



CHAPTER 12

RECREATION AND LEISURE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWDS)

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Introduction

Recreation, a term in physical education refers to all those activities that people choose to do to refresh their bodies and minds and make their free time more interesting and enjoyable. The term recreation has been in existence for use since the 14th century to mean refreshment or curing a sick person; its origin is actually Latin which means “recreate”. Recreation is designed to recreate one’s mind and body after a day’s job and it comes in the form of play that an individual engages in voluntarily. The fact is that recreational activities represent freely chosen, individual or organized group activities that help one to maintain good health, physical and working shape. Apart from its physical importance, recreation is essential for development of skill competencies, socializing with peers, exploring personal interest and enjoying life. Recreational activities can be in the form of communal or solitary, active or passive, outdoor and indoor activities and example include video games, swimming, dancing, fishing, shooting and archery, bowling, dart, music, art, excetera.(Potic, Ksenija, Mirjana & Slobodan, 2014).

Leisure proffers some relief from work. It affords a period when an individuals excuse themselves from excessive working. It is a spare or free time that one has at his or her disposal and the time spent on things that an individual enjoys. At leisure, the mind is free from work and can engage in any form of activities that refresh the mind and body. Leisure gives an individual an opportunity to participate in various recreational activities as it gives room for play in the busy schedule of life. This vintage definition of leisure by Thorsten Veblen’s of 1899 must be acknowledged as it simplifies the meaning of recreation; it was defined as “nonproductive consumption of time”, this implies that leisure is done for pleasure and fun which one engages in for quality of experience and involvement (Isaiah & Yakubu, 2020).

Recreation is experienced during leisure and it is important for the well -being of all, persons with disabilities inclusive. Persons with disabilities are people who have physical, mental or emotional condition that keeps the individual away from living a social and functional life. Different terms are attached to persons with disabilities; which include disabled persons, physically challenged persons, the handicapped, and persons with special needs. It also falls into classifications like



mobility and physical, head injuries, spinal cord, vision, hearing, cognitive and learning, psychological etc. The truth is that persons with disabilities are neglected and not considered while planning or carrying out recreational activities. This has resulted to low level of self-esteem, forcing this group to experience sedentary life style and become socially stagnant (Demirci & Demirci, 2015). According to World Health Organization (WHO) (2021), over 1 billion people are estimated to experience disability. This means 15% of the world's population and with up to 190 million (3.8%) in the bracket of the very young. Disability is a human right issue, with persons living with disability being subjected to multiple violations of their rights, including acts of violence, abuse, prejudice and disrespect because of their disability which intersects with other form of discrimination based on age and gender among other factors. Persons with disabilities also face barriers, stigmatization and discrimination when participating in recreational activities during their leisure. The constant stigmatization and discrimination makes persons in this group look away from activities that could improve their health.

The thesis statement of this chapter is hinged on the fact that persons with disabilities can fully take part in recreational activities at their leisure if given the necessary support. In conquering sedentary life style and stigmatization of persons with disabilities, recreational activities are a response to inclusion or integration and to sound health as it gives this group of people the opportunity to take part, mingle and excite their muscles during leisure. To understand this objective, the discussion in this chapter will start by stating the relationship between disability and health, recreation at disabilities and focusing majorly on visual impairment and autism, the various types of recreational activities suitable for persons with disabilities, difficulties persons with disabilities face while trying to participate in recreational activities, and the benefits of recreational activities to persons with disabilities. Conclusion and suggestions will end the discussion.

Disability and Health

Disability and health have a complex relationship as long-term health conditions might cause disability. According to the report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2022), the nature and extent of a person's disability can influence health experience in such a way that it limits access to, and participation in social and physical activities and limitations to participation in both social and physical activities may result to sedentary behaviour which may ultimately result to low energy and health risk. Individuals with disabilities such as mobility, spinal cord, vision and hearing, are more likely to suffer from obesity and diabetes. There is a high chance for passived persons with disabilities to have chronic conditions like heart diseases, stroke, cancer and diabetes. The impact of these diseases can be reduced when exposed to recreational activities. Recreational activities according to Wenner (2016), are essential for quality of life and have an amplified importance based on higher rates of chronic diseases of persons with disabilities. For persons living with disabilities to maintain maximum health,



participation in recreational activities must be optimal; as recreational activities promote blood circulation, excite muscles, improve self-perception, reduces stress, pain and depression.

Recreation and Disabilities

Enthusiastic participation in recreational activities at leisure is important for the development of individuals committed to it. This also goes for persons with disabilities; voluntary participation in activities here is when people with disabilities like all people, develop skills, competencies, build friendships and create relationships, develop mental and physical health, express creativity, develop personal identity and determine the meaning and purpose in life (Movahedi, 2011). This implies that recreation is valuable for all and its benefits are immense in reducing the risk of diseases such as cancer, stroke, hypertension, depression and also help to control weight. In addition, many people including persons with disabilities engage in recreation for the intrinsic value it gives - relaxation and interactions.

Recreational Activities Suitable for Persons with Disabilities

Recently, persons with disabilities have been encouraged to lead an active life not just because of the health benefits derived from participating in recreational activities, but the integrating power it has. The truth is that, promoting the health of persons with disabilities is paramount, as these groups of persons have a relatively high rate of health problems ranging from obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and depression. One way to reduce these health challenges is to participate in physically and mentally stimulating recreational activities (Shields & Synnot, 2016). Persons with disabilities most times frown at physical participation in recreational activities due to physical barriers like the absence of wheelchair, absence of recreational building and discriminatory attitudes in the society. To overcome all these barriers, society and family must provide facilities and special equipment as well as show acceptance to these groups of people (Demirci, 2018). Cindy, Thomas, Cerin, Chow, Huang, & Yu (2017), state that recreational activities must be designed to meet the needs of the participant as this will motivate and improve the interest of persons with disability. Recreational activities maybe in its real form or adapted to allow for accident-free participation. The various types of recreational activities according Lauruschkus & Nordmark (2015), include: Archery, Hiking, Bowling, Tennis, Music, Bowling, Exercise training, Swimming, Arts and Crafts, Camping, Jogging, Fishing, Basketball, Gardening and so on.

Recreational Activities and Persons with Visual Impairments

The American Academy of Ophthalmology (2022) defined visual impairment as the best corrected visual acuity of less 20/40 in the better eye; the World Health Organization (2021) also defined it as presenting acuity of less than 6/12 in the better eye and in the absence of treatment such as correctable eyewear, assistive



devices and medical treatment – visual impairment may cause the individual challenges with normal daily tasks such as reading and walking. Poor vision prevents proper movement from place to place which may result to sedentary lifestyle. Participating in any form of activity at leisure is very important for good general health, physical fitness and quality of life. For persons with visual impairments, it is important to note that they have the same needs for physical activities as their peers from general populations. Provision of adapted equipment and proper integration should involve proper development of skills and stamina similar to those with typical development. Participation in recreational activities helps in personality development and promotes self-confidence and very valuable for overall development. Special motoric needs are required for persons with visual impairment due to the peculiarity of their condition. The lack of vision impedes all round development as the various stages of growth are obstructed which result to lack of mobility and reduces the motivation to participate in recreational activities (Houston – Wilson, 2011). For the visually impaired to enjoy recreational activities it must be designed in such a way that participants are motivated to regularly take part, and must be accident-free. Some of the activities suitable for the visually impaired are folk dances, basketball, corrective gymnastics, wrestling, volleyball, soccer etc.

In order to achieve enjoyable experience, adaptation is necessary and it is important to focus on residual senses, especially the senses of touch and sense of hearing and that of residual vision. In case of indoor ball games, it is important to use smaller, soft and colourful balls; the nets for volleyball, basketball and football should be illuminated with various colours or contrasting colours, in addition to adaptation of recreational activities that are carried out by the general population. There are activities (sport) intended only for the visually impaired; one of them is goalball- played with a sound ball and all participants wearing blindfold, regardless of the level of visual impairment. Benefits of this game are multiple but the most important is that it encourages the participants to move around and it is also important for social development; because it gives room for cooperation among team members and helps participants feel like part of a group.

Recreational Activities and Persons with Autism

Autism spectrum disorder according to Houston – Wilson (2011), is characterized by shortfall in areas of social interaction, communication and repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour and interests. It was further stated that autism have difficulties in maintaining social contact, symbiotic relationships, problems with verbal and nonverbal communication, imagination, as well as exhibition of unusual behaviour alongside movement problems and difficulty in executing daily routine and task. These individuals, according to Bandini (2012), find it difficult to socialize, and recreation which is a social activity is one area that is not patronized by them. Recreation is a very important tool in creating opportunities to practice social skills, physical aptitude and increase motivation.



Participation in recreation and leisure activities allows individuals with autism to learn skills of various sports or activity which may provide satisfaction and enjoyment. Suitable recreational activities for this group of people include playing cards or board games, drawing and photography, hiking, cycling, golf etc. Adaptation is also necessary while planning activities for people with autism. This involves non-competitive baseball; a rubber surfaced baseball field is used to prevent injuries, wheelchairs accessible dugout and a plain surface to avoid any form of obstacle for wheelchairs. The normal baseball rules are maintained but facilities are completely adapted for safety and enjoyment. The wheelchair softball is another activity coined out of baseball. It involves people with a lot of wheel and the use of a soft ball to serve as the major equipment. These adapted recreational activities are created to allow for proper integration and inclusion, improve independence and enhance physical and mental health (Alu, & Gabi 2014).

Difficulties Faced by Persons with Disabilities while Participating in Recreational Activities

As important as recreation and leisure are to man in general, it is not free of some challenges that could discourage persons with disabilities from participating in recreation and leisure. According to Smith & Sparks (2019), in a study titled "Disability, Sport and Physical Activity", it was revealed that there are various levels of barriers hindering the participation of persons with disabilities in recreational activities. These challenges include independent,, social and, space factors. Each of these factors is discussed as follow:

1. Independent Factor: Lack of knowledge of what type of activities to engage in and places where to exercise is a big challenge. Persons with disabilities find it difficult to participate in recreational activities due to lack of motivation, self-pity for being disabled, concerns about safety, and stigmatization.. The thought of falling while participating in recreational activities invokes gymphobia and discouragement.
2. Social Factor: In some cases, persons with disabilities maybe interested in recreation or leisure but may not have friends to play with. Sometimes, they may find it difficult to participate in regular activities except adapted to meet their specific needs. The absence of modified equipment is also a challenge. For example, not modifying a baseball to a softball, football to a goal ball, a bad limb to a fitted prosthesis are part of the many reasons persons with disability will want to look away.
3. Facilities Factor: Most facilities are designed and constructed without putting persons with disabilities into consideration. The absence of doorways for wheelchairs or crutches, sport arena not exactly designed to encourage persons with disabilities for example poorly lit or wooded walking paths, inadequate transportation and unsuitable equipment for use are reasons participation in recreational activity is low amongst persons with disabilities. The unavailability of some modified equipment makes it



difficult for persons with disabilities to make choices from the various activities.

4. **Planned Programme:** In Nigerian schools and society in general, there is hardly an organized recreational activity for persons with disabilities. There are no special social gatherings in various games for these groups of people. Programmes like NUGA, NICEGA, NSSF, NIPOGA and National Sport Festivals do not put persons with disabilities into consideration that much. These issues are reasons these persons look away from participating in recreational activities.

Benefits of Recreational Activities to Persons with Disabilities

Recreational activities are valuable for quality of life of all, persons with disabilities inclusive. Research suggests that participating in recreational activities for persons with disabilities is even more important than those without a disability. The simple reason is because 66% of disabled people are more likely to be prone to diabetes and obesity. The truth is that, body movement and proper heart functioning is difficult to maintain when sitting all day and living a relatively sedentary lifestyle (Wenner, 2016). The benefits of recreational activities according to Martins (2013), in a study titled "Benefits and Barriers to Physical Activity for Individuals with Disabilities" showcased the importance of recreational activities to persons with disabilities. These include:

1. **Psycho-social Benefits:** Participation in recreational activities has a lot of social benefits. Friendship and social network is built through participation in recreational activities where collective identities are created. Participation improves social integration as it eliminates prejudice and discrimination and creates a pathway for reaching an inclusive society. Persons with disabilities develops self-image through successful experiences and satisfying relationships with peers.
2. **Health Benefits:** Regular participation in recreational activities is valuable in the prevention of many diseases such as cardiovascular diseases. Various activities have proven to reduce the risk of death to heart disease. Apart from improving a man's heart, it is also a natural medicine for physical treatment of diseases such as coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and colon cancer. It can also excite and tone muscles, improve shortness of breath, pain, depression and weakness. Engaging in recreational activities allows for development of components of fitness like muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, power, balance etc.
3. **Skill Development Benefits:** Recreational activities do not only improve social life and health of persons with disabilities, it also helps to develop life-long skills in disabled people. Regular participation develops interest which transcends to lifestyle and becomes profession. The individual is exposed to technical aspect of various activities and sports. This could be seen in the just concluded Common Wealth Games of 2022 in Birmingham England,



where some persons with disabilities like Nwachuke Chiemerie showcased her skills and talents. This creates a sense of belonging and an avenue for inclusion.

Conclusion

Recreational and leisure activities are vital tools for improving the health of all, persons with disabilities inclusive. Regular participation of persons with disabilities in recreational and leisure activities have proven to be a therapy for all sorts of sedentary related diseases and it has also shown to be true in improving social life and skill competencies. For persons with disability to enjoy maximum recreational activities, the individuals, families, schools and the society must address some challenges faced by persons with disabilities like low self-esteem, stigmatization, discrimination, and abuse. The society, schools and families must provide support in terms of acceptance and integration, provision of adapted equipment and facilities designed for modified sports and creating platforms to showcase their skills and talents. Support for persons with disabilities will also motivate and stimulate their love for participation in recreational activities.

Suggestions

- Educate persons with disabilities on the importance of recreational activities. Family, schools and government should consciously highlight the benefits that are derived from participating in recreational activities through chats at home, seminars and talk shows.
- Government should make laws that will strongly protect the rights of persons with disabilities. Protecting these groups from abuse, stigmatization and neglect will reduce the shame and low self-esteem suffered by persons with disabilities.
- Schools, Churches, Mosques and Ministry of Sports should provide materials and adapted equipment that will stimulate the interest of persons with disabilities to participate in recreational activities.
- Government should create safe recreational programmes in various states and local government areas that will improve inclusion. Friendly activities should be planned and carried out periodically to bring people of different background, gender and culture together.

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