

INCREASING VIOLENCE IN SPORT: A THREAT TO SOCIAL HEALTH

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Abstract

Research studies have shown that sport holds prominent place in our society as it serves as an important agency for character development. Over the years, sport provides viable ground for nursing and breeding deviant behaviour like violence. Sport in the recent time is used as a means to influence diplomatic, social and political relations. Many tribes and nations use sport arena as viable ground to exercise political supremacy and power tussle over one another. The material rewards associated with winning in contemporary sports are so great that the athletes and coaches now imbibe the idea of "win at all cost" to obtain material reward or maintain their jobs. To achieve these selfish desires, most athletes, coaches and supporters engage in acts against the rules and regulations of the game thereby stimulating violence in sports arena. The recent societal attitude to sports portrays false value hence antithesis of the spirit of sportsmanship which was founded on respect for universal fundamental ethical principles of harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society thereby maintaining social health. This paper reviewed causes of violence, theoretical explanations of sports violence, and Social health implications of violence, possible solutions to sports violence and recommendations.

Introduction

Sport is as old as the existence of man and an integral part of every culture. It is an area of human activity that greatly interests citizens of every nation. It has enormous potential for socializing people regardless of age, gender, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, social origin, or economic background. Pierre de Coubertin was of this view when he commented that sports is part of every man and woman's heritage and it's absence can never be compensated for (Brussels,2007).

Sport according to Ofili (2005) is any physical activity competitive in nature, engaged in, whether indoors or outdoors, with the intension of obtaining results at all levels. Sport attracts people, strengthens international relations and enhances positive image as it plays specific role in social integration and global solidarity. Sport also improves physical, mental and emotional health. Above all, sport fosters desirable social behaviour like obedience and respect for rules and people, loyalty, solidarity, fair play, tolerance, self discipline, supportive relationship, and

develops co-operative and leadership skills. Suffice to say that sport develops character in acceptable way since all these attributes are core values required of individuals for successful integration into the society. If these values are in accordance with societal norms and mores and also contribute to personal development and fulfilment, they may also contribute immensely to the attainment of social health since they improve harmonious interpersonal relationship. A flash-back to the time of the early 1900's will reveal different attitude in society because then people generally had concern for each other and were not completely consumed with themselves, as is the case today. Earning millions of dollars, driving fancy cars and being part of the latest fad were the furthest things from most people's minds. There were more important things to consider, such as avoiding any act that may threaten one's integrity and doing all it takes to live up to one's reputation . People in those days learned to persevere by going through adversity and as a result they developed character. During that time, sport was also different. People generally understood that it was just a game and players were not elevated above the rest of society. The fans enjoyed the games for what they were, and the athletes just enjoyed playing. A sportsman or woman then is a person who shows a spirit of fairness

and generosity in sport and does not care if he wins or loses.

Sports violence is a mirror of today's Society. It is symptom of a society that is becoming increasingly violent. A brief look at our world reveals that people are consumed with material possessions. The image and idea of self is all-important. Many allow their thinking to be ruled by envy, greed and the lust for power. People are now so accustomed to the comforts of "the good life". Most people would resort to any means necessary to ensure that they get what they want. As long as society is violent sports will be violent. A look at any number of sporting events around the world shows violence- fights, riots, beatings, bombings and murders. Violence therefore is a definite problem in the Sport world.

Violence as defined by Kirkpatrick (2007) is great roughness and force, often causing severe physical injury or damage. In the writers view, violence is the use of physical force to injure people or destroy property. Violence may cause physical pain to those who experience it directly, as well as emotional distress to those who either experience or witness it. Murphy (1999) stressed that individuals, families, schools, workplace, Communities, Society and environment all are

harmful by violence. Violence therefore is a social health problem for all who experience and witness it.

Sport violence according to Terry and Jackson (1985) is any behaviour which causes harm, occurs outside of the rules of the Sport and is unrelated to competitive objectives of sport. In the writer's opinion, Sports violence refers to physical act committed in contact sports such as football, handball, basket ball, volleyball and so on beyond the normal levels of contact expected while playing the sport. These can include intentional attempts to injure a player by another player or coach, but can also include all forms of aggression and threats of physical harm or actual physical harm sustained by players or coaches, and by spectators of sports. Eric digest (1989) identified two forms of aggression in sports

- (a) Instrumental aggression which is non emotional and task oriented.
- (b) Reactive aggression which has an underlying motive and emotional component as its goal.

Violence is an outcome of reactive aggression and is most prevalent in team contact sports.

Concept of Social Health

The term social health was first introduced by the World Health Organisation

(WHO) in 1947, when it was included as one of the fundamental vital forms of health along with physical and mental health (Wise Geek, 2011). According to WHO (1947), the better an individual's social health the better his overall health.

Social health is the individual's health that represents the health of the society in which he lives and prospers. It deals with how an individual is able to socialize with other people and form relationships, how other people react to him and how he interacts with social institutions, conforms to the norms and mores of the society and consequences or benefits of such interactions in relation to his well-being (Wise Geek, 2011). The degree of one's social health can be assessed by the level of his interaction with people, how he deals with everyday situations and how other people reciprocates this gesture to him.

According to Russel (1973) the fundamental skills needed for social health are taught during the formative years of childhood. He stressed that some skills must be developed as individuals grows and matures and these skills will be influenced by the character, qualities of the individual and personality traits. Hence, the degree of social skills individuals acquire as they grow and mature will affect how well they are able to adjust to the norms of society. This will be

evident in their ability or lack of ability to function in the society as “normal” citizens. An individual who fails to develop commensurate level of social skill will be regarded as anti-social human being and probably may become a societal misfit

Russel (1973) also noted that social health can have a positive personal result on individual level because as an individual feels the support offered by being a part of the society, he may also feel the encouragement to better himself through personal growth. This growth may be in the form of an increased education or the development of a talent. This yields personal benefits to the individual and also provides a benefit to the society as a whole. For instance an individual who acquires skills in sport and through training graduates from a novice to an expert or professional. Making big money in sport participation has saved the society some delinquent and restive problems that could have risen as a result of idleness, thus, improving the social health of the individual can improve the social health of society.

Social health can also refer to the health of a society in general and how the members of that society treat and behave toward each other (Wise Geek, 2011). In this sense a country, tribe or community that is rife with conflict or sport violence may be considered

to be suffering from social health issues. Russel (1973) stressed that social health of a society includes how well the society does at offering every citizen equal opportunity to obtain access to the goods and services critical to being able to function as a contributing member of the society. He outlined other indicators of social health of society as the existence of the rule of law, equality in the distribution of wealth, public access to the decision making process and the level of social capital available.

If violence cause physical pain to those who either experience it directly and emotional distress to those who either experience or witness it, then individuals, families, schools, workplace, communities, society and environment are affected and harmed by violence. A sport environment that breeds violence concurrently generates a circle of social health problems to the entire society. Sport violence therefore is a social health problem for all who experience and witness it.

Threat is a sign of something dangerous or unpleasant which may be or is about to happen (KirkPatrick, 2007)

Causes of Sports Violence

Overemphasis on winning: Ideally children's participation in sport should be fun, it contributes to their physical development and well-being, help to develop social skills, and promote a desire for continual involvement with physical activity. Unfortunately for many children, pressure associated with sports due to so much emphasis on winning produce low self-esteem, excessive anxiety, and aggressive behaviour as most coaches pay lip-service to sportsmanship and having fun while rewards are reserved for winning. Anxiety about winning impedes performance and make players more susceptible to injury (Stewart, 2011).

Some athletes may be genetically predisposed to violence (particularly male athletes) who have unusually high testosterone levels. Such athletes are prone to intermittent explosive disorder. Athletes sometimes resort to violence with the intent of injuring and intimidating opponents to have undue advantage to win. In contact sports players often suffer injuries but the contestable issue is, at what point does an injury as the result of honest play turn into injury due to intentional and excessive use of force by a player. Such incidents may be part of a strategy developed by coaches or players for instance using outlawed tactics in boxing like hitting the

opponent on the back of the head, under the belly during clinching, pushing an opponent extremely hard to the floor. Stewart (2011) stated that athletes commonly distinguish between game morality and morality of everyday life. He stressed that a college basketball player said "In sports you can do whatever you want but in life it is more-restricted". According to Jamieson (2011) a football player said that the football field is the wrong place to think about ethic. This lower moral has a lot of social implications. Young children tend to model behaviour and attitudes of star athletes they admire and there may be tendency for them to imbibe all these roughness as normal in sports. A child who watches acts of violence committed by thieves, murderers or sadists in films or on television knows that society disapproves of these acts, but the child who watches sports may feel that athletes act of violence are approved of. In competitive sports so much emphasis is placed on winning and dominance, these goals alone justify illegal and violent acts.

Unruly behaviour of fans and spectators may also stimulate violence. It is quite common for fans or supporters during the heat of a contest to become violent in the stands among each other and against sports officials or athletes. Spectators do take cues from players, Coaches, cheer-leaders and one

another because spectators often derive a sense of social identity and self-esteem from a team. Emulation of favourite players is an element of this identification (Murphy, 1999). Group solidarity with players and coaches leads to seeing opposing teams as enemies and fosters hostility towards the opposing supporters expressing geographical, ethnic group and perceived social dominance. Most times, the sporting arena has been used as a platform for schools, villages, communities and ethnic groups or countries to settle scuffle because athletes want to establish territory. Teams often move out with thugs and at the slightest provocation between athletes or official's decision fist fight between strangers and friends starts. In Nigeria, it is the order of day to experience violence whenever Chelsea and Manchester clubs are playing among the opposing supporters. Fan violence is often alcohol related and may result in monumental destruction of properties and projectiles thrown aimlessly hurting people and in some cases may lead to loss of lives. To lend credence to the menace of fan activities, Alan Rothenberg (the chairman of the World Cup Organising Committee for the 1994 FIFA World cup expressed that there was a collective sigh of relief from security experts in the U.S.A. when England failed to qualify. He emphasised that Iraq, Iran and England

were three countries in the world whose presence would have created logistical and security problems (Wikipedia, 2011).

Mass media activities can make athletes prone to violence. The media affords ample exposure to sports related violence via television, magazine newspapers and radio, thus providing numerous examples to children who may imitate such behaviour. It glamorizes players especially the most controversial and aggressive ones. Its commentary is laced with descriptions suggestive of combat, linking excitement to violent action (Eric Digest 1989). An encounter with violent media can produce a physical, rather than a mental reaction. According to Wash (2004) there would be a rise in testosterone and adrenaline level, and if there are monitors on the brain to indicate increased neural activity through electro-synaptic pulses, there would be a large glow coming from archipallium area. In evolutionary terms, this is the reptilian part of the brain that includes the brain, stem, medulla and cerebellum, and it produces a type of primal pleasure response.

Parental influence play tremendous role in stimulating violence in sports. According to Murphy (1999), some parents instead of regarding sports as a potentially fun or healthy activity for their children, view athletics as a means of achieving fame, glory

or material rewards like scholarship or professional contract. Such parents put undue pressure and encourage their children to use any available means achieve success in sport. Government on the other hand often exert political pressure on sports to showcase supremacy and stable economy. According to Ericson (2011) fervour is sometimes linked to victories or losses. These make athletes to struggle to win by foul means to bring fame to their supporters, communities, tribes or nations.

The rôle of the recreation professional: As the gate keepers of public park facilities, recreation professionals have a critical role in ensuring that the highest standards of conduct are upheld at sporting events. Sports administrators have a legal duty to ensure that the activity is conducted in a safe manner.

Theoretical Explanations of Sports violence

There are three major theories according to Terry and Jackson (1989) that seek to explain violent aggression in sport. The biological theory sees aggression as a basic inherent human characteristic. Within this context, sport is seen as a socially acceptable way to discharge built-up aggression. The psychological theory states that aggression is caused by frustration; it is situational.

Frustration results when one's efforts to reach a particular goal are blocked. In sports, frustration can be caused by questionable calls by officials, failure to make a particular play, injuries that interfere with optimum performance, heckling from spectators, or taunts by coaches on players. The social learning theory maintains that aggressive behaviour is learned through modelling and reinforced by rewards and punishments. Young athletes take sports heroes as role models and imitate their behaviour. Parents and coaches are also models who may demonstrate support for an aggressive style of play. According to Terry and Jackson reinforcement for acts of violence may come from three sources:

- (a) The athletes immediate reference groups- coaches, team-mates, family, and friends.
- (b) Structure of the game and implementation of rules by officials and governing bodies
- (c) Attitudes of fans, media, courts, and society. They stressed that reinforcement may take the form of reward, such as praise, trophies, starting position, respect of friends and family. Leonard (1988) emphasised that vicarious

reinforcement may be derived from seeing professional players paid huge salaries in spite of their aggressive style of play. That player who does not display the desired degree of aggressiveness may receive negative reinforcement through criticism from parents and coaches, lack of playing time, harassment by team mates, opponents, or spectators.

These theories provide a basis for interventions that may curb excessive aggression, especially among young athletes.

Social Health Implications of Violence

Antisocial personality disorder:

People with antisocial personality disorder often behave violently even as children. They may disregard their own safety and the safety of others. People with this disorder do not seem to understand that violence harms other people, and they do not seem to have a conscience that tells them right from wrong. This attitude may lead to desensitization. Constant viewing of violence at home, in communities, or on television can lead people to believe that violence is a normal part of life. People who are surrounded by violence may reach a point where they no longer notice violent and may become less sensitive to the

pain and suffering that violence cause to others. They may also not remember that peaceful behaviour is a possibility (Sports violence, 2011). Scientific research shows that by way of intermittent explosive disorder some athletes (especially males) may have irregularly high testosterone level leading them to violence on the playing surface. There may also be irregular production of Norepinephrine which plays part in the regulation of emotions.

According to Seligman (2011), such individual live in state of learned helplessness which is a form of passivity and hopelessness that people experience when they come to believe that violence are in evitable and inescapable components of their lives. People who experience violence regularly may give up trying to avoid or create safety because they have more approving attitude towards the use of violence to resolve conflicts (Sports violence 2011). This attitude may lead to "mean world syndrome" where youth may believe that the real world contains this amount of pain and violence, and therefore begin to view their environment as a mean and dangerous place. This type of feeling may affect emotional health.

Alcohol and substance abuse like drugs often play a role in violence. These substances interfere with good judgement or behaviour. Some people try to use alcohol or

drugs to treat their feelings of anger or depression, but instead feel worse. Excessive intake of alcohol can lead to memory loss.

Post traumatic stress disorder: This is a condition in which a person has long-lasting psychological symptoms after experiencing an extremely stressful or violent event to which the person responds with fear, helplessness or horror. People with this disorder often relive the terrifying event again and again through nightmares and strong, disturbing memories. They may have trouble sleeping and may feel emotionally numb or cut from other people (sports violence, 2011).

The effects of sports violence are long term injuries. Brain and body injury to the front of the brain may remove some personal control over anger and aggression. Injuries associated with violence may lead to deformity. These affect both the physical and emotional health, hence a threat to a social health.

Solutions to Sports Violence

Social role modelling: A role model is a person who serves another individual as a proto-type of appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours, held and manifested in the enactment of a particular social role. Youths learn by observation and imitation. If they see, hear and observe their home, coach, school,

media role models behaving in violent ways, they may believe that turning angry feeling into angry action is acceptable behaviour, or even the most effective way to solve problems. Parents who model abusive behaviour at home can create a cycle of violence, teaching children to grow up to abusive adults. Likewise coaches should ensure that the values, attitudes and behaviours learned by athletes are desirable to the society because they seem to be more communicable through indirect rather than direct manner. Floyd (1978) cited Coach Eby as a good example of a role model because he was concerned about player's attitude and conduct more than winning a game. He was intolerant of rule infractions particularly if breaking a rule has anything to do with a player's basic character development. He sticks to rules and insists that the rules come first and winning second. Coakley (1982) asserted that sports violence is most prevalent in professional sports and advised coaches to avoid symbolic associations with professional teams like names or logos, and should not model their own coaching techniques on those of professional coaches.

Emphasis on true sportsmanship: Coaches should not emphasize winning at all cost. Enjoyment and the development of individual skills should be the objective

coaches should impact on athletes. They should encourage adherence to rules and praise improvement. Athletic performance should not be equated with personal worth, and player should not be encouraged or allowed to play when injured or ill as a demonstration of stoic virtue (Coakley 1982). Teachers and coaches should commit themselves to teaching of positive sports related values, using a number of intervention strategies, like Kohlberg's moral development model and social learning theories, which have been shown to produce improvement or modification of behaviour, moral reasoning and perception of sportsmanship (Eric Digest, 2011). Coaches should stress participation in sports. Studies show that many children 9-14 drop out of sports because they spend too much time on the bench and not enough in the field. They perceive themselves as unsuccessful because their level of performance does not earn them more playing time. A study of young male athletes indicated that 90% would rather have an opportunity to play on a losing team than sit on the bench of a winning team (Eric Digest, 2011).

Teachers and coaches should commit themselves to teaching positive sports related values, using a number of intervention strategies, utilizing Kohlberg's Moral development model and social learning

theories, which have been shown to produce improvement or modification of behaviour, moral reasoning and perception of sportsmanship (Eric Digest 2011). Discipline in youths can be achieved through sports by enforcement of rules and regulation of sports. Athletes should be furnished with rules and regulation guiding their sports. One of the basic moral assumptions in the society is that rules serve as guide to behaviour and are made to be kept. These rules and regulation in sports serve as the codes of conduct. All the rules of sports are designed to eliminate immoral behaviour. These rules frequently ban general unnecessary roughness, ungentle-manly conduct, disallow specific actions considered to be dangerous such as tripping in basket ball; rough tackling in football or raising sticks in field hockey and so on.

Parents are the first socialization agents and influential role models who can have critical impact on child's attitudes towards sports. Physical educators and coaches should inform parents of curricular activities and goals, alert them to signs of anxiety or aggressive behaviour, encourage positive attitudes toward competition and physical activity, and promote realistic performance (Eric Digest, 2011).

Selection of athletes: This is an area where the coach has to exemplify disciplinary

action worthy of emulation by the athletes. Generally, the coach decides who plays, designs the offence and defence, and assigns the players responsibilities. He equally decides who receives favour when available like scholarship award, prize and so on. To ensure violence is not stimulated, the coach should avoid prejudice and bias in selection of athletes for a particular outing. The coach should select for socially acceptable personality traits in his athletes, who exhibit high standard of appearance, social behaviours and most competent of the team who merits going for any competition.

Leadership role: Leadership in this context is seen as the behavioural process of influencing others to acceptable norms, conduct and common motive. Coaches can select athletes who exhibit character traits approved by the society as leaders or captains of a group of athletes. The essence is for them to reinforce the acceptable characteristics during training, as well as to serve as positional role model to the other athletes

Punishment training: It has recently been advocated that the principles of operant conditioning which deals with the control and modification of behaviours be used as a training method in sports. Punishment is only one way in which behaviour is controlled by its consequences. These consequences are

grouped into positive reinforce and negative or aversive stimuli. Positive reinforcement increases the probability of the reinforced behaviour occurring again like applauding an athlete for balanced landing from the parallel bars. Negative reinforcement occurs when an aversive stimulus is terminated contingent upon certain behaviour. The termination or withdrawal of the aversive stimulus strengthens the behaviour, which preceded the withdrawal. For instance, the cessation of criticism after an athlete exhibits a skill properly will strengthen the behaviour of repeating the task in the same manner (Smith, 2001). The coach should monitor athletes' behaviour and reinforce the rules consistently by praising or rewarding desired behaviours and ignoring or meting punishment to undesired behaviours.

CONCLUSION:

Sports violence is against the spirit of sportsmanship. It has been observed that sports has great potential for building moral characters in youths because in sports individuals express thoughts, feelings and actions in the ways that are appropriate and acceptable by cultural norms or code of conduct. The belief system and behaviour patterns inculcated via sports are supposed to be those, which are functional for the

society but negative values attached to sports in the recent times has led to much deviation from the established principles of sports. Like Jamieson (2011) stated the public should be concerned, but not surprised by the violence in sports today because those involved are mirroring the actions of our society. Violence is antithesis to societal acceptable behaviour and a threat to social health. Parents, schools, coaches and other reference groups need to live up to their expectations as role models to curb sports violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Fans or spectators who incite rival players should be kept at least forty five metres away from the opposing team.
2. Fans that are bent on mayhem should not be allowed to attend any more games until they have vowed to change.
3. Stadia should implement a "fan code of ethics".
4. Parents should show some responsibility and monitor what their children do in their spare time.
5. Youths should watch less television violent movies.
6. Sports organisers should crackdown on vulgar and un-sportsman like chants and all violent insulting languages on the part of the coach and the players.
7. Athletes and fans should imbibe the biblical principle of do to others what you would have them do to you (Luke 6:31).
8. All coaches and parents should have training in child development and physiology, sports philosophy and how to deal with violence in sports.
9. All coaches, players and parents should sign a contract agreeing to a code of conduct, what is expected of coaches, players and parents.
10. Players who are problematic should not be allowed to play on a team.
11. All attempts of injuring other players in order to take them out of the game and all borderline violence should be forbidden. Any attempt by a coach to encourage athletes to behave in this way should be met with severe penalty and eventual removal if repeated.

12. Friendly, civil relations between teams should be encouraged. All games should start and end with handshakes.

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