

Participation Barriers of Recreational Sports Activities: An Exploratory Study among People with Disabilities in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study aims to ascertain the barriers that people with disabilities (hearing impaired, visually impaired, speech disorder and mobility disorder) face when participating in sport and recreational activities in Saudi Arabia. Findings of this study can will serve as a guideline for the stakeholders in Saudi Arabia to provide better services in order to improve the participations in sports activities among the people with disability. Thirty people with disability aged between 10 and 40 were interviewed about barriers to participate in recreational, sports activities. Open-ended questions were used to generate discussions about the problems and possible solutions. It was revealed that the types of barriers are related to problems with the facilities, social related issues, and personal problems.

Keywords: Barriers, People with Disabilities, Saudi Arabia, Participation.

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Introduction

Identifying barriers to exercising is an important goal in health program planning (Cooper, Quatrano et al. 1999; Rimmer, Rubin et al. 2000). Barriers to exercising refer to the obstacles that individuals face when they participate in physical activities (Booth, Owen et al. 2000). It is estimated that over a billion of people with disabilities faced significant barriers in their daily lives, yet many can still contribute on an equal footing in the world of the modern living (WHO 2011). By the same token, equal chances to lead a healthy and happily life should be offered without discrimination of any other segments of society (King, Law et al. 2003). Thus, it is important to identify the barriers to participating in exercise activities that might hinder the development of any health promotion intervention plan (Cooper, Quatrano et al. 1999)

In Saudi Arabia, there are approximately 134,956 people with disabilities (Ministry of Economy and Planning 2007). Out of this number, only a few are actively participating in recreational sport activities (Al-Mater, El-Najjer et al. 1996). Furthermore, they discovered that facilities for non-disabled people are sufficiently provided in Saudi Arabia, it is important to engage the disabled to participate more actively in sporting activities. The objective of this study is to ascertain the barriers that people with disabilities (hearing impaired, visually impaired, speech disorder and mobility disorder) face when participating in sport and recreational activities in Saudi Arabia. The findings from this study can serve as a guideline for the stakeholders in Saudi Arabia to provide better services in order to improve the participations in sports activities among the people with disability.

Methods

Interview and Data Analysis

The respondents in this study were interviewed on the concept of the barriers to participating in sports and recreational activities as well as the possible solutions. Each interview session lasted for about 20 to 30 minutes. As recommended by Strauss and Corbin (2008), the interviews were all audio-taped and transcribed by expert transcribers. Sub-themes were identified and coded into the general theme categories. Careful notes were made of non-linguistic expressions or non-verbal data such as sighs, exclamations, tone of voice, pauses and laughs, which further enrich the content of the data (Strauss and Corbin 2008). Preliminary coding was done by two researchers independently prior to the final coding. Coding was compared and where consensus could not be reached, a third person adjudicated (VEALE 1999; Ezzy 2002). Analyses were done by using the phenomenographic approach (Dahlgren and Fallsberg 1991). Interviews were conducted concurrently based on theory of analytic induction (Glaser and Strauss 2006) by adjusting the interview questions after the first few interviews to include key emerging topics for subsequent interviews based on the experiences from previous interviews. Symbols (e.g.: DSD, DSB, DSS and DSM) were assigned for each respondents. Open-ended questions were used to generate discussion in both areas: problems and possible solutions.

Results

Characteristics of Participants

Thirty male participants aged between 10 and 40 were interviewed. The demographic descriptions of the participants are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic data of the interviewees

Demographics		Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	<10	0	0
	11-20	10	(33.3)
	21-30	14	(46.7)
	31-40	6	(20.0)
	>40	0	0
Marital Status	Single	19	(63.3)
	Married	11	(36.7)
Residence Location	Urban	16	(53.3)
	Rural	14	(46.7)
Type of disability	Deaf (Hearing Impairment)	7	(23.3)
	Blind (Visual Impairment)	7	(23.3)
	Speech difficulties(Speech & Language Impairment)	7	(23.3)
	Mobility Impairments(All types)	9	(30.0)
Causes of disability	Congenital	20	(66.7)
	Accidental	10	(33.3)

*(DSD = Deaf, DSB = Blind, DSS = Speech difficulties and DSM= Mobility Impairments)

Barriers that prevent recreational sports activities:

Through the interview, a few types of barriers were identified from the feedback of the respondents. The types of barriers identified are as listed below:

1- Barriers associated with administrative aspects

Majority of the respondents claimed that the barriers they face are related to the administrations of the recreation centers, associations, or clubs. According to the respondents, they are not given enough opportunities to be involved in the recreational activities as there are limited access to recreation centers, associations and clubs. Below are some of the more common responses of the respondents during the interview.

"Some clubs do not allow us to practice recreational sports activities we have, and the reason is that we are disabled and they only allow for ordinary people." (DSD2, DSB15).

"When designing housing schemes or public squares, no clubs for people with disabilities are taken into account." (DSS10, DSM30)

"There are no sports centers that provide services for people with disabilities.....there are no places to exercise."(DSD1, DSB7, DSS14 and DSM22)

2- Restrictions related to transport facilities

From the feedback of the respondents, transportation is also cited as one of the barriers that people with disabilities in Saudi Arabia face when trying to participate in sports activities. Below are some of the responses received during the interview.

"There is no means of transportation that people with disabilities rely on the family driver. It is difficult for my family to provide special driver for me." (DSD18, DSB5, DSS3 and DSM11)

" ... a lot of obstacles, including lack of transportation" (DSS9, DSM20)

"There are no buses to takenot all people have cars especially those with special needs." (DSD2, DSB29).

3- Restrictions on available facilities within the sports centers and gyms such as safety, security equipment, and other factors

The respondents in this study also expressed their dissatisfaction with the facilities provided. They have poor physical access to sport facilities which creates a barrier in participating in sporting activities. Included below are the complaints of the respondents on the condition of the sports and recreational centers available to them.

"...no doctor in the hall....lack of safety and security factors in the gym." (DSB29, DS18)

".....a lot of sports centers do not provide adequate lighting, especially at night, as well as the presence of many of the barriers in the hallways, and the slopes concrete barriers, causing me a lot of problems and difficulties." (DSD28, DSB5)

"There are no private bathrooms for the disabled in these centers."(DSS3, DSM11)

4- Restrictions associated with recreational sports programs

According to some of the responses received, some sports centers fail to offer a well-planned sports program for people with disability. These problems are reflected in the feedback of the respondents below.

"There are no sport programs for the disabled." (DSD18, DSB5, DSS3 and DSM11)

"Programs offered in physical education classes do not meet the needs of people with special needs." (DSD1, DSB7, DSS14 and DSM22)

5- Restrictions related to the psychological aspects

Some of the respondents admitted to avoid from participating in the sport activities due to their fear of injury. Examples of the psychological difficulties face by people with disabilities to exercising are reflected in the feedback of the respondents below.

"Blind, and extreme fear due to disability and falls and injury..." (DSB15).

" I'm not a difficult exercise, but I always feel that the fear of injury."(DSS3, DSM11)

6- Inequality

Participants with disabilities sometimes face social based issues such as inequality in participation among the service providers of the sports and recreational centers. In their feedback, some respondents expressed how inequality of treatment was shown to them.

"Too many lacks of appreciation and inequality with ordinary people, especially the aspects of sports where they control everything." (DSD1, DSB7, DSS14 and DSM22)

"..... ordinary people can involve freely, while they are idle, do not work and can be anything." (DSS13, DSM33)

".... we feel uncomfortable for lack of transportation or incentives." (DSD1, DSB7, DSS14 and DSM22)

7- Restrictions related to the social aspects

According to the respondents, there were times when attitude of the service provider or staff discouraged the respondents from participating in sports activities. Here are the responses received during the interview.

"Society still needs awareness and interest...as the culture of the community is still lacking, especially towards dealing with persons with disabilities." (DSS14, DSM22)

"Society does not understand the needs of disabled aspects of recreational sport.....we are also in need of sport to compensate for deficiencies resulting from our disability".(DSD1, DSB7)

"..... no society does not reach the level required to understand the special needs and help them in many aspects, including the sporty side." (DSD18, DSB5, DSS3 and DSM11)

8- Family and Friends

The study conducted found that lack of support and encouragement from family and friends somehow affected the people with disabilities in Saudi Arabia from going to the gym or sporting venue. Some of the responses are quoted below.

"Family and friends do not encourage us to participate and recreational sports activities for fear of injury." (DSD1, DSB7, DSS14 and DSM22)

"(Members of my) family do not pay any attention to the sport and say," What is the benefit of exercise?" (DSS19, DSM26)

"Family attitude saying.....exercise.....nothing but a waste of time" (DSD2, DSB15)

9- Lack of Time

Not surprisingly, another reason for people with disability for being inhibited from participating in sporting activities is the lack of time, especially those who are under paid employment or training and those responsible for childcare. This supports the findings of several researchers that time constraint is the single most frequently mentioned reason for ceasing participation in recreational activities (Jackson and Dunn 1991) or a variety of recreational activities (Jackson E. L. & Blakely 1993) and for not using Local Park and recreation services (Scott and Jackson 1996).

Discussion:

The results of this study revealed the types of barriers that people with disabilities in Saudi Arabia face when participating in sports and recreational activities. The barriers included problems with the facilities, social related issues, and personal problems.

The problem with the facilities or lack thereof is partly due to the lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of policy makers regarding the issue of disability sport which leads to its misconceptions and lack of a cohesive strategy to increase participation (Martin, Meltzer et al. 1988). Apart from the unsuitable equipments provided, inadequately trained service providers, unsuitable activities, and inflexible programs, unsuitable design of buildings and equipment, restricted access times, and the need to check beforehand for availability of extra assistance are also considered as barriers for people with disabilities from being involved in sports activities (Lockwood and Lockwood 1997; Arthur and Finch 1999; Doll-Tepper 1999).

Moreover, the difficulty in acquiring appropriate transportation further limits their access to the sporting activities. This is especially true for those with physical disabilities if the public transport is restricted and they have to be burdened with the cost of finding other means of transportation (Heller, Ying et al. 2002).

Besides that, the attitude of the society towards the involvement of people with disability in sporting activities is highly discouraging. Arthur and Finch (1999) stated that some of the staff or service providers fail to appreciate the issues related to participation of people with disabilities in sports or the

negative effect that would follow the refusal of membership or access to certain facilities. They also find it difficult to get involved when family members and friends show lack of support in accompanying them to the exercise venue, especially those who are in need of physical assistance, communication assistance, visual assistance or moral support (DePauw and Gavron 1995; Arthur and Finch 1999).

Among the reasons given, lack of time is one of the highest recurring reasons to explain for the lack of participation in sporting activities (Jackson and Dunn 1991; Jackson E. L. & Blakely 1993). It occurred most among the employed respondents or those who are responsible for childcare.

Recommendations for Improving Participations of People with Disability in Recreational Sport Activities:

Based on the results obtained in this study, it is pertinent that actions be taken to overcome the barriers so that people with disability in Saudi Arabia can participate freely and frequently in sports and recreational activities. Part of the initial steps that can be taken is by providing suitable and safe sports equipment for people with disability. Additionally, appropriate training and programs should be provided to enable them learn the correct steps in performing the sports or recreational activities. Transportation should be adapted and specially designed to increase the independence in mobility of people with disability. More often than not, awareness and acceptance of the society towards people with disability will be increased when being constantly exposed to their presence. By improving the access to sports and recreational activities for people with disability and thereby increasing the chances for them to participate, promoting health program will be more likely to be successful.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the barriers that prevent people with disabilities in Saudi Arabia to participate in sports and recreational activities vary from lack of facilities and transportation, social related issues, and lack of time. It strongly supports the finding of Rimmer et al. (2000) that barriers for participation in physical activities existed for people with disability in Saudi Arabia. To this end, a follow up research should be made on ways to improve the services and also overcome the psychological problems that people with disabilities face when they participate in the physical activities.

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