

**PROMOTING HEALTHY INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP
THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Sports activities are wonderful tools for promoting healthy interpersonal relationship for optimal health. However, literature evidence points to the fact that sports have not been adequately used to promote social health among participants in Nigeria. This is because many people, who participate in individual sports and recreational activities like jogging, weight lifting, badminton, and other individual games, do so without having enough social interaction with other participants, thereby losing the social benefits of sports. In this paper, efforts have been made to explain the reasons why people participate and socialise in sports; the social situation in sports participation in Nigeria, and how sports can be used to promote healthy interpersonal relationship for social cohesion, social capital and social health in Nigeria. It is on this basis that the conclusion was made.

Introduction

Sports provide a wonderful medium for individuals' interaction which improves the physical and social health of children, youths and adults alike. Healthy interpersonal relationship could be acquired through social interaction that occurs through participation in sports and physical activities conducted in a collective manner in Nigeria. However, many participants in sports in Nigeria do not participate to achieve the social objectives of sports. Instead, they concentrate on the physical aspect which tends to develop only the physical body for fitness. This might be because they do not understand the social role of sports in fostering healthy interpersonal relationship. They therefore participate in sports without really socializing or interacting with other participants thereby losing the social benefits of sports. Artinger, Claphan, Hunt, Meigs, Milord, Sampson and Forrester (2011) indicated that sports programmes provide powerful medium for individual interaction and by so doing participants acquire some physical and social benefits. According to Pyne and Fogarty (2009), sports provide numerous opportunities for individuals to grow and develop socially, emotionally and physically thereby achieving optimal health.

The British Medical Association, BMA, (2011) strongly supported the World Health Organisation in her 1946 definition of health, as a state of complete, physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This paper adopts the WHO's definition of Health. The health of an individual could be promoted through social interaction that occurs in sports

To promote means to help or encourage something to develop or succeed (Sinclair, 1992), or the encouragement of the growth or development of something (Encarta, 2009). The Health Promotion Agency, HPA, (2009) defined health promotion as the process of enabling people to exert control over the determinants of health and thereby improve their own health. Participants can exert control over the determinants of health and improve their social health through participation in Sports.

Sports according to Merriam-Webster (2011) is an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment. Wikipedia (2011) defined sports as an organized, competitive, entertaining and skillful physical activity requiring commitment and fair play, in which a winner can be defined by objective means. It is governed by set of rules and customs.

Fenelon (2011) defined sports as all forms of physical activities which through casual or organized participation aim to use, maintain or improve physical fitness and provide entertainment to participants. In this paper, sports and sport are used interchangeably to mean all organised physical, social and mental activities with rules and regulations carried out indoors or outdoors whether at amateur or professional level requiring physical or mental exertion for fitness, entertainment or a reward.

Sports do not only improve physical, mental or emotional health but also promotes healthy interpersonal relationship among participants. Interpersonal relationship is defined by Answer (2011) as an association between two or more people that may range from fleeting to enduring. This association can be based on love, solidarity, regular business interaction, or some other types of social interaction (such as social interaction in sports). Healthy interpersonal relationship in this study refers to an association in which individuals are in good social health in their interaction, connection or affiliations among themselves especially in sports.

Promoting healthy interpersonal relationship in this paper is raising to a high rank an association in which individuals are in good social health through their participation and interaction in sports. The individuals

thereby develop healthy interpersonal relationship skills such as being able to relate in a positive way with one's family members and others. According to Wong (2003), this means being able to make and keep friendly relationship, as well as being able to end the relationship constructively.

Many social health benefits could be achieved through participation in sports in Nigeria. Davies (2007) defined participation as an informed, autonomous and meaningful involvement in decision making and action. According to Wales Council for Voluntary Action, WCVA, (2011), participation is active engagement of organizations, communities or individuals in decision making and action that affects them. Participation in this paper therefore means active engagement of individuals in sports.

Active engagement in sports can lead to numerous social health benefits. Sports and Development (2011) stated that positive peer relation, self esteem, confidence, character development and moral behaviour are acquired through social interaction that occurs in sports and physical activities. Participation in sports activities also encourages effective communication with peers, social cohesion, development of leadership qualities and skills as well as control of aggressive behaviour and delinquency in youths (Pyne and Foggarty,

2009).

Individuals participating in sports can develop high sense of worth and skill development such as social skill, leadership skill, cooperative skill, healthy competition skill and conflict solving skill (Health Scout News, 2011). When people engage in sports, they have lower chance of depression, become capable of controlling aggressive behaviour as well as development of social cohesion and social capital (Harrison and Naraya, 2003).

Begg, Langley, Moffit and Marshal (1996) stated that involvement in sports and physical activities controls delinquency in youths and adolescence as well as reduces anti-social behaviour among young people. When peers participate in sports, they learn to associate with peers, develop positive peer relation and effective communication with peers (Pyne and Foggarty, 2009), and thereby improve their interpersonal relationship.

Reasons for Participating and Socialising in Sports

Individuals and groups participate and socialise in sports for various reasons. Many people participate in sports to keep fit and for maintaining good health (Nwimo and Nji, 2005). According to them, many others, even in Nigeria, participate for good use of

leisure time, skill development and social interaction. Diversion from other activities of life is one other reason given by people for participation in sports as well as for the development of physical, mental and social well-being. Some people engage in sports in order to ease off their tension, take care of stressful day and to let off steam. For others, they socialise in sports as an avenue for meeting with loved ones, make new friends and cement already made relationships. In other words, people participate in sports for various reasons as well as to promote interpersonal relationship.

Social Situation in Sports Participation in Nigeria

Sports activities are designed to achieve physical, mental, psychological and social objectives (Umedum, Okafor and Azubuiké, 1990). However, many participants in sports in Nigeria do not participate to achieve the social objectives of sports instead, they concentrate on the physical aspect which tend to develop only the physical body for fitness neglecting the social aspect. This might be because they do not understand the social role of sports in fostering healthy interpersonal relationship. They therefore participate in sports without really socializing or interacting well with other

participants thereby loosing the social benefits of sports. From observation, many Nigerians engage in individual games such as jogging, weight lifting, gymnastics among other individual sports activities without adequately relating well with other participants during the events. For instance, in Nigeria, one may observe that an individual involved in jogging only goes into the activity and concentrates on it without attempting to interact well with other participants jogging along the road with him or in the stadium. At the end of the exercise, he retires home with little or no social interaction. This practice undermines the social objectives of sports and these participants do not enjoy a healthy interpersonal relationship in sports.

Sports as a Tool for Promoting Interpersonal Relationship

The following interpersonal relationship qualities could be promoted through participation in sports in Nigeria. They are self-worth, self control and confidence; social cohesion and social capital; positive relation and effective communication among peers; character development and moral behaviour; and healthy social interaction. Others are acceptable social, leadership, co-operative and conflict solving skills; depression, aggression, anxiety and stress

management skills; social fitness; as well as sense of humour and mutual laughter.

Individual participants develop self-worth, self control and confidence

Kids can gain self-control and self-worth by practicing a classic game that encourages them to practice self-control (Dewar, 2011). In this game, kids freeze like statues, then one child becomes who is "it", he must try to get them to break character and laugh. The first one to laugh becomes "it" for the next round. Games as described above could be used to encourage kids to practice self-control and self-worth in Nigeria. Confidence can be developed through games among kids. For instance, "Onye ga agba egwu", a game in Igbo culture (Eastern Nigeria) can be used to develop confidence in children. The game simply means "who-will-dance". It is a group game in which a kid is called up to dance on the stage without his pre-knowledge of it. His ability to come and dance without feeling shy helps to develop confidence in him. This can be applied to real life situation.

According to Pyne and Fogarty (2009), team sports membership can help increase a child's self-worth, sense of accomplishment, teamwork, and recognition. As an individual receives a trophy with his

teammates, it develops in him the quality of self worth. UNICEF has identified that involvement in sports or other physical activities allows young people to build self-confidence and feel a sense of achievement (Focus, 2006). Failing to engage young people in sporting and recreational activities according to Donnelly and Coakley (2002) reduces opportunities for children to achieve their full potential, nurture self-esteem, and develop skills necessary for social development even in Nigeria.

Sports bring people together and bond them to achieve social cohesion and social capital

The former secretary general of the United Nation, Koffi Annan indicated that sports is a tool that can bring people together, no matter their origin, background, religious belief and economic status (Focus, 2006). In societies comprising hundreds of different tribal and language groups (such as in Nigeria), sport is a uniting force (Community Development Council of Quinte, CDCQ, 2005) and a tool that can bring Nigerians together and bond them. For instance, the Nigeria national football team is made up of players from different tribal, ethnic and religious background, who are bond to achieve the team's common goal.

Participation in team sports builds social cohesion and social capital among young people and adults in communities. Encarta (2009) described cohesion as working together to form a united whole. Social cohesion is therefore the interaction of sports participants working together to form a united whole. On the other hand, Encarta also described Social Capital as the educational, social and cultural advantages that somebody from the upper middle class is believed to possess. Social Capital is the wealth of knowledge, experience, and advantage possessed by an individual by virtue of his participating and socialising in sports. Donnellson, Leo, and Gayle, (2010) indicated that those who share their interest with others find that their social capital climbs.

Peers positively relate and effectively communicate with other peers

The Sports and Development (2011) stated that sport is effective in promoting mutual understanding and empathy among young people, including young people in Nigeria. Team sports (or group construction projects) force kids to pay attention to each other's efforts, communicate, negotiate, and cooperate (Dewar, 2011). According to Dewar, in one study of patients with high functioning autism and Asperger's syndrome,

school kids attended a one hour session of group construction play once a week for 18 weeks. Compared with kids given special training in the social use of language, the kids in the construction group showed greater improvement in their social interactions. Other research studies indicate that the benefits of these experiences last for years (Legoff and Sherman, 2006). In Nigeria, team sports could be used to effectively promote mutual understanding and empathy among young people as well as encourage young children to relate and pay attention to each other's efforts, communicate, negotiate, and cooperate.

Character development and moral behaviour

Sports and Development (2011), stated that character and moral behaviour are acquired through social interaction that occurs through sport and physical activity conducted in a collective. Sports are used to train participants to work together in a team for harmony and peace. Participants also develop fitness to face life's situation without undue fatigue. Sports according to Ogu and Umeakuka (2005) teaches courage, patience, fortitude, determination and perseverance. Sports could therefore be utilized to teach character and moral behaviour to Nigerian

who participate in sports.

Sports bring great social interaction between participants and instructor.

Physical activities with others allow participants to build social skills through peer interaction. According to Focus (2006), belonging to a social group or a team encourages greater social interaction and integration. Many strategies can be used to make sports activities social in Nigeria. According to Sports and Development (2011), joining a team sports is a great way to meet people and bond with them. Team sports lead to a great social interaction where many Nigerians can meet and work together with many more other people. When one exercises with another person, it makes one's workout more interesting especially when one finds someone who is dependable and he likes to be with the person and do things together. Engaging in sports like bicycle riding, charity football, and other events are great fund raisers for charity. Group fitness programmes are also great ways to meet people and add a social element to one's workout, in which case, there are exchanges with other participants and with the instructor that could be refreshing.

Development of social skills, leadership skills, co-operative skills and conflict solving skills

Playing sports can be a great way of develop some valuable skills and instilling the importance of physical activity among young people in Nigeria. People that are not involved in sports activities as stated by Morgan (2011) may experience limited social development. Sports and Development (2011) has noted that sport has been used as a practical tool to engage young people in their communities through volunteering, resulting in higher levels of leadership skills, community engagement and altruism among young people. Participating in sports, joining clubs or groups, and dance as noted by Canadian Council on Social Development, CCSD, (2001) are examples of ways in which young people can participate in their community, learn new skills, and socialize beyond their family boundaries. In physical recreation and sports activities as remarked by Donnelly and Coakley (2002), participants learn valuable skills related to quality of life: intra-personal and interpersonal communications, determination, perseverance, confidence, leadership, citizenship, goal-orientation, motivation, and personal satisfaction as well as conflict solving skills.

Taking up captainship in team games will inculcate leadership qualities (Carta, 2011). The individual learns how to control other team mates and manage the activities of his team. This quality he can transfer into his daily living as he interacts with the members of the Nigerian society. Some people would argue that kids hone their social skills whenever they play together. In fact, it's plausible that social play, particularly fantasy or pretend social play, functions as a safe testing ground in which juveniles can learn the appropriate social behaviors in their group (Pellegrini,; Dupuis, and Smith, 2007).

Sports control depression, aggressive behaviour, anxiety and stress

Physical activity keeps one sharp and focused not only on one's sport but long after the activity has stopped. According to Carta (2011), people who exercise are less likely to be depressed. Sport has been found to filter violent and aggressive behaviours, anxiety and stress by allowing participants to let off steam (Focus, 2006).

Mutz and Baur (2009) stated that psychological theories of aggression assume that aggressive behaviour results from preceding displeasing or frustrating experiences and that sports activities are a functional cathartic alternative. Social bonding

theory as quoted by Mutz and Baur (2009) also assumes that people have an innate tendency to act aggressively unless they are bound to effective moral standards and conventional social norms, such as might be provided in a sports club. Health Scout News (2011) has established that sport-involved youths are less aggressive than their non-sport-playing ones. Researchers according to Ausport (2011) have also suggested that exercise can help to ease some common traits of mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression. Nobody enjoys to be left out, or be alone. Sport can provide bonding and a sense of belonging to Nigerian participants. It also challenges them to work in a group, and encourages them to think of others. Individuals like to feel part of a team and with sport they can feed off the energy and enthusiasm of their team-mates.

Social fitness

Social fitness is the ability of an individual to get along with other people (Nwimo and Nji, 2005). According to them, *"a person who gets along well with people is deemed socially fit. His attitude to people is positive. He is interested in people and is concerned about their welfare. He is not selfish, when things do not go his way, the*

individual does not complain and find fault with others. He accepts his fault when he is wrong and does not claim to be always right. It is very easy for people to like him and gather around him because he is kind, jovial, generous, humble and self-confident. He interacts positively with people easily and does not shy away from social responsibilities” p.91.

Good social interaction is a key part of living well. Many studies, according to Traumaregister (2007), list good friendships, family relationships and health as the most important things to have in order to be happy and fulfilled. Social fitness therefore results from a healthy relationship with others in sports. This fitness can be achieved through participation in a healthy relationship in sports in Nigeria.

Experience of humour and laughter.

Sports afford participants opportunity to experience humor during the activities. Helpguide (2011) indicated that mutual laughter and play are essential components of strong healthy relationship. By making a conscious effort to incorporate more humour and play into one's daily interaction, Helpguide, indicated that it can improve the quality of

one's love relationship, increase happiness as well as his intimacy and connection with others. When individuals involve in sporting activities in Nigeria share laughter together, it becomes an effective tool for keeping relationship fresh and exciting; adding joy, vitality and resilience. It also makes one feel good which remains even after the laughter subsides. Helpguide (2011) also reveals that laughter protects the heart, relaxes the whole body, boosts immune system and it is an antidote to stress, pain and conflict helping to bring the mind and body back into balance.

Conclusion

Sports are designed to develop physical, mental, psychological and social well-being of an individual. Sports activities serve as a tool for promoting healthy interpersonal relationship among participants. The activities provide the media for individual interaction with numerous opportunities for individual social development and growth. When people participate and interact in sports, they develop healthy interpersonal relationship skills which assist them to relate positively within a sports team, family and society. It is therefore necessary that sport is made social so that participants can interact and gain the social benefits accruable in participation in sports in Nigeria.

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