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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Influence of sports environment in modulating behavioral response of visually challenged

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Abstract

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300 respondents, equally divided in four groups consisted of visually impaired sportsmen and non-sportsmen were selected. Tutko's Sports Emotional Reaction Profile along with demographic profile of the respondents was administered. The samples were selected from Blind School (Lucknow), the senior Secondary School, Kidwainagar (New Delhi) and the National Institute for Visually Handicapped (Dehradun), Blind Relief Association (Delhi). The Sports Emotional Reaction Profile Scores of two criterion groups (under normal and impaired conditions) varied significantly. Visually impaired persons are handicapped with feebleness, awkwardness and helplessness in addition to blindness. The vitality of the blind is much below the average vitality of the sighted and any system of education, which does not recognize and try to overcome that defect will be a failure. Sporting activity is today accepted as an essential part of education and has an important role to play in the welfare of visually impaired.

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Introduction

This research was undertaken with the purpose of informing a wide audience on current provision of sport and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities and on how participation in quality experiences might be increased. There are people with disabilities who have had little or no experience of physical activity or exercise. They need, first of all, to develop their motor skills through adapted physical activity programmes and through physiotherapy where indicated. Other people with disabilities do not have the opportunity to participate in active leisure pursuits and sports that suit and appeal to them. They have had little or no opportunity to engage in physical exercise and sport with others and enjoy their social aspects. In school and in college the experience of children and young adults with disabilities are not always quality ones. Everyone with a disability, including athletes with a disability, need to be adequately catered for and their potential recognized, respected and nurtured.

Central to conducting research in the field of physical activity and sport is a clarification of important words and terms. Sport is often considered as physical activities that are engaged in for competition/ excellence and/or pleasure and that have defined rules and scoring systems. The European Sport's Charter (Council of Europe, 1992) defines sport as all forms of physical activity, which through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels. Exercise is defined as purposeful physical activity, which is often structured, and pursued for health and fitness benefits. Physical activity is defined as all forms of bodily movement, which use energy including such tasks as housework and gardening (Council of Europe, 1992). In this report sport and physical exercise are used interchangeably. In appendix 3, other pertinent terms and concepts are discussed including physical literacy, "elite" athletes, inclusive or adapted physical education/activity and independence, participation, inclusion and interdependence.

The enormous benefits of physical exercise have been recognized but they need to be more widely experienced. The pleasure and enjoyment that comes from physical exercise and sport can be sufficient reasons in themselves for participation. However, taking a more functional view, a whole range of benefits and reasons for participation can be enumerated and these are addressed in the report.

Psychologists have always tried to analyse and identify the cause and effect in the relationships with environment. Research reports have also proved that the behavior of an individual changes with the environmental variations, particularly when the natural environment is transformed into 'behavioral setting' in a suitable ecological space' (Barker, 1965). It has been observed by the contemporary sport psychologists that the organized sports are recognized by the society as the part and parcel of culture and experts provide sporting arena, i.e., 'behavior setting' for specific sport items. Sports have increasingly become an integral part of our culture and must be regarded as a social institution of major importance. Environmental stresses and strains generally lead to mental disturbances and unidirectional behavior. Clinical evidence indicates that participation at sport or otherwise considerably affects the mental health of an individual especially in impaired conditions. The aim of sports in visually impaired is to provide skilled leadership, affording maximum opportunities for individuals and groups to participate in situation that are physically wholesome, mentally stimulating, satisfying and socially sound environment.

In the present investigation an attempt has been made to study sports emotional reaction profiles of sportsmen and non-sportsmen aged 14-18 years with or without any visually impaired condition, respectively belonging to middle socio-economic group, and skilled in Hindi language communication. To differentiate sportsmen from non-sportsmen, the following operational definitions have been taken into consideration.

- I. Sportsmen are those who have been trained from childhood for specific competitive sports and practice the sport regularly. Their motivation must be preserved by offering them possibilities to practice their loved sports, including all material requirement and the mental, cultural and social surroundings.
- II. Non-sportsmen are the people who have not gone in for sport regularly hitherto. They are expected to start very late in life and unfortunately this is true of the majority. They are not trained, have no special movement experience, little self-confidence and many Inhibitions.
- III. Visually impaired refers to eye defects when the respondent cannot figure beyond two metres with both eyes open and his visual acuity does not exceed 2/60 in Snellen's Vision Test. The sighted persons are those who can easily see.

METHODOLOGY

Objective: The main objective of the study was to explore some important personality traits of visually challenged sportsmen and non-sportsmen and sighted sportsmen and non-sportsmen.

Hypothesis: It was hypothesized that Sports Emotional Reaction Profile Scores of different sub-groups of respondents would remain unaffected in changing environment.

Sample: Three hundred sportsmen and non-sportsmen were randomly selected with matching criteria of age, socio-economic status and education. The respondents were taken from the centers of visually handicapped from Lucknow and New Delhi (N = 150). Similarly, a total number of 150 non-sportsmen were selected from the above institutions equiproportionately, i.e., visually impaired 75 and respondents with normal vision 75.

Instrument: The Sports Emotional Reaction Profile (SERP) by Tosi and Tutko (1976) along with demographic profile of the respondents was administered as a tool for the present study. There are forty two items in the SERP which covers seven separate psychological areas pertaining to sport; viz., desire, assertiveness, sensitivity, tension control, confidence, personal accountability and self-discipline. The score for each of the seven psychological areas can vary between 5 and 30. The high score ranges from 10-25 and low score ranges from 5-10.

RESULTS

TABLE :1 Sports Emotional Reaction Profile Scores of 300 Respondents

Personality Traits	Visually Impaired		Normal	
	Sportsmen (N =75)	Non-sportsmen (N =75)	Sportsmen (N =75)	Non-sportsmen (N =75)
Desire	18.6	8.3	18.8	9.0
Assertiveness	25.7	8.6	19.4	9.1
Sensitivity	24.2	8.7	18.2	8.0
Tension Control	24.4	8.8	19.0	8.9
Confidence	18.6	8.6	18.2	8.9
Personal Accountability	26.4	8.4	19.4	8.2
Self Discipline	18.8	9.1	18.8	8.9

The mean scores of visually challenged sportsmen on desire dimension is 18.6 which falls between (10-25) in this area. This shows that the blind sportsmen are generally realistic in setting the goals, which they strive for. They have greater need to succeed. On the other hand the mean score on desire dimension of totally blind non-sportsmen is 8.3, which fall between (5-10). This is very low score. Similar the mean score of sighted sportsmen on this dimension is 18.8 while the mean score of non-sportsmen in desire dimension is 9.0. It means that visually challenged and sighted sportsmen do not possess the “push” and they show a lack of desire to realistic goals and achieve them. Mean score of Assertiveness dimension of visually challenged sportsmen is 25.7 whereas mean score of assertiveness of non-sportsmen is 8.6. On the other hand mean score of assertiveness of sighted subjects is 19.4 and mean score of assertiveness of sighted non- sportsmen is 9.1. It means that sportsmen in any category have a killer instinct. They are generally defensive but non-sportsmen in this category are intimidated too easily, sometimes feeling they are beaten even before they start.

Mean score of sensitivity dimension of visually challenged is 24.2 and sighted sportsmen is 18.2 and mean score of sensitivity of visually challenged non-sportsmen is 8.7 and 8.0(sighted non-sportsmen). The sportsmen having high scores on this trait are termed as “the supersensitive”. The activity and the game of overly sensitive athlete is more important than their performance. On the other hand the sensitivity of non-sportsmen has a great deal of emotional resilience. Mean score of tension-control dimension of visually challenged is 24.4 and a sighted sportsman is 19.0 and mean score of tension control of visually challenged non-sportsmen is 8.8 and 8.9(sighted non-sportsmen). The sportsmen of both the group show clearly that they have faith in their ability to some degree and accept challenges that are within their range of talents. They are fairly realistic about their strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand non-sportsmen in this dimension come in the category of “the nervous wreck.” The mean scores of visually challenged sportsmen on confidence dimension is 18.6 which falls between (10-25) in this area. It shows clearly that they have faith in their ability to some degree and accept challenges that are within their range of talents. Mean score of non-sportsmen in this category is 8.6, which comes in the label of “insecure”. The mean score of sighted sportsmen on confidence dimension is 18.2 which falls between (10-25) in this area. On the other hand mean score of sighted non-sportsmen is 8.9, which falls in (5-10) category. They start expecting to lose.

Mean score of personal accountability dimension of visually challenged is 26.4 and sighted sportsmen is 19.4. This trait indicates willingness to face up to one’s own lapses and to pay the price of trying to correct them. They fall in high category means they have a tendency to be too hard on themselves. On the other hand mean score of visually challenged non- sportsmen is 8.4 and sighted non-sportsmen is 8.2 which shows that their impulses when things go wrong to rationalize too much to blame everyone and everything but themselves. Mean score of self-discipline dimension of visually challenged is 18.8 and sighted sportsmen are 18.8, which is similar to each other. This is willingness to develop and stick to a personal game plan. It is an attempt for them to become their own coach-knowing their ability and developing their own system. On the other hand mean scores of self-discipline in both groups are 9.1 and 8.9 respectively. Low score in this category is known as “the chaotic”. The underachieving athlete needs to press himself to work first on those aspects of his game that he does poorest; otherwise he will probably fail to work on them at all.

The scores of sighted sportsmen of both the groups on every personality trait are moderately high. Moderately high scores on desire, assertiveness and sensitivity show that these types of person are usually realistic in setting the goals. They strive for and that is why they always show healthy assertiveness in almost every sport performance. They are also sensitive to the environment but emotionally resilient enough to cope with worst outside situations. Similarly moderately high score on tension control, confidence, personal accountability and self-discipline show that they can manage their anxieties. They are fairly true about their vigor and feebleness. They usually cannot win any popularity contests because they do not take any blame on themselves and do their work without thinking much about that.

The scores of every personality trait of sighted non-sportsmen in both the group are low. Low scores of desire, assertiveness and sensitivity show that sighted non-sportsmen are not ambitious and are satisfied with their performance in the game. They usually play less because they are afraid to take any type of challenge. They also have a great deal of emotional resilience. Similarly low scores at tension-control, confidence, personal accountability and self-discipline show that these types of person frequently manifest themselves in a physical way. If they win in game, they think it is a miracle or luck. They can blame everyone but themselves.

Discussion and Conclusions

People with physical disabilities are less likely to avail themselves of these benefits for a variety of reasons that include cultural and social factors, facilities, and access. Participation in sport is not essential but it is important that people with disabilities are encouraged to remain physically active. Accumulating evidence shows that people with disabilities that are more physically active visit doctors less and have fewer medical complications and hospitalizations than their sedentary counterparts. Paraplegic athletes are more successful than non-athletes in avoiding major medical complications of spinal cord injury. The same message of the accumulation of at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on at least five days of the week is equally applicable to someone with a disability. The same principles of training--that is, the graded increase in duration, intensity, and frequency apply, but more through exercise according to the disability. The social and psychological benefits of exercise and participation in sport are not exclusive to the sportsmen and major improvements in self esteem and social integration may occur for any individual through an active lifestyle.

Visual impairment can range from complete blindness to partial sightedness combining loss of visual acuity and field loss. Adaptations to sport include a sound-emitting ball for goal ball or cricket or a tandem cycle with a sighted pilot rider. In swimming, an assistant taps the head or shoulder of the swimmer with a soft-ended pole to indicate the pool end to enable turning and finishing. Nowadays, in our increasingly health and leisure conscious society, regular participation in sport and physical activities are widely accepted as a quality of life indicator in all population groups.

Among the aspects of athletic conditioning in professional and amateur sport, vision care is a very important as well as a largely neglected area. This fact is surprising, taking into account that vision is the process of reacting to what is seen, the signal that directs the muscles of the body to respond, providing the athlete with information as to where, how and when to perform. It may be inferred, after Barker (1965), that in varied and changing environments, it has been observed that built in sporting arena has influenced the behavior of non-sportsmen more than sportsmen in general. In a recent study by Allan Wicker the behavior setting concept represents the special form that psychological behavioral processes take in public domain. The concept also envisages these as middle sized ecological units, particularly from the viewpoint that within such units, socio physical environmental influences are experienced, and temporal environment as well as single individuals or groups (Glass T.A, McAttee M.J,2006).It has also been observed that built in sporting arena has influenced the behavior of non-sportsmen more than sportsmen in general.

Participation in physical activity has a role to play in personal development. It improves physiological and mental functioning and gives rise to feelings of physical, psychological and social competence. It is hugely enjoyable and can increase a person's resistance to stress. Through physical exercise and sport people can learn values and habits such as perseverance, constancy and competitiveness, fair play and sportsmanship. Sport can play a role in facilitating social participation, friendship and inclusion. It can be important in generating goodwill within and between diverse groups, places and countries. It is thought that physical exercise and sport can be used to contribute to a range of societal goals such as increasing community regeneration and social capital and reducing truancy and youth crime.

Positive effects of physical activity in persons with learning and physical and sensory disability that have been demonstrated include improvements in general health, physical fitness, bone metabolism and increased functional independence. There is also increased mobility and a reduction in chronic disease and secondary complications. Physical activity also has a mitigating effect on challenging behavior (Taylor W.C., Baranowski T, and Young,1998).

Physical exercise is important in maintaining fitness for daily living, reducing functional limitations, facilitating independent living and preventing, delaying and reducing chronic illnesses and secondary conditions (Bauman, A.E., 2003). In people who have acquired a disability, participation in sport/physical exercise can help them come to terms with their disability, regain self-esteem and social integration Physical activity is part of the antidote to the global burden of obesity and to chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. As the economic and social impact of a sedentary lifestyle and obesity becomes more apparent, efforts are being made around the globe to increase participation in physical exercise and sport. Disability is any physical or mental condition that limits a

person's movements, senses or activities. The term disability is conventionally used to refer to attributes that are severe enough to interfere with, or prevent, normal day-to-day activities. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." Disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. This relationship is particularly acute in developing countries. Studies show that 98% of children with disabilities living in developing countries do not receive an education. This number is even higher for girls with disabilities. As a result, a disproportionate number of persons with disabilities in developing nations live in extreme poverty. Using sport, persons with disabilities can work to remove the stigma confronting them in their own communities. Persons with disabilities are generally excluded from education, employment and community life from a young age. Exclusion deprives them of opportunities to engage and develop relationships with others — opportunities essential to their social development and important determinants of health and well being. As a result, persons with disabilities may have had very little experience greeting people, carrying on conversations and interacting with others.

Sport is well suited to helping persons with disabilities acquire social skills they may be lacking. It teaches individuals how to communicate effectively as well as the significance of teamwork and cooperation, goal setting, self-discipline, respect for others, and the importance of rules. Sport also enables persons with disabilities to take risks and learn how to manage failure and success in a safe and supportive environment. Coaches and teammates provide important role models and can help persons with disabilities to develop skills they can apply in other aspects of their lives, such as employment. Sport also brings together the parents and families of those with disabilities. Often parents of individuals with disabilities find themselves socially isolated. Social interaction with others who have similar experiences enables families to provide support to one another and empowers them to advocate for positive change to ensure greater inclusion and equality for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities in some societies are considered dependent and viewed as frail, incapable, and unskilled. Interestingly, dependence arising from a disability is often unwittingly exaggerated by teachers and family members. In some cases, the dependence of persons with disabilities is almost entirely a creation of those around them. These individuals fail to encourage persons with disabilities to develop their own ideas, express their desires, and make their own decisions. Sport also promotes social-emotional development and facilitates self-help. These skills can be transferred to employment, further helping to build self-sufficiency. An overview of sport and disability programs in developing countries showed that many programs successfully increased employment levels for participants. This was due to increased self-confidence and acquiring important social skills necessary for employment.

Sport also provides a forum to enable persons with disabilities to build the skills they need to advocate for and influence change. The awareness and confidence that persons with disabilities gain through sport are often the impetus for engaging in advocacy work, as the communication, leadership and teamwork skills they develop are easily transferred into this new arena. Individuals with new disabilities can play a bridging role between the disability communities. The education sector can:

- Educate physical education teachers about disability to reduce stigma and misperceptions and foster inclusion
- Provide physical education teachers with toolkits that discuss methods of adaptation and inclusion
- Provide role models of persons with disabilities engaged in sport (through books or live examples)
- Ensure that there are teachers and coaches on staff who have disabilities
- Create awards to recognize positive examples in disability sport
- Create competitions for the design of adaptive sports
- Include adaptive sport competitions in the regular sport calendar, creating showcase opportunities
- Establish programs and cooperatives to educate individuals on adaptive sport, especially within the university system

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