

Sport for Development and Peace Programming: Struggles of Temporary Solutions to Yield Permanent Change

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Aim

Sport for development and peace (SDP) scholars have stressed the need for monitoring and evaluation efforts to be driven with a critical lens and not simply highlight positive outcomes (Coalter, 2010). Potential barriers regarding successful evaluation of SDP programs are the focus on positive outcomes of participants and limited longitudinal data. The purpose of this study was to provide a critical assessment of a (SDP) program, Volley4Change (V4C), through the lens of former participants. Researchers were particularly interested in the feasibility of long-term habit change through an eight-week program. Although SDP research in the South Pacific only started recently, scholars have begun conducting more empirical investigations in this region due to its growth in sport initiatives aiming to tackle health, fitness, and inequality issues (Sherry, Schulenkorf, Seal, Nicholson & Hoyer, 2017).

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

SDP programs have received an increasing amount of institutional and political support over the past decade because of attention from governmental organizations, non-governmental agencies, mainstream development efforts, sporting bodies, and sport practitioners and academics from around the world (Sherry, Schulenkorf, & Chalip, 2015). These SDP initiatives use sport as a vehicle for social change surrounding issues like health promotion and disease prevention, individual development, gender equity, and conflict prevention and resolution (Coakley, 2011)

Previous calls for SDP research have suggested examining the organizational capacity of SDP programming as one way to assess effectiveness. Organizational capacity refers to an organization's ability to produce change and achieve desired goals specific to the dimensions of human resources capacity, financial capacity, and structural capacity (Christensen & Gazley, 2008). This framework also examines the relationship between these dimensions in attempts to determine an organization's strengths and challenges that allows the organization to foster change through the implementation of new practices.

Research Design and Data Analysis

To assess the organizational capacity and success of a small-scale SDP initiative, researchers aimed to speak with key stakeholders and former participants of V4C. Overall, 26 players were interviewed. Each had completed the eight-week program in their local village six months to two years before the interviews. Additionally, three coaches and two executives were interviewed. One on one interviews were utilised with each lasting between 16-43 minutes. The player interviewees were a purposive sample aimed to provide a varied representation in "time away" from the program and athletic skills. This data collection effort was conducted in two stages, once in early 2017 and once in early 2018. Guided by the literature, analysis was conducted using Nvivo 12 to code data and collapse codes into general themes.

Results and Discussion

Findings revealed that initial impact was perceived by all participants in regards to their health and fitness habits. When asked to reflect on their experiences during their eight-week V4C program, 100% of the respondents highlighted positive impacts. Due to pressures from grants and local government officials, the V4C format was designed to spend eight weeks in each village and then relocate to another area in need. This format aimed to maximize outreach based on their funding and limited staff and volunteers. As noted, all players emphatically stressed the positive aspects of the program. Nevertheless, it was nearly unanimous when they shared their current relationship with volleyball and physical activity that although they emphasized notable lifestyle changes, a regression to their previous habits seemed to take place for two key reasons: Lack of programming and cultural norms. Each of these factors emerged due to limited organizational capacity.

Conclusion and Implications

The present study aimed to make a unique contribution to the literature by capturing the perspectives of SDP participants six to 24 months after their SDP intervention who could openly speak about their regression along with their recommendations. Although there were noted improvements in health, eating habits, and socializing because of the program, these results were seemingly mitigated over time due to a lack of additional programming and services along with individuals reverting to their cultural norms.

From a theoretical standpoint, the current project aims to serve as a response to SDP scholars emphasizing a need for empirical studies with a critical lens and the perspective of participants with a less positivist experience. It additionally extends previous work on the organizational capacity of SDP organizations. From a practical standpoint, our research highlights the need for SDP programs to focus their efforts beyond outreach and individuals served to longitudinal outcomes and sustainable change. Considering the competitive nature of fundraising, grant applications, and obtaining support from key stakeholders, it is understandable that most SDP programs strive to bolster their numbers and highlight their ability to reach a wide audience of participants. It would be valuable for stakeholders (e.g., donors, government grants) to emphasize sustainable impact and long-term change over mass numbers, and call for programming that aligns with that vision.

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