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## PROMOTING HEALTH THROUGH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND RECREATION

BY

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### Abstract

*The paper discussed promoting health through physical activity and recreation. It was observed that the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and other international organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO), have of recent embarked on a number of programmes towards attaining a high standard of health for all its citizenry. However, nothing seems to have been done with regards to using physical activity and recreation toward achieving this laudable goal of health for all. The paper further observed that physical activity and recreation, as a path way to attaining optimal health for all is yet to be understood and appreciated by Nigerians as many still die of such ailments as obesity, coronary heart diseases (CHD), asthma. Mild hypertension and morbidity problems which could be prevented through participation in regular physical and recreational activities. Established benefits of regular physical and recreational activities are so glaring that medical and physical education professionals are recommending it as a method of reducing stress, tension, mortality and morbidity in the case of coronary heart diseases (CHD) and obesity related diseases. In view of these, the paper recommends among others that the government should as a matter of urgency and priority, include physical activity and recreation in its programme of health for all. This could be done through a deliberate policy of promoting physical culture of sports, recreation and tourism, with the main goal being the improvement of health and the quality of life of the entire populace.*

### Introduction

The place of physical activity and recreation in promoting and maintaining good health can be better appreciated and justified where, Health is the state of complete, physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO 1964), this definition by the WHO, suggests that there is relative and optimal health; that a person may appear to be healthy but not healthy altogether. Some people may claim that they do not take part in regular

physical activity and recreation but are yet healthy. However, if they are forced by circumstance to run a short distance to catch a train or to rescue a child in danger, they begin to gasp for breath. They also suffer from muscular atrophy, over weight and other inexplicable aches. Many other complains such as low back pain, flabby heart, high blood pressure, inability to reduce Stress and tension are not easily yconnected with regular participation in physical activity and recreation. Though the incidence of chronic diseases such as excessive weight, coronary health diseases diabetes, asthmas and many others in Nigeria have always been under estimated, nevertheless, the level is high enough to necessitate some form of action to curtail the problems. The effect of the present economic erunch, the devaluation of the naira and the high rate of bation on many homes have equally affected the quality and quantity of their nutrition, and increased stress on families, Consequently, the individual must take some deliberate measure to improve, preserve and maintain their health through regular participation in physical and recreational activities.

### **Physical Activity and Recreational: A Pathway to Physical Fitness and Health**

Bucher (1979), state that the way each human being lives will be a major determining factor for the health and fitness of the individual. According to him, although heredity plays a part, to a large degree, health and fitness are acquired characteristics. He observe that, the food that is eaten, the amount of rest obtained, physical activity engaged in, and other health practices that are followed play important roles in determining human well-being. In line with this, it could be said that, the amount of physical and recreational activities engaged in by an individual is proportional to the health and physical fitness of that individual.

Nwegbu (1978), in defining physical fitness, state thata person is functionally physically fit, if he possesses the ability to carry out his daily tasks without undue fatigue and still has an ample reserve energy to enjoy leisure time, (recreational) activities and meet unforeseen emergencies. The pathway to attaining this state of physical fitness as defined by Nwegbu (1978), is through participation in physical and recreational activities. Unfortunately, many people do not recognize the need for physical fitness and health, until cholesterol deposits have closed their arteries, ulcers have penetrated their duodenum and cancer has started its insidious attack on their lungs.

Physical fitness, according to Bucher (1979), embraces the ability of a person to live a full and balanced existence. He said that, a totally fit person possesses not only physical well-being but also qualities such as good human relation, maturity and high ethical standards. Such a person, according to him, also satisfies such basic needs as love, affection, security and self- respect.

Bucher (1974), state that, physical fitness implies soundness of body organs such as the heart, and lungs, a human mechanism that performs efficiently under exercise or work condition such as having sufficient stamina and strength to engage in vigorous physical activities, and a reasonable measure of skill in the performance of selected physical activities.

Physical fitness is related to the tasks the person must perform, the potential for physical fitness to total self. The same degree of physical fitness is not necessary for everyone. It should be

Sufficient to meet requirement of the job, plus a little extra as a reserve for emergencies. Improved physical fitness is therefore synonymous to good health. Recreation is being defined by different authors and scholars as the activities (physical activities) performed by an individual during hours not meant for the daily work. It is frequently referred to as leisure time activity, which provided a means of relaxation believed to be: an antidote for some of the tensions an individual experience in daily life. Ekele (2007) sees recreation as an activity not idleness. According to him the reward is immediate; it is for all ages and sex, and is voluntary. Habila (1986) quoted a renowned physical educationist in Germany, Guthsmuth (1839-1959), who defines recreation as a medium of refreshing the body after long hours of work. To him, and of course many physical educationists, recreation aids in recovery of exhausted energies and is an antidote for tensed nerves, mental fatigue and emotional unrest. Recreation is an important health & force, in relieving emotional tension and making for the social well-being. According to Nwegbu (1978), recreation is not only useful in treating mental illness but also enabling patients to remain well. He added that, a nation, which does not use its leisure hours properly may begin to regress instead of progressing.

In our traditional society, some arrangements were made for recreation in the villages this is because the people know the toning effect recreation has on their health. Village squares were provided where people gathered in the evening moon light nights after work, for funerals, new yam festivals, dances, stories, riddles, wrestling and many other forms of play. In modern times, with the growth of towns many of the recreative activities are neglected (Nwegbu 1978). According to him, people in the township spend their leisure's in drinking, meetings, playing draft and ludo. Others, play tennis, while most of them are engaged as spectators of popular sports like soccer.

### **Kinds of Recreation**

In discussing recreation, Nwegbu, (1979) classified recreation into the following kinds:

1. **Inactive/passive recreation:** In this case, the person is a spectator such as one watching the television or a soccer match.
2. **Creative recreation:** In this case, the person is engaged in the work of art, garden and handcrafts.
3. **Active recreation:** This involves active participation.

The value of recreation increases as they approach the active and creative types. Different people need different types of recreation. Some people need active and creative participation, while others can adequately meet their recreational through passive or inactive participation. It depends on a person's vocational interest.

### **Health Related Components of Physical Fitness**

According to the American Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (1972), the component of physical fitness is classified into two. which are the health related components, and the skills or performance related component. For the purpose of this paper, only the health related components shall be considered. According to the Association, the health related components are needful for good health. Going by their classification, the health related components include the following:

### **1. Muscular strength and muscular endurance**

A person who has sufficient muscular strength and serious activity can perform strenuous work over an extended period. A physically fit individual must have strong and efficient muscles, a balanced proportion of muscle fibers, the ability to bring the needed number of muscle fibers into play when there is work to be done, efficient body levers, a working rhythm, and good coordination.

### **2. Cardiorespiratory Endurance**

When a person contracts a series of muscle groups over a period long enough to put a strain on the circulatory and respiratory systems without causing a stoppage of work, that individual is said to have cardiorespiratory endurance. Nwegba (1978) sees this component as important to good health because an individual with a high degree of endurance receives large supplies of fuel and oxygen. Their pulse rate is slower, blood pressure is lower, lungs have a larger surface area for oxygen absorption, and their susceptibility to fatigue is decreased.

### **3. Muscular Power**

A person who has muscular power also possesses the two components of muscular strength and speed. According to Owegbu (1978), an individual can use speed and strength in an efficient, coordinated, and skillful manner.

### **4. Flexibility**

Total body flexibility depends on the flexibility of the individual's body joints and their supporting structures. Flexibility means that the body is capable of making a wide range of movements. The more flexible a person is, the less energy is spent in accomplishing a skill.

## **Values of Physical Activity and Recreation**

Physical fitness is of considerable value to everyone who participates and makes physical fitness activities and recreation a lifestyle. It helps control body weight and stress, which physiologically helps in lowering blood pressure. This suggests that regular exercise and recreation can be used for the prevention of medical ailments. In line with this, Bailey and Macpherson (1989) agreed that exercise and recreation are beneficial in preventing and treating medical conditions such as obesity, diabetes, asthma, mild hypertension, and peripheral vascular morbidity problems.

Gwani (1992) also observed that regular exercise and recreation can be used in the treatment of coronary heart disease (CHD) and its related problems. According to him, regular exercise affects serum lipid levels. He states that a low level of very low-density lipoprotein (VLDL) and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) fractions reduce the risk of CHD. Similarly, a high level of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) is produced as an effect of exercise. He further observed that with regards to total cholesterol and triglycerides, a lower level is maintained with regular exercise, leading to an overall decrease in triglycerides.

Obesity has many causative factors, but physical inactivity is a significant contributor (Gwani 1992, Nwegbu 1978, and Boateng 1983). Calories consumed must be expended through physical activity and active recreation. If the calories expended are less than the amount consumed, excess calories are stored as fat, leading to obesity over time. Regular exercise and recreation help increase caloric expenditure and prevent fat accumulation.

### **Initiating a Training Programme for Fitness and Health**

Regular exercise can be used for preventive purposes, particularly for individuals with conditions such as asthma, myocardial infarction, myocardial ischemia, and other heart-related diseases (Gwani 1992). He maintained that medication and exercise programs should be employed simultaneously but with caution, as these clients require special consideration. The goal is to help them lead near-normal lifestyles, with exercise intensity differing from that of asymptomatic individuals.

To obtain the greatest health benefits from physical activity, certain guidelines should be followed. Boateng (1983) suggests the following:

1. **Assess the Present State of Fitness:** Individuals who have not been exercising, are obese, or have a history of heart disease or high blood pressure should have their physician's approval before engaging in strenuous activity. If any symptoms such as chest pain, dizziness, faintness, nausea, or breathing difficulty occur during exercise, the individual should stop immediately and seek medical attention.
2. **Determine Exercise Tolerance:** Persons starting a training program should determine their exercise tolerance (how they react to exercise). This helps in determining where to start, what types of exercise to engage in, and how long they should exercise.
3. **Plan the Fitness Program:** Individuals who have not exercised for a long period will need an extended time to get into physical condition. A gradual approach is necessary.
4. **Engage in Warm-Up Exercises:** Warm-up exercises are essential before strenuous activity, especially for older individuals, as they prepare the body for more intense exercises.
5. **Adapt the Exercise Program:** Exercise programs should be adapted to individual needs. Factors such as present fitness level, age, and sex are important considerations.
6. **Cooling Down:** After an exercise session, stretching activities should be done for five to ten minutes to allow physiological functions to return to normal.

### **Planning for Recreation**

To get the maximum benefits from recreation, Nwegbu (1978) emphasized the need for guidance and training in using leisure hours effectively. He recommended:

1. Encouraging pupils in school to master various sports so they have a wide variety of recreational options later in life.
2. Instilling the habit of good use of leisure time at a young age to ensure its continuation into adulthood.
3. Encouraging athletes to engage in multiple sports to provide recreation after their competitive participation ends.

## **Conclusion**

Regular exercise and recreation can be used to prevent and treat medical ailments such as coronary heart disease, asthma, mild hypertension, and other morbidity problems. It is more cost-effective to partake in regular exercise and recreation than to seek medical treatment for preventable ailments. Families and communities should encourage individuals to attain and maintain an optimal level of physical fitness and recreation for its numerous benefits.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the established health benefits of physical fitness, the following recommendations are necessary:

1. The government of Nigeria, through its Ministry of Sports and Health, should promote physical culture, sports, and recreation on a mass scale at the grassroots level.
2. Citizens should have the right to rest and leisure, which should be ensured by developing extensive sports facilities, from local parks to major sporting complexes in local government headquarters and wards.
3. Special funding allocations for physical culture, sports, and recreation should be included in federal, state, and local government budgets to ensure continuous provision, expansion, and maintenance of facilities.
4. Voluntary associations for different recreational activities should be formed to encourage people to use their leisure hours productively.
5. Natural recreational facilities should be utilized, such as hills for climbing, lakes for swimming and fishing, and forests for hiking.

The end result of these efforts would be a country whose citizens are healthier, free from minor medical ailments, more productive in their workplaces, and living more vigorous and fulfilling lives.

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