

Relevance of Physical Activity in the Treatment and Prevention of Mild and Severe Mental Health Problems

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Received 11 February 2014; accepted 29 April 2014

Published online 26 May 2014

Abstract

Mental illness whether mild or severe is a serious psychological health related problem which must be given great attention in our society today. That the accumulation of some of these psychosomatic disturbances such as stress, anxiety, depression, phobia, emotional problems and mild mental illness must have resulted to these mental health. In order to reduce, prevent and treat these mental disorders physical activity is a necessary antidote. Therefore, successful participation in exercise programmes can lead to improvement in mood and ability to deal with these emotional deviations. Emotional bottled up can cause aggravated mental ill-health. Regular exercises particularly on recreational basis can take care of all these steps towards the achievement of a good mental health.

Key words: Physical activity; Mental health

Edim, M. E., & Ekuri, P. E. (2014). Relevance of Physical Activity in the Treatment and Prevention of Mild and Severe Mental Health Problems. *Studies in Sociology of Science*, 5(2), 135-137. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sss/article/view/4442> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4442>

INTRODUCTION

Participation in physical activities alone is not a panacea to the attainment of high level health, but combined with other factors which affect health can elevate health for normal individuals. Its values are varied depending on individual needs. For one individual, mental health contribution may be of the greatest value, and to another,

physical or social health may be important (Fatiregun & Bello, 2011). This paper therefore tries to examine the relevance of physical activity in the treatment and prevention of mild and severe mental health problems.

Bababola (1998), expressed that regular physical activity, fitness and exercise are critically important for the health and well-being of people of all conditions and ages. Research has demonstrated that virtually all individuals can benefit from regular physical activity, whether they participate in vigorous exercise or in some type of moderate health-enhancing activity. He further stated that even among frail and very old adults, mobility and functioning can be improved through physical activity.

Therefore, physical fitness should be a priority for all especially among Nigerians of all categories. Regular physical exercises have been shown to reduce the morbidity and mortality rate from many chronic diseases including mental and emotional disorders. According to Butler, Davis and Lewis (1998), millions of Americans suffer from chronic illness that can be prevented or improved through regular physical exercises. It is important to note that people who suffer from mental or psychological problems could also prevent or improve their health conditions through regular physical activities or recreational exercises.

There is a consensus that physical activity, physical fitness and recreational activities or exercises are reciprocally related and that they exert independent effects on the health of an individual. This implies that people need to be physically active even if they have reasonable levels of fitness. That individual with low levels of fitness can also obtain health benefits by remaining physically active (Corbin, 2001). Some factors that may influence fitness are out of a person's control such as genetics and rate of maturation. Therefore, the emphasis should be placed on being physically active so that you can be mentally fit and healthy for the growth and development of the society.

1. RELEVANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE TREATMENT AND PREVENTION OF MILD AND SEVERE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Many Nigerians today are subjected to so much stress generated both internally and externally that they need an avenue for a kind of release of the mental tension which physical activity or recreation offers. According to Udoh and Ajala (2001) self-gratification and self-esteem are important, and mental health needs the satisfaction of which the pleasant emotions which accompany them can be improved by worthwhile recreational activities. Some Nigerians probably derive some measure of self-gratification and self-esteem from their paid jobs but there are so many people who, for several reasons do find in their jobs mere drudgery and therefore derive no joy in it. This lack of job satisfaction does affect the moral and productivity, and more importantly the mental health status of these people.

To add to that, the dissatisfaction in job for various reasons, the current political, economic stringency and the uncertainty of the future with regards to the present hardships and insecurity in the nation as a result of kidnappers, “Boko Haram” Area Boys and Militants, the mind is bound to be burdened more than ever before. It is therefore necessary to find satisfactory means of defusing the pent up stress which could spell some disaster if allowed to become chronically stable at the first level of mental disorganization, (Hockey, 1993). The mind must be freed through engaging in physical activities during ones leisure time when stress affects behavior most. This can be traced back to the Holy Bible in 1st Samuel, Chapter 16, verses 14–23 when David plays the harp to stop the madness or mental disorder affecting Saul the King of Israel at that time. Playing of the harp in this context is a form of physical activity which helped to soothe King Saul’s melancholy.

2. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENTS

Otinwa (2005) opined that a well-planned and selected physical activity programme often results in satisfaction of basic needs such as activity needs, need for self-actualization, achievement needs and also for recognition of one’s performance. These recognitions could be possible if utilized as an added advantage event at an individual’s place of work.

Some leisure or physical activities constitute worthy means of creative self-experience for example the creative arts. Good use of physical activity time certainly may offer good means of escape from boredom, re-orientation of values and in many cases highly psychologically rewarding (Aushel, 1990). However, a need may

arise to know that basic satisfactions are possible in planned leisure activities. For example one may prefer the satisfaction of an exhaustive jog to the lazy-drone satisfaction of nibbling and constant taking of naps or sitting relaxed to watch other people perform.

Even when human beings are faced with worst economic problems such as retrenchment or low wages, it is certain that only at their free moment, that is leisure time that they experience some reasonable degree of relaxation and its attendant reduction in tension and anxieties. This is the best possible period of engagement in physical or recreational activities.

Ama (1999) explained that the acquisition of the habit of participation in leisure or recreational activities can help one to overcome the numerous tensions and stressors of job insecurity, inflation rush-hour madness and anxiety related confusion. That adequate utilization of one’s leisure time with intelligently choice chosen physical activities that are highly rewarding brings about sound mental health. Aushel (1999) is of the view that recreational or physical exercises provide safe channels to re-direct excess energy for gainful employment while varied interests add zest to life.

Ama (1999) summarized the psychological benefits accruable from the effective participation in leisure hour’s activities to include:

- a. Relaxation of the mind,
- b. Improvement of mental tone of the individual and
- c. Maintenance of sound mental health

An interesting leisure time activity like games, takes the mind off oneself and concentrate on outward interests that is entertaining and rewarding. This explains why a healthful game or hobby is most valuable as a leisure time activity. This period also permits the release of pent-up emotions and provider for self-expression. It is also a means of gaining new experiences and recognition through active participation in physical activity. The period helps in developing confidence and obtaining joy and satisfaction that comes from a successful completed task of physical activity (Edim & Umoinyang, 2011).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the researchers identified some positive means towards better development of mental health to include, broadening of one’s interests; setting suitable goals and persistently striving towards them; building emotional stability, improving skills in human relation and accepting limitations that cannot be changed.

It is therefore recommended that:

- a. Regular physical activities or exercise particularly on recreational basis can take care of all of these steps towards the achievement of a good quality of life and mental health.

- b. The Nigerian philosophy which drives towards the

attainment of health for all by the Year 20:20:20 can only be achieved through the provision of recreational facilities and equipment to cater for all categories of people should be put in place for such purposes.

c. Medical check-up of the cardio muscular system before embarking on any form of physical activity is necessary.

d. There is need to determine the exertion level of physical exercise to be embarked upon. That is because there are some physical activities that can become stressful.

e. Avoid engaging in competitive exercises or sports as a means of controlling mild or severe mental health problem.

f. Finally, consultation of a fitness specialist or an exercise physiologist should be taken seriously.

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