

Sport policy and development

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Sport Policy and Development- Summative 1 Discuss the relationship between sport and crime reduction and critically assess the benefits/limitations that sport presents in achieving positive results. In this piece of literature there will be an in depth discussion of the complicated relationship between sport and crime. There will be a lot of focus on the debate of whether sport plays a positive role in crime reduction in society, and in what ways sport can be used as a method to lower crime in society.

This essay will endeavour to critically examine both the benefits and limitations of sport to achieve positive results in reducing crime in society. The fact is that crime in society isn't a straight forward issue, it is extremely complex. In this section there will be an assessment of the reasons for why sport is believed to either reduce or influence crime. There are multiple theories to suggest that sport can be used in society as a mechanism to produce a positive influence over crime in all areas of society.

There are many theories for why communities see a reduction in criminal activities when good sports policies are implemented and carried out. One of the theories for this was explored in Mutz and Baur's investigation in 2009 into youths' involvement in conflict and violence and the role of sport in preventing it. They wrote about the crime opportunity theory, they said that offenders often act "in a purposive and instrumental- rational manner insofar as they evaluate the cost and benefit that might accompany an offence in a given situation. In other words the perceived likelihood of detection and the effected severity of the punishment define the cost of a crime. They go on to say that the presence of people significantly reduces the likelihood of crimes being committed. This theory has been used to prove

that sport can reduce crime, particularly in youths. It is evident to see that deviant actions are dramatically reduced in the presence of authority; figures that monitor the adolescents whilst taking part in physical activity. In many cases this time can be used to witness youths' misdemeanours and negatively reinforce these actions therefore bettering them (Mutz and Baur,. 009). However, there are researchers that oppose this notion that this theory reduces crime in society as a whole but instead most of the time simply delays the crime until away from that environment. An article in `Sport Illustrated by Jeff Benedict (2010) spoke about how instances of serious felonies perpetrated by college athletes who train round the clock are on the increase. This not only directly contradicts the opportunity theory but Benedict goes on to talk about how these athletes were protected by their sporting status and received reduced sentences or no sentence at all.

This suggests that sport is possibly increasing crime due to the providing immunity and disrespect for the law in effect glorifying criminal activity (Benedict,. 2010). Another theory that supports these structured supervised sports sessions for youth in the attempt to reduce crime is Fred Coalter` “Antidote to boredom theory”. This theory is a common sense assumption on the old phrase “ the devil finds work for idle hands” and links in with the crime opportunity theory.

It suggests that “ much adolescent crime is opportunity led and giving people something (hopefully constructive) to do hopefully keeps them out of harm's way”. In other words in the promotion of sport and a productive activity it therefore reduces the temptation to participate in deviant activity (Coalter,. 2007). It has been theorised that young people, the majority of

which are adolescent males, display aggressive or violent tendencies whilst frustrated or angry, this is said to be due to an instincts that we are born with. It was famously stated by Sigmund Freud (1925) that in certain scenarios we are “ born to be bad”.

In more recent years this theory has been proven to be indeed fact and under further investigation it is thought that when a person behaves aggressively these actions release hormones resulting in catharsis, a word derived from the Greek word katharsis which means to purge/cleanse the body. Behaving like this reduces pent up negative tension; this in turn enables temper regulation more easily. Sport replicates these feelings of aggression and simulates the catharsis of aggression therefore releasing frustration that leads to a state known as `emotional cleansing`.

This acts as a positive tool with adolescents so that aggression is released in a productive and safe environment and suggests that sports that require more aggression, such as all contact sports should see a reduced participation in crime from those individuals (Widmeyer et al., 2002). The Social Bonding theory as theorised by Hirschi in 1969 consists of 4 elements these being `attachment to families, commitment to social norms, institutions and involvement in activities and the belief that these things are important`.

This theory suggests people who produce social ties with positive role models; these being either friends or family, particularly from a young age promote socially acceptable behaviours and attitudes and are reinforced more effectively. These behaviours and attitudes could be any or all of the 4 elements that in turn reduce the likelihood of criminal participation.

Commitment or responsibility inspires pride in one's self and helps promote self-confidence.

Involvement in conventional activities such as sport can provide life direction and a provide focus for people at risk of committing crimes. Finally, belief is the acceptance of moral validity of the central social- value system (Wiatrowski et al, . 1981). Sport is a great medium to induce the social bonding perspective onto society because sport ethics are a mirror image of those we find in every day society (e. g. hard work, abiding rules, teamwork etc..) therefore it tightens bonds to moral codes and in turn limits the likelihood of committing criminal acts (Miethe and Meier,. 994). The social learning theory (SLT) suggests that individual behavioural patterns particularly that of minors are heavily influenced by observation, imitation and reinforcement (Grusec,. 1997). This theory provides arguments for both sides of this argument. On the one hand an argument can be made that contact and noncontact sports can teach strong moral codes to play by the rules or suffer negative consequences, work hard at everything you do in order to receive just rewards, and maintain interpersonal skills in order to maintain strong relationships that help teamwork.

These positive behaviours and attitudes are then in theory adopted in to other areas of life, therefore reducing crime participation (Biel and Bienne,. 2008). For example studies have shown that contact sport if taught correctly can display a positive reductions in crime, Trulson found that the traditional philosophical and psychological elements were vital to be effective in reducing the risk factors associated with offending, if these elements are

removed combat sport was instead associated with an increase in criminal behaviour.

This is a prime example of SLT (Endresen and Olweus,. 2005). This evidence suggests that sport isn't as clear cut as that and in fact sport in most scenarios promotes aggression and even encourages violence towards other people, but it is acceptable because it is in a sports environment. Examples of this could be manufactured fouls in football or the more obvious displays of violence in contact sports. Some theorists believe that SLT and crime participation can be related to these sports because of the skills and attitudes taught in order to be successful within the game e. g. win at all costs", intimidate, be strong and powerful to get your own way, defend team mates. All these can lead to individuals being more likely to become involved in violence than those people that have other leisure activities (Hickley,. 2008). Quite clearly there is what some might perceive as very contentious points raised in many areas of this study, and a lot of literature seems to have an abundance of contradictory dimensions. Having read various pieces of literature it is easy to see why there is so much disagreement where crime reduction and sport initiatives are concerned.

An example of these controversies is in the first point raised, that sport provides an environment in the spot light where people can take part in productive, non-deviant activities and possibly allow social workers to enforce positive attitudes to law abiding and team work. However, to say that this prevents crime full stop is naive and some researchers suggest that methods such as late night basketball is not economically viable in relation the amount of crime in prevents (Hartman and Depro,. 2006).

Research also suggest that sport as an antidote for boredom falls across similar traits in the sense that yes there is an increase in crime particularly amongst youths during periods of perceived boredom and yes sport does act as a remedy for this. However this only displays short term results in reducing crime in a percentage of adolescent males and virtually no females regardless of age. This is because as soon as the youths get bored of the activities very often they would revert back to manufactured excitement in the medium of crime and deviant activity (Levermore,. 2011)

The second contentious issue concerns the social learning theory's effect on crime through sport. The positives and negatives of sports' influences on crime are heavily debated in research of this type especially within contact sport communities. As discussed earlier sport provides an environment where positive attitudes and behaviours can be learnt, refined and reinforced particularly within crime `at risk` areas and demonstrate positive results. However, studies show that contact sports display opposite results where untroubled youths are concerned and can in fact increase crime participation within these groups.

This is said to run the risk of `overdosing` minor offenders with interventions which is known to increase crime participation (Jenkins and Ellis,. 2011). This of course creates a paradox because if contact sport interventions are only appropriate for at risk communities, should they only be accessible to individuals at the risk of offending this would obviously produce social stigmas, labelling and social segregation leading to possible social tensions that incite conflict.

Or should this particular policy area be available to everyone at risk of seducing those without prior criminal involvement with the violence of contact sport therefore providing the potential for corruption? However when considering contact sports popularity in society there does seem to be a lack of interventions that use it as a tool to reduce criminal activity.

The main limiting factors when questioning the positives and negatives of sport and its effectiveness as a crime reduction strategy in society is that more empirical research into the short and long-term benefits is needed along with a correct understanding of the type of programme that is appropriate for different social groups and the strategies that can effectively implement long lasting effects, merely establishing a statistical association for short periods of time is insufficient (Nichols, 1999).

The second limiting factor is the lack of research as regards to the effect of sport and intervention to crime in the older community and all female groups. There is virtually no evidence to suggest that sport helps female offenders. However this may be because statistically speaking males are responsible for 74% of crimes committed and it is common sense that initiatives are aimed at culprits, (British Crime Statistics) although a feminist perspective in this policy area could be beneficial (Coakley and Pike, 2009). As these points suggest, making the policy with the aim to reduce crime in society is very difficult and it seems that there will never be any middle ground on the subject. However with all the academic and statistical literature taken into account there was a common theme in the majority of them. The conclusion that most studies drew was that there is still no evidence to suggest that sport has an influence over crime in society in either direction.

Smith and Waddington concluded that “ despite vast numbers of such community schemes currently in operation in the UK, there is still very little evidence for their effectiveness in reducing and preventing crime and drug abuse”(Smith and Waddington,. 2004). This is supported by various other academic articles (Caruso,. 2011, Coalter,. 2005, Nichols and Crow,. 2004). In my opinion the best way to combat crime is via top quality coaching in communities that teach appropriate values that sports uphold and therefore can be transferred into everyday society.

Secondly, the correlation between contact sports, physical violence and aggression in society and reoffending criminality is too high and causes to many social problems, therefore I feel it would be better if initiatives are designed around non-contact sports, so when unnecessary aggression is portrayed it is reinforced with negative consequences e. g. card, sending off. This is transferable to everyday life.

Thirdly, I believe that sport crime interventions are the best resource we have in terms of cost efficiency, documented research and developed programmes and it is likely that any other initiatives would show the exact same results if not worse. With this in mind we should heed the evidence that suggests the best way to target crime in society when using the medium of sport is by targeting the impressionable youth community, we should continue this focus. However for more decisive conclusions to be drawn from studies in this area there needs to be more extensive, more representative and more investment in longitudinal studies.

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