Parental Support for Children with Disabilities: Special Olympics Participation

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Healthy People 2020 describes the major research findings on the health benefits of physical activity and provides the physical activity guidelines for children and adolescents. Children and adolescents have been recommended to be engaged in 60 minutes or more of physical activity daily (USDHHS, 2008). Potential positive effects of participation in physical activity programs can be as powerful for children with disabilities as it is for children without disabilities. However, there have been limited opportunities for children with disabilities to participation in physical activity programs as children without disabilities do (Moran & Block, 2010).

Special Olympics is an international sport training and competition program for people with intellectual disability that provide the opportunity to participate in various physical activities and sports. Special Olympic programs allow for the utilization of competitive physical activity to engage children with intellectual disability in various sport programs. Through the development of these programs, Special Olympics have helped integrate children and adults with intellectual disability into existing communities and after-school sport programs. Children with intellectual disability participate in developmentally appropriate play activities designed to foster physical, cognitive, and social development (Winnick, 2010). The acquired sport skills of children in training are showcased in the many Special Olympics events held throughout the year. The demonstration of support for the Special Olympics initiative represents the value this program has in these communities.

For children with intellectual disability, parental influence and support are important for physical activity participation. Moola, Faulkner, Krish, and Kilburn (2008) reported that parental perception identifies the benefits of participation of physical activity in children with disabilities. In addition, several studies have established the importance of parental support for physical activity participation (An & Goodwin, 2007; Law, Petrenchik, King, & Hurley, 2007). However, limited research is available to whether the parental perception of physical activity can be related to subsequent support for participation in physical activities.

The purpose of this study is 1) to examine parental perceptions toward facilitators and barriers to support their children with disabilities to participate in Special Olympics events, 2) to understand the relationship between service quality of Special Olympics events and parental intention to support their children with disabilities to participate Special Olympics events.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been considered important to the field of physical activity for people with disabilities (Conatser, Block, & Gansneder, 2002). The three components of parental perceptions have been determined through various theoretical and empirical TPB studies: (a) attitude, (b) subjective norm, and (c) perceived behavioral control. The TPB model provides insight into parental perceptions toward the barriers of supporting participation and the service quality of the facilitators to supporting participation of Special Olympics of their children with disabilities.

Attitude can be defined the degree to which performance of the behavior, supporting their children with disabilities to participate in Special Olympics events, is valued. For example, if a parent believes that participation in Special Olympics events of children enhances social interaction, improve physical fitness, and develop movement/sport skills (Jeong, Kim, & Lee, 2015), the parent may have positive attitude toward Special Olympics events. Subjective norm is important people/referents and/or perceived social pressure to engage or not to engage in the behavior which is parental support for their children with disabilities to participate in Special Olympics events. Perceived behavioral control refers to the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of the behavior and perceived power of these factors. For example, if a parent believes that supporting his or her child to participate in
Special Olympic events is important, but child with a disability does not prefer to participate in, the parent may not support the child with a disability to participate in Special Olympics event. Taken together, parental intentions to support their children with disabilities participate in Special Olympics events are determined by: (a) attitude, (b) subjective norm, and (c) perceived behavioral control.

Attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms with respect to the behavior, and perceived behavioral control over the behavior are usually found to predict intentions with a high degree of accuracy. In turn, these intentions, in combination with perceived behavioral control, can account for a considerable proportion of variance in behavior. The TPB has shown to be an accurate measure of intentions and behaviors in many fields. Thus, parental support for their children with disabilities to participate in Special Olympics events are determined by intentions and perceived behavioral control.

For successful event management, an organization should focus on the quality of events because it substantially impacts on participants’ attitude and behavior (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). In sporting events, it is important to consider various dimensions of service quality such as program, interaction, outcome (e.g., valence and physical change), and physical environment quality (Ko & Pastore, 2005). Within Special Olympic events in this study, several criteria of service quality have been extracted by Byon and his colleagues (Byon, Choi, Cottingham, & Park, 2015): registration process, transportation, accessibility, staff, and food services. Accordingly, if parents of children with disabilities are satisfied with service quality of these dimension, the parents would support for their children to participate in future Special Olympic events.

The primary expected outcome is to find an acceptable model. The TPB will also be validated as an appropriate model for measuring parental perceptions toward Special Olympics events as an avenue for their children with disabilities to participate in various physical activity and sports program, as well as measure the barriers and the facilitators in supporting their children with disabilities to participate in Special Olympics events. Also, this study will show how service quality and parents’ satisfaction with Special Olympics events affect parental support for children with disabilities to participate in Special Olympics events. Finally, solutions will be suggested, and it will encourage parents to foster facilitators to provide healthy lifestyles for their children with disabilities.