
SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT WITH AT RISK GIRLS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING AND MANAGEMENT

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All authors:

Sarah Zipp (corresp), John Nauright, Sasha Sutherland

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Synopsis:

This study examines the nature of the impact of a sport for development programme for “at risk” adolescent girls in Barbados and St. Lucia within the context of a human capability approach for youth development. These small island nations provide an excellent sporting laboratory for analysis of programme effectiveness due to their relatively small populations and geographical space as islands in the Caribbean. Based on this study we developed a new model of sport for youth development.

Abstract:

While sport for development programming has flourished, the complex social and economic environment for girls and young women are often overlooked by researchers. While the recognition of the need for programmes targeting females is growing, huge gaps remain in the literature and in the efficacy of programmes and what impact they make on participants.

Sport participation is shown to provide positive benefits for education attainment, gender equality and health in developed and developing societies. Particularly for youth, sport for development programmes have also demonstrated the capacity to challenge gender-based restrictions and expectations as well as to empower girls and young women. Conversely, sport may be used to reinforce traditional, restrictive gender stereotypes and promote unhealthy concern over body image among female participants (Brady, 2005; Savedra, 2009).

This study examines the nature of the impact of a sport for development programme for “at risk” adolescent girls in Barbados and St. Lucia within the context of a human capability approach for youth development. These small island nations provide an excellent sporting laboratory for analysis of programme effectiveness due to their relatively small populations and

geographical space as islands in the Caribbean. Based on this study we developed a new model of sport for youth development that has not been previously presented.

Our study addresses key questions including: do the participants benefit, and if so, in what way?; and how does sport contribute to these outcomes? Our case study programmes are designed to promote healthy lifestyles and address social challenges (sexual health, gender inequality, youth unemployment, etc.) for adolescent girls who have been identified as “at risk” by school officials. Combining a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach, this study includes surveys, focus group discussions, reflective journals, and interviews. Results of the study indicate that these sporting activities encouraged self-efficacy, social cohesion and empowerment. However, outcomes toward progressive perspectives on gender roles, norms and expectations were mixed. We conclude with discussion of implications for future programme development and address questions of transferability to improve delivery of similar programmes and analysis of their effectiveness.

In particular our study, explores the complex relationship between sport/physical activity and gender roles/norms in a post-colonial, developing economy. In St. Lucia, a small group (n=19) of girls who were either removed from or dropped out of mainstream secondary school participated in this study. In Barbados, 16 adolescent girls joined the study from two different sport for development programmes. These young women took part in our mixed-methods study, including surveys, focus groups and guided journals. Additionally, interviews with coaches, instructors and administrators for these programmes were conducted (n=8). These programmes included alternative and supplementary education projects, with curricula focused on academic disciplines (literacy and math), computer skills and broader life skills guidance (mental and physical health, career mentoring, social awareness, etc.). Each programme offered a mix of organized sporting activities such as football, netball and dance in addition to their primary curricula.

This study is built upon the theoretical framework of human capability development. Specifically, the human capability approach of Amartya Sen served as the overarching theory on human development (2000). Within this context, the youth development theories of Robert Blum were employed to examine how sport programmes may impact elements of well-being, social inclusion, gender equality, female empowerment and health among youth (2006). Elements such as education, freedom, and gender equity are central themes in this theoretical concept. Martha Nussbaum built on Sen’s work and developed a particular focus on gender and human development. Her work focuses on the “capability approach,” which examines specific elements how humans are capable of doing. This approach is also referred to as “welfare economics.” Among the elements related to sport that she identified are bodily health, bodily integrity (free movement), affiliation, and play (Nussbaum, 1999).

As a result of our findings we developed a new model of sport for youth development based the human capability theoretical framework which is transferable to other contexts subject to a checklist and analysis of variables specific to each spatial and cultural context. This model will be presented at the

conference along with specific data from our research method.

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