

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF INTRAMURAL SPORTS CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF QOM, IRAN

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to evaluate the social benefits of participating in intramural sports activities for the students of Qom University. 230 students, including 156 males and 76 females, answered questions of the questionnaire (Artinger *et al.*, 2006) which consisted of two parts of demographic features and benefits obtained from participating in intramural sports. The independent t-test results showed that there was a significant difference between males and females regarding social benefits in the areas of social group bonding and personal benefits. The results also showed that there was no significant difference in social benefits of intramural sports between competitive and recreational sports, and between individual and team sports. However, there was a significant difference in the area of social group bonding between individual and team sports. The mean score of perceived social benefits of participation in intramural sports was at the average level for all the participants. It seems that by improving the quality and diversity of intramural sports, the level of perceived social benefits of participants can be raised.

Keywords: *Social Benefits, Intramural Sports, Students, Qom*

INTRODUCTION

Playing sports is one of the phenomena and human social activities that can be used in every culture and society as a means of bringing people together. For many people, sports are used as a tool and an incentive to join a group and to satisfy a sense of belonging. Although the role of sports in promoting health and wellness is important for many people, at the same time, for many of them, it is internally associated with their identity and self-concept (Allen *et al.*, 2010). The public health of society is essentially related to social, structural and physical environments which can affect hygiene, health and participation of members of society and organizations in various processes such as research and development. The role of sports in public health from the social aspects has not been well studied. It has mostly been considered in isolation and in the field of personal health (Edwards, 2015). One of the challenges of different societies is lack of sufficient social dynamism and poor social relationships which are against human social nature. One of the most important and the most significant factors in socialization process is the growth and personality development of individuals in a society. In this regard, one of the tools and methods that can encourage and promote personality growth is to get involved in sports and regular physical activities (Gatab & Pirhayti, 2012). Socialization process can take place through participation in sports activities because they can provide an environment similar to personal and social life. Moreover, sports provide a learning environment and an opportunity to help people experience competition, cooperation and compliance with laws and regulations (Shariff & Mustapha, 2010). Sports programs can provide an active and social atmosphere for individuals and groups with different interests and tastes in different social and cultural fields so that they can come together, interact and improve their sense of community (Sherry *et al.*, 2015). There is ample evidence that confirm the role of sports in promoting self-confidence, individual efficacy and perception of high quality of life for people with impairments and physical disabilities. Moreover, when the components of health promotion and social integration are combined, they will have the ability to improve the lives of people participating in exercise programs (Blauwet & Willick, 2012).

In the context of social change, the field of sports represents a subset of sports development, in which sports is considered a facilitator of developing social capacity and creating a healthy society, physically and socially. Iso-Ahola (1980), one of the pioneers in this field, views socialization through intramural sports as a process through which individuals acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills

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and motives about leisure. In the early 21st century, this notion that sports projects can be used as a strategy to create positive social changes seemed hard to reach. Nevertheless, this field began to grow in research areas, which has received more attention in universities as special social and cultural environments (Sherry *et al.*, 2015). By finishing high school and entering university, students' behaviors continue to change. High school students may feel lonely and isolated when entering university because they do not have the support of their peers any longer. Physical activities often involve a sense of connection with others. Although students have different levels of needs, but sports and physical activities can help improve students' adaptation through making connections. University sports can help students solve their emotional challenges during their life and development stages. Positive and good use of sports and physical activity can be helpful in building teamwork and self-esteem (Miller, 2015). Playing sports is considered an important factor in boosting physical self-esteem, and improving the quality of life among youth and students (Joseph *et al.*, 2014). It is one of the best opportunities through which students can learn positive social behaviors. Recreational and intramural sports provide the best opportunities in universities to achieve such goal. Academic environments heavily emphasize awareness of "social norms" associated with physical activities (Teleman *et al.*, 2015). Lv & Takami findings (2015) showed that doing sports and physical activities facilitates the learning process and improves students' social skills.

Astin (1984) believed that the more students are involved in educational and intramural activities, the more they experience growth and development in their social behaviors. According to this theory, high participation in sporting activities will contribute to the development of social feelings (Astin, 1984). There is also a long-standing belief that young people can gain valuable experiences such as learning rules and regulations, perseverance, courage and responsibility through games and sports (Salamuddin & Harun, 2010).

Sports sociologists are keen to understand the role of doing sports in positive personal growth and life skills of people. Motivational atmosphere obtained from sports participation increased by coaches and teammates can be an important factor in the development and growth of perceived social benefits gained from sports participation (Gould *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, because of the multiple roles and functions of sports in the socialization process of individuals, different researches in this area have obtained different results.

A study conducted on 14 databases related to social and psychological benefits obtained from people's participation in sports activities showed: Various social and psychological benefits were reported in these researches, including the fact that team sports, due to their social nature, played a more important role and affected the socialization process of participants more significantly (Eime *et al.*, 2013). Devecioglu *et al.*, (2012) in their study on the benefits of intramural sports, found that there is a significant difference in levels of socialization between team sports and individual sports. The socialization level was higher among the participants in team sports. There was not a significance difference between males and females regarding the levels of socialization. In this study, the gender variable did not result in significant changes in the amount of social benefits perceived by the participants (Devecioglu *et al.*, 2012). Artinger *et al.*, (2006) reported that gender, type of residence and activity level (competitive and non-competitive) affect the social benefits of the intramural sports. According to Artinger *et al.*, (2006) intramural sports programs should be consistent with the objectives of the institution and the role of these activities in students' social development should be taken into account. Many studies have been done on the intramural sports programs in Iran. However, University of Qom, despite its special educational environment, has not been studied yet. One of the characteristics of this university as an Islamic university in Iran is the separation of girls from boys in all educational environments, especially in sporting activities. This research aims to compare the social benefits of participating in intramural sporting activities between male and female students and between those living on campus and those living off campus.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

In order to collect the required data for this study, 230 students who had enrolled in the intramural sports programs were selected. Data collection tool was a two-part questionnaire. The first part

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included questions about social benefits of participating in intramural activities (Artinger *et al.*, 2006). This section consisted of four areas including “university integration”, “personal social benefits”, “cultural social benefits” and “social group bonding” which were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one to five. The second part of the questionnaire included demographic characteristics of the participants, such as gender, age, year in school, residence status, intramural sports activities in terms of individual or team and recreational or competitive nature of intramural sporting activities. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was calculated 0.83 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of study included the analysis of 230 returned questionnaires whose questions had been completely answered. The results showed that the number of participants in this study included 156 males (67.8%) and 74 females (32.2%). The number and age of the respondents were as follows: three percent (7) of respondents were 18 years old, 19.6% (45) were 19 years old, 25.7% (59) were 20, 14.3% (33) were aged 21 years, 20.4% (47) were 22 years old, and 17% (39) were aged 23 and more. 26 (11.3%), 78 (33.9%), 6 (2.6%) and 119 (51.8%) participating students were first-, second-, third- and fourth- year students respectively. One hundred ninety students (82.6 %) lived on campus and 39 students (17%) lived off campus. Sixty-eight students (29.6%) participated in competitive sports and the remaining 143 students (62.2%) were involved in recreational sports.

An independent sample t-test was used to examine the differences between males and females, students living on campus and off campus, participants in competitive activities and recreational activities and individual sports and team sports.

The total mean score of perceived social benefits was (79.37) and (82.15) for male and female students respectively. The independent t-test results showed that there was a significant difference between males and females on the social benefits of participating in intramural sports and in the two areas of personal benefits and social group bonding. Moreover, independent t-test showed that generally there was no significant difference between students residing on campus and those residing off campus.

However, this difference was significant in the area of university integration. The results showed that there was no significant difference in social benefits between students participating in competitive activities and those participating in recreational activities. The results also indicated that there was no significant difference between participants in individual and team sports, but this difference was significant in the area of social group bonding (Table 1).

Table 1: Differences between Groups in Perceived Social Benefits on the Basis of Gender, Residence, Type of Intramural Sporting Activities

| | Degree of freedom | t | Significance | Male | Female |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Social Benefits | 227 | -65/1 | 04/0 | 37/79 | 15/82 |
| Individual | 228 | -25/2 | 02/0 | 79/18 | 77/19 |
| Social Group Bonding | 228 | -93/1 | 05/0 | 90/19 | 65/20 |
| | | | | On campus | Off campus |
| Social Benefits | 227 | 34/1 | 12/0 | 73/80 | 38/78 |
| Integration | 227 | 82/2 | 00/0 | 06/14 | 77/12 |
| | | | | Competitive | Recreational |
| Social Benefits | 209 | 74/1 | 08/0 | 24/80 | 10/83 |
| | | | | Individual | Team |
| Social Benefits | 146 | -26/1 | 20/0 | 05/79 | 14/81 |
| Social Group Bonding | 146 | -51/2 | 01/0 | 60/19 | 69/20 |

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In another part of the data analysis, the total score (165) of social benefits perceived by participants was classified in 3 levels: low (1-55), moderate (56-110) and high (111-165). The results demonstrated that the mean score of perceived social benefits for all participants was moderate. (Table 2)

Table 2: The Level of Social Benefits Perceived by Participants

| Level of Social Benefits | Low 1-55 | Moderate 56-110 | High 111-165 |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Number | 4 | 226 | 0 |
| Percentage | 7/1% | 3/98% | 0% |

Discussion

This study was conducted to assess the social benefits of undergraduate students participating in intramural sports in the University of Qom. The research questions being answered showed that generally there is a difference between males and females participating in intramural sports in terms of perceived social benefits in the areas of personal benefits and social group bonding. Unlike the results of the present study, in the research done by Devecioglu (2012), gender variable had no effect on the social benefits perceived by participants. This difference may be due to the cultural differences between the two studied populations, i.e. Iran and Turkey. It seems that intramural sports in the especial environment of the University of Qom, affected female students more positively considering the higher average achieved on the social benefits mentioned above. It seems that because the intramural sports activities suited their taste, the female students gained more social benefits from such programs compared to the male students. However, considering the average score of all students, intramural sports planners of the University of Qom are facing a challenge to improve the above programs. Diversifying programs and improving their quality and quantity may be effective in increasing the social benefits achieved by participation in these programs. Another part of the results showed that there was no difference between students residing on campus and off campus. According to Artinger (2006), university students who are residing in the campus benefited more from social benefits of intramural sports programs compared with those students who resided outside. The results of this study, however, did not show such an outcome in this area. It seems that spaces and sports facilities as well as sports and recreational programs outside the university had no significant difference in terms of level and quality with intramural sports programs within the university.

The results of this study suggest that competitive and recreational activities make no difference in achieving social benefits obtained from intramural sports. The social benefits probably do not depend on the type of intramural activities participants are involved in. In fact, it can be said that these benefits can be achieved through any type of sporting activities. This allows managers to offer a wide variety of activities in the planning and implementation of intramural activities regardless of how competitive they are. Our results showed that although in general no difference was observed between individuals participating in individual and team activities in terms of social benefits, a significant difference was found in the area of social group bonding. As expected, team sports activities had a higher mean in the area of social group bonding and according to the findings of Devecioglu *et al.*, (2012) it seems that the socialization level was more in team activities compared with individual activities. When people participate in team sports, socialization process is facilitated among them because in team sports, the team's success depends on cooperation, coordination, teamwork and participation of all team members which is an important factor in the process of obtaining social benefits of participation in sports.

The mean score of students for the social benefits shows that the majority of students experienced an average level of social benefits of participating in intramural sports activities and none of them was at a high level. It seems that in the intramural programs of this university, social needs of students have not received enough attention and the offered programs have failed, in terms of quality and quantity, to yield the expected results in obtaining the social benefits for students. Weaknesses in the design and implementation of programs and intramural activities in which social aspects of sports participation is considered, is another challenge for planning intramural activities. The social aspects

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of these activates have not been taken into consideration sufficiently because programs are performed routinely without much attention. It seems reassessing the programs as well as asking for students' views on their areas of interest and improving facilities in order to diversify activities and paying attention to team sports can be effective in this regard. Finding ways through which socialization process is taken into account in sports and combining sporting activities with other intramural activities can be an important step in improving the social benefits of intramural programs.

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