

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED PERSONS THROUGH SPORTS PARTICIPATION

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### Abstract

*For the last couple of decades UNESCO has aimed to achieve to a far extent the implementation of the guiding principle of inclusion at all levels in education systems worldwide. The idea that countries 'should ensure an inclusive education system at all levels' is also a central objective of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This paper discussed improving the quality of life of the physically challenged persons through sports participation. Regular participation in sporting activity not only help prevent illness and disease of the physically challenged, but also help them look good, feel good and improve their quality. This paper discussed on the causes of disability, disability in Nigeria, disability sports, sporting activities for the physically challenged, benefits of sports for the physically challenged, challenges keeping the disabled persons out of sports, improving the quality of life of the physically challenged persons through sports participation. It concluded that the physically challenged must be encouraged to participate in various sports because they need to keep fit even more than the able persons in order to achieve high quality of life. It further recommended that sports facilities and equipment should be provided at various levels as this will enable the physically challenged to participate freely in sports.*

**Keywords:** *Participation, Physically challenged persons, Quality of life and Sports*

### Introduction

The terms “physically challenged,” Handicapped, Impaired, and Disabled are often used inter-changeably and synonymously by both professional and lay people. Until recent years any One with an abnormal condition or who deviated from the majority in any way was considered handicapped or physically challenged. According to Daniel (2005), children are classed exceptional when they are in mental, physical, social, emotional or behavioural characteristic. Collins (2007) however does not distinct categories of exceptional but covered children with physical disabilities, speech defects, vision or sight impaired, orthopedic impairments, brain injuries, auditory or hearing difficulties, chronic medical problems, mental retardation giftedness, and emotional or psychological disturbances.

For purposes of clarification, impaired individuals have identifiable organic or functional conditions. Some part of the body is actually missing, a portion of an anatomical structure is gone, or more parts of the body do not function properly or adequately. The condition may be permanent, as in the case of amputation, congenital birth defect, vertebral or cerebral palsy, brain damage, etc. it may be temporary functional speech defects, some learning skills disabilities, various emotional problems, certain social maladjustments, or specific movement or locomotive deficiencies. Disabled individuals are physically challenged because their impairment are limited or restricted in executing some skills when doing specific jobs or tasks, or performing certain physical exercises or sporting activities.

Physically challenged persons reflect an attitude of pity. Some individuals with disabilities and impairments are handicapped mildly while others are severed. Those with severe impairments or disabilities adjust extremely well to their conditions and live happy lives. In their eyes or mind, they are not handicapped or disabled, even though society continues to label them physically challenged persons (Daniel, 2005). From the foregoing, those considered physically challenged are individual with one or

multiple forms of impairments which restricts their participation in physical activities or sports directly or indirectly like their able physically fit individuals.

People have reacted in different ways to disabling conditions; such reactions include: shame, prejudice, fear and exclusion from family or community life. In a developing country like Nigeria, it is evident that persons with disabilities constitute one of the poorest, socially excluded and marginalized groups within the society (Lang & Upah, 2008). Even today, Nigerians with disabilities continue to face social stigma, exploitation, and discrimination (Adima, 2010). In fact, in most communities, children with disabilities are perceived as a financial burden because they are unable to contribute to the family economy like their peers without disabilities, some of whom assist their parents by going out to the streets to sell various food items, clothing, and general merchandise (Kiefer, 2004). People with disabilities (PWDS) are vital and valuable part of the society, yet most marginalised and vulnerable group of persons in Nigeria. They are abused, exploited and excluded by the societies and denying them of their inalienable and recognised rights.

Community misconceptions and stigmas remain associated with PWDS, homes of PWDS and this in turn leads to attitudes and behaviours of neglect, isolation, abuse and marginalisation of PWDS by communities and families leading to increased discrimination. PWDS are under looked by their fellow peers in the societies that they live. Some parents have had and continue to have negative attitudes towards PWDS. A study conducted by the African Child Policy Forum in 2009 revealed that parents of PWDS and the immediate family members are the most perpetrators of violence against PWDS. Parents often hide PWDS and deny them of their rights thinking that they are totally helpless. Communities view PWDS as objects of charity worthy of no existence. This has, as a result, affected the ambitions of PWDS. The enrolment rate of PWD in pre-primary, primary and secondary school is very low. About 9% of PWD attend school and only 6% of these persons complete primary school and go to study in secondary schools according to a study conducted by UNICEF.

### **Causes of Disability**

Disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. Poor people without disabilities can develop them, due to poverty and malnutrition where Poverty is one of the biggest causes of disability. Poor people are most vulnerable to disability because they are forced to live and work in unsafe environments with poor sanitation, crowded living conditions, and with little access to education, clean water, or enough good food. This makes diseases such as tuberculosis and polio--and the severe disabilities they cause-- much more common because diseases get passed from one person to another more easily, war in which Explosions cause people to become deaf, blind, and lose their limbs, as well as causing other injuries. Their mental health is also badly affected by the violence. The destruction of homes, schools, health centers, and means of livelihood that results from conflicts and wars leads to increased disability, poverty, and disease , poor access to health care also causes disability in the sense that difficult labor and birth can cause a baby to be born with a disability such as cerebral palsy. Some illnesses a pregnant woman may get can cause physical or learning problems when her baby is born. Illnesses that can cause birth defects include German measles (rubella), which is a common cause of deafness in newborn babies. Giving injections with an unclean needle or syringe is a common cause of infection and can pass the germs that cause serious diseases such as HIV/AIDS or hepatitis. Unclean injections are also a common cause of infection that can lead to paralysis or spinal cord injury or death. Also, some injected medicines can cause dangerous allergic reactions, poisoning, and deafness to a baby in the mother's womb.

### **Disability in Nigeria**

The World report on disability, published in 2011, said about 25 million Nigerians had at least one disability, while 3.6 million of these had very significant difficulties in functioning. The 2006 Nigerian census reported 3,253,169 people with disabilities, or 2.32% of the total population of 140,431,790 in that year. However, the Centre for Citizens with Disabilities, a Nigerian NGO, claims the census did not

capture the full extent of disability in Nigeria, and has called on Nigeria's National Population Commission to cooperate with the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development for the then 2016 census in order to measure disability more accurately.

The five most common types of disabilities in Nigeria are, in descending order, visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical impairment, intellectual impairment, and physical impairment. It is an open secret that persons with disabilities (PWDs) often face untold hardship from day to day in the country. They are both discriminated against and stigmatized. Former President of the World Bank, Paul Wolfowitz once said that PWDs are people with extra talents. Yet, they are often forgotten. "When PWDs are denied opportunities, they are more likely to fall into poverty. As long as societies exclude those with disabilities, they will not reach their full potential and the poor in particular will be denied opportunities they deserve," he said. The plight of PWDs in Nigeria is further aggravated due to lack of appropriate laws to ensure their full social integration into society particularly through provision for their economic, social, educational, emotional and psychological needs.

The National Policy on Education (1977) and (2004) also affirmed among other objectives under the philosophy of Nigerian Education that adequate provision of sporting facilities, equipment and supplies be provided and made accessible to all category of pupils at all levels of education for its citizens irrespective of one's fitness status or disabilities. This worth affirmation are a challenge in the education of the physically challenged child. Though the handicapped child is deficient in some of the very tools with which to attain the Nigerian philosophy of Education, as many are defective in sight or totally blind. Others have mild hearing impairment or completely deaf, some have speech defects, crippled, lowered vitality, limited mental processes, emotional disturbances and other exceptionalities. The challenge readily becomes clear that these categories of children must be provided with sporting activities, games and sports that will give them a sense of belonging and an all round development of the body.

### **Disability Sport**

Disability sport is a term that refers to sport designed for, or specifically practiced, by people with disabilities. Today, the idea of people with a disability being able to participate in sport and physical activity is not so uncommon. Sport play a key role in the lives of people with disabilities, the same as it can for people without a disability. Sport encompasses all forms of physical activity and includes play, exercise, recreation, organized, casual or competitive sport and indigenous sport or games that contribute to socio-economic interaction and development. In Nigeria, despite the fact that society tends to focus on the adversity of disability, sport for the disabled has promoted social identification among the disabled people that is not easily obtained in other socio-cultural contexts.

### **Sporting activities for the Physically Challenged**

Daniel (2005) Observed that the disabled needs recreational form of expression that are within his/her capacity. Agwubike (2006) confirmed this statement when he said recreational activity for one person may not be the same for another. Some physical education activities or sport are obviously unsuitable for children with particular disability. The kind of recreation the physically challenged can engage in is conditioned by the person himself and his type of impairment. This is why Agwubike (2006) asserted that, for activity to become therapeutic or instrumental in producing change in a direction from dysfunction toward function, it becomes necessary to arouse and harness the individual's will to learn. The problem of matching and selection, possibilities for success, safety, naturalness, and interest must be considered. There should be a balance between directly participating and being a spectator in many recreational activities. In the area of game and sports, those of the non-contact or non-combat type with low requirements in speed, strength, agility and endurance (achieving performance related physical fitness status or components) offer the best chance for safe and successful participation for those with physical impairments.

**Benefits of sports to the Physically Challenged**

Many benefits can be derived by people with disability in sports. According to Kiefer (2004), Sport can play a key role in the lives of people with disabilities, the same as it can for people without a disability. It encompasses all forms of physical activity and includes play, exercise, recreation, organized, casual or competitive sport and indigenous sport or games that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction. Over the past three decades, research efforts have developed significantly in the area of disability sport and adapted physical activity. Numerous studies have revealed that physical activity and sport participation result in improved functional status and quality of life among people with disabilities (Abang, 2011).

Scientific research has been conducted across disability groups that reveal participation in sport and physical activity leads to improved levels of physical health and well-being. Sport and physical activity has also been shown to improve physical fitness and general mood in psychiatric patients with depressive and anxiety disorders. Additionally, sport and physical activity has been linked to improvements in self-confidence, social awareness and self-esteem and can contribute to empowerment of people with disabilities (Kiefer, 2004). On a larger scale, participation in disability sport also contributes to nation building and national identity and can also promote rehabilitation of people with disabilities following natural and man-made disasters (Collins, 2007).

Disabled sport is increasingly being used as treatment complementing the conventional methods of physiotherapy. It helps to develop strength, coordination, and endurance (Akinsanmi, 2009). Some sports develop selected groups of muscles - for example, weight lifting and archery help to strengthen the arm muscles of paraplegic patients, enabling them to gain independence in self care activities. Wheelchair sport such as basketball helps develop coordination as the disabled person has to propel the wheelchair and learn to pass, catch, and intercept the ball. Swimming is generally accepted as a valuable form of exercise and treatment (Kiefer, 2004). Another important aspect of sport is the opportunities it provides for disabled people to establish social contacts. Disability that persists can cause deterioration of disabled people's attitudes towards themselves and result in self pity, disruption of self esteem, and social isolation (Collins, 2007).

Adima (2010), participation in disabled sports can help physically disabled people to regain self esteem, promotes the development of positive mental attitudes, and helps them to come to terms with their disability and achieve social reintegration. Regular physical activity by disabled people: may help people become more independent, Contribute to improved health, improves perceptions of feeling healthier, happier and more energetic, reduces the risk of hyperlipidemia (high levels of fat in the blood) may help in broadening horizons and making new friends, promotes a more positive body image, more likely to experience academic success and stay in school, reduces the amount of time off from work, reduces symptoms of stress and depression, builds higher self esteem, confidence and pride, develops leadership skills and team work (Ihenacho, 2009).

**Challenges keeping the disabled persons out of sports**

It is no secret that barriers to participate in sport exist and affect all people, able-bodied as well as those living with disabilities. In fact, in Nigeria, people with disabilities experience additional barriers compared to their abled-bodied compatriots, and this is a serious concern that needs serious addressing. Firstly, there are inadequate disability sports competitions in the country. Secondly, most towns in Nigeria do not have sports grounds and sports facilities conducive for disabled persons. This discourages disabled people and those NGO's which are keen to help them. People living with disability need to have access to facilities where they too can engage in leisure activities that will improve their physical fitness and social life without hassle.

Every day, we preach that disability does not mean inability. But the question is, are we doing enough to help the disabled people to showcase their abilities when it comes to sports? Sports is one of the major keys that has the power to drastically change and influence a disabled person's life from zero to hero.

### **Improving the quality of life of the Physically Challenged Persons through Sports Participation**

Abang (2011), explained that sports improve the inclusion and well-being of persons with disabilities in two ways — by changing what communities think and feel about persons with disabilities and by changing what persons with disabilities think and feel about themselves. The first is necessary to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with disability. The second empowers persons with disabilities so that they may recognize their own potential and advocate for changes in society to enable them to fully realize it.

Sport also provides opportunities for persons with disabilities to develop social skills, forge friendships outside their families, exercise responsibility, and take on leadership roles. Through sport, persons with disabilities learn vital social interaction skills, develop independence, and become empowered to lead and make change happen (Barton, 2008). Coverage of sport events involving persons with disabilities can play a major role in creating more positive and accurate perceptions. For example, the growing profile of the Paralympics has significantly contributed to increasing recognition of persons with disabilities. Over 300 million people watched television coverage of the 2000 Sydney Paralympics Games. This single event significantly increased awareness of the capabilities of persons with disabilities (Akinsanmi, 2009).

Sport is well suited to helping persons with disabilities acquire social skills they may be lacking. It teaches individuals how to communicate effectively as well as the significance of teamwork and cooperation, goal-setting, self-discipline, respect for others, and the importance of rules (Adima, 2010). Sport also enables persons with disabilities to take risks and learn how to manage failure and success in a safe and supportive environment. Coaches and teammates provide important role models and can help persons with disabilities to develop skills they can apply in other aspects of their lives, such as employment (Bauman, 2002). Sport also provides a forum to enable persons with disabilities to build the skills they need to advocate for and influence change. The awareness and confidence that persons with disabilities gain through sport are often the impetus for engaging in advocacy work, as the communication, leadership and teamwork skills they develop are easily transferred into this new arena. For example, Manuel Gaiato contracted polio as a young child in Angola. He became interested in playing sports after seeing photos of wheelchair basketball. Through involvement in a local sports project, Sports for Life, he was given an opportunity to play (Biddle and Fox, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

The physically challenged must be encouraged to participate in various sports because they need to keep fit even more than the able persons in order to achieve high quality of life. The activities will occupy them, thereby making them to think less about their disability, afford them the opportunity to have proper bodily development and growth that would be useful through out their life time. It will make them utmost feeling of being accepted in the society.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the above discussion, the following recommendations are put forward:

- i. All physically challenged should be encouraged to participate in one form of sports or the other in order to enhance their health and well-being.
- ii. Sports facilities and equipment should be provided at various levels as this will enable the physically challenged to participate freely in sports.
- iii. Varieties of activities should be provided for the physically challenged in promoting both physical, mental, social and emotional health of the disabled through a well designed programme of sporting activities that will facilitate such promotions.

- iv. Proper medical guidelines should equally be put together to safe guard the lives of the disabled against preventable risk and to protect the coach from unnecessary tort liability.
- v. There should be proper training and orientation of personnel that will handle the handicapped in varieties of sports. This will pave way for the disabled when mentally fatigued from long concentrated office work
- vi. Government at all level (local, state or federal) should provide adequate sporting facilities and equipment with modifications to suit specific or each handicapped condition.

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