Comparison of Iran and New Zealand Universities students: the Social Benefits of Intramural Sports

1Ali Zarei, 2Steve Jackson, 3Mahboubeh Chaman Pira

1Assistant Professor of the department of Physical Education at Islamic AZAD University, Tehran central branch
2Professor, University of Otago.
3M.A in Sport Management, Alame Tabatabaee University.

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ABSTRACT
Background: Recreational sports professionals need to promote greater institutional understanding and appreciation of the social significance of intramural sports.
Objective: The purpose of this study is to examine the social benefits of intramural sports participation for students at Iranian universities and compare the results to students at Otago University in New Zealand. Surveys were randomly distributed to 1050 students participating in a variety of intramural sports programs. The research question is, "What social benefits are attained while participating in intramural sports?" Results: In spite of many differences in cultural and environmental factors both groups indicated that they benefited the most in the areas of personal social benefit, social group bonding and reliable alliance benefits. The results revealed that there were significant differences between males and females in social benefits in both groups; however, Iranian male students and New Zealand female students reported significantly higher benefits. The on campus students reported significantly higher benefits as well. There was significant difference between competitive and recreational league participants in both groups, in which those students participating in competitive league benefited higher. One-way ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences for year in university in both groups. Conclusion: The findings from this study can be used to guide recreational sports research, policy development, and management.

INTRODUCTION
Numerous benefits have been found to be associated with recreational sports involvement including: stress reduction [20, 17], self-esteem [9], enhance GPA [4,7], student development [13,19,21], and ease of social integration [7,8], however recreational sports professionals must begin to relate programs to specific benefits, as well as to the administrative and physical education philosophies in which they have been steeped for so long. Recreational sports programs should have been begun to substantiate their efforts on how programs not only develop students physically, but also how they develop them holistically.

There is little doubt that there are a number of social benefits associated with recreation, leisure, or sport participation; however there is considerably less empirical support documenting the social benefits of intramural sports participation. Student participation in intramural sports programs serves to enhance the social element of development, whether the participation is individual or in groups. Furthermore, outside of structured freshmen programs, "recreation may be the single common bond between students".

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this study is to examine the social benefits of intramural sports participation for Iranian student universities and compare the results to students at Otago University in New Zealand. More specifically, the research questions are; what social benefits are attained while participating in intramural sports?" and " Are there differences in the social benefits between: males & females; first- second- third-, and fourth year students; and students who live in residence versus students who live off campus?"
Literature Review:

Recreational sports professionals need to promote greater institutional understanding and appreciation of the social significance of intramural sports. While intramural sports are one of the most popular co-curricular activities for many students on university campuses, and one of the most beneficial social outlets for students, it is not publicly recognized as such. A likely reason for this is that recreational sports practitioners have not successfully, or effectively, articulated the social importance of intramural sports [12].

Astin(1984) proposed that “the more involved students are in academic and extracurricular activities, the more development they will experience”. According to this theory then, “extensive involvement in sport activities should lead to an enhanced social-emotional development” (Astin, p 79). According to Iso-Ahola (1989), “one mechanism for coping with the constant demands related to university life through participation in recreational activities, which has been shown to play an important role in helping students balance and improve the quality of their lives”. Iso-Ahola(1980), defined leisure socialization as “ a process through which individuals acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and motives about leisure”. Since most traditional age students are now at a stage of development in their university years where autonomy and identity are of importance, this becomes crucial in contributing to a sense of belonging and being part of a social group [5]. During this time personal interactions with an ever-widening sphere of social contacts in a variety of setting broadens an individual’s development [3].

Although much has been written about the socialization effects of recreation, leisure, sport, and intramurals, and the impact of these activities on socialization, the research on which this literature is based has major limitations. The evidence is relatively outdated and anecdotal in nature. This study seeks to determine if there are any significant differences between various demographic groups in the social benefits attained from intramural sports involvement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Procedure and samples:

The researcher used an instrument composed of two sections: social benefits of intramural sports participation and demographics. The questions in the demographics section were designed to address the research questions posed for the study. The social benefits section measured social benefits in five areas including: university integration, personal social benefits, cultural social benefits, social group bonding, and reliable alliance. The five categories were based on the review of literature and were specifically derived from a list of social benefits from Driver and Bruns(1999). The social benefits were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one (1), Strongly Disagree. To five (5), strongly Agree, suggest that the overall scale is reliable.

[12] reported internal consistency estimates( Cranach’s Alpha) for the personal, cultural, university integration, social group bonding, and reliable alliance social benefits 0.67, 0.66, 0.54, 0.72. and 0.60 respectively. However internal consistency estimates were computed for the data in the present study, and the result Participants were randomly selected on site from an intramural sports program at Iranian universities. Surveys were distributed either prior to or after students participated in their intramural sport. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to completing the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants:

A total of 1050 surveys were completed. The respondents for this study consisted of 535 (51%) Iranian students and 515 (49%) New Zealander Students, 603(57.4%) males and 447(42.6%) females. Eighty six (8.2%) of the respondents were 18 years of age, 16.7% (175)were aged 19 years,17.7%(186)were aged 20 years, 19%(199) were aged 21years, 16.1%(169)aged 22 years, and 22.3% (235)were aged 23 years or older. Two hundred and sixty five (25.2%) were in their first year of study, 24.4 % (256) were in their second year, 24 % (256) were in their third year, and 26.4 %( 277) were in their fourth year or more of study.

Measurement of Social Benefits:

The five social benefits were measured by four to six questions designed to assess that particular benefit and were measured on a five point Likert scale ranging from one(1) “ Strongly Disagree” to five(5) “strongly agree”. Iranian respondents indicated that they benefited the most in the areas of personal social benefited (M= 20.53 out of a possible 25, SD=2.75) and social group bonding (M= 24.30 out of a possible 30, SD=2.98) the least in the area of university integration benefits (M=14.19 out of a possible 20, SD=2.88). However the New Zealander respondents indicated that they benefited the most in the areas of social group bonding (M= 24.29 out of a possible 30, SD=3.55) and personal social benefited (M= 18.86 out of a possible 25, SD=2.93) the least in the area of cultural benefits (M=13.13 out of a possible 16, SD=2.39).
**Analysis:**

The results of the first t test revealed that there were significant differences between Iranian males and females on the following dimensions of social benefits: personal social benefits, university integration, and reliable alliance benefits. In each dimension, males reported significantly higher benefits. There were significant differences between New Zealander males and females in all dimensions of social benefits but in each case, females reported significantly higher benefits. The comparison results revealed that there were significant differences between Iranian and New Zealander females in cultural, university integration, reliable alliance and social group bonding benefits. In related cases, The New Zealander female students reported significantly higher benefits. The other comparison results revealed that there were significant differences between Iranian and New Zealander males in all dimensions. In each case, Iranian male students reported significantly higher benefits.

The t test indicated that there were significant differences between on-campus and off-campus students in both groups. In each case, students who lived on campus reported higher benefits. The comparison results revealed that there were significant differences between Iranian female students who lived on-campus and New Zealanders in personal social and reliable alliance benefits. The other comparison result revealed that there were significant differences between Iranian male students who lived on-campus and New Zealanders in personal social, cultural and social group bonding benefits. In each case, Iranian male students reported significantly higher benefits.

The one-way ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences for year in Iranian university for: personal social Benefits, university integration benefits, social group bonding benefits, and reliable alliance benefits. Each of the Turkey’s post hoc analyses revealed that first-year students reported significantly higher social benefits than second, third, and fourth year students. However, the one-way ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences for year in New Zealander university for: cultural benefits, social group bonding benefits, and reliable alliance benefits. Each of the Turkey’s post hoc analyses revealed that second-year students reported significantly higher social benefits than first, third, and fourth year students.

**Discussion:**

The findings showed that male and female students reported higher social benefits in all number of areas than mean average. It seems that they know that social interaction will promote if they get involve in intramural sports programs, so recreational sports professional need to develop greater institutional understanding and appreciation of the social significance of intramural sports.

There were a number of differences in the reported social benefits based on the student’s gender. Male students reported significantly higher social benefits in a number of areas when compared to female students. This finding contradicts to Forestter’s 2006. It seems that the male students of this study have more chance to access the sports facilities and female students in a turn have limitation. Creating “opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and unification for both male and female students are essential if campuses are to develop a sense community” (10). There were also a number of differences in the reported social benefits based on the student’s year of study in both groups. More specifically, fourth-year students reported significantly higher social benefits in a number of areas when compared to first-year students. And this finding is on the contrary of Forestter’s 2006. It seems that fourth-year students have had a multitude of co-curricular opportunities to benefit socially, and first-year Iranian students have structured programs, and almost stranger to the sports facilities and programs. It should be publicly recognized that intramural sports are one of the most popular co-curricular activities for all the students on university campuses, and one of the most beneficial outlets for students.

On campus and off campus students reported benefiting higher than mean average but there was no significantly differences in any number of areas. The result has some confounding. It was expected that the students who live on campus would benefit more from participating in intramural sports than the students who live off campus because of accessing to the sports facilities.

**Conclusion:**

The findings from this study can be used to guide recreational sports research, policy development, and management. Recreational sports programs need to position, or reposition, themselves in order to focus on the impacts of their programs and services. These programs also need to articulate to presidents, principals and board members within the institution as well as the students, faculty, and staff.

**REFERENCES**
