

Physical Education and Sports to Overcome Disability

Madhu Gaur

Assistant Professor, Shri J.N.P.G. College, Lucknow, UP, India

Abstract

It is well established that poverty and disability are inextricably linked and both have a direct impact on health, well-being and development outcomes. Physical activity and sport play an important role in poverty elimination by helping to promote the inclusion of marginalized groups, reduce social vulnerability, support the empowerment of vulnerable or at-risk populations and enhance self-esteem along with physical and mental health. This, in turn, serves to foster independence and economic opportunity which is essential for reducing poverty among vulnerable groups. It is an undisputed fact that young and old must strive for a healthy lifestyle. This means kids, teens, and adults must keep mentally and physically fit. Children with special needs most definitely benefit from having a balance in all aspects of their life: social, physical, and mental.

KEYWORDS: Disability, Self-esteem, Community recreation, Mitigation.

Introduction

There are more than a billion people with disabilities worldwide, many of whom face substantial barriers to participating in physical activity. Engaging in a healthy lifestyle with a disability can be a daunting task—physical activity generally requires elements of strength, endurance, balance, and coordination that are taken for granted. In people with disabilities, one or more physical attributes might be affected by disability, which limits access to sport, fitness, and work or household-related physical activity. Lack of exercise is a serious public health concern for all people, but people with disabilities are at much greater risk of the serious health problems associated with physical inactivity.

The United Nations has repeatedly reaffirmed the importance of physical activity and sport as integral elements in realizing development goals. Social rights to participate in physical activity and sport is also firmly instantiated in the international human rights law framework, where it is included as the right to participate in sport, recreation, and play.

It is well established that poverty and disability are inextricably linked and both have a direct impact on health, well-being and development outcomes. Physical activity and sport play an important role in poverty elimination by helping to promote the inclusion of marginalized groups, reduce social vulnerability, support the empowerment of vulnerable or at-risk populations and enhance self-esteem along with physical and mental health. This, in turn, serves to foster independence and economic opportunity which is essential for reducing poverty among vulnerable groups. Governments recognize the important link between sport and development and the need to ensure that disability inclusion is prioritized in the sport for development policies and programs. Where physical activity and sport are utilized in supporting development goals, it is important to ensure that persons with disabilities - who are among the poorest of the poor - are included and are able to participate:

- Physical activity and sport can help reduce health-care costs and increase productivity, key issues in emerging economies and therefore must be accessible to persons with disabilities;

- Development messages targeted to youth and adults through sport and recreation platforms (e.g. health messages; voter information) must be accessible for persons with disabilities;

- Educational outreach through school sport and community recreation should include and be accessible to children with disabilities.

Addressing the social and environmental determinants of health for persons with disabilities and the entire population is an important dimension of ensuring inclusive, economically productive and healthy societies. The right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health cannot be attained without due attention to physical activity and sport. There is now global recognition that physical inactivity is a major driver of ill-health and impacts health conditions that can accelerate or aggravate disability. And all too often, persons with disabilities encounter a variety of barriers that inhibit participation in physical activity and sport. Research discloses the following:

- Lack of understanding and unfounded assumptions about the health of people with disabilities results in the exclusion of people with disabilities from health promotion and disease prevention programs.

- Health promotion interventions such as physical activities are beneficial for people with disabilities and yet health promotion activities seldom target people with disabilities, and many experiences multiple barriers to participation.

- Increases in diabetes, cardiovascular diseases (heart disease and stroke), mental illness, cancer, and respiratory illnesses, observed in all parts of the world, will have a profound effect on disability.

- Physical inactivity is one among several factors contributing to increases in non-communicable diseases and resulting disability.

- At all stages of childhood and adolescence, participation in physical activity and sport has a profound impact on overall growth and development and is an essential element of quality of life in childhood.

Physical activity can foster healthy child development, life-long health, social cohesion, and increased productivity and performance in school and daily life. Children with disabilities too often experience double discrimination: they are excluded from school and excluded from participation in sport and physical activity inside and outside of schools. Research discloses that:

- Weak or non-existent physical education requirements for children generally result in low levels or non-existent physical activity for those with disabilities.

- When physical education is required, children with disabilities are often excused from attendance by their schools on the basis of a doctor's note, rather than provided with adaptive physical, education by their schools.

- Children with disabilities today are less active than their peers.

- For girls with disabilities, the barriers to physical activity and sport are even more pronounced, as they face multiple layers of discrimination stemming from being female, living with a disability, possibly living in

poverty or coming from a minority or indigenous community, and the negative social norms associated with girls across all forms of physical activity.

International human rights law specifically recognizes the right of children with disabilities to play and to participate in recreation, leisure and sporting activities in the school system. This includes access to playgrounds and other child-specific sport, recreation and play venues in the community as well as adaptive physical education in schools.

Effective governance for sustainable development requires public institutions in all countries and at all levels to be inclusive, participatory and accountable. Laws and institutions must protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and all persons must be free from discrimination – including discrimination on the basis of disability and another status. Inclusive and participatory governances are enablers and outcomes of development. Laws and policies requiring mandatory physical education or promoting sport for all are often silent on addressing the right to access physical education and sport for persons with disabilities. Disability inclusion in sport, physical education, and related social activities should be promoted and protected in law, policy, and institutions of government.

In sum, disability inclusive sport and physical activity has numerous benefits for the health of persons with disabilities, including the mitigation of disabling health conditions, the prevention of secondary or aggravating disabling conditions, as a component of a rehabilitation program, and as a facilitator of self-esteem and mental health.

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