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Socioeconomic status and participation in sports: A review of literature

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Abstract

Social and economic status of an individual has great impact on sports activities of students at different levels of education. Concepts and theories that connect Socioeconomic Status (SES) and sports activities of students studying at University level will help the strategists to plan well for the future of sports enthusiasts, universities and for the nation too. There have been numerous studies carried out by several researchers across the world to help policy makers. There are various factors that impact the participation in sports by people of younger generation. The SES and the interest in sports and participation in sports across the world provides opportunity to understand various strategies adopted by governments and sports clubs to attract the younger generation to actively participate in sports. This research paper has tried to capture the work of research scholars across the world, from different countries, who have been actively contributing towards understanding of SES factors and participation in sports.

Keywords: Socio-economic status, sports participation, sports club, sports policy, socio-demographic factors

Introduction

Socioeconomics is the study of impact of economics on the social fabric of the nation. Social fabric here means 'Society' and 'Social Values'. Social economics is an alternative term used for socioeconomics. Editor ^[9] of a health website 'www.pdhpe.net' explains about the three main factors that impact social status are employment, education, and income. When a person can afford to become a doctor and then a surgeon, then he is able to earn a large income being in that position, which will help him to maintain a good social status. He checks that his children ends up getting a good employment, good income, good societal status and so on. Bruna *et al.* ^[4] have suggested different indicators of Socioeconomic Position (SEP). SEP indicators mentioned by authors are education, housing conditions and income. Education is a very indicator of SEP. It captures academic assets of an individual. It is usually captured as a continuous variable in terms of number of years spent for education or as a categorical variable in terms of category of education like school level, degree level, master's level, or doctorate level. Education captures very well the smooth process of socioeconomic change from being dependent on parents' socioeconomic position to his own socioeconomic position when he starts funding his own education while learning during his mid-life situation. As the current education system is lifelong learning process, during formative years an individual's education is funded by socioeconomic position of parents. Education in later years depends on an individual's own employment and income status. The academic assets, materialistic assets, and other assets which he owns is a result of parents SEP in initial years and his own SEP in later years during employment and post-retirement.

Housing condition is another indicator of SEP of an individual. Housing condition is whether an individual owns a house or lives in a rented house. Household materialistic assets he owns is a feature of household condition. It comprises of all the assets a person holds like vehicle, hot-water geyser facility, number of bathrooms and toilets, washing machine, mobile phone, telephone, refrigerator. Housing condition also considers number of members in a family and number of members per rooms available in a house are SEP indicators too. Income is one more indicator of SEP of an individual. It is a direct indicator that helps in identifying the housing conditions and the education status of an individual.

Socioeconomic Status (SES) is another term used as an alternate to SEP. Villalba ^[21] defines SES as the social and economic status of an individual or a group which can be a household. Cowan ^[8] and Baker ^[2] define SES with respect to health, occupation, income and education. Author defines SES as sum total of social and economic status of an individual which has a bearing on individual's health. This research work reinforces the fact that SES can be measured using constructs like occupation, income, and education. Author further states that these three have a bearing on health conditions of an individual. Based on SES of individuals, their capacity to buy resources related to health differs. Finally, author also says that it could be possible that health is deciding SES. Author argues that less healthy people work less, so earn less. This impacts an individual's SES.

As per American Psychological Association (APA) ^[1] SES is not only about income of a person but encompasses an individual's financial position, educational status, and the social status in the society. SES affects physical as well as the academic performance of an individual. If SES is low, then it correlates with the lower income levels leading to lower academic performance due to lower cognitive development and then leading to lower economic status of children of next generation. Low SES also affects the physical wellbeing of an individual.

This paper has discussed the literature related to the studies done on various factors of SES and their impact on sports. The literature survey is also done to understand various studies carried out by researchers in different parts of the world on SES and sports.

Factors of SES and sports

SES affects physical activities like sports. Several variables of SES influence participation of young population in sports activities. Variables like neighbourhood, household, parental income, parental education, location of residence from the point of access to sports and others. Several authors have worked on different aspects of SES and its influence on participation of students in sports.

Eime *et al.* ^[17] have studied whether the remoteness of the location and SES of an individual has an impact on the participation level in the physical activity. They have defined participation level in physical activity in various categories: first category based on whether they participated in any physical activity, second category being frequency of participation as in whether less than 12 times in a year or greater than or equal to 12 times in a year. They have finally concluded with an interesting observation. Remoteness of location or SES does not have an impact on the physical activity. Farther the location, greater will be participation in physical activity. This is an interesting observation because general perception is exactly opposite of this finding. People tend to believe that if someone is in a remote area, it would probably be difficult for that individual to actively participate in any physical activity especially in team sports. Physical activity decreased only in certain categories of sports with increase in remoteness of location and lower SES.

BBC ^[3] web-source discusses different factors that influence the sports participation in its detailed article. The factors which the article considers are age, disability, economic status, cost of access to sports, gender, ethnicity, family, religion, and group of friends.

Age: Children who gain motor skills at an early age develop interest in sports. As they turn into adolescents the interest in

sports depends on various other factors like confidence, personality development and image building skills. Once they grow old, body weight provides resistance to take active part in sports. They lose the flexibility to stretch, and the strength required to be active participant in sports.

Disability: Disability and sports participation is highly influenced by the parents' education and interest levels. If there is enough motivation from parents towards participation in sports by any disabled kids, they tend to perform better in sports. The motive to excel is found to be high with disabled kids.

Gender: Women display less interest in sports participation than men due to several health issues which can act as barrier to interest in sports.

Cost: Cost of getting access to sports facilities is very high. Low SES people cannot afford to get access to facilities and these results into less participation in sports. High SES facilitates participation in sports. Access to facilities is first barrier and if there is access to facilities, then affordability is the next barrier which declines the interest level in participation in sports.

Family: Family plays an important role in motivating students to participate in sports by creating a conducive environment in household and by providing necessary moral and financial support when required.

Howie *et al.* ^[10] have conducted extensive literature review studying 111 research works related to the studies involving youth sport and the influence of family and peers in participation in youth sports. All the articles were grouped into 8 categories: a) reasons for participation in youth sport by adolescents; b) social norms that exist; c) achievement goal theory; d) structure of the family; e) family members and their participation in youth sports; f) support from parents and the barriers they have to break; g) value of peer groups; h) influence of peers and teammates.

Country-wise studies on SES and sports

Carlijn *et al.* ^[6] have studied the impact of neighborhood of an individual like whether the person is living in a safe or a dangerous neighborhood, household environment such as availability of necessary material for living, in participation of sports, using advanced analytical tool like multilevel logistic regression. They have studied the population aged between 25 to 75 year in Eindhoven, one of the largest cities of Netherlands. They have considered 213 neighborhoods with a target of 4785 residents as respondents. They have concluded that inequality in participation of sports by people is due to reasons like conducive or non-conductive neighborhood or household environment where that individual grows up. Eime *et al.* ^[18] have studied the influence of different demographic factors on the sports activity in all the geographical regions of Australia. The study has also studied the influence of access to sports facilities on the participation rates in sports activities. This has helped in policy decisions related to investment in sports facilities in different regions of Australia by the government. They have found that there is higher participation rate in non-metropolitan cities than metropolitan cities though various factors of socio-economic status complicated the problem.

Elmagd *et al.* ^[15] have studied the impact of SES on the barriers of participation in sports by students pursuing higher

education in United Arab Emirates (UAE) including non-participants in sports. They have mainly considered the three aspects of SES: income of the family, education level of parents and occupation of parents. They have studied how these three aspects of SES influence the perception amongst participants and non-participants in sports about the barriers in participating in sports. They have found that there is high number of female students as non-participants in sports. The research has found that in case of low education level of parents, then there is high chance that the peer pressure acts as significant barrier to participation in sports. The interesting result of the research is that the students with parents having high education levels and high levels of income were having lack of interest as biggest barrier to participate in sports. Girish *et al.* [11] have studied how the sports facilities in England managed to perform during the recession and austerity period from 2005-2006 to 2015-2016. Most of the local sports facilities in England are dependent on the government funds and in the times of recession it becomes difficult to manage the sports facilities. The study conducted included 1116 sports facilities. The dimensions studied included a) access to sports facilities located locally; b) financial strategies adopted and financial position of sports facilities; c) utilization of sports facilities by the local users and finally d) customer satisfaction levels. The study has found the feasible model to develop the sports facilities is to outsource them to a third party and at the same time increase the fees of sports activities to develop the business. This model enabled to increase the customer satisfaction levels to as the outsourced party was providing better services. The sports centers were now more worried about attracting newer customers to increase the revenue of the sports facilities.

Chun *et al.* [20] have studied the impact of SES factors like education, income, and occupation on Koreans' interest level in participation in sports during their leisure time. Lo & Hsu [7] have considered to study the impact of program initiated by UN called "Healthy City" and "Healthy Community" to address the issues related to health like stress, blood pressure, hypertension, depression, obesity, and other health issues found in people residing in cities. Authors have studied the impact of leisure sports facilities on mental and physical health. They have used Contingent Valuation Method to study the impact. The study concluded that three points: i) health of residents can improve by introducing healthy city program; ii) health can improve through use of gym, participation in leisure sports and leisure activities and iii) different lifestyle and background decides the amount people are ready to pay for leisure sports.

C. B. Rajesh *et al.* [5] have studied the influence of SES and emotional intelligence on the performance of athletes in universities in Kerala state, India. The study included 211 female athletes who were part of track and field athletics. The study found that there is significant correlation between socio-economic status and emotional intelligence. The study concluded with an interesting insight that there is not so significant correlation between socio-economic status and the performance of the athletes in the state of Kerala, among the university students.

Pharr *et al.* [12] have conducted survey amongst physically active women in United States using Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data about their participation in different categories of sports. The study had categorized physical activity into a) sports; b) conditioning exercises; c) recreation and d) household tasks. They had listed down 76 different physical activities which were classified into these 4

categories. Women were from younger age group those who actively participated in sports. They were also found to be more employable and were mostly college going graduates. The study indicated that the results can be used to devise promotional strategies to encourage more women to actively participate in physical activities, especially in sports. Salonen [19] has conducted anonymous but extensive survey which included 1763 middle-aged mothers from economically well-to-do families where annual income was about 80000 Euros and the parents were spending around 1000 – 3000 Euros on getting their kid trained in figure skating which is an Olympic sport. Author found that the necessity of the study as the popularity among kids to learn figure skating in Finland is rising and the costs of learning too. They have found that membership fees of club training kids in figure skating have grown 2-3 folds in last decade make it one of the most expensive sports in Finland. Author was interested in knowing the socio-demographic background of families, socio-economic status of parents and the family life and their lifestyle to understand how the parents are able to break the barrier which is mostly money in order to make their kid learn figure skating. The study found that high cost of figure sporting keeps many children away from this sport while financially strong parents were not bothered about high expenses of figure skating if their child moved to higher level of training. They were not worried about spending their leisure time to check their child gets better training in figure skating.

Maisala-McDonnell & Heini [13] have studied the barriers faced by the immigrant girls participating in sports activities. The study was part of their doctoral research and FC Kontu, a local club was collaborator in this research study. FC Kontu wanted to understand the various barriers immigrant girls face. One of the biggest barriers the study found was religious beliefs of the immigrant parents that inhibited their female-child participate in sports while immigrant male child did not have any such barriers. While the non-immigrants and immigrant male child were successful in sports activities, the situation was not the same with immigrant female child. FC Kontu had to conduct this study to formulate strategies to facilitate and convince immigrant parents about the importance of female child participation in sports. As part of strategy, FC Kontu even designs hijab sports gear to convince the parents. It has planned a special summer camp for immigrant girl children and a football group too. Wicker *et al.* [16] has compared the well-being of elite athletes with young residents in the age group of 18-30. 709 athletes from German Sports Aid Foundation were part of the study along with 2455 young residents from the same geography. The study found that athletes fell behind young citizens in all aspects of well-being like health, family time, wealth, and leisure time. Authors have used regression analysis to compare the wellbeing of athletes with young residents and found that athletes need support and investment to improve upon their well-being.

Conclusion

Main factors of socio-economic Status are income, occupation, and education. Most of the studies that include socio-economic status involve these three components as base while branching out to have more related factors under their umbrella. There are many related factors that are considered in this study that were influencing the participation in sports by youth. There have been interesting and diverse studies conducted across different countries to understand which of

these socio-economic status factors influence the participation in sports. Various factors like family background, family income, immigrants' beliefs, aspirations of children, peer pressure, UN programs, recession, austerity measures, government policies, framing new policies related to sports, gender disparity, neighborhood, cost of access to sports facilities, access to sports facilities were studied by several research scholars to understand their influence on sports participation. This paper has tried to capture the work of several scholars to understand the influence of socio-economic status factors on sports participation.

Extensive literature review in the area could help to understand other socio-economic status factors from the countries which are not covered in this research paper. There is lot of scope for research in this area as studies can be done state-wise and at university levels too, as the factors might be quite different from the ones which are already covered by research scholars. Several interesting facts get revealed in the process which can help policy makers while framing the sports policies.

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