

# **Analysis of Factors Influencing Sport Venue Managers' Decision Making in Emergency Situations Involving Spectators with Disabilities**

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## **Abstract**

Accommodating and ensuring the safety of sport spectators with disabilities during emergency situations remains one of the most complex challenges in contemporary sport venue management (Grady & Andrew, 2006).

The effectiveness of standardized emergency preparedness policies and practices to assist people with disabilities, however, has not yet been explored in the literature (Schneid & Collins, 2001). Rather, the primary literature on this topic has instead focused on policies and practices developed to assist able-bodied people during emergencies (Rowland, White, Fox, & Rooney, 2007) despite the fact that "the risks of hosting disabled patrons are different, if not necessarily greater, than for other audiences" (Adelman, 2007, p. 12).

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate how facility emergency policies and procedures could be more effectively adapted to meet the needs of spectators with disabilities and to develop a model that can be used to measure a venue's readiness to address the needs of this population during an emergency.

This paper builds upon the existing bodies of knowledge in sport management, crisis management, economics, and disability studies by examining the focal issues using a cross-disciplinary perspective.

While acknowledging significant progress made in improving accessibility to sport venues, there still remain significant barriers to sport and leisure participation for people with disabilities (Devine & McGovern, 2001, Rimmer, Riley, Wang, Rauworth, & Jurkowski, 2004).

A critical barrier which has been identified is assistance during emergencies.

Developing emergency procedures is a particularly difficult issue in accommodating patrons with disabilities.

Emergency preparedness includes emergency response planning, emergency personnel training, and supply availability (Rowland et al., 2007).

Given that people with disabilities may often require different types of assistance, there is a need for specialized training in how facility managers can best assist spectators with a variety of disabilities during an emergency (Rowland et al., 2007). Furthermore, even in situations where a comprehensive emergency plan is in place,

"how well the action is implemented depends upon the quality of the plan and its support structures and upon the readiness of the responsible parties" (Smits & Ally, 2003, p. 2).

Smits and Ally (2003) hypothesized that planning, assigning responsibilities, and training specific to crisis management are activities likely to have the greatest impact on readiness (p. 10).

In addition, the ability to analyze situations thoroughly and accurately and the ability to make sound decisions are essential components of effective emergency management (Smits & Ally, 2007).

Moreover, "role appropriate crisis management behavioral readiness is the result of both individual and organizational factors" (Smits & Ally, 2007, p. 12).

How well these factors address the needs of spectators with disabilities during an emergency, therefore, needs to be measured.

The growing field of behavioral economics provides tools that can be used to measure crisis readiness for the patrons with disabilities. Specifically, venue preparedness can be explored.

As economics is the dynamic study of collective human behavior, the model will be utilized to identify variables that affect venue managers' abilities to provide emergency procedures for patrons with disabilities.

In sport, economic analysis is applied to the organization, behavior, and outcomes in the industry (Goff & Tollison, 1990).

By applying ideas from behavioral economics, a model is proposed to represent crisis management preparedness for persons with disabilities. As mentioned, research has separated factors affecting emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities into two general categories.

Thus, the model has taken the following functional form:

Venue emergency preparedness =  $f(\text{individual factors, organizational factors})$ . Individual factors identified that affect preparedness include decision making, knowing one's role during a crisis, adequacy of training, number of years in position, position type, and employment status (e.g., full time/part time).

Organizational factors include internal communications systems, external communications systems, availability of technology, managerial controls, managerial experience, type of crisis training employed, venue type, and age of venue.

This study provides insight into the current state of the industry with regard to emergency procedures.

Further, this study develops a framework to assist with the identification of best practices for the industry through examination of the relationships between individual and organizational functions and venue preparedness.

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