

Sport and recreation participation preferences in the Botswana Defence Force

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Abstract

Sport and recreation are used as vehicles to create military readiness. Botswana Defence Force (BDF) soldiers are constantly deployed to border posts and other areas where their missions involve anti-poaching activities, disaster management and foreign peace-keeping. When not deployed, they reside with their families in military barracks where they participate in sport and recreation activities. Sport and recreation are practised in military settings in residential and occupational capacity. Literature suggests that participation in sport and recreation in military settings is mainly focused on promoting and maintaining military efficiency and morale. This study aimed at determining the preferences of sports and recreation activities of military staff. This study utilised a survey design using self-administered questionnaires to determine participation in and preferences of sport and recreation activities within the BDF. Using a convenient sampling technique and eight hundred and fifty seven (857) respondents participated in the study. The results of this study indicated that participants preferred individual as well as team sport and recreation activities. The five most preferred activities were soccer (47.1%), running (33.6%), shooting (29.7%), volleyball (24.6%) and obstacle training (21.2%). This study emphasizes that individual activities were preferred and a change in preferences regarding participation in team sport and recreation activities was observed. This information is valuable to the management of sport and recreation at the BDF regarding sports and recreation interests of the soldiers and their families.

Keywords: Military sport and recreation preferences, military sport and recreation patterns, military readiness, sport and recreation activities, Botswana Defence Force.

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Introduction

Military readiness is a function or the ability of a person to perform his or her full duty (Lauder et al., 2000). It is important to keep in mind that the soldiers and support personnel are able to focus more on the tasks at hand if their needs are met. This includes the need to relax under stressful circumstances. This implies that a soldier as well as the unit should be fully equipped and motivated to perform tasks. Conversely, lack of sport and recreation activities would result in decreased readiness (Phillips, 2006). Sport and recreation are used as vehicles to create military readiness and to achieve a state of relaxation. Soldiers may either have a very demanding schedule or with a great deal of free time, depending on their location and duty station. When they have free time available, they can participate in sports on both a recreational or competitive basis (Lauder et al., 2000). Phillips (2006) comments that morale, welfare and recreation play an important part in a military soldier's life.

According to Gouws (1997) and Eicheberg (1998) sport is a competitive physical activity for which there is a set of rules and regulations and there is a winner. Recreation is defined by Edginton et al. (1998) as a process that restores or recreates the individual and could also be explained as purposeful wholesome activities linked with specific types of activities such as games, arts, crafts, outdoor recreation, recreational sport and others. The role of sport and recreation in a military setting is twofold. Firstly, it is instrumental to defence as most fitness programmes in military settings are biased towards military training of all ranks and focuses on creating physical fitness, mental alertness and qualities of military preparedness. Secondly, it is used to boost unit morale by building inter-rank relations outside the threatening hierarchal structure. Thirdly, it is attached to different political intentions from its national defence purpose in showing superiority over other countries encouraging national integration (patriotism) and taking pride in their teams (Riordan, 1986; Chien-Yu, Ping-Chao, & Hui-Fang, 2008; Mason, 2011). Another important role of sport in the military is that it is centralised in the control of sports development as sport participation in the military contributes to the wider world of civilian sport (Riordan, 1986; Mason, 2011). A study conducted by Shehu and Moruisi (2010) on the influence of sport on personal development and social investment among Botswana Olympic athletes indicated that those athletes that stemmed from the military were encouraged to participate in sport for military readiness but it also prepared them to become national athletes proudly presenting their country. Supporting evidence indicates that the BDF participates in inter-unit competitions and local leagues involving 16 sports. These activities include: body building/ weightlifting, tennis, athletics, karate, badminton, soccer/football, baseball, aerobics, boxing, basketball, volleyball, rugby, cricket, traditional dancing, recreational games and field hockey (Mophuting, 2007). The BDF is

further affiliated members of the International Military Sports Council known as the *Conseil International du Sport Militaire* (CISM). The CISM is an international sport association for armed forces, the largest authority for military sport activity in the world. They support 25 sport types in which military forces take part during the Military World Games hosted every four years (a year before the Olympic Games). These World Games are based on the CISM and Olympic spirit without political, racial and religious considerations and discrimination (CISM, 2007).

Botswana Defence Force soldiers are continuously deployed to the border posts and other areas where their missions involve anti-poaching activities, disaster management and foreign peace keeping aimed at fostering regional (southern African region/ Southern African Customs Union [SADC]) peace building policy (Maclean, 1999; Dutch Aviation Society, 2006). When they are not deployed they reside with their families in military settings where sport and recreation activities are practised. This is the time they have to use to relax and practise their sports, rejuvenating them mentally and physically in order to stay prepared for combat. Sport and recreation occur in military settings, not just as part of their military training (occupational capacity), but also in residential setting (living on base camp). Sport and recreation does not often take place in occupational settings, but happens automatically in the military as it becomes a major part of the daily lives of military staff and their families and further contributes to military readiness (Mull, Bayless, Ross & Jamieson, 1997).

Literature focussing on participation in sport and recreation within military settings mainly relates to the promotion and maintenance of military efficiency and morale. Military recreation, moral and welfare programmes were established as a front line source of readiness during the First and Second World Wars. More recently these programmes were introduced as a means of providing soldiers with the opportunity to relax and rejuvenate as it was believed that one could not send a tired soldier back into the line of duty as they could be a danger to themselves and their entire unit (Rice, 1998). Studies conducted by Amusa et al. (2008) and Toriola et al. (2000) focused mainly on the civilian community of Botswana. Amusa et al. (2008) examined the factors that limited the frequency and quality of participation in sport and recreation. They further investigated the extent to which the barriers to participation in sport and recreation were common amongst the population of Botswana. Their studies indicated that participation in sport and recreation was mainly constrained by socio-economic, socio-cultural, facility awareness and accessibility barriers. Their findings on restrictions to participation were generalised to the larger Botswana community. However, barriers to sport and recreation participation in the military are different. Military Forces provide the infrastructure of formal programmes and activities to staff and their families who reside at the barracks.

This ensures accessibility to programmes and activities. Toriola et al. (2000) conducted a comparative analysis study of youth sports programmes in Botswana and Nigeria. Findings of their study related to Botswana indicated that youth sport programmes were mainly institutionalised, targeting schools, specifically primary schools and to some extent secondary schools. Little provision was made for sporting interests of out-of school and disabled youth. Their study provided an understanding on the culture of sport participation among Botswana citizens as they have limited exposure to sport at school level. This could have an impact on their participation in sport-related activities after school.

More related is the study conducted by the Department of Sport, Rehabilitation and Dental Sciences at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in 2003-2006 involving 1025 soldiers. This study firstly assessed the needs and status of sport and leisure programmes offered to military staff in the BDF, and secondly, determined the status of BDF sport and recreation facilities by means of a facility audit (Tshwane University of Technology, 2006). The survey method was used to assess the needs and status of sport and recreation programmes in the BDF focusing on the perception of soldiers regarding sport and leisure with specific reference to demographic characteristics, patterns of participation in sport and recreation activities, the usage and needs of sport and recreation programmes and services, as well as the military sport and recreation facilities. The results showed that BDF staff participated in various activities at different levels and that the majority of the respondents preferred team sports. The most preferred activities were soccer (n=458), body building/weightlifting (n=285), volleyball (n=126), recreational games (n=183) and athletics (n=182). The results further showed that the staff members did not understand the benefits of participation in sport and recreation activities. As a result, the BDF was encouraged to: 1) enhance the training and coaching of the different sport and recreation activities offered at the base camps, 2) create a better awareness of the benefits participating in sport and recreation activities, 3) promote the sport and recreation activities already offered at base camps, and 4) provide a wider variety of sport and recreation activities.

The problem that emanates from the literature is that sport and recreation participation in the military is instrumental to defence and it contributes to the wider world of civilian sport. The research question following from this is to determine what sport and recreation activities military personnel in the BDF prefer to participate in, and what are their reasons for participation in these sport and recreation activities.

Materials and Methods

Whilst conducting research in November 2007, the BDF consisted of approximately 12 000 troops. The BDF recruited only male cadets from four military base camps were selected. The sizes of the base camps varied and could therefore not accommodate the same number of soldiers. For this reason, a convenient sampling technique was used to select respondents who were available and accessible at the base during the research period (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Eight hundred and eighty two (882) questionnaires were distributed and eight hundred and fifty seven (857) questionnaires were completed by participants [Gaborone (N=335), Thebephatshwa/ Molepolole (TAB:- Air force base camp) (N=221), Selebi-Phikwe (N=112) and Francistown (N=184)].

This study made use of a survey design based on self-administered questionnaires to determine participation preferences in sport and recreation activities within the BDF. The questionnaire was distributed throughout four military base camps in Botswana that were assigned by the BDF. Two assistants accompanied the researcher to Botswana to distribute and collect the questionnaires. They underwent thorough training regarding the aims of the study and the intention of the questions. In conjunction with the BDF, the soldiers were requested to meet at a specific venue at each base where the questionnaires were distributed for completion. The questionnaires were collected by the research team after completion.

Research instrument

The research instrument forms part of a larger study focussing on the use of sport and recreation as a means to reduce stress. For the purpose of this study, only the sections focussing on the demographic data of the military staff and their sport and recreation participation was used. These two sections were adopted from the Needs Analysis Survey used by TUT (2006). Modifications were made to the questionnaire to suit the purpose of this study. Demographic information included gender, marital status, level of education, religion, military force type, military rank and military status. Personal information of the participants provides information on the characteristics of the participants. The second section measures the participants' perceptions on sport and recreation programme demographics. This includes participation behaviour, assessing the sport and recreation activity preferences of respondents, reasons for their participation, frequency of participation as well as level of participation. Individual and team sport and recreation activities were listed and respondents were allowed to select more than one activity. The researcher made use of open and close-ended questions providing possible answers to the

questions where applicable and leaving space to comment on those questions where more information was requested.

A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the instructions concerning the questionnaire were comprehensible, and to improve the quality of the questionnaire. Twenty questionnaires were piloted after which the questionnaire was refined based on feedback and participant responses. The questionnaire was not tested for validity and reliability due to time constraints.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher gained written permission from the Botswana Defence Force to conduct the research. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Participants were informed about the procedures and nature of the research and gave informed consent. Participation was voluntary and the privacy of the participants was respected as they were not required to reveal their identity. The information obtained was treated with utmost confidentiality.

Data Analysis

A database was created and double entry was used for data capturing in order to prevent coding errors. The data was analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package for Social Software v.17 (SPSS). Results were reported as frequencies and percentages.

Results

A total of 857 male respondents participated in the study. Demographic information indicated that the respondents were aged 18-44 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic data of participants (N=857)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-25	273	32.1
	26-34	327	38.5
	35-44	207	24.4
	45 +	43	5
Marital Status	Unmarried	635	74.4
	Married	197	23.1
	Cohabiting/Separated/ Divorced/Widowed	21	2.5
Educational level	Primary School	30	3.6
	Secondary School	538	65
	Tertiary Qualification	260	31.4

Three percent of the respondents did not reveal their rank. The majority of the participants were from lower ranks; 272 (32.6%) Officer Cadets and 386 (46.25) Corporals. Sixteen percent (n=136), indicated that they were either Staff Sergeants, 1st /2nd Sergeant Majors, Sergeant Majors, Warrant Officers, 1st/ 2nd Lieutenants, Captains or Majors and only 1% (n=8) of the respondents being non-commissioned staff members. Respondents from the Air Force and Engineer Regiment had the highest response rate (Table 2).

Table 2: Botswana Defence Force Military force type

Military Force Type	Frequency	Percentage
Air Force	214	25.9
Engineer Regiment	197	23.8
Infantry Battalion	120	14.5
Armoured Brigade	95	11.5
Administrative	83	10
Armoured Artillery	65	7.9
Commando Regiment	29	3.5
Infantry Brigade	23	2.8

Generally, the participants were satisfied with their level of participation in physical activities, with n=590 participants indicating that they were satisfied to extremely satisfied, n=160 indicating that they had mixed feelings and only n=83 indicating that they were dissatisfied to extremely dissatisfied. Participants were asked to give an indication of their involvement in individual and team sport and recreation activities respectively. This was used to determine their preferences and to establish their reasons for participation. They were allowed to select more than one activity from both the individual and team activity lists. Table 3 illustrates the participation preferences of respondents in individual sport and recreation activities. The five most preferred individual activities were running, shooting, obstacle training, physical conditioning in the gymnasium and endurance racing.

The most preferred team activities are presented in Table 4. They are ranked in order of popularity, with soccer being the most popular followed by volleyball, rugby, indoor soccer and traditional dancing.

Nineteen (2.1%) of the respondents listed other individual and team activities that they participate in. These activities included: ballroom dancing, dancing, drama, fishing, hunting, gambling, hill climbing, horse riding, endurance walks, card games, reading, watching movies, traditional games (i.e. Sepantsula and Dikhwaere), singing, snooker, taeko boxing, drag racing, bridge and choir.

Table 3: Individual sport and recreation participation preferences

Sport and recreation activities							
Activity	N	%	Popularity	Activity	N	%	Popularity
Running	290	33.6	1	Chess	64	7.4	12
Shooting	256	29.7	2	Cycling	48	5.6	13
Obstacle training	183	21.2	3	Darts	39	4.5	14
Gymnasium	170	19.7	4	Table tennis	34	3.9	15
Endurance racing	161	18.7	5	Karate	31	3.6	16
Bodybuilding	146	16.9	6	Computer chess	29	3.4	17
Athletics	137	15.9	7	Boxing	26	3	18
Religion	100	11.6	8	Gymnastics	21	2.4	19
Music	98	11.4	9	Badminton	17	2	20
Aerobics	90	10.4	10	Tennis	17	2	20
Swimming	90	10.4	10	Wrestling	3	0.3	21
Pool	74	8.6	11				

% = percentage

Table 4: Team Sport and Recreation Activities

Activity	N	%	Popularity	Activity	N	%	Popularity
Soccer/football	406	47.10	1	Recreational games	54	6.26	8
Volleyball	212	24.59	2	Hockey	43	4.99	9
Rugby	136	15.78	3	Baseball	40	4.64	10
Indoor soccer	101	11.72	4	Basketball	31	3.60	11
Traditional dancing	83	9.63	5	Netball	9	1.04	12
Tug-of-war	73	8.47	6	Battle games	8	0.93	13
Softball	56	6.50	7	Cricket	2	0.23	14

% = percentage

The participants were not asked to indicate the level of participation for each selected activity, but rather to give a general indication of their different levels of participation. Participants were allowed to indicate more than one level of participation, as the possibility exist that they participate at recreational and competitive level. The question was posed in order to establish the recreational use of these activities. The participants indicated that they mainly participate in the activities for recreational purposes (55.61%), with a lower percentage participating at club (31.43%), regional (7.36%) or national level (5.61%). Majority (65.9%) of the participants indicated that they participate in the selected activities throughout the year, but with breaks. When asked how frequently they participate during the week, 22.4% (n=179) indicated that they participate between 0-1 times per week, 43.6% (n=348) 2-3 times per week and 34%

(n=272) more than three times per week. Respondents indicated that they mainly participate in these activities for increased health and personal wellbeing (n=448), with a lower emphasis on leisure and relaxation (n=256), to become a professional athlete (n=105), or as part of a treatment programme to relief stress (n=80).

Discussion

The Dutch Aviation Society (2006) indicated that the soldiers of the Defence Force are deployed where they are involved in various military activities. These activities are often stressful and could restrict their frequency of participation in any physical activity for the purpose of relaxation. Findings of the study indicated that the BDF staff participated in selected sport and recreation activities throughout the year, but with breaks in between. These breaks could be affected by deployments or by considering that many sport and recreation activities are seasonal (i.e. soccer, rugby, cricket, swimming).

Mophuting (2007) indicated that the BDF participates in the following sport and recreation activities: body building/weightlifting, tennis, athletics, karate, badminton, soccer/football, baseball, aerobics, boxing, basketball, volleyball, rugby cricket, traditional dancing, recreational games and field hockey. In terms of the rate of participation in specific individual and team sport and recreation activities, the TUT (2006) study indicated that the majority of participants preferred team activities with soccer being the most preferred followed by volleyball and recreational games. In examining the interest in individual activities among participants in the TUT (2006) study, the only activity highlighted as being most preferred were bodybuilding/ weightlifting with more than 100 participants participating in the activity. However, in this study a change in preferences was observed in those team and individual activities ranked in order of popularity. The five most preferred activities were soccer, running, shooting, volleyball and obstacle training. Individual sport and recreation activities gained interest with eight activities listed in popularity with more than a 100 respondents participating in such activities.

Phillips (2006) and Rice (1998) indicated that the main purpose of sport and recreation in the military is to ensure military readiness, create a state of relaxation and to rejuvenate stressed soldiers. The results of this study show that although the respondents participate in these activities for recreational purposes, their main goal is for personal health and well-being, rather than leisure and relaxation.

Two different groups of participants were involved in TUT's (2006) study and the present study, but in both cases they formed part of the Botswana Defence

Force. In TUT's study, recommendations were made to the BDF to provide a greater variety of activities and to promote participation amongst the military personnel. These recommendations cannot be directly measured but the observed differences in preferences in sport and recreation activities could be seen as a positive result, in that the BDF made use of the opportunity to initiate change.

Amusa et al. (2008) noted that time, culture, availability of resources, funding as well as access to information influences participation in sport and recreation activities. Toriola et al. (2000) provided an understanding on the culture of sport participation amongst Botswana citizens, as they have limited exposure to sport at school level, which could impact their participation in sport related activities after school. The BDF recruits new soldiers every six months. The social influences of the new intake could therefore affect the participation preferences of military staff. These social aspects were not taken into consideration in determining the participation preferences of the respondents, however, it could serve as an explanation of the observed differences in sport and recreation participation preference in the present study.

Conclusion

Findings of the study indicated that more than eight individual activities were listed as preferred activities with a response rate higher than 100. The BDF recruit new soldiers at least twice a year and these individuals could have different preferences towards sport and recreation activities. Therefore, it is recommended that the BDF should conduct sport and recreational surveys at regular intervals. This would ensure that sport and recreation managers in BDF would be informed regarding the sport and recreation preferences of their military personnel in order to provide the relevant activities and to promote participation. It is further recommended that social changes and influences should be investigated in order to see the impact on changing preferences for sport and recreation participation in the BDF.

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