



Sports and Games Preference and Mental Well-Being among Community Health Officers-In-Training at University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assessed sports and games preference and mental well-being among community health officers-in-training at University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Kwara State, Nigeria. A descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted. The population of the study comprised all CHOs-in-training at the College of Community Health, UITH, Kwara State totalling 104. A purposive sampling technique was used to select all 104 students as the sample size. A validated structured questionnaire was used for data gathering. The reliability of the instrument was carried out using split half method and data were correlated using Spearman-Brown Rank Order which yielded R coefficient of 0.79. Research questions were answered and presented using percentage, composite bar chart and mean score. The null hypothesis was tested using Chi-square statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that volleyball was the most preferred sport (30.8%), while ludo was the most preferred game (15.4%). On gender basis, male mostly preferred football (62%), while females preferred volleyball (75%). Participation in sports and games enhanced mental well-being (grand mean = 4.20). Also, males and females students differ significantly in their selection of sports and games (p -value = 0.0043, $p < .05$). It was recommended that students should focus more attention on both volleyball and football, while other sports and games should not be neglected. Also, students should continue to engage in sports and games as a means of promoting mental health for optimal academic performance.

Keywords: CHOs-in-training, Games, Preference, Sports, Well-being

INTRODUCTION

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Tertiary education is demanding in nature. There is a shift of focus from home environment, workplace and sometimes private business towards academics all in an attempt to perform optimally and achieve success. According to Hewitt (2019), tertiary education encompasses moving from home towards independent living followed by preparation for professional life. These changes can impact negatively on the physical, mental and social well-being of students

(Niessen et. al., 2019). There is need for students to ease themselves of academic tension and promote their well-being on daily basis. Therefore, participation in sports and games within the school environment can bring about improvement in students' well-being, and thereby improve the overall health. Fatai (2017) defined sports as organized spontaneous exercises or games or as a competitive or on-competitive process through which an individual obtains physical skills, mental relaxation and bodily fitness. As revealed by Steenkamp et al. (2017), stress and anxiety from educational pursuit can trigger physical and mental illnesses, disorder in performance and students' inability to adapt themselves to different situations and finally, depression. Therefore, students' participation in sports and games become important, and an effective means of improving their total well-being in higher institutions of learning.

Community Health Officers (CHOs) are Community Health Practitioners (CHPs) trained to achieve universal health coverage by bringing health care services to the grassroots level and provide basic health care services that meet the health needs of the populace (Oguntunji et al., 2026). In the context of this study, CHOs-in-training are students who are undergoing either one or two year(s) (depending on professional/academic certificates previously acquired) professional training at University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UIH), Amilegbe, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. Due to the cumbersomeness of their professional training, the institution authority introduced once-a-week mandatory sport and game activities for them with the purpose of promoting their total well-being throughout the period of staying in school. Available sports for CHOs-in-training include, football, volleyball, table tennis, weight lifting, running and jogging, while available recreational sports games include ludo, whots (card game) and traditional seed board game (ayo olopon) (Oguntunji et al., 2025). Previous study showed that participation in sports and games among CHOs-in training promotes cardio respiratory functioning, strength and agility, reduces muscular pains and body joints, promotes team work and interpersonal relationships, and gives opportunity for making new friends, and build self-confidence.

Choice of sport is determined by several factors. The choice of sport is determined by

several factors such as age, gender, interest, previous experience, availability of facilities and equipment, and health status (Yakubu et al., 2019). According to Russel et al. (2017), it has been recognized that boys and girls are socialized differently, through gender-stereotyped beliefs and behaviours in the family, physical education classes, and sport contexts where girls and boys are not encouraged in the same way. Chalabaev et al. (2013) asserted that sports that demonstrate strength and power, such as football and basketball are seen as expression of masculinity, while aesthetic sports, such as dance, are feminized. In Italy, gender disparities in sports participation have been observed in 11-19 years old girls (41% girls versus 59% of boys) (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2017). On a biological point of view, some physical characteristics of male predispose them to outperform females in sports that require strength, power and speed. According to Robin & Melissa (2026), adult males tend to be taller with longer limbs, shoulders breadth allows for more muscles on a larger shoulder girdle, developed larger skeletal muscles, and have more overall muscle mass and less body fat than females.

Gender is a highly visible position of inequality in participation in sports (Spaaij et al., 2015). The disparity in participation across gender reflects the societal perceptions that sport participation is part of a typical male dominance (Robertson et al., 2018). The study of Khan et al. (2022) shows gender preference for sports participation in which girls preferred sports such as skipping, and traditional sports which involve running at a slow pace and are physically less demanding. Boys mostly preferred sport such as football, cricket, badminton and volleyball which are more physically demanding. Similarly, some girls also preferred volleyball, handball and badminton and others preferred board games during their leisure time. On same-sex or mixed groups, girls prefer participation in sports with other girls; while boys prefer mixed-gender group sports (Khan et al., 2022).

The findings in the study conducted by Frömel et al. (2022) between 2009 and 2022 among both the Czech and Polish secondary school boys revealed that, the most preferred team sport among Czech (29.2%) and Polish (41.4%) boys was soccer. Apart from soccer being the most preferred one, Czech boys also

preferred floorball (17.3%), basketball (9.6%), volleyball (8.5%) and ice hockey (7.6%), while Polish boys preferred volleyball (19.1%), basketball (14.6%) and handball (6.1%) (Frömel et. al., 2022). Among the females, the most preferred team sport among Czech (35.9%) and Polish girls (45.6%) was volleyball. The Czech girls' order of preference was followed by basketball (12.2%), handball (10.8%), floorball (9.5%) and soccer (7.6%) (Frömel et. al. (2022). Among the Polish girls, order of preference was followed by basketball (18.7%), handball (9.3%) and soccer (7.1%) (Frömel et al., 2022). In a cross-sectional study of 973 Portuguese children and adolescents aged 10-18 years, a higher percentage of boys (51.3%) participated in organized sports compared to girls (28.3%) (Marques et. al., 2016).

Participation in sports and games has been closely linked to improved mental health status. Okechukwu (2021) reiterated that participation in sports is associated with psychological and emotional benefits such as improvements in mood, self-esteem, social interactions, social integration, social bonding and overall mental well-being. A study conducted in United States revealed that higher sports participation was associated with better mental health outcomes, such as lower depressive symptoms and higher life satisfaction (Hoffmann et al., 2022). As reported by Pluhar et al. (2019), sports participation lowers the rate of anxiety, depression and amounts of stress. The result of the study of Cecchini et al. (2020) on associations between physical activity levels and depressive symptoms among 714 adolescents who participated in the physical activity at a moderate intensity shows a significantly lower probability of suffering from depressive symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia, feeling of hopelessness and decreased appetite among others.

Interaction with some CHOs-in training at UITH, Kwara State revealed that many were not actively engaged in sports and games before gaining admission. Harry & Wetzler (2018) reported that students' health is deteriorating year- by-year, and more worryingly, that many students have committed suicide, been depressed, or had a mental breakdown. Such mental conditions may not guarantee better future considering the competitive work demand and expected

roles in the society at large. Despite the vast awareness of health risks associated with being physically inactive and the importance of being physically active, inadequate physical activity level is prevalent throughout the world (Non-Communicable Alliance, 2016). According to World Health Organization (WHO) (2021), insufficient physical activity is the 4th leading risk factor for mortality. Globally, 1 in 4 adults do not meet the global recommended levels of physical activity. People who are insufficiently active have a 20% to 30% increased risk of death compared to people who are sufficiently active (WHO, 2022).

In Nigeria, the prevalence of physical inactivity was recorded as the highest in North-central (77.8%) in which Ilorin belongs to, followed by South-East (63.3%) and South-South (57.7%). The North-East (44.9%) and South-west (40.8%) had lowest estimated prevalence (Adeloye et. al., 2021). Researchers observed paucity of data on participation in either sports or games among community health students in Nigeria. To the best knowledge of the researchers, there is no work that examined preference for sports and games, and links it to the mental well-being of community health students. Only a scholarly work was found that established how sports participation promotes community health students' physical and social well-being. Upon this premise, the researchers investigated sports and games preference and mental well-being among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study was to examine sports and games preference and mental well-being among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions were raised and answered in this study:

1. What are the most preferred sports and games among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria?
2. Does preference for sport and game vary by gender among CHOs-in-

training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria?

3. What is the contribution of participation in sports and games to the mental well-being among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

This null hypothesis was tested in this study: Gender is not significantly associated with preference for sports and games among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted. The population of the study comprised all CHOs-in-training at the College of Community Health, UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria totalling 104 as at 2023. A purposive sampling technique was used to select all the entire students making 104 as the total sample size for the study. All the students in the college were included in the study because their total population was not large enough due to the regulatory body that is, Community Health Practitioners Registration Board of Nigeria's policy on student admission on yearly basis. A structured questionnaire on "Sports and Games Preference and Mental Well-being among CHOs-in-training" was used to obtain data from the respondents. Instrument validation was done by three experts in the related fields. The reliability of the instrument was carried out using split-half method and data obtained were correlated using Spearman-Brown Rank Order formula which yielded a coefficient of 0.79. The permission to carry out the study was obtained from the institution authority.

The consent of each respondent was sought with the filling of informed consent

form; confidentiality pledged, and the participation in the study was made voluntary. One trained research assistant helped in the instrument administration. Data entry and processing was done using Statistical Package for the Social Science version 25.0. The research questions were answered and data presented using percentage, composite bar chart and mean score. Also, the null hypothesis was tested using Chi-square statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Research Question 1: What are the most preferred sports and games among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 1. Showing the most Preferred Sports and Games among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria.

S/N	Sports/Games	Frequency	Percentage
1	Football	26	25.0
2	Volleyball	32	30.8
3	Table tennis	4	3.8
4	Weight lifting	1	1.0
5	Running	5	4.8
6	Jogging	9	8.7
7	Jumping rope	7	6.7
8	Ludo	16	15.4
9	Whots	4	3.8
10	Board game (Ayo olopon)	0	0.0
	Total	104	100

The Table 1 shows that volleyball was the most preferred sport 32 (30.8%), and ludo was the most preferred game 16 (15.4%) among the CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: Does preference for sport and game vary by gender among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria?

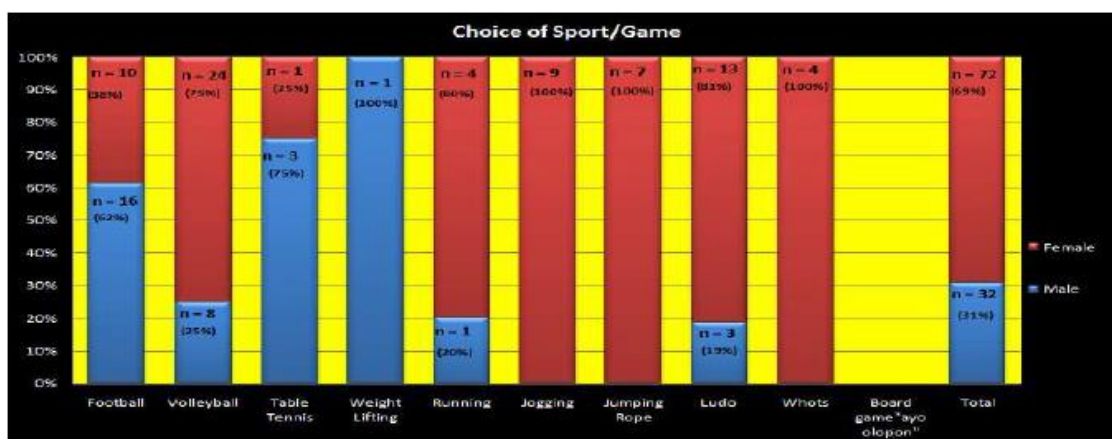


Figure 1. Composite Bar Chart Showing Variation in Preference for Sport and Game Based on Gender among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria.

In the composite bar chart presented in figure 1, it revealed variation in preference for sport and game based on gender among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria. On comparative point of view, among all the sports and games participated in, football was mostly preferred among male students 16 (62%), while volleyball was mostly preferred by female students 10 (38%). Research Question 3: What is the contribution of participation in sports and games to the mental well-being among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 2. Showing the Contribution of Participation in Sports and Games to Mental Well-being among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria.

S/N	Items	Mean Score	Decision
1	Better mental coordination	4.34	Agreed
2	Reduction in anxiety/tension	4.13	Agreed
3	Improves mood	4.20	Agreed
4	Reduction in suicidal thought	3.88	Agreed
5	Reduction in mental stress	4.36	Agreed

6	Reduction in depression-related symptoms	4.25	Agreed
7	Increased mental alertness	4.27	Agreed

Criterion $\bar{x} = 3.00$ Grand Mean = 4.20 (Agreed)
Mean score interpretation: 3.00 & above (Agreed); Below 3.00 (Disagreed).

The results in the table 2 revealed that the mean scores of all items were above the criterion mean of 3.00 indicating that the respondents agreed that participation in sports and games enhanced their mental well-being. Specifically, items 5 had the highest mean score of 4.36 which implies that respondents agreed that participation in sports and games contribute greatly to their reduction in mental stress. However, item 4 that is, reduction in suicidal thoughts had the mean score of 3.88, yet more than the criterion mean.

Research Hypothesis One: Gender is not significantly associated with preference for sports and games among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Table 3. Chi-square Test of Association between Gender and Sport/Game Preference among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Sport/Game	Male O (E)	Female O (E)	Total	χ^2 Male	χ^2 Female	χ^2 Total
Football	16 (8.00)	10 (18.00)	26	8.000	3.556	11.556
Volleyball	8 (9.85)	24 (22.15)	32	0.346	0.154	0.500
Table Tennis	3 (1.23)	1 (2.77)	4	2.541	1.131	3.672
Weight Lifting	1 (0.31)	0 (0.69)	1	1.564	0.692	2.256
Running	1 (1.54)	4 (3.46)	5	0.189	0.084	0.273
Jogging	0 (2.77)	9 (6.23)	9	2.770	1.230	4.000
Jumping Rope	0 (2.15)	7 (4.85)	7	2.155	0.958	3.113
Ludo	3 (4.92)	13 (11.08)	16	0.751	0.334	1.085
Whots/Board Game	0 (1.23)	4 (2.77)	4	1.231	0.547	1.778

N = 104, df = 8, cal. χ^2 = 28.23, p-value = 0.0043, level of significance = 0.05

The findings in the table 3 showed (χ^2 cal = 28.23, df 8, p-value. = 0.0043, and level of significance = 0.05). Since p-value (0.0043) < 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant association between gender and preference for sports and games among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria

Discussion

The table 1 shows the preferred sport and games among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that volleyball was the most preferred sport among the respondents with 32 students (30.8%), followed by football with 26 students (25.0%). The implication of the finding is that, volleyball and football are examples of aerobic exercise that can enhance cardiovascular endurance and mental alertness, promote weight control by burning body fats, increase stamina and strength, and reduce stress and risk of high blood pressure. The finding is in line with the submission of Spaaij et al. (2015) that gender creates disparity in sports participation. Also, Yakubu et al. (2019) pointed to gender as one among the several factors that determine the choice of sport participation.

The composite bar chart presented in the figure 1 showed the variation in the preference for sport and game based on gender among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria. The implication of the finding is that male respondents preferred highly energy demanding sport like football, while female respondents prefer volleyball that is less energy demanding in nature. This shows the individual natural ability as regard masculinity and femininity. The result align with the report of Khan et al. (2022) whereby girls preferred sports

which involved running at a slow pace and are physically less demanding; while boys mostly preferred sport such as football among others that are more physically demanding. Similarly, Chalabaev et al. (2013) asserted that sports that demonstrate strength and power, such as football and basketball are seen as expression of masculinity, while aesthetic sports are feminized. In the table 3, the findings showed that male and female respondents differ significantly in their selection of sports and games. The variation was observed in preference across football, volleyball, jogging, jumping rope, and other activities. These are in line with the submission of Frömel et. al (2022) in which volleyball was the most preferred team sport among Czech (35.9%) and Polish girls (45.6%), but only 19.1% of Polish boys preferred volleyball.

Findings in the table 2 revealed the contributions of participation in sports and games to mental well-being among CHOs-in-training at UITH, Kwara State, Nigeria. The implication of the finding is that respondents' participation in sports and games greatly improve their mental well-being with respect to reduction in mental stress, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, depression and better mental coordination. The results of these findings are in accordance with the report of the of Hoffmann et al. (2022) that higher sports participation has better mental health outcomes, such as lower depressive symptoms and higher life satisfaction. The finding further aligns with the assertion of Pluhar et al. (2019) that sports participation lowers the rate of anxiety, depression and stress.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, among the CHOs-in-training, only volleyball was the most preferred sport; and football and volleyball were differently preferred among males and females respectively. Also, participation in those exercises promotes their mental well-being positively. Based on the conclusion of this study, it is recommended students should focus more attention on both volleyball and football based on preference, however, other sports and games should not be neglected. Finally, students should continue to engage in their weekly sport and game activities as a means of promoting their mental health for optimal academic performance.

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