

The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Sports Participants in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have affected sport negatively in Zimbabwe and the whole world. This descriptive study sought to investigate the effect of the lock-down, a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, on sports participants in Zimbabwe. Data for the study were collected from ten respondents (5 coaches and 5 players) randomly drawn from the disciplines athletics, basketball, soccer, table tennis and volleyball, who each responded to a self-administered online questionnaire. The responses were condensed into frequency tables and presented graphically. The study found that most players have reduced their training load, and feel fatigued and depressed, as a result of the lock-down. The study further found that a substantial number of sports participants has changed their diet for the worse and have had their sleeping patterns disturbed as a result of the lock-down. It is concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic had negative effects on the mental health, sleep patterns, and training levels of sportspersons in Zimbabwe. Sports teams in Zimbabwe are therefore advised to implement programs that will improve the training status, eating and sleeping habits of sports persons in Zimbabwe, and address feelings of depression among them. Further similar studies could include sports participants in managerial positions.

Introduction

Sports is regarded as an important part of modern life, which contributes to community identity, health, and economic and social development, among other things. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in reduced and restricted sports participation and gatherings, to varying levels in the whole world. According to Rattern (2020) [1] the sporting sector has been affected by the COVID-19 crisis in a way that has never been seen before. All physically activity and team sports were suddenly restricted in many countries, often being relegated to home-based individual physical training [2,3]. This has seen almost all sport codes in Zimbabwe also being restricted and shut down from the public. One would expect that players and coaches, among many others, to have been hardest hit by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Few studies have been conducted to ascertain the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on sportspersons in Zimbabwe. The researchers therefore sought to study the ways in which players and the coaches of different sports have been affected by this pandemic. Results from the study will hopefully assist in coming up with strategies to continue with sports during, or after the pandemic.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused, and continues to cause, one of the most significant disruption to sporting calendars world-wide [4]. and prevent over-whelming the healthcare system.

All local and international competitions and events were cancelled, postponed, or restricted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with numerous mostly negative consequences. As a result of the fact that the global sporting calendar is rearranged to accommodate the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, for example, other events may be squeezed into the months that follow, posing risks of overtraining and over-competition for athletes. Postponement and cancellation of sports has potential costs in terms of compromised athlete development and loss of competition experience and declining athlete motivation. Other possible negative effects include mental health, physical health and nutritional health [5,6].

Methodology

The research followed a cross-sectional survey research design. The population for the study comprised of five of the forty-eight sports disciplines which are recognized by the Sports and Recreation Commission Act (2001) [7]. A sample of five sport disciplines was purposively selected to yield participants from athletics, basketball, football, table tennis and volleyball. Two participants per sport discipline (one coach and one player) were selected through the use of a simple random sampling technique. The researchers used online questionnaires to which the respondents answered via WhatsApp. We considered this instrument very relevant in view of the restrictions that were obtaining. A web link with the questionnaire was sent to all the participants via an email together with the instructions, covering letter and consent forms. The results were condensed into frequency tables and presented graphically.

Some Results

Maintaining Activity During Lockdown

	Alone	%	Digitally with a personal trainer	%	Zoom with others	%	Not training	%
Coaches								
Females	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Males	0	0%	0	0%	3	60%	1	20%
Players								
Females	1	20%	2	40%	1	20%	0	0%
Males	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%

From these data only a fifth of athletes trained alone, while less than half trained digitally.

Motivation to Exercise



From this graphical depiction of motivation to exercise, both player- and coach-motivation to exercise had reduced during the lockdown [8-64].

Summary Conclusions and Recommendations

This study investigated the effect of COVID-19 on the different sport codes in Zimbabwe. Data for the research was collected from five national sports associations in Zimbabwe. Five coaches and five players from

athletics, basketball, football, table tennis and volleyball, were selected for the study. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. The study found that most players have reduced their training, feel fatigued and depressed as a result of the lock-down. The study further found that a substantial number of sports participants has changed their diet for the worse and have had their sleeping patterns disturbed as a result of the lock-down. It is concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic had negative effects on the mental health, sleep, and training levels of sportspersons in Zimbabwe. Sports teams in Zimbabwe are advised to implement programs that will improve the training status, eating and sleeping habits of sports persons in Zimbabwe, and address feelings of depression among them. Further similar studies could include sports participants in managerial positions.

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