Motivational Attitudes Toward Participating in Sporting Events Among People with Disabilities

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Although a physically active life benefits people with disabilities in many ways (Ayvazoglu, Ratliffe, & Kozub, 2004; Cooper, Quatrano, & Axelson, 1999; Kosma, Cardinal, & Rintala, 2002), research consistently reported that people with disabilities' participation in sports is significantly less than the general population (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). Healthy People 2010 (2000) found that approximately 60% of people with disabilities did not participate in any sport or physical activity. Furthermore, National Council on Disabilities (2005) indicated, "The extent of non-participation of individuals with disabilities in social and recreational activities is alarming." Hums and Wolf (2003) also noted that sports for people with disabilities have been largely ignored, and most people with disabilities are involved in separate segregated disability sport organizations.

In 2005, over 50 million people in the United States have some types of disabilities. This number accounts for almost 20% of the population and represents the single largest minority group in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2005). Therefore, since the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services set a national goal of increasing physical activity levels for the United States population, physical educators and sport managers should be concerned with how to increase the number of people with disabilities participating in sports.

Over the past decades, numerous studies have been conducted to find factors that influence people with disabilities' participation in sports. However, most of these studies were conducted from adapted physical education and therapeutic recreation perspectives (Brasile & Hedrick, 1991; Fung, 1992; Shapiro, 2003; Williams, 1994). Few studies investigated motivational attitudes of people with disabilities toward participating in sporting events from the sporting event coordinator's or sport manager's standpoints. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to investigate motivational factors that influence participation in organized sporting events for people with disabilities. In addition, this study was designed to examine how these factors improve the participants' self-esteem because studies have consistently found that self-esteem is one of the most important determinants for people with disabilities to successfully perform social activities including participating in physical activity and sport (Karen, 2001; Kozar, Martin, & Bell; Sherrill, 1988).

The participants for this study were 83 athletes with physical disabilities from two state wheelchair games. Of the 83 participants, 78% (n = 65) were male and 22% (n = 18) were female. With regard to age, 24% (n = 19) were in the age range 20-35, 30% (n = 24) in the 36-50 age range, and 20% (n = 15) in the 51-65 age range. Based on the literature on sport participation motivation (Milne & McDonald, 1999), researchers identified five motivational factors related to athletes with disabilities: Competition, Achievement, Social Affiliation, Skill Mastery, and Stress Release. A survey instrument was formulated through an examination of the published research in this area. The reliability of the instrument calculated by using Cronbach's alpha and each of the five factors ranged from .71 to .87. The survey consisted of two parts with 26 questions. The first part included demographics and the second part was the motivation survey across five factors. A five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) was used to measure the degree of motivation.

Overall, the top three reasons for participating in the wheelchair games were Achievement (M = 4.43, SD = 0.74), Stress Release (M = 4.38, SD = 0.66), and Skill Mastery (M = 4.25, SD = 0.83). While male athletes with disabilities rated Achievement (M = 4.48, SD = 0.69) as among the most important reasons for participating in the wheelchair games, female athletes rated Stress Release (M = 4.41, SD = 0.65) as the top reason. In terms of age, young athletes rated Stress Release (M = 4.52, SD = 0.52) as the most important motive, while middle age and order adults rated Achievement (M = 4.45, SD = 0.76) as the top reason for participating in the sporting events. A multiple regression analysis found that Competition and Achievement were significant predictors (p< .05) to improve self-esteem. There were positive relationships between self-esteem and the factor of Achievement and Competition.

This study contributes to the newly emerging body of research in the domain of sport management focusing on disability issues, by examining sport participation motivation among persons with disabilities. In addition, the results of this study would help sport practitioners (e.g., disability sporting event coordinators, disability sport managers, and coaches) to increase participation in...
organized sporting events for people with disabilities, which often face difficulties with recruiting participants. Furthermore, this study can provide valuable information to improve self-esteem of participants for disability sporting events. For example, sport practitioners could emphasize the factors of Achievement and Competition to enhance self-esteem of athletes with disabilities by designing diverse sport programs and events or providing them with more opportunities to win medals (Shapiro, 2003).