ABSTRACT

Sports scholars agree that participation in sports by the youth contributes to their social development. Studies on the relationship between participation and social mobility in America show that Americans believe that sport is a path to upward mobility and that there are many socio-economic benefits that one may get as a result of participation in sports. Men and women who have had great success in sports such as Michael Jordan of NBA, Mike Tyson in boxing and the Williams sisters in tennis exemplify the enormous socio-economic transformation accruing from participation in sports. Although Kenya is a sporting nation, no study has been carried out on the social mobility status of its athletes.

The study investigated the relationship between participation in sports and social mobility of the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) members. The variables in the study included: sex, marital status, education, income, occupation, type of house, type of family and attitude. The purpose of this study was to find out whether participation in sports had contributed to social mobility of MYSA members. Comparing MYSA member’s socio-economic status with those of their parents did this. The exploratory survey design was used to answer the research questions. The study sample involved one hundred adult members of MYSA who were purposively selected. Data was collected using the questionnaires and descriptively presented using percentages and tables. Additionally, data was subjected to chi-square statistics for the purpose of deriving inferences.

Findings showed that 64(68.1%) were upward mobile, 17 (18.1%) were downward mobile, while 13(13.8%) experienced “zero” mobility or had no changes in their socio-economic status. Findings showed a person’s education and occupation determined one’s
eventual social mobility levels more than the parents influence. Mothers were also found to have a more positive influence on the member's social mobility of the than fathers.

It is therefore recommended that everyone should be encouraged to participate in sports given its importance in life. Sports can also be used in rehabilitation and correction of deviant behavior by engaging youths in productive activities, especially those from deprived neighbourhoods. Kenyan women need to take active roles both as participants and sports administrators for the development of sports in the country. Athletes need to have alternative careers, which would act as a cushion when careers as professional athletes come to an end.

There is need for introduction of sports scholarships as an incentive for the talented youths and also to encourage and promote education among the aspiring sports people. The government needs to start such youth organizations especially in the deprived neighbourhoods. Investments in sports should be promoted to create a Sports industry, and employment opportunities for the citizen, and in the process alleviate poverty.