

## The challenges of workplace physical activity among employees of higher institutions in Ondo State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

The study examined challenges facing workplace physical activity participation among employees of higher institutions in Ondo State, Nigeria. Research is required in this area because of its tremendous importance to national development. It has long been espoused that the wealth of a nation depends on the health of her workforce. Studies have shown that participation in physical activity is a 'preventive mechanism' against ill health. For the purpose of this study, a total number of 400 subjects were selected from five (5) government-owned higher institutions in the state using purposive random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire tagged, "Challenges facing Physical Activity Questionnaire (CPAQ) which was validated for its content was used for collecting data on challenges facing workplace physical activity involvement of employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. The data were analyzed using t-test.

The challenges facing workplace physical activity participation among employees of higher institutions as delineated by the study include fear of injuries, lack of qualified leisure service managers, unattractive facilities, lack of support from employers, unavailability of staff-based physical activity programmes, lack of skills in sports and recreational activities. The study concluded that if management of higher institutions can provide the enabling environment and supports, their employees will partake in regular and gainful physical activities.

**Keywords:** lifestyles, sedentary, tertiary institutions, leisure, physical activity involvement, flow, sponsorship management, work-based.

### Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa with an estimated population of 150 million people. The citizens are predominantly farmers. The country is referred to as giant of Africa, not in terms of technological development, but because of the size and her potentials - human and materials.

Today, statistics showed that Nigeria has 365 higher institutions with 99,364 staff strength (27,394, teaching and 72,070, non-teaching) (Shu'ara, 2010). It is a policy in Nigeria today that all higher institutions seeking government approval should have modern sporting facilities. Also, it is included in the National Sport Policy that a day be set aside for sports to enable staff and students participate in physical activities because of its tremendous importance to individual and community development.

Employees of higher institutions in Nigeria need to participate in physical activity more than ever before. Today, physical activity is no longer part of daily life, automobiles have replaced walking, elevators have taken the place of stairs, while washing machines have replaced manual laundry, and various mobile communications and remote controls have drastically reduce human movements (Talabi, Ajayi-Vincent, Adesina and Aribamikan, 2010). The result of all these technological advancements has placed individuals in a state of inactivity and has resulted into disease. Adegun and Konwea (2009) lamented that Public Servants by the nature of their jobs leaves sedentary lifestyles. Lack of physical activity or sedentarism is one of the leading causes of major non-communicable diseases, which contribute to the high rise of cardiovascular diseases, deaths and disability (Akindutire and Adegboyega, 2012). The World Health Organization (2002) reported that in 2001, 1.9 million deaths were attributed directly to physical inactivity. Specifically, the report further indicated that physical inactivity caused 15% of some cancers, diabetes and heart diseases. In Nigeria, chronic diseases are reported to account for 24% of all deaths. The total deaths in Nigeria in 2005 were 2,014,000 out which 478,000 were due to chronic disease (WHO, 2005). In terms of national income, according to the report, Nigeria lost 400 million dollars to chronic disease caused by inactivity in 2005.

Despite the efforts of the government, workplace physical activity remains low in Nigeria. Study has shown that apart from the lecturers in Department of Physical and Health Education or Coaches in Sports Centers in tertiary

institutions, most employees have non-challant attitude towards active involvement in regular and gainful physical activity (Ikhioya and Sosanya, 2002). Even the few that participate do so at level below the World Health Organization Guidelines (Ajibua, 2012). One may argue that staff have no motivation to take part in physical activity, even the Wednesday afternoon which the national policy recommended for physical activities is not adhered to. Instead, staff consider this period free and fix other activities. Higher institutions occupy critical position in any nation. It is the springboard for national growth. It has the major responsibility to direct the nation from where she is located towards right direction (Chaudhury, 2012). The participation of majority of staff in physical activities will not only make the staff fit to carry out their daily routine without undue stress, but to a large extent also motivate and promote the active involvement of students. Workplace physical activity is recognized as an appropriate site for promoting healthy behavior (Gomez-Lopez, Gallegos and Extremera, 2010). Cho (2004) argued in the same line that work-based physical activity programme can yield promising health behavior changes. Participation in physical activity as reported by Scherrer, Henley, Sheridan, Sibson and Ryan, (2008) can positively affect staff performance - concentration, motivation, loyalty and level of staff turn-over and creativity.

### **Objective of the study**

The objective of this study was to find out the challenges facing workplace physical activity participation among employees of higher institutions in Ondo State Nigeria with a view to providing solution to the in order to engender national growth and development.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Method**

To undertake this study, the descriptive survey research method was adopted. This is because it not only helps to explain phenomena in terms of conditions or relationship that exist, opinions that are going on, effect that are evident or trends that are developing, it also made it possible to obtain responses or reactions from subjects within a short period of time.

#### **Population Sample and Sampling Procedures**

The population for this study were the teaching and non-teaching staff in Government-owned tertiary institutions in Ondo State. The institutions include, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba, Adeyemi College of Education Ondo, Federal College of Agriculture, Akure, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Rufus Giwa Polytechnics, Owo. For the purpose of this study, the convenience sampling technique was applied to select 40 teaching and 40 non-teaching staff from each of the five tertiary institutions. Thus, the total respondents for the study were 400.

#### **Instrumentation**

The instrument employed in the study was a structured and validated questionnaire, Challenges of Leisure Involvement Questionnaire (CLIQ) to collect information on the pattern of activities involved in by teaching and non-teaching staff.

#### **Validation of Instruments**

The content validity of the instrument was determined by three (3) Physical and Health Education experts from the Department of Physical and Health Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria who assisted in vetting the questionnaire. They examined the relationship between the objectives of the study and the focus of the questionnaire and made necessary corrections.

#### **Data Collection**

The questionnaire was administered personally to the respondents, and responses given by the subjects were sincere since names were not written on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was collected from each subject after all items were filled. It took 4 weeks to collate all the questionnaires.

#### **Data Analysis**

The information gathered from the subjects through the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics (t-test), to elicit information on the challenges facing workplace physical activity participation among employees of higher institutions in Ondo State.

### **Results**

The results of the study were presented based on the responses to the questionnaire administered.

Table 1 elicits information on the challenges facing employee physical activity involvement. Respondents were asked if fear of injuries was one of the things that put them off from participating in physical activity, (41.8%) subjects were of the opinion that fear of injuries was not one of the things that put them off from participating in physical activities whereas (45.3 %) viewed fear of injuries as the barrier militating against their participation in physical activity.

The result of the data showed that 261 respondents (65.3%) were of the view that lack of attractive and standard facilities pose serious challenge for physical activity involvement of employees of higher institutions.

One hundred and eighty-two (45.6%) respondents agreed that lack of staff-based leisure programme is a challenge facing staff leisure activity involvement in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Nevertheless one hundred and twenty-five subjects expressed opposing view.

When subjects were asked if insecurity was among the factors that prevented them from participating in physical activities, one hundred and sixty-one (40.3%) articulated the view that insecurity was a serious problem facing staff participation in physical activity pursuits. However, one hundred and fifty (37.6%) subjects expressed opposing view. To the later group, insecurity has never constituted barrier against their involvement in physical activity.

It is obvious from table 1 that unavailability of expert leisure managers was one of the major barriers militating against physical activity pursuits among staff in higher institutions in Ondo State. This view was expressed by one hundred and ninety-four subjects (48.6%) whereas one hundred and twenty-eight respondents (32.1%) did not consider accessibility to physical activity programmes as a barrier to staff involvement in physical activities.

Presence of policy on physical activities in higher institutions in Nigeria will encourage effective staff-based physical activity programmes and consequently motivate staffers to participate in physical activities. Respondents were requested to indicate if there is policy on staff-based physical activity programmes in higher institutions, the result of the data analyzed revealed that one hundred and seventy-seven subjects (44.3 %) agreed that lack of staff-based physical activity policy is one of the challenges they faced in the pursuit of physical activities in their respective institutions while 39.3% disagreed that lack of policy on staff-based physical activities were not a barrier to their involvement in physical activities.

As indicated in table 1, it was observed that 252 (53.1%) respondents suggested that funding was one of the challenges facing staffers in the pursuit of physical activities.

## Discussion

Results of the study indicated that fear of injuries, unattractive facilities, lack of staff-based physical activity policy and lack of funding were challenges facing workplace physical activity participation among employees of higher institutions.

*5.1 Fear of Injuries:* Gionoudis, Webster, and Cook (2008) described injuries as pains and discomfort experienced as a result of participation in activities. It may be imagined or real. Imagined fear may result when individual visualize the injuries before leisure activities. When it is real, it normally occurred as a result accidents during physical activities. These accidents are caused by what participants, instructors/managers do or left undone during physical activities. This should not be handled with levity by leisure service manager. He/she must employ psychological interventions to wipe out fear of injuries among their clients.

*5.2 Unavailability of Standard Facilities:* Majority of respondents expressed that unattractive facility was one of the factors that put them off from participating in physical activities. The importance of facility to physical activity programme development has long been espoused. According to Jeroh (2004) and Orodele (2008) only 7 out of about 117 Universities in Nigeria have tartan track, swimming pool and squash racket court. Infact, no tertiary institution has swimming pool in Nigeria apart from University of Benin, University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University. Only University of Benin, University of Lagos, University of Nigeria and Ahmadu Bello University have tartan tracks. Soccer pitches where available are like Sahara desert. Indoor sports halls where performance could be enhanced through provision of playing surface for various physical leisure activities are inadequate and without necessary facilities (Onifade, 2010). Haruna (2008) in his comparative study of two universities in the United State and Nigeria showed that leisure facilities in Nigeria are not adequate for physical activity development.

Proximity and accessibility to leisure facilities may have bearing on whether Public Servants will participate in physical activity opportunities presented to them (Christopher and Samuel, 2010). Fasan (2004) also remarked that the number of people that will show interest in physical activities will be determined by the nature of the facilities available. That is, the commitment of interested member of staff will be attracted to physical activity by the number and standard of facilities. Trimble (2010) cited that inadequate facilities affect campus perception and participation in physical activity programmes. A well-maintained leisure facility generates positive moral and pride on the part of the staff and students. Leisure facilities should be accessible by good road network. They must be centrally accessible and located to promote utilization. This influences the size of facility 'drawing radius' (Mullin, et al, 2007).

*5.3 Lack of Qualified Personnel:* Alla (1997) expressed that personnel matter in any organization is a key factor. Hence, it is the responsibility of various tertiary institutions to add value to physical activity programme development by recruiting, selecting and placing competent and qualified personnel to handle various aspects of physical activity programmes. Collins, (2001) revealed that great vision without great people is senseless. If we have the right quality and quantity of personnel to handle physical activity programmes in our tertiary institutions the problems of how to manage people, money and materials would have been solved. Alla (1997) pointed out that person who does not have training and potentialities for growth and development in leisure management should not be accepted to take charge of physical activities. Udoh (2002) maintained that to

cultivate the right physical activity culture in any organization, the management of such organization must begin with the selection of right personnel. Assemblage of people with wrong profiles will not only threaten the establishment, but will lead to disillusionment of other members of staff who are interested in physical activities. Jeroh (2002) commented that the calibre of personnel needed to facilitate physical activity programme development in Nigeria universities is not there. Ajiduah (2003) articulated that the level of physical activity involvement in any community will depend on the experience and professional preparation of the leisure service managers. In other words, achieving physical activity programme development in any tertiary institution may be a mirage unless there is quality instruction from those saddled with the responsibility of leisure development in our institutions. Jeroh (2002) submitted that few tertiary institutions in Nigeria can boast of six (6) sport coaches on its payroll. Ajibua (2012) study indicated that only one institution out of all government-owned institutions Ondo State has more than six coaches on its payroll. This is grossly inadequate compared with what obtains in developed countries of the world

*5.4 Insecurity:* Insecurity may pose serious challenge to physical activity programme involvement among staffers of tertiary institutions. The likelihood of experiencing flow in leisure depends on environmental stimuli. Immediate surroundings of leisure facility are extremely important factor in determining attendance density and frequency in physical activity programmes. When leisure facilities are located where leisure consumers believe is 'unsafe' or insecure, attendance will suffer (Mullin, et al, 2007). They went further to confirm that leisure consumers do not attend leisure programme solely for entertainment but to encounter a satisfying social atmosphere which is devoid of security risks. Behavioural learning theory explained that if individual enjoy physical activity environment, they are more likely to continue to participate and succeed within them, whereas if they find the environment unpleasant they are more likely to dropout.

*5.5 Lack of Accessibility to Physical Activity Programmes:* Limited opportunities for physical activity programmes are often responsible for low physical activity involvement among employees (Jackson, 2005). This statement was confirmed by this study that there were few physical activity programme opportunities for the staffers. Adegun and Konwea (2009) remarked that institutions that fail to provide adequate and accessible physical activity programmes that support healthy lifestyle choices run the risk of developing unhealthy and unsatisfying staff population. This is because staff populations that suffer from stress, anxiety, depression are less likely to perform their job as expected. Limited recreational options that fail to meet the needs of the entire population may also create privilege for certain group and isolate others. In other words, variety of activities must be provided to meet the needs and aspirations of all the staff. To achieve this, Physical activity programmes must be comprehensive and balance in such a way that it will appeal to sexes, all ages and people of different socio-economic backgrounds.

*5.6 Absence of Staff-based Physical Activity Policy:* The result of the study indicated that one of the major problems of physical activity programme development in tertiary institution is the unavailability of leisure policy. A policy is a road map to show where development will go. Thus, an organization or community that fails to initiate appropriate plans and policies on which to follow for productive purpose will not achieve the targets or objectives set out to attain. Based on this, Ojeme (2002) cited that tertiary institutions will be more effective in the management of all facets of sport and leisure programmes if there are policy to give guide and direction to leisure development. He went further to explain that such policy must specify the standard to be accomplished and the roles of all concerned agencies. In other words, such policy should explain the strategies for leisure programme development; specify the goals and the roles of the institution authorities. Managing man, materials and money in any organization without a policy guide is like somebody walking in a strange forest without a compass.

*5.7 Lack of Funding:* Money is the basic tool of administrative control. If there is no fund to prosecute physical activity programmes in our tertiary institutions as indicated in this study, it may be very difficult to attain the target objectives. Money occupies an enviable position in physical activity programme development and management. Its presence carries with it the provision of facilities, equipment, supplies and the remuneration of leisure personnel.

Leisure managers are handicapped when it comes to getting money to run leisure programmes in their institutions. Most of the investigations in the past showed that the willingness to invest in employees' physical activity programmes by the management of various institutions is not present (Ajibua, 2012). This explained the paucity of staff-based physical activity programme in our tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Unlike their counterparts in United States of America, Canada, United kingdom etc, tertiary institutions in Nigeria have not benefited from corporate event sponsorship (Fasan, 2004). It is disheartening to note through this study that despite of the fact that majority of staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria were aware that corporate organizations can help fund leisure programmes, nothing was done to utilize this opportunity. This may be due to lack of knowledgeable people in sport sponsorship management in Nigeria (Adiat, 1999).

Sponsorship Management falls within the province of Sport Marketing. It is the glamour side of Sport Marketing (Van Heerden, 2003). Sport Marketing as a field of scientific study is at the infant stage in Nigeria and in Africa. Observations have shown that there is no Physical Education Department that offers Sport

Marketing at undergraduate level in Nigeria. Even students studying Marketing in our Polytechnics and Universities are not exposed to this field of study, which means that Marketing and Business students are not exposed to this field too. A review of the current Marketing and Physical Education Journals unfortunately also indicates that academics in Nigeria are not devoting sufficient attention to leisure marketing in the overall marketing strategy. This shows that leisure marketing has not yet been accepted as an important and relevant ingredient for leisure and sports development.

### Conclusion:

The various constraints identified in this study as restraints for not engaging in physical activities are similar to the earlier ones identified by previous researches. Challenges can negatively influence participation in physical activity (Davidson and Lawson, 2006). However, a thorough knowledge of what keeps people away from participating in physical activity is essential for the identification of appropriate point of interventions to promote active lifestyle and health benefits they offer. Providing solution to the barriers militating workplace physical activity participation will further motivate workers to be more committed to their jobs and be more productive.

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