# Sports and Violence Prevention

## Introduction

Paradoxically, sports play a crucial role in violence prevention rather than just being an emphasis on athletic skills and physical fitness. What role do sports play in preventing health threatening behaviour or delinquency? Sports can equip the youth with emotional and social skills (Young, p. 130) \_ by and large, sports provide a diversion of energy for the youths who are likely to engage in violence. As a matter of fact, it keeps the youth out of trouble by being off the streets. On the other hand, sports impart values such as positive approaches towards competition and teamwork that play crucial roles in kick starting the careers of many youths. Sports have proven to be effective in improving self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-confidence, moral values, emotional regulation, social skills, work ethic and physical fitness (Miller et al, p. 108).

In this study, we identify child abuse, domestic violence and gang violence as the types of violence that sports focuses on reducing and/or preventing. Intervention largely emanates from characteristics of perpetrators and victims that have been observed over time\_ there has emerged a multidisciplinary approach to monitoring and measuring of violence. As a matter of fact, violence is indeed premised on appropriate infrastructure that focuses on prevention. For example, a community may organize a basketball tournament that targets youths living in group homes or housing projects in their quest to prevent gang related violence. As an embraced culture in sportsmanship, there was no issue on the court when it came to the usual punching and/or shoving. However, these events have not been successful especially with regard to finding professional athletes who reflect good morals since a host of these individuals have been found culpable for violence, especially against women (Jewkes, p.1580).

## Sports as useful tools for imparting life skills

Ironically, reduction and prevention of deviant behavior has been attributed to sports especially in urban areas that are poverty stricken though competition limits these opportunities only to the most gifted (McMahon, p. 115). Consequently, sports educators use sports to inculcate interpersonal and emotional benefits in imparting life skills that can help those who are most gifted as well as those who don’t reach the professional level. This means that life skills should be the main aim of sports since it incorporates the cognitive and behavioral tools that entail success such as effective decision making, anger management and anticipating for the future\_ largely, these life skills can be applied in other domains of life. Conversely, professional athletes have a role to play in that they have a duty to be good role models through qualities they possess on the road to success in life and sports (Miller et al, p. 109).

## The al-risk youths and sports

Disruption of social order has most often been linked with youths (Lyndon, p.377); it is at this juncture that sports has been used to constructively socialize them and constrain violence and deviant behaviour among them. This is true especially in societies where the youth have been identified as threats and/or problems to society. The focus is particularly on changing the personal behaviors and characteristics of these youths to enable them escape their immediate disruptive environment in the same economic and social system. In addition, the focus is mainly on improving self esteem and empowering the youth to move from individuals who are marked as persons in need of socialization and control to responsible youth with proper lifestyles and character. As expected, most of these youths are from ethnic minority backgrounds and low income regions (Jewkes, p.1580).

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Violence prevention is a byproduct of physical activities and sports\_ it entails activities that steer the youth away from risky behavior and trouble through programs that impart life skills aimed at development of pro-social behaviors and reduction of vandalism (Miller et al, p. 758). Sports act as catalyst for traditional and social cohesion. For example, the British football club Liverpool FC has in the past held campaigns aimed at reducing, truancy, promoting coaching and quit smoking programs. These programs have been found to have explicit or implicit prevention of violence outcomes. In the recent past, sports have shown potential in prevention of violence among communities and groups alike. By and large, the prevention of violence entails a social context that is largely supportive as well as appropriate and accessible activities. For example, a sport that entails survival in the wilderness dubbed Spectrum in the United States has been used to control an experimental group of adolescents with the program reporting a 20% reduction of arrests of adolescents that had participated in violence (McMahon, p. 116). These programs consisted of sports that were either group or solo survival expeditions.

## Infrastructure and policies for violence prevention

Development of policies on violence prevention focus on reduction in number of offenders that are motivated, making commission of violence difficult and creation of infrastructures that enhance supervision of perpetrators of violence (Miller et al, p. 431). The programs usually focus on al-risk youths and are mainly aimed at developing character through cooperation, trust and accomplishment of virtues through experience. For example, the Hope Center Wilderness Camp in the United States focuses on delinquent youths use sports to straighten them by utilizing non-punitive measures and providing quality care while emphasizing therapy, education, safety and health on these wilderness expeditions.

## Homeless youths together in prevention of violence

Sports have also been used in integration of youths that are homeless\_ the al-risk youths are susceptible to violence on the premise of unfavorable social contexts such as homelessness (Miller et al, p. 759). For example, in Adelaide and particularly the inner city; the youths in these areas have been found to have poor emotional, mental and physical health as a result of exposure to sexual abuse, alcohol, drugs and crime. This is largely due to inconsistent and transient support networks: as a consequence, the program develops trust by offering support to these youths through sporting activities such as basketball or netball thus instilling a sense of belonging among the al-risk youths by bringing them together.

## Gender equality and its role in violence prevention

A host of the participants expressed interests in violence prevention premised on the fact that they expressed willingness in supporting friends from the female gender in case of abuse in their relationship as well as prevent their male counterparts from verbally abusing women (Young, p. 131). In addition, the outcomes intimated that there was a reduction in beliefs that supported rape and gender equality was fast gaining recognition. Sports have in the past been used by the community, service providers, clinicians, systems leaders and policy makers in combating domestic violence. Reduction of violence against girls and women has been at the apex of the “CORE” agenda premised on its mission to promote healthy relationships and gender equality (Jain et al, p. 110). Sports form the platform for formation and enforcement norms that are masculine in nature\_ there is connection between violence perpetration, sexual assault myths, violence and sports. Largely, sports present challenges and opportunities; in the United States, the futures without violence intimate that boys and men have embraced willingness in using sports to end violence. Worldwide, athletes that are both non-famous and famous are crucial since they are norm-shapers and positive messengers of strategies that combat domestic violence. In 2011, a qualitative study on violence prevention was conducted with 12 male participants on board as coaches questioned on their role in prevention of violence (Miller et al, p. 113). The respondents in the research felt they had the ability to influence their sportsmen as well as offer a supportive role that impacts the games or lives of their players. As a matter of fact, most coaches were not inclined to violence prevention with a host placing the blame on the perpetrators of violence for the problem.

In Canada, the Whitemud West Bantam Coach Training supports and trains coaches to inculcate intervention virtues and integrate information aimed at addressing violence (McMahon, p. 117). The intended results were premised on behaviour and attitude change of players and coaches towards gender based violence. Largely, the hockey setting was specifically targeted with focus on responsiveness to violence situations\_ after evaluation, there was witnessed awareness among players and coaches of the need for violence prevention especially one targeting women its impact and prevalence on women. The coaches, athletes and players established new strategies in enhancing behaviour and attitude change with regard to gender based violence.

## Sports and its role in combating sexual violence

In response to sexual violence, the Australian Football League came up with a policy dubbed the Respect and Responsibility Policy to respond to sexual violence allegations (Jewkes, p.1583). A curriculum was developed to train the participants with the Victorian Health Promotion and the Latrobe University taking the initiative to inquire into the widespread gang rape incidents and instances of sexual harassment in the year 2005. This consisted campaigns on public education, discrimination policies and sexual harassment. By and large, the primary approach is premised on implementation of public awareness, development of policies and a focus on education to curtail the abhorred forms of violence.

Boys and men have been used to prevent violence cases in the society (Miller et al, p. 432). In the United States, the Mentors in Violence Prevention began a project aimed at resisting the establishment of violence as a norm in the society. As a matter of fact, athletes were taught on how to effect change through embracing healthy forms of masculinity other than violence\_ this was crucial particularly among college and campus student athletes. The project offered to play the role of a bystander by intervening through responding to violence situations and prevention of violence. Furthermore, it addresses boys and men on their roles with regard to skills and tools within the system that disproportionately affect girls and women. At the core of the program is the role played by the student athletes in responding to incidents of violence, abuse and harassment. In addition, life skills are taught as well as character building exercises that enable the participants in confronting violence. Sports associations, high schools and military have also adopted the program especially in prevention of bullying and gender-based violence\_ this in essence promotes leadership skills among young people (Jewkes, p.1584). The design embraced by the program was premised on reforming student athletes through the various mechanisms and evaluations that have constantly plagued the behaviors and attitudes of students especially with regard to gender violence. The mentors in violence prevention participants collected quantitative and qualitative data from rural and urban high schools with 476 student leaders from 21schools (Miller et al, p. 760).

## Sporting initiatives focused on violence prevention

 In the United States, campaign focused on prevention of violence dubbed Coaching Boys Into Men (CBIM) was established (Miller et al, p. 761). At the core of the campaign’s agenda was inculcating among boys the value of respecting women and that “violence can never be equated to strength” ( Jain et al, p. 116) \_ the campaign mainly focused on boys and men as well as equipping trainers with resources, scenarios and strategies crucial in promotion of healthier behaviors and attitudes. Furthermore, the campaign centered on prevention of violence in relationships, sexual assault and harassment; in India, cricket was the sport associated with the campaign. The approach was tested in 2011 with 17 schools taking part in the exercise and 2,007 participants responding recognition of ill intentions and behaviors against women was portrayed with interventions of such situations at the rise (Miller et al, p. 433).

In Canada, the Respect Group Inc through its numerous educational programs for parents and coaches has promoted respect in the workplace through imparting focus on neglect, bullying, harassment and abuse (McMahon, p. 119). The program also features physical development, power imbalances and discrimination through its tools that include programs for camp counselors, referees and coaches in their quest to report and respond to identified causes of neglect, harassment and abuse. Exceptionally, the hockey Calgary has met these demands especially once parents register their children for the sport\_ it includes intensive training, information and resources. The respect in sport program creates a haven for safe sporting as well as prevents harassment and abuse in sports, the responsibilities of managers and employees within the workplace are clearly stipulated as well as intervention of practices that promote harassment, discrimination and bullying (McMahon, p. 119). By and large, the program focuses on inappropriate and appropriate behaviors within the adult-child relationship.

Raising awareness has been the major premise for professional as well as amateur sports; men have been involved in prevention of violence mainly through mobilization of the community in countries such as the United States, Denmark, Scotland, Australia, Italy and Canada though the white ribbons campaign (Miller et al, p. 434). Leveraging the interests of men especially with regard to mobilization and awareness efforts has been the premise enjoyed by the campaign though season-long as well as single game initiatives (Jain et al, p. 110). For example, the national team in Denmark held a campaign for violence awareness dubbed “Give a Red Card to Violence against Women” ( Jewkes, p.1585).

In the United States, men led initiative referred to as the NFL Dads Dedicated to Daughters have addressed prevention of violence through changing and challenging stereotypes aimed at continuance of demeaning acts of violence against women (Miller et al, p. 113). The daughter of both non-famous and famous NFL players posed for pictures and revisited issues touching on healthy relationships, masculinities, gender equality and fatherhood. In addition, the initiative focused on fan-champion, friend-confidant, provider-protector and teacher-student relationship in combating violence on all fronts.

## Conclusion

Changes in behaviour of athletes are necessary for sports to have an effect in prevention of violence. The goal of violence prevention through sports emanates from proper attitudes among non-famous and famous sportspersons; being good role models will go a long way into transforming the outlook that boys and men have towards violence, them being mostly perpetrators. Clarity in what constitutes violence should be concisely spelt out to avoid claims of ignorance as well as promote reasonable behaviour from the al-risk youths that are most likely to commit acts of violence. The relationship between the different genders should be on an equality basis and premised on combating violence on all fronts in the society.

At the forefront of this fight against violence should be community based sporting initiatives coupled with media attention to sensitize wide regions on the need for prevention of violence of sorts using such mediums. Predominantly, infractions emanate from inequality in approaching situations; sports are characterized by equality based notions that in essence bring an end to allegations of injustice that cause violence. Sports also instill virtues such as honor and fair play thus discarding the values of competitiveness that dominate society resulting to violence.

Largely, sports entail a break from the norm in the sense that ordinary societal standards are relaxed and behaviour that would otherwise be judged harshly is treated without contempt the interaction between participants in the different sports does not end there since the bond formed develops into friendship that dissociates any sort of violence that may be anticipated. Perspectives from a cross-cultural view intimate that the offender and victims of violence may at times be drawn towards liking the same team thus reducing perjury that if left to grow would lead to violence.

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