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Factors Militating Against Disabled Children's Involvement in Physical Activities and Sports

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Abstract

The paper reviewed factors militating against disabled children's involvement in physical activities and sports. The selection included studies that focused on children with physical disability, para sports, exercise and general exercising activities from 2015-2023. Search words such as, barriers, inhibitors, limitations, were included. Exclusion criteria were studies focusing merely on people with cognitive impairments, hearing or visual impairments, organ transplant as well as those focusing on people with no related physical disability. The studies collected were limited to the following search engines: Google scholar, Medline and Researchgate. Empirical studies reviewed indicated that exercise and sports are vital tools for the wellbeing of people with physical disabilities. Factors including dependency, poor transportation, parental control and accessibility to sport facilities were hinderances to effective participation of children with physical disabilities in exercise and sports. The authors established the fact that based on the review; the aforementioned barriers militate against disabled persons' participation in exercise and sports. However, all hands should be put on deck to ameliorate the aforesaid challenges militating against disabled children involvement in exercise and sports.

Keywords: Disabled children, Exercise, Physical activity, Sports

Introduction

Several factors in our present economic state posed as barriers that prevent children with physical disabilities from engaging in exercise and sports. However, prior studies have focused on underprivileged access to sports activities as a major barrier and suggested possible steps to encourage the disabled children in participation in exercise and sports, the menace of their poor participation still persist. A number of scholars (Branda et al., 2023; Rimmer et al., 2022; Jaarsma et al., 2019) have viewed lack of adequate funding, care givers and parental control to be incomparable factors preventing children with physical disabilities from engaging in exercise and sports and depriving children with disabilities from the golden value of participating in exercise and sports, other researchers dispute that funding is not a strong factor militating the involvement of disabled children in sports and exercise and argued that improvised facilities and equipment can be used by disable children for exercising there by averting poor funding as a barrier (Heah et al., 2017). Individuals who regularly engage in physical activity experience less prevalence of diseases related to physiological dysfunction, and health challenges of body composition (Staiano et al., 2020). Epidemiological studies have shown that sedentary lifestyle leads to onset and progression of life-threatening disease

conditions among physically disabled persons, such as hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and early overweight and obesity (Al-Attas et al., 2020; Madden & Smith, 2022). The rate at which disabled persons engage in physical activity and sports is less compared to their physically fit peers (Carlon et al., 2019). In Nigeria, children with disabilities are more dominant in the northern parts of Nigeria, these children often participate less in sports than the physically fit children (Maher, Williams, Olds, & Lane, 2021).

The benefits of sports have been documented frequently to include an increase in physical fitness (People, 2019). These benefits are also very much applicable to children with physical disabilities, sports participation also promotes personal autonomy, community integration and life satisfaction of participants (Durstine et al., 2017; Majnemer et al., 2020).

Regular participation in physical activity and sports, enhances body composition, bone health, improves psychological health and promote social engagement, all this are not limited to physically fit persons, sports and exercise participation is also beneficial and important for the disabled persons (LeMURA & Maziekas, 2018; Shields & Synnot, 2019).

According to Damiano (2017) there are additional therapeutic benefits to participation in regular exercises for children with disabilities, they often have delayed gross motor development, less proficiency in balance, coordination and poor cardiovascular fitness, all of which could potentially be improved by participation in exercise and sports (Madden & Smith, 2022).

The benefits of sports participation for people without physical disabilities are similar for people with physical disabilities (Carlon et al., 2019). Besides health related benefits of sports such as reducing chances of heart disease, obesity, type II diabetes, active people with physical disabilities are also mentioned for better balance and psychosocial benefits such as fun, social contacts, acceptance of the disability and improved self-confidence (Tenenbaum & Eklund, 2020).

In recent times, sports are still part of the rehabilitation program, this is to acquaint persons with physical disabilities with different sports possibilities and to increase their physical fitness and quality of life via Adapted Physical Education Programme (Bragaru et al., 2019; Van der Ploeg et al., 2020).

The reasons for lower levels of participation in physical activity among children with disability are complex and multifactorial (Heah et al., 2017). Some of the frequent reported factors are lack of motivation, lack of energy and sports history, transportation, accessibility to sports facilities and economic state (Tasiemski et al., 2019). Until these limiting factors are controlled, the benefits of sports and exercise enjoyed by people without disability will never be extended to people with disabilities.

The health benefits of sports have been frequently documented. Several studies noted the potential for sports to decrease the risk of secondary health conditions such as heart disease, obesity and its complications on the life of physically disabled children (Health & Services, 2019; Heath & Fentem, 2021).

Haven understood that most physiological and psychological composition of people without disability and people with physical disabilities is insignificantly deferent, the importance of sports and exercise to these two group of persons are similar however, studies have reviewed a significant drop in the participation in exercise and sport by the disabled persons despite the provisions made for people with special needs via the adapted physical education programme,

it is then important to take note of the factors that hinders people with physical disabilities to participate in adapted physical activities. It is in light of these that this paper stands to review the factor militating against the involvement of disabled children in physical activities and sports.

This paper is a systematic reviewed; it therefore reviewed studies related to factors hindering the effective participation of disabled persons in physical activities and sports. The selection included the studies that focused on people with physical disability, studies that focused on sports, exercise, and general exercising activities. Search words such as, barriers, inhibitors, limitations, were included. Exclusion criteria were studies focusing merely on people with cognitive impairments with no related physical disability, on people with hearing or visual impairments organ transplant. The studies collected were limited to the following search engines: Googlescholar accessed 2023, 15:16 Pm, Medline accessed 2023-2024, 11.15 Am and Researchgate accessed 2023-2024, 17.25 Pm

Table 1. Empirical Studies on Factor Militating Against Disabled Children Involvement in Exercise and Sports

Author(s) and Year	Title of Study	Participants	Measurements	Findings
Branda, Sherenwel, and Sewell (2023).	The comparative assessment of inclusion of persons with disability in sport	A total of 30 participants (10 young athletes with disability, 10 relatives of children with disability and 10 staff of Dutch Paralympic.	Barriers and facilitators of sports in Dutch Paralympic	1. Inadequate funding 2. Lack of Education 3. Poor attitude towards disabled children, were the impediments to involvement in sports by disabled children.
Rimmer, Rubin, and Braddock (2022)	Barriers to Exercise in African American Women with Physical Disabilities	50 subjects were asked questions about their participation and interest in structured exercise.	Barriers to participation in sports as a disabled person	The four major barriers were 1. cost of the exercise programme (29.2%) 2. Parental hindrance (51.8%). 3. transportation (17.5%). 4. Not knowing where to exercise (1.5%).

Maher, Williams, Olds, and Lane. (2021)	Physical and sedentary activity in adolescents with special needs.	62 college students were respondents	Limiting factors experienced by disabled children in sports	1. Parents did not have enough information about adapted sports. 2. Lack of community sports facilities is limiting factor to sports. 3. Dependency on others are barrier to sports and exercises among disabled children.
Majnemer, Shevel, Birnbaum, Chilingaryan, Rosenbaum and Poulin, (2020).	Participation and enjoyment of leisure activities in school-aged children with cerebral palsy.	20 patients attending Physiotherapy clinic.	Barriers to participation in sports as a disabled person	1. Lack of community sports facilities is limiting factor to sports. 2. Poor awareness programme. 3. Dependency on care givers were barriers to sports and exercises participation by disabled children.
Jaarsma, Geertzen, de Jong, Dijkstra, and Dekker (2019)	Barriers & Facilitators of sports in Dutch Paralympic Athletes: An explorative study	76 Dutch Paralympic athletes completed the questionnaire	Barriers and facilitators experienced by ambulant and wheelchair athletes were compared.	1. Social support is a facilitator to sports. 2. Lack of community sports facilities is limiting factor to sports. 3. Dependency on others were barrier to sports and exercises.
Saebu, and Sørensen, (2018)	Factors associated with physical activity among young boys with a disability in Northern central, Nigeria.	105 participants were randomly selected across the states in the Northern central, Nigeria.	Factors limiting the involvement of disabled children in sport	1. Distance to the sport facility from home. 2. Poor funding. 3. Parental influence 4. Ignorance 5. Stigmatization of disabled children

Kosma, Ellis, Cardinal, Bauer and McCubbin, (2017)	The mediating role of intention and stages of change in physical activity among adults with physical disabilities: An integrative framework: Focus group Study	Participants were 40 in number (20 children with disability, 20 parents of children with disability)	mediating factors of intention and stages of change in physical activity participation	1. Personal behaviour 2. Accessibility to sport facilities were impediments to involvement in sports by disabled children.
Shields and Synnot (2019)	Perceived barriers and facilitators to participation in physical activity for children with disability: a qualitative study: Focus group Study	63 participants (23 children with disability, 20 parents of children with disability and 20 sport and recreation staff)	Similarities and differences, People showing the difference, One size does not fit all, and communication and connections were measured.	1. Stigmatisation 2. Poor attitude towards disability are barriers to involvement in sports by disabled children.
Jaarsma, Dijkstra, de Blécourt, Geertzen, and Dekker (2015)	limitations and facilitators of sports participation among children with physical disabilities: A mixed method Study	30 children and 38 parents completed a questionnaire, and 17 professionals were interviewed in a semi-structured way.	Limitations and facilitators experienced by disabled children in sports	1. Children specifically experiencing dependency on others is a barrier. 2. Parents did not have enough information about adapted sports. 3. Sport professionals observed a high family security as hindrances on disabled children participation in sport.

Common Factors Militating Against Disabled Children's Participation in Physical Activities and Sports

Dependency on others

The most frequently experienced barrier is dependency of the physically disabled children on others. Studies show that this factor is frequently experienced by wheelchair athletes than by ambulant athletes (Jaarsma et al., 2019). This report is similar to that of previous research where athletes with spinal cord injuries expressed difficulties with personal assistance in order to access equipment or do the exercises. As wheelchair athletes often need help from professionals or family members to participate in sports, this dependency may be felt as a burden on those people (Kehn & Kroll, 2019). As a result, some active children with disabilities cannot access people to depend on to be able to participate in sports. Fuller (2016) opined that this perception of being a burden and feeling of guilt for being unable to do the same things as everyone else, can cause many people with disabilities to stop asking for help altogether. Health professionals frequently mentioned the attitude of the family (e.g., parents and siblings) of the children with disabilities as an important role to assist in the child's participation in adapted sports.

Lack of Transport

lack of transport are reported as barriers by people with physical disabilities (Rimmer et al., 2018). Difficulties with transportation for some disabled children is a study of concern, lack of transportation, large expenses for taxi services to and from the sport facilities and difficulties with public transport because of the use of a wheelchair. These difficulties have been found often in researches (Rimmer et al., 2020; Rimmer et al., 2018; Tenenbaum & Eklund, 2020) sport professionals also mentioned transportation as one of the organisational issues parents have to address.

Adapted Equipment

The cost and availability of adapted equipment for use by children with a disability can have a major impact upon the participation of physical disabled persons in exercise and sports. A single racing prosthetic for a below the knee amputee with fitting and a top of the range Invacare Top End Eliminator OSR Racing Chair is very expensive especially for children under a low class income family in Nigeria (Dyer et al., 2019).

Accessibility to Sports Facilities

lack of facilities in the neighborhood, is also a barrier which agrees with previous research (Saebu & Sørensen, 2018). Lack of facilities in the neighborhood is a prominent problem for disabled children, for instance, children in wheelchairs have to look for facilities specifically for disabled sports and have difficulty integrating with able-bodied athletes. Sport facilities that also provide wheelchair sports are probably less available than facilities for able-bodied sports, especially in rural areas.

Many buildings in Nigeria were designed and built without the conception of disabled persons users in mind. Therefore, people with disabilities have difficulty entering such facility; this may put them off taking part in sport at all. Not only does it make access awkward, but it makes people with disabilities feel unwanted and unwelcome at the venue (French & Hainsworth, 2022).

In another study, persons with disabilities noted that 'membership and transportation costs are the primary economic barriers directly affecting their ability to access recreation and fitness facilities'. This was often accentuated by having 'fewer economic resources compared to their

non-disabled counterparts (Assembly, 2019). Teachers and health professionals also mentioned the lack of sports clubs for people with disabilities, particularly clubs with team sports, in the children's neighborhood.

Lack of Adequate Knowledge and Skill

Children with disability were thought to face additional barriers to participation compared to children with typical development including a lack of instructor skills and unwillingness to be inclusive, negative societal attitudes towards disability, and a lack of local opportunities (Shields & Synnot, 2019).

Parental Behaviour:

Unequal time distribution of the parents between the disabled child and their siblings is a limiting factor for the disabled children involvement in physical activities (Kosma et al., 2017; Pittet et al., 2019)

Personal Disability

Some studies find the personal disability of the physically disabled children as barrier to exercise and sports participation and is reported both by inactive and active disabled persons. A study involving Dutch Paralympic athletes were the only recent group investigated that did not feel hindered in sports participation by their personal disability. This could be that the Dutch Paralympic athletes have made it their duty to push their body to the limit in sports, this could explain why this group of people would not consider their disability as a barrier to sports participation. However, the recreational athlete and children with physical disabilities actually consider the disability to be a barrier, regardless of type of disability (Dlugonski et al., 2019). If any disabled child will take his or her personal disability as a duty and responsibility like the Dutch Paralympic athletes, the cases of reporting personal disability as a barrier will be reduce and eventually eliminated.

Conclusion

The researchers haven reviewed these studies outlined in table 1 above, established the fact that these barriers really militates against participation of the physically disabled children. Children with disabilities need the early attainment of motor skills and the integral role of their families in supporting their participation in physical activity.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion drown from the study, the researchers recommend that,

1. Parents should not place excess security on the physically disabled children, ample time and freedom should be allotted to them for play and fun among their peers.
2. Government should improve the standard and organization to para sports to appease the interest of the physically disabled child.
3. Universities should ensure that the knowledge of adapted physical education programme should be made viral to the understanding of every citizen, this will do away with the barrier of lack of knowledge on exercise and sports for the disabled persons.

4. The public stop stigmatisation of disabled children and encourage them to participate in sports and exercise.
5. Facilities should be easily made accessible for the physically disabled children, if this is done the barrier of transport, over dependency on care givers for mobility will be reduced.

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