

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AS A PANACEA TO HEALTHY AGEING BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

People's participation in physical activities is gradually decreasing, potentially due to the global economic recession. People do not generally see the benefits associated with participation in physical fitness but rather believe there is no need to develop anxiety where there is none. Based on this premise, the purpose of this paper is to emphasize the advantages of physical activities which include healthy ageing among individuals living with disabilities, with the ultimate goal of motivating them to participating in physical activities. The paper explores various physical activities that individuals with disabilities can engage in and the advantages they can reap from therein. The paper concluded that physical activities are essential to human existence and, consequently, to individuals living with disabilities. Therefore, the paper recommended that individuals living with disabilities should always find time to participate in physical activities, as their nature may require them to remain stationary for extended periods as well as encourage healthy ageing among them.

Key Words: Accident, Malformation, Wheel-Chair, Correctional, Developmental

Introduction

Ageing generally presents unique challenges for the aged and those growing old, most especially among persons with disabilities due to their nature. Individuals with disabilities, who face various challenges, may require assistance from others in their daily activities. According to Ocloo et al. in Oyeniyi et al. (2019), disability refers to a complete or partial loss of behavior, mental, physical, or sensory functioning, which can be caused by diseases, malformations, accidents, or hereditary factors. Therefore, persons with disabilities are individuals living with one form of deformity or another, which may include orthopaedic or physical deviation, mental retardation, emotional or behavioral disorder, intellectual impairment, visual impairment, auditory impairment, speech impairment, and health impairment. According to WHO (2022), an estimated 1.3 billion people worldwide experience significant

disability, accounting for 16% of the global population or 1 out of every 6 individuals.

Researchers have discovered that physical activity is essential to human survival and existence. Physical activity, an important aspect of physical education, is crucial to human existence and serves as a means to reduce obesity and sudden death associated with inactivity (Oyeniyi, 2018). It is also an aspect of human life that helps in keeping an individual in good shape. It is important to understand that man, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, cannot exist without engaging in physical activities, as these activities form the foundation of every individual's life. In fact, these activities occur in every individual's daily tasks and even predate human existence, as the spermatozoan that fertilizes the egg undergoes a number of physical activities prior to fertilization. The spermatozoan engaged in numerous physical activities such as running and

swimming before finally making contact with the egg in the fallopian tube's ampulla. It is also important to note that the human activities between a man and a woman, which ultimately lead to conception, involve numerous physical activities. Based on this premise, individuals, regardless of their disability, should consistently engage in some form of physical activity.

However, the current global economic situation has left many individuals without access to adequate nutrition, leading them to forego participating in physical activities. Individuals, particularly those with disabilities, have seen the detrimental effects of this life of inactivity, as it can lead to degenerative diseases like obesity, cancer, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, among others. Individuals with disabilities, due to their inherent nature and sedentary lifestyle, may be susceptible to these hypokinetic diseases. Torabi and Luegers (2010) posited that physical activity is a vital component of maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle regardless of age and ability. According to Oyeniyi (2016), physical activity is an important aspect of human life that helps in keeping an individual in good shape and good form for healthy living. He stated further that, to keep the body and soul on the same pedestal and live an active life, there is a need for every individual, whether persons with disability or without disability, to take part in regular physical activities to promote healthy living. Adegun (2005) asserts that both males and females naturally engage in physical activities, meeting the demands of daily life through occupation and maintaining a healthy body-soul connection. He stated further that the biological and social nature of human beings make it mandatory for mankind to engage in one form of physical activity or the other from birth to death. Regular exercises continue to be an important behavior in promoting,

postponing, or preventing the prevalence of neuromuscular disorders such as mechanical back pain, neck and shoulder pain, and in reducing the risk of developing coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, and column cancer (Vuori, 1995; Jones, Ainsworth & Croft, 1998).

Place of Physical Activities in the Life of Persons Living with Disabilities

The roles of physical activities in the lives of persons living with disabilities cannot be over emphasized because they are sine qua non to the development of every individual, which may include but are not limited to the following:

1. improved physical function and mobility
2. enhances mental health and reduces stress
3. encourages social interaction and community development
4. helps manage degenerative diseases.
5. improves cognitive function
6. promotes self-esteem
7. instill self-confidence

1. Improvement Physical Function and Mobility

Engaging in physical activity can help individuals with disabilities enhance their ability to move from one place to another. Physical activity avails every participant the great opportunity of moving the body or any part of the body either through locomotor or non locomotor movements, most especially individuals living with disabilities that are confined to static positions. It also serves as a form of mobility for individuals living sedentary lives. Participation in regular physical activities can also help in preventing regular falls associated with the elderly and persons with disabilities.

2. Enhances Mental Health and Reduces Stress

Participation in physical activities enables one to be free from unnecessary stress associated with inactivity. Engaging in a variety of activities reduces unnecessary thinking, which can potentially lead to suicide or other negative mental activities in individuals with disabilities who become disabled later in life. Every individual, including exceptional persons, benefits from constant physical activity as it produces endorphins in the brain, known to promote feelings of well-being. Researchers have also established that regular physical activities can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, potentially preventing suicide. Torabi and Luegers (2010) assert that clinical settings employ physical activity to manage nervous tension. They also observed that, following an exercise session, clinicians had seen a significant decrease in the electrical activity of tensed muscle fibers. They further proposed that participants may experience reduced jitteriness or less hyperactivity after engaging in physical activity. Chin-hug and Hsiu-Lin (2010) proposed that engaging in physical activity is a healthy habit that can alleviate feelings of fatigue and low energy. Regular physical activity, fitness, and exercise are critically important for the health and well-being of people of all ages, which is also essential to aid growth in adolescents (Olubayo-Fatiregun, 2010).

3. Encourages Social Interaction and Community Development

Involvement in physical activity by persons with disabilities enables participants to come in contact with other people from other spheres of life, either with disabilities or without. At this level, there is usually a cross-fertilization of ideas that could solve issues that may result in sudden death or a suicide mission.

4. Helps manage degenerative diseases.

People with disabilities can manage degenerative diseases through well-managed and prescribed physical activity. Physical activities such as walking, jogging, running, arm twisting, and swinging can help reduce tension and prevent participants from suffering from various degenerative diseases such as peptic ulcer, stroke, hypertension, among others.

5. Improves Cognitive Function

Participation in physical activity helps proper functioning of the brain. It has been established that many physical activities help in developing the brain because participants have always been performing better in academic activities after participating in such exercises. There are many physical activities that can be used to teach rudimentary aspects of mathematics like multiplications for example “ten ten” or singing games like two one two and others.

Physical Activities that can be done by Persons Living with Disabilities

There are varieties of physical activities that can be done by persons with disabilities depending on the age and nature of disabilities. The activities may include adaptive sports, developmental sports, correctional sports, cycling and hand-cycling, chair yoga, accessible fitness classes, walking and hiking with assistive devices, swimming, and water-based activities.

1. Adaptive Sport

These are sporting activities that are worked out from the regular programme to encourage the participation of individuals living with disabilities. The activities are adapted to the individual needs of persons with disabilities. For example, wheelchair volleyball, badminton, or tennis. In this form of activity, the participants are allowed to use their equipment, such as the wheelchair.

2. Developmental Sports

This has to do with activities that are done to work on certain parts of the body of person with disability that need to be repaired. For example, an individual that has an accident and has a fracture that has been rehabilitated but needs to be brought back to near normal will have to undergo a developmental programme to restore it to near normal, if not normal.

3. Correctional Sports

These are sporting activities that are done to make corrections to any part of the body that is suffering from deformity. For example, an individual with a flat foot can be asked to constantly walk on a pipe to rectify such deformity as a form of exercise to correct the deformity.

Barriers to Physical Activities by Persons Living with Disabilities

There are many barriers that can debar persons with disabilities from participating in physical activities which may include any of the following:

- vii. Lack of Facilities
- viii. Poor Transportation
- ix. Social Stigma and Discrimination
- x. Financial Problem
- xi. Lack of Significant Other's Support
- xii. Lack of Trained Personnel

Strategies to Promoting Physical Activities among Persons with Disabilities

- iii. Provision of Inclusive Facilities
- iv. Accessible Infrastructural Development
- v. Training of Instructional Personnel/ Caregivers
- vi. Support from significant others
- vii. Provision of Technology-Based Exercise

Conclusion and Recommendations

Physical activities have been discovered to be *sin-qua-non* to human

existence whether an individual is living with disability or not. It is therefore pertinent to state that individuals living with disability need it more because of their nature, which may compel them to be on the same spot for a long period. Generally speaking, physical activity is essential for healthy ageing, which makes it mandatory for persons with disabilities to always find time to partake in any of the suggested physical activities for healthy ageing.

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