Sport as a Resource to Affect Healthy Aging: A Structural Equation Model Evaluation

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People are living with more chronic illnesses than ever before, with 80% of older adults having at least one chronic condition, just in the U.S. alone (CDC, 2015). Research highlights quality of life in older adults is dependent upon how people navigate and adjust to the retirement transition, marking the beginning of late adulthood (Wang, Henkens, & van Solinge, 2011). Understanding how to overcome the retirement transition with effective strategies focused on improving quality of life outcomes is crucial to minimizing the gap between quality and quantity of life in an aging world. One promising mechanism is sport participation as a preferred outlet for physical activity (Chalip, 2006) and for direct health outcomes (e.g., Downward, Dawson, & Mills, 2016; Warner, 2018). As part of a pilot study, our research team conducted a study on examining sport participation's effectiveness on resources known to predict retirement adjustment (e.g., Leung & Earl, 2012) as indicative of quality of life (this study was presented at the NASSM conference in Ottawa, Canada, 2015). Using new nationwide survey data (N=5175), we expanded this study to illuminate the impact sport participation has on specific types of resources needed for the continued development of older adults.

Participants 55+ years old who have retired from the full-time workforce were sampled across the U.S. An independent survey sampling agency, SSI, electronically collected data via their own nationwide database. Participation eligibility was assured using screening questions, and two separate survey versions with mixed orders were used to minimize respondent error. As a result, 799 and 4376 responses were initially gathered from the two surveys. Survey instruments consisted of variables measuring three areas including sport participation, types of resources, and post-retirement attitudes (via the pilot study, we have established reliabilities and validities of the instruments). The final sample was split into four random subsamples, and we are conducting the following analyses: (1) exploratory factor analysis (n=976) to extract factor dimensions, (2) a confirmatory factor analysis (n=977) to examine psychometric properties, (3) another CFA (n=976) to validate the revised model, and (4) structural equation modeling (n=977) to examine the overall factor relationships. We wish to present our findings at the conference.

However, preliminary findings generally indicate that sport may add or provide access to multiple resources for an individual, making it both an effective and efficient delivery system of resources. Yet, the design of sport is so often geared toward the needs of youth (Baker, Fraser-Thomas, Dionigi, & Horton, 2010) and absent from public health discourse (Berg, Warner, & Das, 2015). Although evidence from our previous study suggests a positive relationship between sport and overall retirement resources, we were still unsure which resources sport affects most prominently. We expect our findings from this expanded study to show more specifically which types of resources are affected. We also expect to show a structural model showing the strength of these relationships. Thus, our study may add insight to the sport design inputs necessary to cultivate salient resources for the 55+ population wishing to age successfully.