Psychological Benefits of Special Olympic Involvement
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Special Olympics

Canterbury Christ Church University
Background – Key players.

• Research project for Clinical Psychology training
• In association with Canterbury Christchurch University, SOUK, SO US, Mencap.
• Research team
What do we know about some of the problems people with LD face?

- Health e.g. Obesity levels
- Mental illness
- Social networks
- Stress levels
- Self esteem
- How does sport come into this?
In mainstream society sport has been found to be a very effective intervention improving social and health issues.

So what do we know about its impact on these issues for people with learning disabilities?
Research questions

Within the population of people attending ID organisations....

- Does sport via Mencap or Special Olympics increase self esteem?
- Does sport via Mencap or Special Olympics increase social networks?
- Does sport via Mencap or Special Olympics lower stress?
- Does sport via Mencap or Special Olympics increase quality of life?
Participants

- 44 Female, 57 male (n=101)
- Mean age 35.1 (range 18-67)
- 64 single, 31 boy or girlfriend, 6 married
- 30 employed in voluntary work, 13 paid employment, 30 studying, 26 neither studying or in employment
Design

- Cross-sectional design comparing 3 groups
  1) involved in sport via the (SO), n=51
  2) involved in sport but not via the SO, n=20
  3) not involved in sport, n=30

- DVs: levels of stress, quality of life and self-esteem, and engagement in social networks.

- IV was group membership (sport or non-sport).
Special Olympics (N 40)
- Social networks
- Self-esteem
- Quality of life
- Stress

Mencap (N 34)
- Social networks
- Self-esteem
- Quality of Life
- Stress

Matched
- gender
- IQ
- Opportunity
Measures

- WASI (Wechsler, 1997) 2 subtest form
- Life Experiences Checklist (Ager, 1990)
- Rosenberg Self-esteem Measure (Rosenberg, 1965)
- Life Stress Inventory (Bramston & Bostock, 1994)
- Social Support Self Report (Lunsky & Benson, 1997)
Results

- Self esteem and LEC positively and significantly correlated
Results & Clinical implications

- Of the three groups only SO predictive of higher levels of SE
- Suggests there is something additional to playing sport that SO offers
- SO specific research – awards, terminology athletes, identity, systemic involvement, etc etc etc +++
Qualitative research

- Community
  
  ‘Like playing sports, meeting up with friends and coaches, tell each other stories, made some new friends. Like the coaches they make it fun’

- Self esteem, worth, confidence

  ‘Being with the team, skiing is my life, I feel like a bond girl coming down the slopes’

- Learning

  ‘It keeps me fit and active. I meet new and different people. I can make decisions, go on holidays – it helps me learn new things for the future’

- Fitness

  ‘Like working out, like getting stronger’
Further research needs

• Unable to state a causal effect, can only say there is a difference
• IQ? Social construct? Measurement

• ++++
• +++
Implications

Physical and psychological well-being

How it make me feel

Reciprocity
Support
Achievement
Challenge & Learning
Implications

- Sport/SO involvement may be viewed as an intervention to improve physical and mental well-being.
- Sport/SO involvement may be viewed as a potential protective factor against poor physical and mental well-being.
- How might other organisations draw upon these findings?
- ParaOlympics – sense of community, integrating/inclusion. Emphasis in capability rather than incapability ++++
Thank you!

• Questions at the end.....

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