

SPORTS- FOR- ALL AS A MEANS TO IMPROVE LIVING STANDARDS

MICHAEL K. BOIT
DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION
KENYATTA UNIVERSITY, P. O. BOX 43844, NAIROBI, KENYA

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the importance of physical fitness through physical activity, which includes sport. It highlights the impact of industrial revolution as one of the main factors that has contributed to sedentary life style and environmental pollution. Studies linking better living standards with regular physical activities and those stressing the link between physical fitness and mental alertness have been highlighted. In this paper sports-for-all, must be seen as a fundamental right to every individual in the society ranging from the young to the old, a view which must include the less fortunate members of our society who are either physically or mentally handicapped. In addition, Sports-for-all is seen as the most logical approach in efforts to avert crisis emanating from lack of physical activity that include drug dependency and juvenile delinquency most of which occur as a result of idleness and lack of socially acceptable avenues of releasing tension and stress. Human resource development must be given priority consideration in economic development in every country and hence the importance of sports-for-all in the process of nation building cannot be over emphasised.

Key Words: *Spots-for-all, physical fitness, recreation, nation building.*

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century has been characterised by rapid industrial revolution and as we move toward the 21st century a new era of high technology has emerged. The industrial revolution has had a significant impact on human development however; one of the drawbacks has been the global pollution of water, land and space through industrial and nuclear waste. Our human adaptation to regular physical activity has been greatly reduced by easy gadgets that include automobiles, elevators and long hours of sitting in offices or in front of television sets. As a result we have created a society of sedentary people with minimal physical activities and exercise. This paper attempts to link physical fitness and health standards among people of all ages as one of the ways to reduce many cases of heart related problems. In the last two decades, many laboratories have been set up in the United States of America and in most of the developed countries where coronary diseases have been on a

rise. One example is the Cooper Fitness Centre in Dallas, and many similar Fitness Centres across the globe. Africa, which initially had less negative impact as a result of industrial revolution, is no longer a safe haven since stroke and other coronary diseases are on upward trend.

Linking Physical Fitness to Healthy Living

It is generally believed that play and physical activities come naturally to children or in other words, children are spontaneously physically active but gradually become inactive as they mature into adulthood. It has been recommended by experts that regular physical activity be positively linked to optimal functioning of our vital organs and subsequent physical fitness or wellness which enables an individual to enjoy life. It has been proven through scientific studies that people who habitually engage in physical activities are able to protect themselves from primary and secondary cardiorespiratory diseases. Heart diseases, most of which are associated with sedentary life style have been delineated as a major cause of death. Holloszy (1990) states that diet and exercise are among the most powerful preventive measures in efforts to maintain good health. Many studies have focused on levels of cardiac and respiratory function as a yardstick to evaluate and monitor people's state of health. The high incidence of coronary heart disease is convincing evidence that the modern civilised society has not adapted to the sedentary life style brought about by industrial revolution.

Biological Adaptation

We must constantly remind ourselves that we are descendants of hunters and gatherers of food and that since creation of mankind, the human life has been characterised by numerous physical activities as opposed to the sedentary life which we have recently adapted. Our biological adaptation, therefore, requires regular physical exercise typical to that of a hunter and a gatherer, to enable our vital organs to function efficiently. Consequently, sedentary life style has become a risk factor of cardiovascular disease. Other factors include cholesterol, mental stress, illegal drugs and polluted environment. As a result of industrial revolution, we have automobiles to take us wherever we want to go, lifts to carry us to the top of buildings without having to climb the stairs and sit for long hours in offices. Through electronic media especially in affluent societies, children and adults are glued to television sets for long hours and the trend is getting out of hand. Human life is not only under threat from sedentary life style patterns but the industrial revolution is also responsible for water, air and noise pollution. On top of all these are psychological and socio-economic hardships, which have direct

relationship with high blood pressure and mental stress that often lead to suicide in extreme cases. Attempts to cope with stress without appropriate safety valves often expose the victims to greater risks as the majority find comfort in drugs.

Sports Opportunities and Physical Exercise

We see street children openly taking drugs and the news are full of sad stories on drug-related crimes. Maybe the provision of opportunities for sports and other socially acceptable physical activity opportunities to youths and adults can be an alternative to drugs. Sport is known to act as a valve for people to release their tension after a stressful day. It is also true that boredom as a result of lack of activity creates opportunities for temptations to try drugs. Sport promotes the noble virtues of, self discipline, self actualisation, self respect and can promote or influence the development of social, moral and cultural ideals which enable our youths to be better prepared to meet the numerous challenges in life.

Recent studies in the United States and Britain support the view that positive development through sport can result in significant reduction of juvenile delinquency and criminal cases among the youths especially at urban sectors. It is therefore a challenge to parents, educational institutions and the society at large to ensure that we provide opportunities for the youth to gain access to a wide variety of sport disciplines so that everyone in the society to find a sport of his or her choice. This could enhance people's interest and participation in sports activities.

In the ancient Greek culture, physical activity and sport were held in a very high esteem in a broad spectrum that included everyone in the society. In fact the Spartans believed that physically fit women could bear strong children. It took the modern man several years to allow women to run long distance events and the marathon. Contrary to earlier beliefs, women who exercise regularly have fewer problems at childbirth than women who do not exercise regularly. A good example is a comparison between a rural woman and urban woman. It seems rural women have relatively easier childbirth than urban women. Therefore, the need for regular physical activity among women is not necessarily to achieve an easy childbirth but, broadly, to enable an individual to live a healthier life.

It is important to note that sport is a life long pursuit without age limit, gender or race, however, as a life long process it must be based on a solid foundation at an early age in order to achieve the best results. In an

analogy, we can say that a human body is essentially a machine and like most machines they come with a manufacturer's warranty of approximately 100 years and for this warranty to remain valid the machine must be properly maintained and serviced regularly. In case of the *Human Machine*, proper maintenance means balanced diet and regular physical activities to tone up the vital organs in order to operate at optimal capacity. Unfortunately, human beings violate the warranty conditions by not only adapting sedentary life style which weaken the engine and other vital components but the lack of balanced diet, the poisoning of the body organs through the use of illegal drugs all add up to drastically reduce the life expectancy.

In addition to balanced diet and regular physical activities, the human machine must be protected from environmental pollution, mental stress and other factors considered hazardous to human life in order for the human machine to meet requirements and conditions for full warranty of at least close to 100 years. While the focus has been from the perspective of an individual, the benefits of sport to the society and to the nation at large cannot be over emphasised.

Nation Building Through Sports

Participation in sport plays an important role in promoting a well-integrated and cohesive society. In countries characterised by diverse ethnic groups, sport can help to break down parochial views when abilities and talents are discovered and appreciated across ethnic boundaries. People with mental retardation are often neglected but through the Special Olympic Sports programmes, parents and the public society have learned to appreciate people with mental retardation and that the Special Olympics has become a mass movement geared to positively influence people's attitude towards the mentally retarded. Apart from religion, sport has the potential to mobilise the masses and to promote national unity and image through successful participation at international championships. The former communist countries took great pride in sport and successfully used sports to achieve instant prestige for their nations. The sports programmes were well co-ordinated and directly state controlled unlike the Western countries where sport is subsidised by the state but mainly run by the sports volunteers. Kenya has played an important role by mandating the teaching of Physical Education at both Primary and High Schools. This positive initiatives, in order to fully achieve its objectives, need to be strengthened by making Physical Education an examination subject at both levels.

CONCLUSION

This paper has specifically focused on the importance of physical fitness through physical activities, which include sports. It has highlighted the impact of industrial revolution as one of the main factors that has contributed to sedentary lifestyle and the environmental pollution, which is one of the main variables among the risk factors. In addition, lack of balanced diet, use of illegal drugs and poor living conditions all add up to significantly reduce the life expectancies of the affected people. Studies linking better life with regular physical activities were cited in this paper and physical fitness is linked to mental alertness.

Drawing from the above discussions, sport-for-all is the most logical approach in efforts to avert crisis emanating from physical inactivity. Sport-for-all therefore, must be regarded as a priority in any national development policy. There is a tendency for many countries to seek instant gratification through sport success at international level by channelling the largest share of the financial resources into elite sport programmes at the expense of the sport-for-all approach. No one denies the fact that every country needs a high calibre athletes and players so long as that can be achieved without compromising the needs of the masses of the people.

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