

Participation in sport and recreation in a poor community: Perceived constraints and opportunities

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Abstract

Participation in physical activity and sport has many health benefits and contributes to well-being of individuals. In a broader context it could even bring communities together and improve social cohesion, especially in rural areas. This article focuses on constraints and opportunities associated with participation in sport and recreation in a rural setting. An empirical and quantitative research approach was used to collect primary data through a household survey in the Sicelo township, Gauteng province, South Africa during January 2014. A total of 400 households were included in the survey. Descriptive statistics were used to report on the data. Pearson's Chi-square test was applied in order to determine the existence of significant differences between the formal and informal areas in the study area in terms of their orientation towards the use of parks and sports facilities. Results indicated that the Sicelo area is poor with a low average income per family of R 2 483 per month. A total of 56 percent of households are living below the estimated poverty line. Respondents indicated that participation in sports and recreation activities were not high on their priority list. Limited community facilities exist in the area, which leads to long travel distances to sports and recreation facilities. Poor communities are generally excluded from the opportunity to participate in sports and recreation activities. It was concluded that participation of local poor communities is dependent on availability, maintenance, close proximity and safety at such facilities. Recommendations were made based on the results of the study.

Keywords: Sport, recreation, poverty, constraints, opportunities, Sicelo township.

How to cite this article:

Meyer, D.F & Surujlal, J. (2014). Participation in sport and recreation in a poor community: Perceived constraints and opportunities. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, October (Supplement 2:1), 182-195.

Introduction

Positive health benefits associated with participation in regular sport include reduced risks of coronary heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, hip fractures, high blood pressure, and obesity (Stephenson, Bauman, Armstrong, Smith & Bellew, 2000). Despite such evidence, research has shown that more than 50% of adults do not engage in the required amount of sport to meet public health recommendations (Powell, Slater, Chaloupka & Harper, 2006). Sport in the context of this study is defined as all forms of physical activity that, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness

and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels (Priest, Armstrong, Doyle & Water, 2007).

Sport is an important part of today's society. From a social point, it plays a significant role in bringing people from different social backgrounds closer together. Cashman (2002) argues that sport is a binding thread in rural areas, contributing to local identity, sense of community and a spirit of egalitarianism. Although this may possibly be an over estimation of the role that sport plays in rural community, anecdotal evidence suggests that it plays a significant role in the lives of people in rural areas. Tonts (2005) comments that while much of the research on rural sport has focussed on questions associated with infrastructure provision, facilities management, physical activity, and health promotion, very little research attention has focused on questions of exclusion and inequality. This is concerning, given the fact that recent economic attention has focused on service delivery in rural areas. The delivery of sport in rural areas is of importance, given the significant role it can play in the health and social cohesion of a community.

Sport and recreation in rural areas

Rural areas are characterised as land spaces which are remote and relatively underdeveloped, lacking basic infrastructure for sanitation, water, road and other transport, electricity and information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Surdy, 2012). The socio-economic realities of rural areas are that the inhabitants are at a disadvantage from the start with functionally illiterate and innumerate household heads.

The lack of facilities and infrastructure, coupled with other factors such as high crime rates and poorly educated people make rural areas less attractive to potential sponsors, investors and sport marketers, negatively influencing the delivery of sport and recreation opportunities. This may perhaps be the reason why these areas are often ignored. Participation in sport in rural areas impacts directly on the community in the various ways. Among these are that: a) it creates an awareness and commitment to healthy and active life style (Anna Foundation, 2013), b) it helps develop anti-drug and crime attitude and reduce levels of substance abuse and self-harm (Cairnduff, 2001; Anna Foundation, 2013), c) it allows for constructive use of leisure time and self-discipline (Brunton et al., 2003), d) it instils greater self-worth through accomplishments of personal sports achievements and personal empowerment (Dionigi, 2002; Brunton et al., 2003), e) it develops improved levels of concentration, control and discipline which improves school results (Anna Foundation, 2013), f) it allows for the development of teamwork and group cohesion (Cairnduff, 2001, Murphy & Kappst, 2002), g) provides for a future career in sport (Anna

Foundation, 2013), and h) it develops self-esteem and respect for others (Murphy & Kappst, 2002). Participation in sport and recreation activities also contributes to an improvement in the quality of life of people in rural areas. Evidence (Wilson, Kirtland, Ainsworth & Addy, 2004) suggests that environmental factors may play an important role in shaping health behaviours, such as increasing participation in sport and recreation.

A literature search on sport and recreation participation patterns in rural communities in South Africa yielded very few meaningful results. Hence the purpose of this study was to examine constraints and opportunities regarding sport participation in rural communities.

Methodology

Research design

The specific research design applied to the research commenced with a literature review which served as the theoretical basis of the study. The literature review was supported by a quantitative household survey in a poor community, as part of the empirical component of the research. Findings and recommendations were deduced from the literature review and the empirical phases of the research. The mixed method research design allowed the researchers to better understand and link the findings to the theoretical concepts.

Sample

An empirical and quantitative research approach was used to collect data through a household survey in the Sicelo township during January 2014. The Sicelo township is a poor residential community, within a South African municipal setting located in the southern parts of the Gauteng Province. The area is located approximately 60km south the Johannesburg central business district (CBD) and forms part of the Midvaal municipal area. The township is located adjacent and to the west of the R59 freeway, which links Johannesburg with the Vaal-Triangle region. It consists of approximately 4000 housing units, of which close to 50 percent are informal units. It has a population of approximately 15 200 people with limited community facilities.

A sample of 400 households in the study area was randomly selected from the two areas, namely the “White House” area which is the informal settlement and the “Jantine” area which comprises mostly formal housing. For each of the two areas, two hundred households were selected and included in the survey. In the analysis of the survey, the two areas will be compared in terms of the orientation towards the use of parks and sports facilities.

Instrument and procedures

Primary data were collected by means of a questionnaire which was developed based on a comprehensive literature review. The questionnaire comprised various sections which include demographics, income and expenditure, perceptions of government service delivery, life satisfaction, orientation towards sports, recreation and open space, lived poverty index focussing on basic needs, and survival strategies for poor people. Specific questions regarding this article include level of household income, travelling distances to parks and sports facilities, usage of facilities for physical activity, maintenance of facilities, constraints to participation in physical activity. In addition questions were asked regarding parks in the area including the levels of priority of provision of parks, the levels of utilization of parks, the level of maintenance of parks and what factors prevents households from utilizing parks. Questions relating to sports participation include whether members of the household participate or not in sports activities, what levels of priority is sports participation and what prevents members of the household in participating in sport in the study area. Trained fieldworkers, who were familiar with the area and its residents, administered the questionnaire to the head of the households in the chosen areas.

Ethical considerations

Prior to the administration of the questionnaire the specific ward councillors were approached with a request to conduct the study in the area. After permission was granted potential participants were approached. In addition to verbally explaining the purpose of the study, they were referred to a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. Once informed consent was obtained from the participants, the procedure to complete the questionnaire was outlined. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. They were also informed that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any stage from the study without any repercussions.

Data analysis

The survey data were captured and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS – version 22) software package. Descriptive statistics were used to report on the data. Pearson's Chi-square test was applied in order to determine the existence of significant differences between the formal and informal areas in the study area in terms of their orientation towards the use of parks and sports facilities.

The poverty status of households was calculated using the international US\$2 per day, per person, poverty line. To establish a poverty line for individuals in the household, the \$2 was multiplied by 30 (average number of days in a month) and

then by the exchange rate of R11.00 to \$1. The monthly poverty line for an individual was calculated and set at R660 per month.

Results

Poverty status

Of all the households in the study area, 56 percent are classified as poor and below the poverty line, while 44 percent of households are classified as non-poor and above the poverty line. The average income per household was established at R2 483 which confirms the relative low income levels in the study area. The Sicelo township could therefore be classified as a poor community.

Travelling times to parks and sports facilities

Travelling distances measured in walking or driving time in minutes to the nearest park or sports facility provides an indication of proximity of these facilities to respondents. The majority of residents in the area do not have private transport and generally have to walk or use public transport. In the Sicelo area community facilities are limited and only a few community facilities such as a sports field with pavilion, ablution and hard courts, a few informal parks, early learning centre, clinic, primary school, and limited informal retail facilities exist. Table 1 provides an indication of travelling times to different parks in the Sicelo area measured in minutes.

Table 1: Travelling time in minutes to parks in the study area (percentage in brackets)

Travelling time to parks	White house area (informal housing area) (n=households)	Jantine area (formal housing area)(n=households)	Total study area (n=households)
0 to 5 minutes	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
6 to 10 minutes	0 (0.0%)	91 (45.5%)	91 (23.0%)
11 to 20 minutes	2 (1.0%)	15 (7.5%)	17 (4.3%)
21 to 30 minutes	11 (5.6%)	28 (14.0%)	39 (9.8%)
31 to 45 minutes	180 (91.8%)	56 (28.0%)	236 (59.6%)
46 to 60 minutes	2 (1.0%)	9 (4.5%)	11 (2.8%)
More than 60 minutes	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)	2 0 (5%)
Total	196 (100%)	200 (100%)	396 (100%)
Average travelling time in minutes to nearest park	37 minutes	22 minutes	29 minutes

From Table 1 it is evident that the majority of participants have to travel long periods of time to parks in the area. The average travelling time to a park for the total study area is 29 minutes. The formal housing area (Jantine) has a

substantially shorter average travelling time (22 minutes) compared to the informal area (White House) (37 minutes). The standard regarding the provision of parks in communities with a population between 3 000 to 15 000 is one local park with play equipment (CSIR, 2012: 43). Table 2 indicates travelling time to sports facilities in the study area.

Table 2: Travelling time to sports facilities in the study area (percentage in brackets)

Travelling time to sports facilities	White house area (informal housing area) (n=households)	Jantine area (formal housing area)(n=households)	Total study area (n=households)
0 to 5 minutes	1 (0.5%)	14 (7.0%)	15 (38.9%)
6 to 10 minutes	22 (11.9%)	97 (48.5%)	119 (30.9%)
11 to 20 minutes	46 (24.9%)	44 (22.0%)	90 (23.3%)
21 to 30 minutes	11 (5.9%)	26 (13.0%)	37 (9.6%)
31 to 45 minutes	104 (56.2%)	19 (9.5%)	123 (31.9%)
46 to 60 minutes	1 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.3%)
More than 60 minutes	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	185 (100%)	200 (100%)	385 (100%)
Average travelling time in minutes to nearest park	28 minutes	18 minutes	21 minutes

From Table 2 it is evident that the majority of households have to travel long periods of to sports facilities in the area. The average travelling time to sports facilities for the total study area is 21 minutes, while the formal housing area (Jantine) has a substantially shorter average travelling time of 18 minutes compared with the informal area’s (White House) time of 28 minutes. The standard regarding the provision of sports facilities in communities with a population up to 15 000 people include a grassed surface area equivalent of two football fields, two combi-courts (hard court) and a community pool (CSIR, 2012: 43).

Availability and utilization of parks for recreational purposes

The responses to availability and utilization of parks in the study area were analysed. Four specific items were included in the instrument regarding this issue. Firstly, participants were requested to indicate the level of priority the provision of parks had in relation to them. Table 3 provides an indication of the level of priority. For the total study area more than 53% of households indicated that provision of parks is of low to no priority. More participants 67%, (n=132) in the informal and 39% (n=75) in the formal area were of the opinion that parks is of low or no priority. A Chi-square test was used to test if there is a statistical difference between the perceptions regarding the priority of provision of parks in the formal and informal areas. The Chi-square test had a value of 45.8 and a p-

value of 0.000 pointing to a significant difference in the perceptions of participants in the two areas of the study.

Table 3: Perceptions of households regarding the priority of provision of parks (percentage in brackets)

Perception of level of priority for provision of parks	White house area percentage of households (informal housing area)	Jantine area percentage of households (formal housing area)	Total study area percentage of households
High priority	38 (19.2%)	38 (19.6%)	76 (19.4%)
Medium priority	26 (13.2%)	81 (41.8%)	107 (27.4%)
Low priority	114 (57.9%)	61 (31.4%)	175 (44.8%)
No priority	18 (9.1%)	14 (7.2%)	32 (8.2%)
Total	196 (100%)	194 (100%)	390 (100%)

Secondly, the question was asked “if parks were available and how often would each participant utilize such parks”. The detailed results are provided in Table 4. For the total study area more than 57.1% of households indicated that they would utilize parks daily or at least weekly if the parks were available, while 42.9% indicated that they would use a park if provided only once a month or never. In the informal area, 75% of households and only 39.1% of households in the formal area will utilize parks on a daily or weekly basis. The Chi-square test was used to test if there is a statistical difference between perceptions regarding the possible utilization of parks in the formal area compared to the informal area. The Chi-square test had a value of 68.5 and a p-value of 0.000 indicating a significant difference in the perceptions of participants regarding the utilization of parks if available in the study area.

Table 4: Perceptions of households on utilization of parks if it were available in the study area (percentages in brackets)

Perception of frequency of utilization of parks if they were readily available	White house area percentage of households (informal housing area)	Jantine area percentage of households (formal housing area)	Total study area percentage of households
Once a day	28 (14.4%)	18 (9.3%)	46 (11.7%)
Once a week	120 (60.6%)	58 (29.9%)	178 (45.4%)
Once a month	28 (14.1%)	34 (17.5%)	62 (15.8%)
Once a year	0 (0.0%)	32 (16.5%)	32 (8.2%)
Never	22 (11.1%)	52 (26.8%)	74 (18.9%)
Total	198 (100%)	194 (100%)	392 (100%)

Thirdly, the question was asked, if the parks in the area are well maintained or not. The results are indicated in Table 5. For the total study area, more than 49% of households indicated that parks are not well maintained while only 30.2% indicated that parks are well maintained in the study area. In the informal area only 4.1% of households and more than 56% of households in the formal area

indicated that parks are well maintained. The Chi-square test was used to test if there is a statistical difference between perceptions regarding the possible utilization of parks in the formal versus the informal area. The Chi-square test had a value of 127.4 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant difference in the perceptions of participants regarding maintenance of parks in the formal and informal areas of the study.

Table 5: Perceptions of households regarding the maintenance of parks in the study area (percentages in brackets)

Perception on maintenance of parks in the study area	White house area percentage of households (informal housing area)	Jantine area percentage of households (formal housing area)	Total study area percentage of households
Yes, parks are well maintained	8 (4.1%)	110 (56.1%)	118 (30.2%)
No, parks not well maintained	127 (65.1%)	66 (33.6%)	193 (49.4%)
Uncertain	60 (30.8%)	20 (10.2%)	80 (20.5%)
Total	195 (100%)	196 (100%)	391 (100%)

Lastly, the question was asked what factors prevent households from using parks in the study area. The results are presented in Table 6. For the total study area the main factors preventing households from using parks are that parks are located too far away with 36.3% of households indicating this reason, followed by poor safety at parks (29.9%) and households (18.3%) do not have time to visit parks.

Table 6: Perceptions of households regarding factors preventing people from using parks in the study area (percentages in brackets)

Perception of what factors prevents households from using parks in the area	White house area percentage of households (informal housing area)	Jantine area percentage of households (formal housing area)	Total study area percentage of households
Parks located too far away	93 (46.9%)	50 (25.5%)	143 (36.3%)
Parks in poor condition with poor maintenance	7 (3.5%)	3 (1.5%)	10 (2.5%)
Parks is not save to use	41 (20.7%)	77 (39.3%)	118 (29.9%)
No time to visit parks	19 (9.6%)	53 (27.0%)	72 (18.3%)
No interest in using parks	25 (12.6%)	4 (2.0%)	29 (7.4%)
No parks available	6 (3.0%)	4 (2.0%)	10 (2.5%)
Other factors	7 (3.5%)	5 (2.6%)	12 (3.0%)
Total	198 (100%)	196 (100%)	394 (100%)

In the informal area, 46.9% indicated the main reason for not using parks is that it is too far away to visit followed by poor safety at parks as a second main reason. The formal area participants identified the lack of security at parks as the main reason at 39.3% followed by the fact that households do not have enough time to visit parks in the area. The Chi-square test was used to test if there is a statistical difference between perceptions regarding the factors which prevent households from using parks in the formal and informal areas. The Chi-square test had a value of 57.5 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant difference in the perceptions of the participants regarding the factors preventing households from using parks at the formal and informal areas of the study.

Availability and utilization of sports facilities in study area

The responses on the availability and utilization of sports facilities in the study area was analysed in this section. Three specific questions were asked during the household survey regarding this issue. Firstly, it was asked if any members of households participated in sports. The results are listed in Table 7. For the total study area, only 21.4% of households indicated that they participated in sports. In the informal area only 11.7% of households and 30.9% of households in the formal area participated in sports. The Chi-square test was used to test if there is a statistical difference between sports participation in the formal area versus the informal area. The Chi-square test yielded a value of 20.8 and a p-value of 0.000 indicating a significant difference in sports participation between participants in the formal and informal areas of the study.

Table 7: Level of sports participation in the study area (percentages in brackets)

Participation in sports in study area	White house area percentage of households (informal housing area)	Jantine area percentage of households (formal housing area)	Total study area percentage of households
Members of household do participate in sports activities	22 (11.7%)	59 (30.9%)	81 (21.4%)
Members of the household do not participate in sports activities	166 (88.3%)	132 (69.1%)	298 (78.6%)
Total	188 (100%)	191 (100%)	379 (100%)

Secondly, participants were requested to indicate level of priority of participation in sports activities. The results are listed in Table 8. For the total study area more than 67% of households indicated that participation in sports is of low to no priority. In the informal area 69% of households and 55% of households in the formal area were of the opinion that participation in sports is of low or no priority.

The Chi-square test was used to test if there is a statistical difference between perceptions regarding the priority of sports participation in the formal compared with the informal area. The Chi-square test had a value of 26.1 and a p-value of 0.000 indicates a significant difference in the perceptions of the participants regarding prioritization of sports participation at the formal and informal areas of the study.

Table 8: Perceptions of households regarding the priority of sports participation (percentages in brackets)

Perception of level of priority of sports participation	White house area percentage of households (informal housing area)	Jantine area percentage of households (formal housing area)	Total study area percentage of households
High priority	30 (16.5%)	20 (10.2%)	50 (13.2%)
Medium priority	25 (13.8%)	48 (24.4%)	73 (19.3%)
Low priority	66 (36.4%)	36 (18.3%)	102 (26.9%)
No priority	59 (32.6%)	93 (47.2%)	152 (40.2%)
Total	180 (100%)	197 (100%)	378 (100%)

Lastly, participants were requested to state the factors that prevented them from participating in sports activities in the study area. The results are listed in Table 9.

Table 9: Perceptions of households on factors preventing people from using sport facilities in the study area (percentages in brackets)

Perception of what factors prevents households from sports participation in the area	White house area percentage of households (informal housing area)	Jantine area percentage of households (formal housing area)	Total study area percentage of households
Lack of income/money to participate	10 (5.8%)	13 (6.9%)	23 (6.4%)
No time to participate	27 (15.7%)	44 (23.5%)	71 (19.8%)
No facilities or poor facilities	9 (5.2%)	10 (5.3%)	19 (5.3%)
Facilities located too far away	34 (19.8%)	49 (26.2%)	83 (23.1%)
Facilities in an unsafe environment	11 (6.3%)	17 (9.1%)	28 (7.8%)
No interest in sports participation	67 (38.9%)	13 (6.9%)	80 (22.3%)
Other factors	14 (8.1%)	41 (2.9%)	55 (15.3%)
Total	172 (100%)	187 (100%)	359 (100%)

For the total study area the main factors preventing households from sports participation are that the facilities are located too far away at 23.1% of households indicating this reason, followed by no interest in sports participation

at 22.3% and households do not have time to participate at 19.8%. In the informal area, 38.9% indicated that main reason for not participating is that they have no interest in sports participation, followed the long distances to facilities as a second main reason. In the formal area, participants indicated the long distances to facilities as the main reason at 26.2% followed by the fact that households do not have enough time to participate in the area. The Chi-square test was used to test if there is a statistical difference between perceptions regarding the factors which prevent households from sports participation in the formal versus the informal area. The Chi-square test yielded a value of 57.6 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant difference in the perceptions of the factors preventing households from sports participation between the formal and informal areas of the study area.

Discussion

The study area is a typical poor, rural community with limited community facilities, including sports and recreation facilities. It comprises two areas with distinct differences with one area consisting mostly of formal dwellings while the other area consists of mostly informal dwellings. This set-up mirrors many of the residential areas in South Africa where formal and informal settlements are in close proximity to each other.

As explained in the theoretical analysis, participation in sports and recreation has many benefits, especially in poor rural communities. Such benefits include improved health, life satisfaction and quality of life, social relations, community cohesion, sense of community, and sense of achievement. As is evident in the findings, poor, rural communities are in most cases removed and excluded from the opportunity to participate in sports and recreation. Local communities need to travel long distances, if measured in time, to facilities due to long distances and the lack of mobility of people. The Anna Foundation (2013) suggests that reliable public transport may help connect people in rural areas to facilities, if facilities could not be provided locally. The fact that people have to travel or walk long distances to access facilities for sport or recreation is indicative of poor planning on the part of the municipality. Instead of catering for the sport and recreation needs of the residents, the location of the facilities creates additional burden on them to access it.

Due to the high levels of poverty in the study area, the local community's needs and priorities are not focused on sports and recreation which could be seen as luxuries, but more on necessities and survival aspects of basic needs such as housing, food, transport and education. The local community has therefore placed sports and recreation low on their list of priorities. According to the Local Government Budgets and Expenditure Review (2011), households in rural areas depend on a combination of social grants and remittances from members

working away from their households. This limits their access to good quality social services such as education and health.

Although the utilization of parks and sports facilities is relatively low in the study area, local communities indicated that they would utilize such facilities if they were available in close proximity. This is a positive signal that strategic planners should take cognisance of. The rural development strategy should ensure that facilities, where available, should at least be well maintained. The maintenance of facilities plays a major role in the levels of utilization thereof. Poorly maintained facilities are less attractive, hence lower participation and utilization. The ripple effects of this would be residents with lower fitness levels and higher risk of diseases. The facilities would also be used for purposes other than that for which they were built.

Recommendations

Local government, as the sphere of government closest to the people has to play a significant role in the needs assessment of local communities, planning, provision and maintenance of community facilities, in this case recreational and sports facilities. People will utilize facilities if they are optimally located within close proximity of local communities and if they are well maintained. Given the fact that residents of the study area indicated interest in utilising parks and sport facilities, but are unable to access them because of proximity, the local municipality should plan on providing these facilities within reach of all residents.

Local community leaders also need to play an important role of educating and motivating local residents, especially youths, to participate in recreation and sports activities due to the large number of benefits derived from such activities. Local residents should be recognised as important role players and should be consulted in the planning process of recreational facilities and programme planning.

It is recommended that the municipality in the study area take note of the CSIR report as a base for improved provision of sports and recreation facilities. The CSIR report provides guidelines for the provision of all types of community facilities.

Conclusion

A number of factors prevent local people from utilizing local sports and recreation facilities. The main factors that are evident from the household survey are the proximity to facilities regarding cost and time, availability of facilities, maintenance of facilities, and safety aspects at facilities. In conclusion,

participation levels of local communities in any activity of sports and recreation, is dependent on the availability and maintenance of such facilities in the area. It is therefore evident from the findings in this study that proximity of facilities and poor maintenance contribute to low levels of participation in sport and recreation in poor communities.

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