for 2021 (#16) as now (#14) showing that group walks or rides can be an easy-access exercise solution. This outcome is supported by the fact that recreational running appears to be more popular over the years in Greece [50]. It will be important to investigate what will happen with these particular trends as well as those related to technology in the future, with respect to the evolution of the pandemic crisis and its effects on the provision of in-person exercise services in the fitness industry.

5.9. Strengths and Limitations

The study presents the common limitations of online surveys such as coverage errors, the absence of randomness in the samples and those related to the response rate. However, the sample size as well as the response rate in the Greek survey is much higher than those usually reported in similar surveys in other countries and regions [16] and has increased compared to 2021 (N=542, 15.5% vs. N=809, 17.4%), reaching robust sample size and response rate, also obtaining responses from all regions of the country and a wide spectrum of ages and occupations. In contrast with the ACSM's worldwide survey of fitness trends, no incentive (material) was offered to respondents

in the Greek study, which may be a further tool for increasing the number of participants in surveys of this kind.

The main strengths of the present study are the replication of the ACSM's methodology used by international surveys on fitness trends, and its high degree of standardization. This enables the potential comparison between worldwide fitness trends surveys for the same year, with the aim of obtaining information on these trends in different regions around the globe. With the publication of the results of this study, Greece joins the list of countries that regularly carry out this type of research, allowing remarks to be drawn from its evolution over time. This type of studies contributes to the development of fitness services and products and thus it may be beneficial to continue with this line of pioneering research in Greece in the coming years.

6. Conclusions

In summary, personal training was the most popular fitness trend for 2023, which is a finding in line with previous results from a Greek survey on fitness trends in 2021 [15]. Furthermore, this particular trend has been systematically documented as one of the most attractive trends among industry stakeholders in Europe [18] but also globally [14,16,17]. The present national study delivers the opportunity to investigate potential comparisons among Greece and other countries/regions aiming to provide remarks regarding the current state of fitness trends linked to various fitness services and programs around the world [24,51]. Given that physical inactivity is considered one of the greatest threats to public health in both Europe [52] and globally [4], the purpose of this national survey is to guide and support all key industry stakeholders on how to create and implement injury-free, effective, and enjoyable movement-based concepts relevant to current top fitness trends. Considering that the dynamic development of the fitness space requires businesses and exercise professionals to be constantly updated and to implement innovative services within a multifaceted and competitive sector [53], the interpretation of the present results into good practices may promote positive exercise experiences for customers in the local fitness market, which contributes about 1.7% to the country's gross domestic product [54]. Lastly, future research should certainly further test whether customers' opinion varies compared to the present results not only in Greece but also in other countries and regions. Such an approach may support the mission of the physical activity, exercise, and leisure sector for continued growth and further innovation promoting bodily movement as a high priority for the masses worldwide.

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Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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