



A Systematic Literature Review on Sports Programming for Survivors of Trafficking

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

BACKGROUND

This systematic literature review on sports programming for survivors of trafficking aims to provide practical insight into whether there is evidence that supports sport or physical activity-based programming for trafficking survivors. This study aims to assess the efficacy of sports interventions on three specific reintegration outcomes: 1) psychological effects (i.e., emotional, behavioral, and mental health) 2) social outcomes (which we define as acceptance by and/or connection to society/family), and 3) economic livelihood outcomes of trafficking survivors.

The SLR process involved a comprehensive search of multiple academic databases to identify relevant studies. After screening 7,230 studies, seven papers were identified, bringing the total to eight studies that provided evidence of the effects of sports programming on survivors of trafficking.

KEY FINDINGS

We see solid qualitative and quantitative evidence that Sport for Development (SfD) programs can improve psychological outcomes for survivors of the types of traumas that trafficking survivors frequently experience. Quantitative evidence from the studies shows statistically significant improvements in the psychological well-being of trauma survivors, including symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression (Craig et al., 2020; Knappe et al., 2019; Namy et al., 2022; Van der Kolk et al., 2014). Qualitative evidence also highlights several positive outcomes, such as improved mood and optimism (Craig et al., 2020; Ley et al., 2018), enhanced self-compassion and body-mind connection (Crews et al., 2016), and increased self-confidence and empowerment (Craig et al., 2020; Ley et al., 2018)).

There is also moderately strong evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, that suggests SfD can improve social reintegration outcomes for these survivors of trauma. Quantitative evidence indicates improvements in marital relationships and increased social and emotional support (Bennett et al., 2014; Staempfli and Matter, 2017). Qualitative evidence points to the development of support networks and deeper connections, as well as the breaking of isolation and building of relationships (Crews et al., 2016; Ley et al., 2018; Van der Kolk et al., 2014). However,



LEARNINGS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Choosing the right sport and ensuring trauma-sensitive programming is crucial for the success of SfD interventions. Different sports may be more suitable for specific traumas; for instance, yoga, which focuses on bodily awareness and control, might be particularly beneficial for survivors of sexual violence, while team sports could be more appropriate for fostering social cohesion. Complementary components such as couple's therapy, mindfulness practices, financial literacy, group counseling, and health education should be considered to address the broader needs of the target population. Creating a recreational environment can make the program more appealing to those who may be uncomfortable with traditional psychosocial therapy settings. However, it is important to be aware of potential risks. Recreation can be physically strenuous and psychologically stressful, and some participants may experience pain sensations or distressing memories, which could lead to dropout. Therefore, careful consideration is needed to optimize participation and ensure the mental well-being of all participants.

these social reintegration outcomes are measured in a somewhat subjective manner. Because none of the studies in this SLR address livelihood outcomes, we are unable to conclude anything about the impact of SfD programs on the livelihoods of trauma survivors.

There are several limitations and gaps in the literature that need to be considered. The studies primarily come from the United States, Europe, and Africa, highlighting a need for more research in Asia, particularly for Asia countering trafficking in persons (CTIP). Most participants were adults, with limited evidence on teenagers and none on children. Several studies focused on men-only or women-only programs, leaving a gap in understanding mixed-gender team sports or yoga programs for men. Additionally, most studies evaluated short-term effects, limiting our understanding of the long-term benefits of SfD programs.

Many studies used pre-post designs without randomized control, which restricts causal inference. Issues include the lack of counterfactual estimates and potential biased selection into SfD programs. There is also a need to compare different intervention components (e.g., sport alone vs. sport plus counseling) and to compare the social return on investment (SROI) of these interventions with psychotherapies or pharmaceutical treatments. None of the studies discussed the costs associated with the evaluated programs, which is crucial for understanding the cost-effectiveness of SfD programs for trauma survivors. While Gosselin et al. (2020) found a positive SROI for sports interventions, there was no discussion on how these values compare with the SROI or cost-benefit ratios of psychotherapy or pharmacological treatments. And the cost-effectiveness of SfD for trauma survivors warrants further study.

SfD interventions indicated some possibilities for the CTIP programs. First, it aligns well with the 4Ps Framework of Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnerships in CTIP. Particularly, SfD programs contribute significantly to the Protection component by addressing psychosocial healing as a critical initial step towards the reintegration of survivors. These programs embody the principles of trauma-informed care, as outlined by the 4 R's: realizing the impact of trauma, recognizing signs and symptoms, responding with integrated knowledge, and actively resisting re-traumatization.

Moreover, implementing SfD within CTIP efforts adheres to six guiding principles of trauma-informed approaches: Safety, Trustworthiness and Transparency, Peer Support, Collaboration and Mutuality, Empowerment, Voice, and Choice, and Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues. By integrating these principles, SfD programs can provide a safe and supportive environment that acknowledges survivors' trauma experiences, builds trust, fosters peer support networks, and empowers participants through meaningful choices and cultural sensitivity.

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