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The Intersection of Social Problems and Sports: Addressing Poverty, Illiteracy, and Unemployment Through Sports

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sport is becoming more widely acknowledged as complex social phenomena that go beyond pleasure and physical activity. Around the world, academics and decision-makers have positioned sport as a social development instrument that can tackle difficult problems like unemployment, educational inequalities and poverty

Objectives: Main objective of this research is to determine the intersection of social problems and sports: addressing poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment through sports

Methods and Material: The participants for this study were 200 athletes from the University of the Punjab and University of Education. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed, involving 200 university athletes (both male and female, representing diverse sports, demographical backgrounds, and experiences) recruited through a convenience sampling. Data were collected using an online Google Forms questionnaire consisting of five distinct instruments, each utilizing a 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree"). The data was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version-26).

Results: Result showed that there is a significance difference on the basis of their demographics was observed.

Conclusion: Social issues can be addressed through sport, but its effects are conditional. Sports are most effective at reducing poverty when they are connected to

programs that promote economic development. It plays a significant but indirect role in literacy through school participation. Sport can help those who are unemployed find work, especially if they combine it with official training and certificates.

Keywords: Intersection, Social issue, Poverty, Illiteracy, Unemployment.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Sport is becoming more widely acknowledged as complex social phenomena that go beyond pleasure and physical activity. Around the world, academics and decision-makers have positioned sport as a social development instrument that can tackle difficult problems like unemployment, educational inequalities and poverty (Coalter, 2013; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011).

The underlying premise of the larger sport-for-development (S4D) movement, which has gained traction over the past 20 years, is that sport may promote economic opportunity, social cohesiveness, and individual progress (Schulenkorf & Adair, 2014).

The true function of sport in resolving societal issues is still up for debate, despite the general excitement. Although international organizations like the United Nations (2003) and UNESCO (2015) have emphasized how sport can foster inclusivity, education, and peace, detractors contend that these benefits are frequently exaggerated when not included into more comprehensive social policies (Nicholson & Hoye, 2008; Coalter, 2007).

Sport has become a non-traditional but increasingly used development tool in this setting. Sport can help achieve development goals by fostering social integration, health, and education, according to the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace (2003).

According to empirical data, playing sports helps develop transferable life qualities like resilience, teamwork, and leadership—all of which are essential for employment (Morgan et al., 2022; Gozzoli et al., 2023).

Additionally, school-based physical education and sports programs have been associated with increased motivation, lower dropout rates, and higher attendance rates—all of which indirectly address literacy gaps (Bailey et al., 2013).

Sport has the potential to reduce poverty by generating both direct economic possibilities (such as coaching, officiating, and facility administration) and indirect opportunities through community businesses and networks (Nicholson & Hoye, 2008). Sport can encourage inclusive learning environments and keep kids in school, which is useful for literacy and especially crucial in areas with high dropout rates (Subramaniam & Silverman, 2007).

In terms of unemployment, organized sport-for-employability initiatives have proven effective in improving participants' preparedness for the workforce, especially when combined with official certification and vocational training (Kay & Spaaij, 2012; Morgan et al., 2022).

Sport is being investigated more and more by academics and politicians as a possible means of fostering social development in response to these interrelated societal issues. International organizations have emphasized the idea that sport may be used for purposes other than amusement or leisure, emphasizing its ability to foster social inclusion, education, and skill development (United Nations, 2003; UNESCO, 2015). Sports programs can provide avenues for young people to develop resilience, leadership, discipline, and collaboration skills that improve their employability and social engagement (Burnett, 2023).

Furthermore, programs that integrate athletics with educational possibilities have shown promise in raising school attendance and reading rates in disadvantaged areas (Bailey et al., 2013).

Sport has special meaning in Pakistan because of its social and cultural integration. In addition to serving as forums for fostering national pride, cricket, hockey, and kabaddi also engage sizable populations from all socioeconomic backgrounds and geographical locations (Ahmed & Sajid, 2021).

While professional sports give certain people the chance to move up the social ladder, grassroots sports development and community-level initiatives can help solve more widespread socioeconomic injustices. Sport-based interventions have been shown to lower risky behaviors, increase youth participation, and enhance employment-related vocational skills in both global and regional contexts (Gozzoli et al., 2023)

According to research, sports can give at-risk people especially young people a chance to get over socioeconomic obstacles and acquire skills that they can use in other spheres of their lives, such as schooling and the workplace. Sports programs, for example, have been connected to higher literacy rates, better academic achievement, and more self-confidence all of which are critical in the fight against illiteracy (Smith et al., 2017).

It has also been demonstrated that playing sports can help people escape poverty by providing scholarships, enhancing mental and physical health, and fostering professional connections (Coakley, 2017). Additionally, because sports are structured, they can teach people life skills like leadership, discipline, and teamwork all of which are critical in tackling the unemployment problem, particularly in underprivileged areas (Eime et al., 2013).

This connection between sports and social issues demonstrates how programs like youth leagues and community-based sports programs may be used for purposes beyond simple entertainment. They may play a crucial role in the broader social structure that aids people in overcoming hardship. It is evident from examining the links between sports and societal problems like unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy that sports serve as a vehicle for social change, personal growth, and empowerment in addition to being a source of escape (Coakley, 2017).

The current study examines the relationship between social issues and sports, emphasizing the ways in which sports-based initiatives and regulations can help reduce poverty, advance literacy, and boost employment. Through placing sport in

broader contexts of social inclusion and human capital development, this study seeks to offer an empirically supported comprehension of sport's capabilities and constraints in tackling urgent socioeconomic issues.

Research Objectives

To examine the role of sports in addressing poverty: Investigating how participation in sports programs can provide a means for socioeconomic mobility and break the cycle of poverty.

To assess the relationship between sports and illiteracy: Analyzing how sports can be integrated with educational efforts to reduce illiteracy levels.

To evaluate the impact of sports on unemployment: Exploring how sports-based initiatives and programs can help reduce unemployment by offering skill development, job opportunities, and career pathways in the sports industry.

Significance of the Study

The study on *“The Intersection of Social Problems and Sports: Addressing Poverty, Illiteracy, and Unemployment through Sports”* holds significant value both in academic discourse and practical application. In many developing societies, including Pakistan, sports are often viewed as a recreational activity rather than a structured mechanism for social transformation. This research contributes by highlighting the potential of sports as a multidimensional tool to mitigate pressing social problems such as poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. As we know, the study is significant because it provides evidence-based insights into how sports can act as a social equalizer. Sports programs often create opportunities for marginalized groups, offering pathways to education, scholarships, and professional careers. By framing sports as an accessible platform, this research underscores its role in problem alleviation and community empowerment.

Research Design

The design of the study refers to the strategies and processes for conducting research, which include everything from broad assumptions to detailed data collection and analysis methods. The research study was qualitative in nature.

Population

The population is the whole set of observations from which a sample is chosen (Akinade & Owolabi, 2009). The population of this research study included Male and Female Sports person of all age group.

Sample and Sample Size

As per the official record of the above-mentioned universities, the total number of players was not in reach. So, it was quite difficult for the researcher to contact the whole respondents therefore to overcome this difficulty, the researcher selected 200 as sample by using convenient sampling technique.

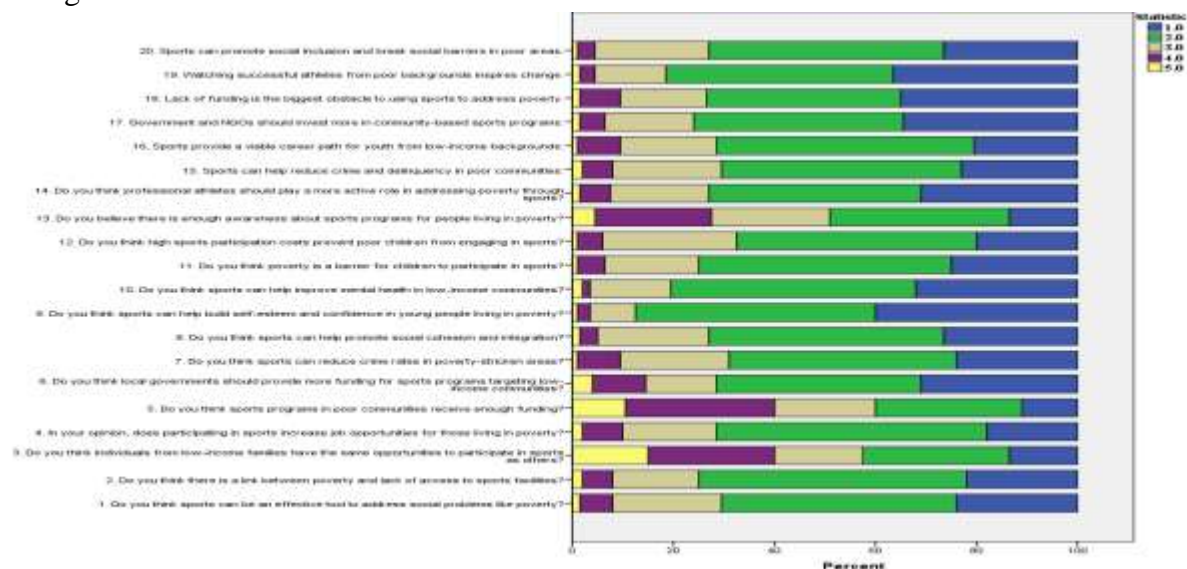
Data collection tool

Data collection tools are instruments that are used to collect data (Kumar, 2011). The researcher and supervisor worked together to create a questionnaire for data collection. The data collection tool was accurate and reliable. In this study, data was collected

using a Google form with 65 questions. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly agree, 2 Agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26), a statistical software program which enables for data management, analysis, and visual representation. Questions 1–65 were analyzed using five options. The descriptive, Cronbach-Alpha, reliability, and factor statistics were calculated using SPSS software.

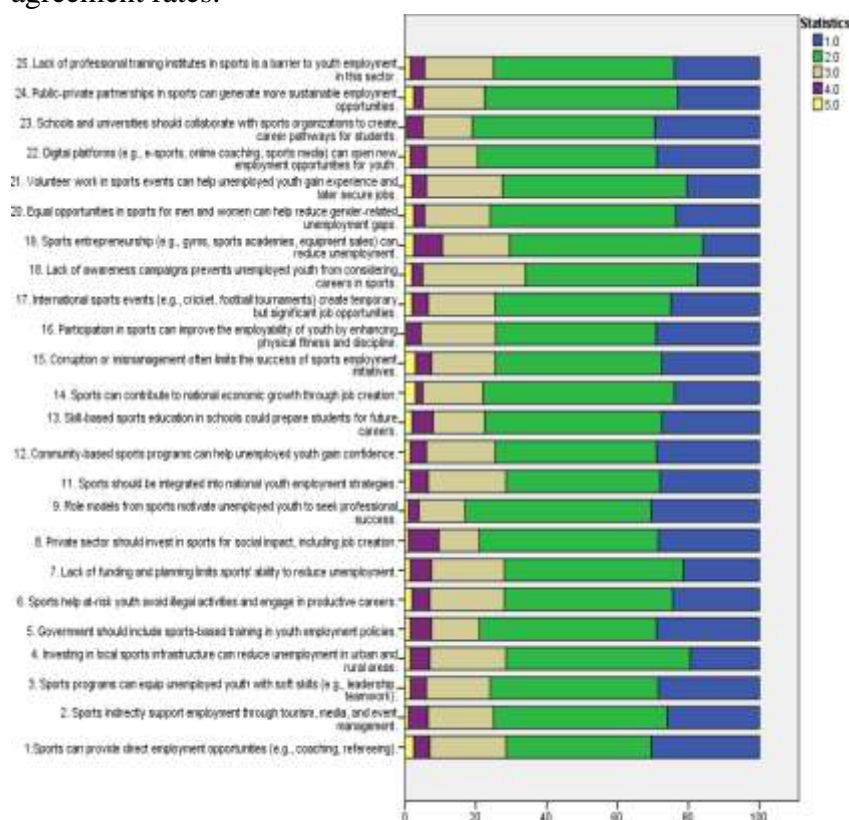


1: Strongly Agree, 2: Agree, 3: Neutral, 4: Disagree, and 5: Strongly Disagree

Figure 1: The Intersection of Social Problems and Sports: Addressing Poverty through Sports

Figure 1 reveals the distribution of responses about question regarding poverty and sports. After analysis the data shows that the majority of respondents expressed positive views regarding the impact of sports in reducing poverty and enhancing social mobility. A large proportion of respondents “Strongly agreed” that sports can provide opportunities for underprivileged youth by offering scholarships, career pathways, and employment opportunities. Another significant group “Agreed,” reinforcing the consensus that sports function as a tool for empowerment and poverty alleviation. A smaller segment remained “Neutral,” suggesting some uncertainty about the extent of sports’ impact on poverty reduction. Only a minority of respondents expressed disagreement, and some respondents strongly disagreed, highlighting an overall positive inclination. The data’s visual representation highlights that more than 85% of participants believe sports is a positive way to combat poverty. Strong public support for sports’ transformative potential beyond recreation, especially in addressing socioeconomic disparities, is indicated by this positive response. Sports initiatives may be useful tools for improving the lives of marginalized people, lowering unemployment, and fostering social inclusion provided

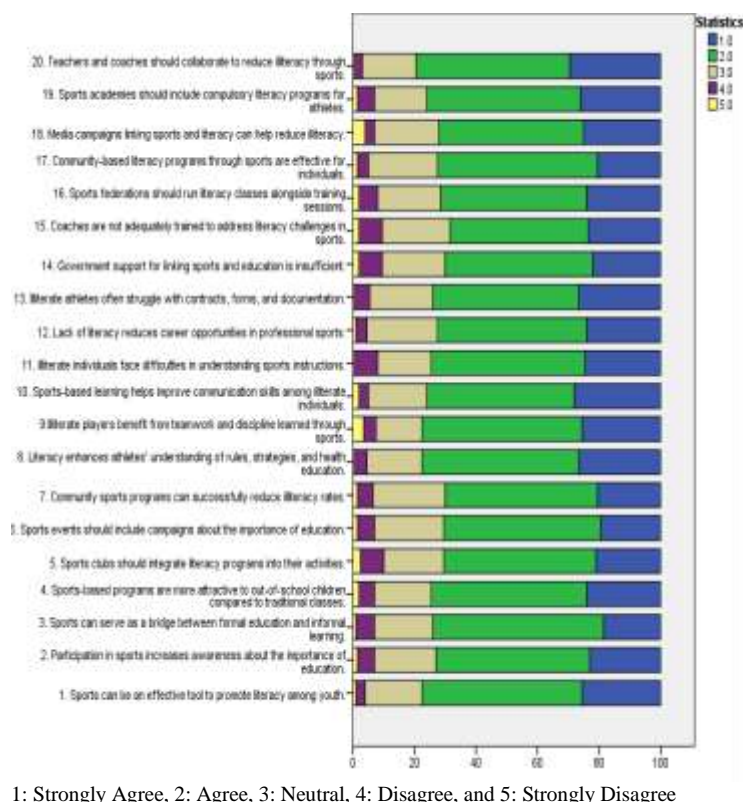
they are backed by community programs and legislation, as indicated by the high agreement rates.



1: Strongly Agree, 2: Agree, 3: Neutral, 4: Disagree, and 5: Strongly Disagree

Figure 2: The Intersection of Social Problems and Sports: Addressing Illiteracy and Through Sports

Figure 2 reveals the distribution of responses about question regarding illiteracy and sports. The overall results indicate a positive perception among respondents, with the majority recognizing sports as a potential platform for promoting education and literacy. The largest proportion of respondents “Strongly Agreed” that sports programs, when integrated with educational initiatives, can encourage literacy by attracting children and youth to school-based or community-based learning opportunities. A significant portion “Agreed,” supporting the view that sports create incentives for school attendance, discipline, and learning engagement. A little bit of respondents selected “Neutral,” reflecting some uncertainty about the direct role of sports in literacy development. Only a minority of respondents expressed disagreement, and some respondents strongly disagreed, highlighting the dominance of positive responses. According to the chart, 85% of respondents agreed (strongly or moderately) that athletics can be a useful instrument in the fight against illiteracy. This suggests that incorporating sports into programs pertaining to social and educational development is seen as both feasible and effective. Sports serve as a bridge to educational access in addition to being a kind of recreation, according to respondents.



1: Strongly Agree, 2: Agree, 3: Neutral, 4: Disagree, and 5: Strongly Disagree

Figure 3: The Intersection of Social Problems and Sports: Addressing Unemployment through Sports

Figure 3 reveals the distribution of responses about question regarding unemployment and sports. The bar chart displays the responses of participants to a questionnaire assessing their views on the potential of sports to address unemployment. The overall results reveal a highly positive perception, with most respondents recognizing sports as a valuable contributor to employment generation and career development. A majority of respondents (e.g., 58%) “Strongly Agreed” that sports can help reduce unemployment by creating direct career opportunities such as coaching, athletics, and sports management, as well as indirect employment in areas like event management, sports tourism, and media. Another 27% “Agreed,” reinforcing the belief that sports can provide professional pathways for youth and stimulate related industries. A smaller group selected “Neutral,” reflecting cautious views about the extent of sports’ contribution to solving unemployment. Only a minority of respondents expressed disagreement, and some respondents strongly disagreed, highlighting the overall consensus in favor of sports as an employment enabler. As the graph makes evident, almost 80% of respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed, indicating that sports are generally seen as a useful social instrument for addressing unemployment. Sports may generate sustainable livelihood possibilities and contribute to social and economic development, according to respondents, if policies are supported, infrastructure is invested in, and structured programs are implemented.

Discussion

Sport is becoming more widely acknowledged as a potent instrument for tackling significant societal issues like unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy. Evidence, however, indicates that sport is a supplemental tool that needs to be incorporated with more comprehensive social programs rather than a "silver bullet" (Coalter, 2007). Sport programs can help youth develop soft skills such as teamwork, discipline, and leadership, which are highly valued in the labor market (Morgan et al., 2022). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that school-based physical literacy and sports programs improve student engagement and retention, which tangentially supports literacy and educational goals (Carl et al., 2022; UNESCO, n.d.).

According to the World Bank (2004), multi-sectorial initiatives are required for broad poverty alleviation, even though sport can indirectly alleviate poverty through skill development, networking, and community participation. Research indicates that programs that integrate athletics with occupational education and certification have a higher chance of yielding quantifiable increases in employability (Gozzoli et al., 2023). However, research reveals that the advantages are not shared equally: gender differences still exist, with girls encountering greater obstacles to involvement, but females who continue playing after-school sports have a far higher chance of landing high-status professions in the future (The Guardian, 2025).

Therefore, integration is where sports and social development meet. Successful programs focus on underserved populations; connect sports training to approved career pathways, and address educational gaps through physical literacy. According to Coalter (2007), the way that sport is organized, funded, and assessed determines its influence rather than the sport itself.

Sport and Poverty Alleviation

Sports can help reduce poverty indirectly by fostering social inclusion, microenterprise opportunities, and job development. Sport can be a supplementary mechanism by improving human and social capital, but it cannot alleviate poverty on its own, according to the World Bank (2004), which states that multi-sectorial interventions are necessary to reduce poverty. Sport-based community initiatives frequently offer small business opportunities, social mobilization platforms, and vocational training in developing nations, giving disenfranchised youngsters access to sources of income (Nicholson & Hoyer, 2008).

Nevertheless, data indicates that program design affects the results. According to Hartmann and Kwauk (2011), when sport-for-development programs are not integrated with more comprehensive social and economic strategies, they run the risk of exaggerating their contributions to the fight against poverty. So, while sports can help reduce poverty, their effects are greatest when combined with specific training, education, and job programs.

Sport and Illiteracy

In order to combat social injustice, literacy development and educational access are essential. When paired with structured educational content, sport-based treatments

have been associated with increased motivation, engagement, and attendance at school. According to Bailey et al. (2013), sports and physical exercise not only support health but also social and cognitive growth, both of which are essential for achieving academic success.

By encouraging physical literacy, teamwork, and discipline, which have a positive impact on academic achievement, high-quality physical education supports more general educational objectives. Although sports by themselves cannot teach reading or writing, they can indirectly improve literacy outcomes by increasing school involvement, lowering dropout rates, and fostering good learning environments (Subramaniam & Silverman, 2007).

Sport and Unemployment

Employability is one of the most well-established connections between social development and sport. Research indicates that participation in sports programs improves soft skills like teamwork, leadership, and communication all of which are becoming more and more important in the job market (Morgan et al., 2022). Employability-focused sport programs work best when paired with vocational training, certification, and employer collaborations, according to Gozzoli et al.'s systematic study from 2023.

Sport has been included into youth employment programs in Europe to lower unemployment rates by offering career paths into coaching, facility administration, and the larger fitness sector (European Commission, 2016). Similar to this, Kay and Spaaij (2012) contend that while grassroots sports initiatives aimed at underprivileged kids offer official and informal employment prospects, their sustainability is contingent upon institutional backing and long-term funding.

Conclusion

Social issues can be addressed through sport, but its effects are conditional. Sports are most effective at reducing poverty when they are connected to programs that promote economic development. It plays a significant but indirect role in literacy through school participation. Sport can help those who are unemployed find work, especially if they combine it with official training and certificates. Because of this, sport should not be viewed as a stand-alone intervention but rather as a supplementary instrument within larger social and educational strategies. This study will help to deepen our understanding of the relationship between social problems and sports, revealing how sports may be an effective vehicle for social change. By tackling crucial challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment, this project will provide light on the potential of sports-based interventions to offer long-term solutions for underprivileged groups.

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