**Qualitative Assessment of Issues and Prospects of Physical Activity and Sports Participation for Quality Living in Kano, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*In Nigeria, there are significant factors affecting the increase and decrease in the number of people taking part in sports. This study focused on the issues and prospects that surrounded sports participation for healthy living in Kano, North-Western Nigeria. Five focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with exercise specialists, health education practitioners, educational administrators, school heads, and other members of the community. Results from the FGDs raised eight major issues hindering physical activity and sports in Northern Nigeria; with awareness about the benefits of physical activity, economic, and other competing pressures and facilities’ availability given high priority by all the groups. Based on the results, the authors recommend that government at all levels should shoulder their responsibilities outlined by the National Sports Commission which included proper budgeting and provision of sports facilities. Public and private sectors should be encouraged to invest in physical activity and sport industry in Northern Nigeria to join the silent multi-billion Naira industry globally.*

***Keywords:*** *Physical activity, Sports, Quality living, Issues, Prospects*

**Introduction**

Earlier in history, a number of issues existed that hinders the promotion of physical activity and sports for healthy living among individuals living in the North-Western Nigeria. In the recent years, there has been an increased public awareness of the importance of exercise programmes for health and wellness, especially among urban dwellers. This is evident in the new fitness centres opening up and people walking on the streets on weekends for health purposes. This development is seen on adults and adolescent men and women. More new fitness centers that provide commercial fitness service existed today in the city of Kano. In places such as Kofar Nassarawa Sports Complex (Filin Mahaha) large amount of people engaged in active recreation especially in the weekends.

However, Kano people as a whole have been very slow to embrace the habit of daily regular physical activity; partly due to the commercial nature of the area. Also, in the past two decades, the expansion of facilities to increase access to universal basic education led to the reduction of spaces especially play grounds by the erection of classrooms and other structures either to accommodate more learners or expand the schools to accommodate Junior post basic and senior secondary levels. Many schools, including post-secondary institutions have been affected by such actions. Pieces of land curved out for schools were offered to individuals for residential or commercial purposes; play spaces were mostly affected. More-over, majority of Islamiyya schools, which are a popular choice among Muslim parents in Kano (Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria, 2015), do not have enough space for sports participation.

On the other hand, views about health and sports have evolved over time, and are understood differently across cultures. The dominant religion and culture of the northern people (Hausa/Muslims) do not totally condemn sports and physical activities; however, the subject is surrounded by both cultural and religious misconceptions. These misconceptions have affected sports development and participation. The growing econmic crisis in the country, particularly north, has can affects sports participation and keeps people physically inactive. Globally, according to the World Health Organization (2022), one in four adults do not meet the global recommended levels of physical activity.

Published scientific reports proved that engaging in sports and physical activities profoundly impacts our short and long term health and quality of life. Sport and physical activity do not only help to improve physical fitness and health, it is also an integral strategy for stemming metabolic diseases which are critical health priority areas for global health maintenance (Arnett & Blumenthal, 2019; Eime, Harvey, Charity, Casey, Westerbeek, & Payne, 2017). According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) appropriate physical activity and sports for all constitute one of the major components of a healthy lifestyle. Sedentary behaviour is a potential risk factor for chronic ill health and mortality, that is, independent of health enhancing physical activity (Chau, Grunseit, Midthjell, Holmen, Homen, Bauman, & Van der Ploeg, 2012). The Centers for Disease and Prevention (2022), American Heart Association (2018), American Diabetes Association (2019) and the American College of Sports Medicine (2021) recommend regular moderate physical activity for individuals to improve and maintain health. The activities should include a broad range of appropriate and enjoyable physical activities and body movements in people’s daily lives, such as walking to work, climbing stairs, gardening, dancing, as well as a variety of leisure and recreational sports. The “Exercise is Medicine” initiative movement started in America has greatly encouraged the medical community to include exercise recommendation and prescription in daily patient care. Numerous resources to achieve this have been developed by the American College of Sports Medicine, American Heart Association and the movement itself.

Physical activity and sportsare linked to quallity of life. Quality of life requires participation in regular physical activity and or sports. The two terms go together when referring to health promotion and quality of life. For a healthy life, sports is defined as the physical actions including recreational actviites and dance, skeletal muscles’ energy consumption through body movement. Participating in regular physical activity is also a major health choice along with other changes in lifestyle. It is believed that achievement of health is not a single event; attaining and maintaining health and wellness is an ongoing process. Regular physical activity is a key factor in health promotion strategy, as indicated by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022).

One study (Sabir, Jimoh, Iwuala, Isezuo, Bilbis, Aminu, Abubakar, & Sa’idu, 2016) in North-western Nigeria suggested an increased weight gain among Hausa-Fulani, the dominant ethnic group. With these recent developments, there is urgent need to address issues and prospects related to sports development and participation in physical activities in North-western Nigeria. The purpose of these research is to investigate the issues and prospects in north-western Nigeria related to physical activity and sports participation for quality living.

**Materials and Methods**

**Design and setting**

This is a qualitative research design that adopted focus group discussion (FGD). The setting of this study was Kano city, which is the capital of Kano State. Kano is a State located in the North-Western Nigeria created on May, 27, 1967 from part of the northern region. The state borders Katsina State to the North-West, Jigawa State to the North-East, Bauchi State to the South-East and Kaduna State to the South-West. The 2016 census, put the population of Kano state as 13, 076, 892. Kano being the most populous State in Nigeria, is regarded as the centre of the North-west and can represent the typical culture of the north because of its commercial position.

**Participants**

Participants comprised four categories of people: exercise specialists, health education practitioners, educational administrators, school heads and other people in the community who volunteered to participate in the study. Twenty-eight (28) volunteers participated for one-hour interview per group. The criteria for participation are much related to falling in one of the groups. Five (5) focus group discussions were conducted, one per group.

**FGD guiding questions**

The following questions guided the discussion in all the groups:

**Q1**: Do you agree that physical activity and sports contribute to overall quality of life? PROBE for health benefits of participation.

**Q2**: What do you think are the issues surrounding physical activity and sports in Kano? PROBE for: major challenges to participation of all people such as religious misconceptions, culture, facilities, family background, gender issues, awareness on the benefits, personal motivation, economic reasons etc.

**Q3**: What are the possible prospects in the future? PROBE for: current developments causing adults men and women attending physical activities in some stadia, government policies, school development programmes, etc.

**Q4**: Are physical education lessons adequate in school time tables and are they being conducted? PROBE for: No of PE lessons per week, school grounds for outdoor activities, etc.

**Q5**. Do you think private sectors, non-governmental organizations and International donor organizations have a role to play in improving physical activity participation for quality of life? PROBE for possible contributions

**Q6**: What recommendation do you have for general improvement regrading participation in physical activity and sports? PROBE FOR: recommendations to school administrators, private organizations, international donors, religious bodies and Government.

**Arrangements of FGDs conducted**

The arrangement of the FGDs conducted is explained in table 1 below:

**Table 1: Arrangement of FGDs Conducted**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S/N | Category | Qualification | Work Place | NO. | % |
| 1 | Exercise Specialist | B.SC, M.SC, PhD | University, hospital, Security School | 4 | 14.3 |
| 2 | Health Education Practitioners | B.SC, M.SC, PhD | School of Nursing, Primary Healthcare | 3 | 10.7 |
| 3 | Educational Administrators | B.SC. ED | Ministry of Education, Educational Agencies | 6 | 21.4 |
| 4 | School Heads | NCE, B.SC. ED | Schools- primary, secondary | 7 | 25.0 |
| 5 | Others (students, business people, etc) | SSCE, DIP | School, local market | 8 | 28.6 |
|  | Total |  |  | 28 | 100 |

**Consent**

Each participant signed a consent form to participate in the FGD. Participants were informed of the detailed procedure of the FGD and that they are free to respond with whatever answer they felt was applicable to the questions. They also had the right not to answer a particular question or questions asked.

**Data Analysis**

Evaluations of issues and prospects were captured through the discussions recorded from the FGDs. Evidences of key issues and prospects from literature review were used to substantiate some of the key points raised in the groups. Three steps where followed to analyze the data:

1. Transcribing focus group recordings
2. Identifying major themes and organizing the data
3. Interpreting the themes and ideas in context

**Discussion**

The focus of this study was to find out issues and prospects related to physical activity and sports for quality living in Kano, north-western Nigeria. The following findings are from the series of five (5) focus group discussions conducted with 28 participants who formed the five groups.

One-hour discussion in the five groups, each has described the status of participation in physical activity and sports in North-western Nigeria as well as the challenges and issues surrounding the phenomenon. Participants in all the groups have described the challenges posed by the degrading economy and how it affects sports participation. Many people who have formed a healthy habit have withdrawn.

**Analysis of key issues from the findings**

The finding of this study identified eight (8) major issues that hinders participation in physical activity and sports. They are described below:

**1) Awareness about benefits**

Participants from all the groups have mentioned this as the top issue that hinders participation in physical activity and sports as number one. Lack of awareness over the benefits of sports and physical activities among individuals from rural to urban dwellers have led to wrong decisions and inactions; that turned useful spaces for sports and physical activities to personal properties and commercial structures. This lack of awareness also derailed other supporting incentives such as family motivation and support from family and friends for individuals especially adolescents and young adults to engage in active sports and physical activities for health benefits.

**2) Economic and other competing pressures**

Most of the participants mentioned this point as the top issue hindering participation in physical activity and sports in the focal area.Due to economic and political pressures many governments would prefer offering pieces of available lands to individuals and groups for the purpose of generating income to meet personal financial needs. Also, many able-bodied youth and adolescents and their parents would prefer economic activities throughout the days to help run their livelihood.

**3) Physical education programmes in schools**

This is the third issue raised in the discussions. School physical education programmes were intended to inculcate positive health behaviours and exposed children to active sports and games.In many countries, less than one third of young people are sufficiently active to benefit their present and future health. In Nigeria, physical activity levels of youth are moderate while sedentary behaviour (inactive lifestyle) is high (Akinroye, Oyenyemi, et al., 2014). With the decreasing physical activity and sports programmes in schools at an alarming trend, there are possibilities of increasing risk of obesity and other cardiometabolic risk factors. Physical education is no more than an elective course in secondary schools; and a merged subject in basic education. This has seriously affect student’s participation in physical activity and sports.

**4) Access to sport facilities and availability**

Despite considerable evidence on the health benefits of regular physical activity, few individuals got opportunity to engage in sufficient levels of physical activity and sports in northern Nigeria. One major reason outlined in the FGDs has been lack of sporting facilities, especially at community levels. Physical activities and sports facilities refers to buildings, centers, or other facilities operated by a local or governmental authority and with designated space for physical activity, including open spaces, fitness centers, tennis clubs, indoor exercise settings, or community parks (Eime, Harvey, Charity, Casey, Westerbeek & Payne, 2017). The increasing awareness among the populace and Doctors’ recommendation on various ailments would surely increase pressure on government to focus on sports facilities. Scholars (Alla & Ajibua, 2012; Reimers, Wagner, Alvanides, Steinmayr, Reiner, Schmidt & Woll, 2014) postulates two theoretical processes that determine the relationship between availability and utilization of sports facilities. First, the absence of nearby sports facilities in the community and second proximity to sports facilities.

**5) Status of women in the society**

It is a common understanding that the northern culture does not tolerate women engaging in physical activities and sports in the open, except for those in the boarding schools. This barrier is very strong and paving only slowly. All the FGDs outlined this among the important issues.

**6) Political ccommitments and support**

Sports and physical activities have never been part of political plans in the north, many politicians prefer raising structures providing haphazard vocational trainings, and paying money to media campaign against the provision of qualitative sports pitches, gymnasia and play arenas. The FGD discussions emphasized no significant amount being budgeted by states and local governments for the development of sports and physical activity programmes. The key challenge here, is how to get the politicians involved.

**7) Personal motivation**

This was mentioned by 3 groups. Health and wellness is a personal journey that encompasses a lifestyle that includes the joys of physical activity as an integral part of daily living. Due to socio-cultural barriers the society in the north looks at sports and physical activity with negative or questionable perception which reduces the intrinsic motivation of adolescents and younger adults to engage in physical activities and sports**.** If we lack examples, with which we want to identify ourselves and which represent a certain social status, it means we don’t have a guide; thus, it will be hard for us to fight for a cause.

**8) Participation of local and international organizations**

This point was raised by only one group, however the discussion was very rich. In the past few decades there were many interventions in both education and health, but with no focus in sports and physical activities, which are very vital to achieving both. Many local organizations have taken roles to community development without considering the role of sports participation as a vital tool to achieving peace and security, in addition to educational and health benefits. This may not be unconnected with the roles of sports professionals which should guide stakeholders and make proposals.

Other minor issues raised in the FGDs include insecurity, time constraint, support from family and friends, choice of different sports and physical activities, availability of local physical activity programmes and data on sports programmes and development.

**Analysis of key prospects from the findings**

Upon all the challenges, many prospects were identified for sports and physical activity participation in North-western Nigeria.

**1) Continuity of democracy and supremacy of peoples will**

As democracy is growing in the country, there is tendency of supremacy of peoples will. Hence, the well noted increase of peoples interest in physical activity and sports for health benefit, will in no time be part of our campaingns and constituency projects.

Moreover, one of the major objectives set forward in the National Sports Policy of Nigeria (2009) is to encourage mass participation in sports and recreation with a view to using exercise for the improvement of general health and fitness of citizens. Along to achieving these and other objectives, the National Sports Policy shouldered some responsibilities upon the states and local governments which include the following:

***Role of state government***

The State Governments through their supervisory agencies shall among other things: (i) provide adequate and standard facilities, (ii) organize and deliver sports services at their level, (iii) encourage development of physical education and sports in schools, (iv) establish State Sports Councils or Commissions as the case may be for the development of sports in their States, (v) ensure adequate budgetary allocation to sports, and v) ensure that at least 5% of the total Budget for Sports is earmarked for maintenance of sports facilities and infrastructure.

***Role of local government***

The Local Governments through their supervisory agencies shall: (i) establish Local Government Area Sports Committee, (ii) provide adequate funds for Sports in the Area, (iii) encourage development of Physical Education and Sports in schools, (iv) provide community-based sports centers in the Area, (v) encourage the formation of Sports Clubs, (vi) earmark at least 5% of its total Budget for the maintenance of Sports facilities and infrastructure, and (vii) collaborate with the Local Government Education Authority/Board on matters of school’s sports.

These responsibilities shouldered on the States and Local Governments are enough to help in achieving mass participation in sports among all ages. However, the problem is whether or not the two levels discharge these responsibilities. The fact remains far from the present reality. Very little examples can be sighted in Northern-Nigeria to indicate full commitments of states and local governments towards sports or leisure development. The sports facilities are deteriorating both in schools and in the public.

**Role of healthcare personnel**

Professionals in every area supposed to shoulder the responsibility of public enlightenments to create positive awareness on subjects at stake. Although many adults including women today participate in weekend physical activities, majority remain sedentary thought out the week. There is need for media programmes, bill bots, posters and use of social media to educate people on the benefits of exercise and how much exercise they require to maintain good health. Sport bodies like sports councils and sports units in the ministries have a vital role to play in this regard. Health educators working with the local government health departments need to include sports awareness during their local health campaigns.

**2) Roles of social media**

The role of social media development in Nigeria in shaping the lives of people is unlimited and rapid. Sports and physical activity clips are all over, most of which are both educative and enjoyable. This is silently increasing interest in sports participation and meaningful physical activity. Most of the groups in the FGD discussion expressed high optimism on media campaign and sited several examples of video clips that aroused interest on the subject.

**3) Market boom for fitness center**

The various group discussions described the new multi-million sports centers established in Kano as a surprising development in sports and physical activity participation. This alone will succeed in bringing a large part of the population into sports in the near future.

**4) Doctors’ recommendation**

Two groups specifically mentioned and emphasize this point. Doctors especially at secondary and tertiary health institutions have realized the importance of physical activity and incorporate it into patients’ care, especially hypertensive and diabetic patients. This will continue to play an important role that will eventually lead to mass participation by all categories of people.

**5) Increased religious understanding**

With more religious scholars in the dominant Muslim north attending public fitness centers to exercise in their free times; and with some of them including benefits of exercise in their preaching, there is high chance of increased public awareness. Many traditional fatwas (religious opinion) related to physical activity and sports have changed and many sanctions were removed. This is a healthy development. The FGD members have cited examples of Islamic scholars attending fitness centers and many of them who encourage people to exercise in their sermons and mosque lessons.

**Conclusions**

This paper particularly investigated issues and prospects that surrounded sports participation for quality living in Kano, north-western Nigeria. Focus group discussions raised 8 issues surrounding physical activity and sports participation, out of which these three were captured and emphasized by all the groups: awareness about the benefits of physical activity, economic and other competing pressures and facilities’ availability. Physical activity and sports for quality living for all require capital investment and optimal supports from lawmakers, executive members and change agents from the community. If we do not act, the obesity epidemic will continue and results in subsequent debilitating ailments that will lower the quality of living of our people. Acting promptly and wisely on the other hand, will help in reducing the prevalence of obesity and cut-off the burden of healthcare cost, overcrowding in the health centers and death. The paper recommends for wider community mobilization and public awareness to change the negative behaviours of communities and families in northern-Nigeria towards participation in physical activities and sports. The current educational and sport policies must be reviewed; education and sport must be integrated. Physical education lessons must include organized physical activities that will not only provide the required level of physical fitness, but will inculcate positive behaviours on students to adopt active lifestyle. Active recreation should be encouraged and supported by governments, civil societies and community-based groups.

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