

Sports For All

Zakariya Alem

Michigan Islamic Academy

### Abstract

This paper talks about the problem in youth sports regarding equality and fairness. It shows the reasons why there is such a huge decline in the participation of sports, as well as who are the individuals being left out of sports. In addition to this, the paper includes why the people who are not able to participate should be able to partake in the benefits of sports. There are physical and mental benefits of sports, benefits in the classroom, and benefits throughout life such as lessons that people will never forget and hold on to.

### Sports for All

Many believe the reason for the decline in participation across all youth sports has to do with teenagers moving onto other activities such as video games, electronics, or a disinterest in physical activity. This is unfounded; the reason for the decrease in participation is that the cost of playing these sports has increased dramatically. According to Jacob Bogage (2017) as he said in his article *Youth sports study: Declining participation, rising costs and unqualified coaches*:

Athletic participation for kids ages 6 through 12 is down almost 8 percent over the last decade [...], and children from low-income households are half as likely to play one day's worth of team sports than children from households earning at least \$100,000.

Families who are socioeconomically advantaged are able to pay the extra money to get their children on well-resourced teams to improve their skills. This leaves community teams with less resources to provide quality activities for children who can not be on the well-resourced teams, which means children whose parents cannot afford to pay are forced to play on teams that are not as competitive as the other teams in terms of performance. This can take away the incentive for children to play. Socioeconomic disparities have a significant negative impact on youth involvement in sport activities. Youth sports activities have been shown to improve health, social skills, and academic achievement. Society, as a whole, has a role to play in reducing disparities and improving access. Greater access to high quality programming, removal of barriers such as transportation, and exposures to scouts for college opportunities will have a great impact on reducing these disparities and ensuring equitable access for all.

There is a lot of talent that goes unscouted because players do not have the resources at hand to help take them to the next level. An article by Bruce Kelley and Carl Carchia (2013),

showed that 40% of boys at six years of age do not participate in sports at all whereas, 53% of six-year-old girls do not participate in sports either. Everybody should have the opportunity to showcase their talents whether it be to coaches of high school sports, college sports, or professional sports. There is an immense contrast between travel teams, in which the cost and exposure of recruits is high, and recreational teams where the cost is low and there is no exposure of recruits. Playing on a travel team provides experiences and opportunities that not many players have access to. If people had the opportunity to sign up their child for the best team available most would, but not everyone can. As author Matthew Stewart (2018) mentioned in his article *The 9.9 Percent is the New American Aristocracy*, the upper middle class and above have “taken their money out of productive activities and put it into walls.” Meaning that the money these families are spending on their children on sports activities is creating barriers for other children that are not born into these fortunate families from participating in these sports. Like Richard V. Reeves mentions in his book titled *Dream Hoarders* (2018): “When we hoard opportunities, we help our own children but hurt others by reducing their chances of securing those opportunities.” Some may argue that parents have the right to use their money to allow their children to have more and should not be criticized. The issue here is not the individual act of one person doing this, it is the norm that creates a collective impact that pulls money and resources away from community-based activities that needed money.

Socioeconomic class should not be a factor in getting access to sports and therefore causing a barrier to the benefits of sports participation. The physical and mental benefits of sports are so numerous that all students should have access to sports. Since sports participation requires dedication and commitment, it often takes up a lot of a student’s energy and time. Most people

may think this would result in a negative outcome academically, but the opposite is true. A high school in Minnesota conducted a study on the relationship between the amount of time a student dedicated to sports with their grade point average (GPA). The results were remarkable - the more sports the student participated in, the higher their GPA. Students who participated in three sports had an average GPA of 3.51 and those who did not participate in any sports had an average GPA of 2.72. Not only did sports participation impact GPA it also impacted absenteeism rates. Students who were involved in one or more sports were absent less than those who did not partake in sports at all (Urdahl, 2018).

Another benefit of sports is it helps with improving teamwork and problem solving skills. Most youth sports are team based. Going through tough losses and great triumphs helps build teamwork which helps create a bond between the whole team. Not only does this impact the team performance, it creates a space for life lessons to be learned and experienced. When a player is in a game and has a problem, for example, their team is losing or the team has to sustain the lead with their best player on the bench because of an injury, the player has a problem that needs solving and just like in the classroom sometimes the player gets it right and other times he/she gets it wrong. Either way people only learn from their mistakes and that builds character and resilience in a person. According to MU Health (Missouri University Health; year), "Watching your hard work pay off and achieving your goals develops self-confidence." This process of problem solving and lessons learned are experiences that can be used by students to provide an advantage in relation to the other students who do not play sports or those who are not able to afford to play it.

In addition to these life skills, there is a great amount of physical gain that students can benefit from. The obesity rate is only increasing. According to the National Center For Health Statistics (FastStats, 2017), since 1988 the number of adolescents aged 12-19 who are obese has increased every year until 2016. There are several reasons why the obesity rate has increased - some are in an individual's control and some are not. The one thing that is clear, however, is that as a nation Americans are moving less. One of the ways to ensure an increase in physical activity is by teaching the importance of physical activity at a young age. This can be shown through increasing the participation in youth sports. The focus on increasing access to sports can get students moving more often and more regularly which not only helps with weight maintenance, it also decreases the rate of disease and illness (Missouri University Health). Exercise has been shown to help improve cardiovascular health by increasing a person's cardio endurance which allows them to exercise for longer periods of time without getting too tired (Rail, 2011). In addition to improving cardiovascular health, physical activity can improve other aspects of the body as well. Oxygen is a necessity to the human body without it every human would not be able to live. Participation in sports such as running, swimming, and, in general, just moving works to help expand the lungs in the long run and to make better use of the oxygen that comes into the body because once the body gets used to doing these cardio exercises it finds ways to perform these activities for a longer time frame (Rail, 2011). For example, one technique which helps make better use of the oxygen is breathing in through the nose and breathing out from your mouth. It helps to relax the human body when stressed or being overworked. Kevin Rail (2011) mentioned that: "During the course of a game or exercise session, your brain releases chemicals that can put you at ease and make you feel more relaxed." All of these are benefits that students

can learn while playing sports when they are trying to manage their breathing during games. These benefits are just a small glimpse into the physical benefits of playing sports. Knowing this, it is fair to say that sports' participation can have a great impact on an individual's health. A lack of access to equitable sports participation can mean that students are missing out on all of these benefits. It is only fair for everyone to be able to experience these benefits and learn lifelong habits that others have access to just because of availability to more resources.

One of the biggest issues in terms of accessibility when it comes to sports in America is that for every sport a payment of some sort is always involved - no matter how high a level of play - unless it is professionally or at a school. Even playing sports in high school may come with a cost, according to a national survey conducted by Beata Mostafavi of the University of Michigan (2016), of the 666 parents who responded, only 30% said that they paid zero dollars for sports and the rest had to pay an average of 302 dollars. Students who play club sports for third party teams other than their school have to pay for several costs - games, tournaments, hotels, practice, and coach salaries. In total, all this adds up more money, especially for the higher divisions. For example, in soccer, according to Jason Smith, soccer costs on average about 2,000-5,000 dollars per year for one player depending on the level they play at (2017). This is in addition to , registration fees of up to 2,000 dollars, any additional equipment that may be needed (for football players or hockey players), coach's salaries, renting practice facilities, and purchasing hotel rooms for tournaments (2017). This alone can discourage many parents from even thinking about signing their children up for these sports, because parents to spend money on other necessary school needs. For many parents this is a complete barrier to getting their child into a competitive sports team. The sports industry is a corporation and a business that is only

increasing the culture of trying to squeeze money out of parents and student athletes at all levels from secondary schools to higher education. This leaves students that come from low-income families with no option but to play on lower-level, less competitive teams. As mentioned in the Time article called (How Kids' Sports Became a \$15 Billion Industry) author Sean Gregory (2017) said:

For better or worse, youth sports is being privatized," says Jordan Fliegel, an entrepreneur who has capitalized on the shift. Whatever the answer is, the transition has been seismic, with implications for small towns, big businesses and millions of families."

This is showing us that the problem for youth sports being privatized is not only for the lower income families, but also for towns and businesses. It has a much bigger impact than most people think at the moment.

### **Islamic View**

In Islam, sports in general are encouraged for Muslims to do. As Muslims know, following the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammed is needed in order to fulfil their duty to Allah. In the Quran Allah says: "And whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad PBUH) gives you, take it, and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it), and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Severe in punishment." (Quran, 59:7) This shows that Allah is saying that whatever the Prophet Muhammed says we have to obey and follow. In many instances Muslims hear about the times the Prophet (SAW) used to wrestle with the companions in the masjid, and how he preached for his people to learn horseback riding, swimming, and crossbow shooting. Mentioned by Sheikh Yusuf Badat As the Prophet (SAW) once stated in a hadith:



Anything which is not included in the remembrance of Allah is useless and futile except for four things; playing with one's spouse, training one's horse, walking between two targets (while aiming arrows), and learning how to swim.

This shows that the religion of Islam encourages people to participate in sports especially the three mentioned in the hadith.

Similar to the disadvantages many people of lower income households have in the topic of sports compared to those who are well off, the Quran provides many examples of fairness and being just. In this case, the people who are from low income households who are at a disadvantage are being treated unfairly. As Abu Amina Elias mentions in his article about justice and fairness in Islam, Allah (SWT) says in the Holy Quran:

"O you who believe, be persistently standing firm in justice as witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. Follow not your desires, lest you not be just. If you distort your testimony or refuse to give it, then Allah is aware of what you do (Surat An-Nisa 4:135)."

This example corresponds with injustices in sports saying that people should be just whether it is someone who is poor or rich and people should always stand for what they believe in no matter who it is they are opposing.

In conclusion, sports is crucial and essential for children and without having access to it, they are at a disadvantage socially and physically. Working towards equal access in sports is a step that needs to be taken in order to help the people who are at a disadvantage. This can begin when greater access is created through removing barriers in the form of transportation and finances. Socioeconomic disparities have a significant negative impact on youth involvement in

sport activities. Youth sports activities have been shown to improve health, social skills, and academic achievement. It is imperative that the focus of youth sports moves from the private sector to improving the conditions of public sports.

## References

- Bogage, J. (2019, April 7). Youth sports study: Declining participation, rising costs and unqualified coaches. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/recruiting-insider/wp/2017/09/06/youth-sports-study-declining-participation-rising-costs-and-unqualified-coaches/>.
- Elias, A. A. (2018, March 21). Justice and fairness for all in Islam. Retrieved from <https://abuaminaelias.com/justice-and-fairness-for-all-in-islam/>.
- FastStats - Overweight Prevalence. (2016, June 13). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/obesity-overweight.htm>.
- Gregory, S. (2017, August 24). Kids' Sports Leagues Have Turned Into a \$15 Billion Industry. Retrieved from <https://time.com/4913687/how-kids-sports-became-15-billion-industry/>.
- Badat, Y. Hadith of the Day. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://askaquestion.hadithoftheday.com/index.php?p=/discussion/150>
- Missouri University Health. Benefits of Sports for Adolescents. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.muhealth.org/conditions-treatments/pediatrics/adolescent-medicine/benefits-of-sports>.
- Rail, K. (2019, October 15). What Are the Benefits of Sport & Physical Activities? Retrieved from <https://www.sportsrec.com/346320-what-are-the-benefits-of-sport-physical-activities.html>
- Reeves, R. V. (2018). *Dream hoarders: how the American upper middle class is leaving everyone else in the dust, why that is a problem, and what to do about it*. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press.

Smith, J. (2017, November 18). Paying to Play: How much do club sports cost? Retrieved from <https://usatodayhss.com/2017/paying-to-play-how-much-do-club-sports-cost>.

Stewart, S. by M. (2018, June 13). The 9.9 Percent Is the New American Aristocracy. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/06/the-birth-of-a-new-american-aristocracy/559130/>.

Urdahl, T. (2018, July 26). Using Data to Show the Link Between Sports Participation and Academic Achievement. Retrieved from <https://insideoutinitiative.org/2018/07/26/using-data-to-show-the-link-between-sports-participation-and-academic-achievement/>.