

Factors and Challenges Associated with Participation in Community Sport in Eldorado Park, Johannesburg, South Africa

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Abstract

Research concerning leisure activity, recreation and sport for the youth has attracted increasing attention. This is especially true for community sport. Community sport is pivotal because community sport organisations can provide opportunities for members to participate actively, thereby enhancing social engagement and community cohesion. The purpose of the study was to identify possible factors and challenges that may influence participation in community sport in Eldorado Park. A qualitative research approach utilising semi-structured interviews was adopted for the study. The sample of the study comprised key community members of Eldorado Park, a suburb south of Johannesburg in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Key members in the context of this study are those individuals who played a significant role in uplifting the community through organising and supporting community sport. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants who were resident in the community for at least ten years. An interview schedule, which focused on opportunities and constraints of participating in community sport, was developed for the study. Two researchers who were experienced in qualitative research were requested to pre-test the interview schedule. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were subjected to content analysis with the aim of developing themes emanating from the analysis. The findings from the in depth interviews revealed several factors and challenges associated with participation in community sport in Eldorado Park. Five broad themes, namely facilities, undesirable behaviour, stakeholder involvement, social factors and resources were identified through the analysis of the transcripts. A multilateral intervention involving community members, the municipality and businesses is therefore necessary to attract community members and especially the youth, to participate in community sport. This will be helpful in curbing undesirable risk behaviours in the community such as alcohol, illicit drug abuse and gangsterism.

Keywords: Eldorado Park; community sport; challenges; participation; social engagement

1. Introduction

Research concerning leisure activity, recreation and sport for the youth has attracted increasing attention (Trainor, Delfabbro, Anderson & Winefield, 2010). This is especially true for community sport. This interest came about as a consequence of the life experiences of young people in modern societies that affect their relationship with family, community, education, leisure and lifestyle (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). It is for such reasons that there is a noticeable increase in research relating to community sport (Finch & Donaldson, 2010). Community sport is pivotal because community sport organisations can provide opportunities for members to participate actively, thereby enhancing social engagement and community cohesion (Misener & Doherty, 2009). In order to understand the importance of these activities it will be sensible to provide different perspectives as articulated by different researchers.

The Council of Europe's sports charter defines sport as, "all forms of physical activity which, through casual participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels" (Rowe, Adams & Beasley, 2004:6). Leisure activities on the other hand are defined as "activities that individuals engage in for enjoyment or well-being which are independent of work or activities of daily living" (Verghese et al., 2006:2). Recreation is "a generally unstructured activity that individuals freely pursue in their uncommitted time (leisure time) for personal sense of enjoyment that also benefits their physical, social or emotional well-being" (Olliff, 2008:53). For the purpose of this study the Council of Europe's sports charter definition of sport will be used.

2. Literature Review

Murphy and Carbone (2008) are of the view that one way to assist children, and especially those with disabilities, to participate fully in their family and community lives, is through the promotion of sport participation. Some authors are of the view that physical activity should be considered a high public priority (Humpel, Owen & Leslie, 2002) while inactivity should be regarded as a public health problem (Sallis, Bauman & Pratt, 1998). For example, the government of Australia introduced policies aimed at increasing organised sport participation among community members (Cuskelly, 2004). Some of the initiatives included finding ways to encourage and support involvement in physical activity and extend delivery of sport participation services beyond infrastructure to the participation of the private sector. Similarly, the authorities in Canada embarked on grassroots sport programmes to increase participation in community sport (Vail, 2007). These programmes are regarded as a priority as they enable the leaders to identify community needs and provide solutions that benefit the community.

Baum et al. (2000) are of the view that the levels of participation in community sport activities can reduce social exclusion and there is the likelihood that the overall quality of life may improve. However, the authors noted that the levels of participation are influenced by many factors such as an individual's socio-economic status, health and demographic characteristics. Skinner, Zakus and Cowell (2008) argued that engagement in sport has the power to develop positive community networks and relationships, which create opportunities for social inclusion and community development. Therefore, there is a great deal to be learnt regarding community engagement in sport activities and how to reach the most disadvantaged groups (Mummery & Brown, 2009). It is against this background that the present study was undertaken to identify the factors that influence the decision to participate in community sport.

2.1 Benefits of Sport Participation

Sport activities are developmentally important as they provide opportunities for skill development and social relationships (Fourie, Slabbert & Saayman, 2011). By bringing individuals together from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, sport has the potential to contribute to social inclusion as these individuals share a common interest (Bailey, 2005), while at the same time it helps them to experience a sense of belonging, loyalty and support (Cameron & MacDougall, 2000). The findings of a study by Kay and Bradbury (2009) confirmed that people interact more with their peers after participating in sport. Similar findings were revealed by Townsend, Moore and Mahoney's (2002) study in rural Australia where it was found that sport in rural communities contribute immensely towards social cohesiveness. It was not surprising that Britain adopted policies that encourage community sport participation, as this was perceived to improve social inclusion and community regeneration (Jarvie, 2003). Evidence suggests that antisocial behaviour is normally associated with drug use and criminality, for example, some of the risk factors that can cause people to break the law are poor social ties, community disorganisation, and the availability of drugs and firearms (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003).

While it is acknowledged that crime prevention is not the primary objective of sport, sport has the potential to prevent crime (Cameron & MacDougall, 2000). Moore and Werch (2005), who remarked that previous research has revealed that generally sport participation leads to lower usage of cigarettes, marijuana, cocaine and other drugs, support this view. Page, Hammermeister, Scanlan, and Gilbert (1998) are of the view that participation in sport has the power to encourage people to develop healthy habits and at the same time deter them from engaging in risky behaviour. In support of this view are the findings of a study by Baumert, Henderson and Thompson (1998) in which the differences in health-related behaviours among students were assessed. The findings revealed that athletes are less likely to engage in health risk behaviours like smoking or drug abuse, while at the same time, it encouraged students to engage in healthy dietary practices and the athletes were less likely to feel hopeless or bored. It is for such reasons that Morris et al. (2003) suggest that by providing accessible and appropriate activities in a supportive social context to promote sport participation, people may escape the temptations to use alcohol and drugs.

Additionally, sport participation is also known to contribute to mental, physical, social, and emotional health and well-being, hence business and industry worldwide increase their expenditure for such activities (Caldwell, 2005). Participation in sport reduces the risk of diseases such as obesity, heart disease, colon cancer, stroke, diabetes, and many more (Moore & Werch, 2005). Furthermore, it benefits people because it promotes social well-being, physical and mental health, teamwork, academic achievement, self-discipline, leadership and socialisation. The findings of a study by Passmore (2003) among Australian adolescents support the view that participation in sport influences mental health while at the same time enhance competencies, self-efficacy and self-worth among adolescents.

Some of the many benefits of sport participation are reduced anxiety and depression, reduced blood pressure and medication intake, increase in perception of control over the environment and feelings of independence (Haberkost,

Dellmann-Jenkins & Bennett, 1996). For children with disabilities regular physical activity strengthens the muscles and joints structure and slows the functional decline often associated with disabilities (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). Participation in recreational activities is important for the complete well-being of children. Confirming this are the findings of a study by Loughry et al. (2006) among Palestinian children in which it was found that the children's emotional and behavioural well-being improved after exposure to recreational activities.

Yet, over the years, there has been a lack of attention devoted to people who elect to participate in formal but relatively unstructured recreation, despite the importance associated with physical activity and sport (Mahoney, Stattin & Lord, 2004). Encouraging is that this trend appears to be changing positively as health and fitness are given much publicity through advertisements showing the benefits of physical activity (Goldsby, Kuratko & Bishop, 2005). There is also a noticeable research regarding community sport as manifested by an increase in community physical activity interventions (Mummery & Brown, 2009; Finch & Donaldson, 2010).

2.2 Physical Activity and Sport Participation among South African Young People

In the case of South Africa this attention devoted to the importance associated with physical activity and sport is manifested by the findings of a study by Naidoo et al. (2009) in which they evaluated the effects of nutrition and physical activity intervention among primary school learners in Kwazulu-Natal, Province. The purpose of the intervention was to increase physical activity participation and promote healthy lifestyles among primary school learners. The findings revealed that post-intervention, learners appeared motivated to participate in physical activity during break times. Furthermore, there was a notable general increase in after school activities post-intervention. Similarly, Burnett (2010) reports that Sport and Recreation South Africa (SRSA) funded and implemented mass sport participation programmes to increase sport participation and recreation activities among young people as one of its main objectives.

Obajimi, Omoregie and Akuru (2012) opine that integrating sport into the broader framework of development can touch the lives of people in different ways regardless of their social status in the community. Sadly, however, the findings of a study by Fourie et al. (2011) in Potchefstroom, South Africa revealed that young people were inadequately active. Some of the reasons cited for the lack of physical activity are lack of time for leisure, too much exposure to technology and changing lifestyles. Furthermore, it was found that young people choose to socialise with friends, watch television and spend time on the computer instead of participating in physical activity. According to Burnett (2010), the main challenges for non-participation in sport among South African young people are inadequate physical resources, replacement of equipment and lack of skill-appropriate training among others. Trainor et al. (2010) caution that lack of involvement in physical activity at spare time, such as doing nothing, is negatively related to well-being and could lead to poor psychological functioning. It is against this background that the present study identified factors and challenges affecting sport participation in the community of Eldorado Park.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research approach utilising semi-structured interviews was adopted for the study. Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) posit that semi-structured interviews comprise key questions, which help in defining the areas to be explored. The authors argue that this flexible approach allows for the exploration of views, experiences and/or motivations on specific matters, which in the case of this study is community sport. This approach is also appropriate for studies where participants may not want to discuss issues in group settings. Hence, in this study questions were designed in such a way not to lead the respondents to certain answers.

3.1 Sample

The sample of the study included fifteen key community members of Eldorado Park, a suburb south of Johannesburg in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Key members in the context of this study were those individuals who played a significant role in uplifting the community through organising and supporting community sport. Snowball sampling method was used to recruit participants who had been resident in the community for at least ten years. It was believed that these individuals would have vast knowledge of the community and would contribute the greatest amount of theoretical information with regard to the phenomenon being researched (Gordon & Lavalley, 2004).

3.2 *Instrument and Procedures*

An interview schedule, which focused on opportunities and constraints of participating in community sport, was developed for the study. Two researchers who were experienced in qualitative research were requested to pre-test the interview schedule. Pre-testing involved a content analysis and clarification of terms used. Feedback from the researchers indicated that no modifications to the interview schedule were necessary. A community member who was also a graduate volunteered to assist in identifying potential participants through whom other participants could also be recruited. The community member, who also volunteered to conduct the interviews, was trained a fieldworker. Using the community members to conduct the fieldwork was advantageous in that a) they know the community well; b) the participants would be more comfortable speaking to the fieldworker than someone they were not familiar with; c) the participants were more easily accessible to the fieldworker; and d) it would be easier and more convenient for the fieldworker to set up appointments at times and mutually agreed times and venues. The fieldworker set the appointment and venue well before the interview, which lasted 30 – 40 minutes. To assist with the data analysis, the fieldworker took field notes during the interview focusing mainly on the respondents' body language.

3.3 *Ethical Considerations*

This study adhered to various ethical considerations. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and informed consent was obtained from them. Permission was also obtained to record the interviews. The respondents were assured that their responses would be handled with integrity and will not be used for any other purposes than those stated. Participants were assured of confidentiality and informed that they would remain anonymous at all times. The respondents were informed verbally that their participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any repercussions.

3.4 *Data Analysis*

Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process that tries to establish how respondents make sense of a specific phenomenon (Maree, 2011). In this case the original field notes were read and reread in conjunction with the transcripts while the audio recordings were listened to in order to try to make meaning of the collected data. The transcripts were subjected to content analysis with the aim of looking at the data from different angles to identify cues that will assist in the understanding and interpretation of the data. After carefully reading the transcripts and listening to recordings, meaningful segments were identified and assigned codes. During the entire data analysis process, the researchers kept in mind the objectives of the study.

3.5 *Trustworthiness*

The trustworthiness of the findings is a crucial aspect of any research (Maree, 2011). By implication, this means that the findings must be credible, transferable, dependable and conformal. Among others, this can be attained by verifying the raw data with participants, keeping notes and allowing stakeholder checks. In this study, a fieldworker who worked in the community conducted the interviews. Furthermore, the field worker asked the respondents to peruse the transcripts to ascertain whether the correct information was captured. An experienced researcher was invited to comment on the findings, interpretation and conclusions.

4. **Results and Discussion**

The findings from the in depth interviews revealed several factors and challenges associated with participation in community sport in Eldorado Park. Five broad themes, namely facilities, undesirable behaviour, stakeholder involvement, social factors and resources were identified through the analysis of the transcripts. Several sub-themes were identified as emanating from these themes. Regarding facilities, the following emerged; lack of facilities, poor facilities, misuse of facilities, while with regard to undesirable behaviour substance abuse and gangsterism came up more often as some of the inhibiting factors. Stakeholder involvement included the lack of business involvement, parental involvement, community involvement, municipalities' involvement and police involvement. Regarding social factors unemployment, poverty, crime, domestic violence and teenage pregnancies were cited frequently as challenges facing the Eldorado Park community. As for resources, sponsorship and leadership were referred to more often as factors hampering sport

development in the community. These are illustrated in Figure 1.

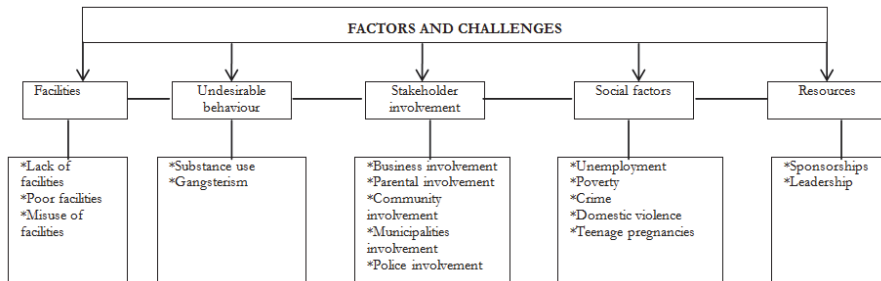


Figure 1: Factors and challenges: Themes and sub-themes

It is evident that there are several factors and challenges, that affect participation in community sport in Eldorado Park, and these are discussed in the next section.

4.1 Facilities

Recreational and sport facilities are known to keep young people out of trouble. A case in point is the visible Swedish youth recreation centres (YRC) that were intended to provide the youth with alternative to roaming the streets (Mahoney et al., 2004). The community of Eldorado Park is not well known for entertainment facilities and wonderful amenities, and it lacks social infrastructure (Anon, 2008). It appears therefore that the shortage of sports facilities and the poor state of existing facilities have a negative impact on participation in sport in this community. This is evident in the following excerpts:

"The youth abuse alcohol and drugs because recreational facilities are limited"
"I am also working with the government towards getting a multipurpose sports centre"
"Shortage of sports facilities is a major problem"
"The conditions of sporting facilities are not up to standard and need to be upgraded"

On a positive note, however, it is encouraging that the existing 12000-capacity stadium at Eldorado Park is being given a face-lift. The hope is that the renovation of the stadium will assist in keeping the youth busy and away from problems such as substance abuse as this facility will have a tennis court, a cricket pitch, a netball court and a soccer field (Valentine, 2014).

4.2 Undesirable behaviour

Cameron and MacDougall (2000) remarked that for an ordinary person, sport is plain fun or fantasy in which a person may escape the day-to-day reality of family conflict, homelessness or the temptation to use alcohol, drugs and other substances. According to Kings (2013), in 2012 the levels of drug-related theft and domestic abuses in the Eldorado Park community were the highest in the Gauteng province and it was for this reason that the residents appealed to the President of the country to assist them to solve the drug problem. The findings also indicate that the youth engage in undesirable behaviour such as the abuse of alcohol and drugs, crime and gangsterism. It therefore appears that participation in community sport is substituted by undesirable behaviour in which youth engage. Some notable excerpts emphasising this point are:

"There is violence, drugs and alcohol in this area and our flat is not in a good condition"
"The young people of today are no longer interested in sports instead they are more interested in drugs"
"Gangsterism, alcohol and drug abuse is rife"

4.3 Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder involvement in sport at grassroots level can go a long way to develop sport and unearth raw sporting talents.

A case in point is the Australian Football League, which is reported to have invested \$3 million over three years into the junior development in the community of Queensland (Cameron & MacDougall, 2000). It is not surprising to observe Eldorado Park residents lamenting the lack of involvement in sports by stakeholders such as corporate business, parents, the community and the local authorities. Most of the respondents in the study perceived that corporate sector did not plough funds and resources back into the community. They also perceived that parents were not sufficiently involved in encouraging and supporting their children to participate in community sport. According to the respondents, the authorities are not doing enough to invest in recreational facilities. The lack of involvement of key stakeholders gives the impression that even though talent is available in this community; it is unlikely that the youth will participate in sport. This lack of stakeholder involvement is reflected in the following excerpts:

"Business does not plough back into the community"

"Parents do not encourage youth participation in sport"

"There are no places or facilities to play except the park and the park is too small to accommodate some sporting codes such as soccer"

4.4 Social factors

Smith and Waddington (2004) posit that the provision of sport and physical activity can play a crucial role in reducing social ills such as crime and drug abuse among the youth. The community of Eldorado Park has been torn apart by drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, domestic violence and unemployment (Molosankwe, 2006). These social ills, coupled with the lack of employment opportunities and economic activity, has recently caused the government to intervene and address the social factors affecting the community (Mokonyane, 2013). While there is no justification for committing crime some community members blame the high unemployment rate among the youth of this community for the escalating levels of crime (Molosankwe, 2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that the negative impact of social factors makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the youth to engage in sporting activities. Some of the narratives in this regard were:

"They do not have money... jobs need to be created so that crime can be reduced"

"I used to be a voluntary worker, and if I get elected as a councillor I will work with the police to reduce crime and will also try to curb poverty"

"I want to assist the police in reducing crime and not allowing criminals among us"

4.5 Resources

Misener and Doherty (2009) caution that without resources such as adequate volunteers and facilities in community sport organisations, the services that contribute to individual and societal benefits will be compromised. It is for this reason that in an attempt to change the lives of individuals through sport participation and building healthy communities that a company such as Nike invested millions of dollars in community-based sport initiatives world-wide (Burnett, 2010). The lack of financial resources towards sport in Eldorado Park is an issue that residents raised as one of the inhibiting factors to participation in community sport. This is reflected by the serious shortage of sports facilities in the community.

Cuskelly, Hoye and Auld (2006) reported that without a vibrant volunteer sector the quality of life of many people would be affected significantly because volunteers sustain communities at many levels through a wide range of activities such coaching kids at local sport clubs, supporting networks for the homeless, counselling and many other activities. Vail (2007) describes a community leader as a person who is well connected and respected in the community, and who is willing to take the first step to create interest and support. These kinds of leaders and volunteers are needed to build safe and healthy communities. Evidently, in the Eldorado Park community, there are no role models to lead and guide young people to take part in sporting activities. For example, one respondent remarked that despite the abundance of talented young people in the community, there are no structures in place to develop sport. Regarding the lack of sponsorship and leadership, some of the informants stated excerpts as follows:

"No sponsorship for sport... business sponsors other activities but not sport"

"There are no structures in place....if structures are in place everything will fall into place"

"There should be coaching clinics"

5. Recommendations

It is evident from the findings that Eldorado Park community is faced with factors and challenges that affect the

participation in community sport. Without the appropriate interventions young people's commitment to schooling, developing skills and personal safety will be compromised (Loughry et al., 2006). One such intervention to address these challenges can be by providing opportunities to play sport in a familiar and supportive environment, which will enable participants to bond and share life experiences (Olliff, 2008). The likelihood is that significant impact can be made should interventions targeted at addressing the challenges be widely adopted, complied with and sustained (Finch & Donaldson, 2010). Therefore, it is recommended that more parks and facilities should be built in the community. This requires the involvement of different stakeholders such as business, which will assist in terms of financial resources, and community members who may volunteer their skills to speed up the process.

Providing accessible sport opportunities can be important for the youth who have experienced traumatic situations such as exposure to crime because sport has the potential to help them avoid risk-taking behaviour (Olliff, 2008). A case in point is the so-called Midnight Basketball programmes in the USA that were designed to combat criminal behaviour among young people in the 1990s. In these programmes, young people would engage in supervised basketball matches during the high crime hours (10:00pm to 2:00am) in the inner-city urban areas (Smith & Waddington, 2004). Therefore, it is recommended that multi-purpose community centres should be built in this community. Parents and community members should be trained to develop structures that will deter young people from exhibiting undesirable behaviour as well as provide leadership and counselling to the youth.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to identify factors and challenges associated with participation in community sport in Eldorado Park. It is evident that serious challenges exist which impede the participation of community in sport. A multilateral intervention involving community members, the municipality and businesses is necessary to curb undesirable practices such as alcohol and drug abuse, and gangsterism so community members are attracted to participate in sport.

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