

The Impacts of Covid-19 on Sporting Activities and Society in the Mutare Community, Zimbabwe: Negotiating a Bumpy Playground

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Abstract

The global spread of Covid-19 created a bumpy ‘playground’ for different sporting activities and society due to the contagious nature of the disease that requires social distancing. It was imperative for most governments and sporting organisations to postpone or cancel sports tournaments at all levels. The primary aim of this research was to explore the socio-cultural and economic impacts of Covid-19 on the Mutare community, Zimbabwe with the aim of generating strategies that could be adopted to promote sporting activities in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. The sample for this study was purposive consisting of twelve (12) players; four (4) physical education tutors; two (2) sponsors; two (2) sport-related businesses, five (5) sport fans and five (5) informal traders. The interpretive paradigm was relevant for the study and I used a case study research style. Data was generated through telephone interviews, individual WhatsApp interviews and WhatsApp chat group discussions. A thematic approach was used to analyse the data. The study showed that Covid-19 had socio-economic, cultural and health impacts. Strategies that were recommended for sporting activities during a pandemic such as Covid-19, include engaging in individual physical activities that could be performed in and around the home in order to maintain fitness and good health. In addition, testing and sanitising players as well as disinfecting sporting facilities are recommended during this pandemic to reduce the economic impacts for Mutare. Various digital technologies could be adopted to promote sporting activities in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Impacts, Mutare community, Covid-19, Sporting activities, Society, Strategies

1 Introduction

The paper explored the impacts of Covid-19 on sporting activities and society in Mutare in Zimbabwe. Mutare is situated 260 kilometers from the capital city, Harare, in the eastern border of Zimbabwe. The research focused on the socio-cultural and economic impacts of Covid-19 on the sports fraternity and related stakeholders in the Mutare community. The study further examined the impacts of Covid-19 on the economic activities in the Mutare community as a result of lockdown restrictions. Finally, various strategies that could be adopted in order to ensure continuity in sporting and physical activities as well as business practices during the Covid-19 pandemic or such similar contagious diseases were explored.

2 Background to the Study

The background discusses aspects on the nature and characteristics of the coronavirus and its socio-cultural and economic impacts for athletes globally and in Zimbabwe.

2.1 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Coronavirus

Coronavirus (CoVs) are a family of viruses that causes respiratory disease in humans (Cui, Li & Shi 2019; Whitelaw, Mamas, Topol & Spall 2020). The symptoms of SARS include high fever, dry cough, headache, diarrhoea and respiratory infections (Avendano, Derchach & Swan 2003; Centres for Disease Control & Prevention 2019; Farfan-Cano 2020). SARS can spread through airborne respiratory droplets that may land on another person (Farfan-Cano 2020; Memish, Perlman, Kerkhove & Zumla 2020). Health specialists encourage social distancing; wearing of masks, washing and sanitising hands to reduce the spread of the virus. (Farfan-Cano 2020). The disease from contracting corona virus, is called COVID-19 (Whitelaw, Mamas, Topol & Spall 2020). This disease thus has repercussions for sport.

2.2 Impacts of Covid-19 on Sport

The active participation in sporting activities promotes body fitness, good sportsmanship, endurance, self-esteem, friendship (Babalola 2010). Active engagement in sport is argued to also reduce depression, anxiety and heart

related diseases (Ajisafe 2009). However, Covid-19 has numerous negative impacts for sport.

2.2.1 Covid-19 and Income

The lockdown and postponement of sport tournaments impacted on the sporting fraternity. In an effort to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic through enforcing social distancing, sport gatherings and activities at different levels including the Olympic games and European football were postponed (Parnell *et al.* 2020). The lockdown had multiplier negative impacts on sport-related businesses, sporting houses and players. There has been a loss of income to sports related-businesses, salary cuts for the players and sporting managers of up to 30% and a loss of employment particularly to those who relied on an income from sports (European Olympic Committees (EOC) 2020; Evans, Blackwell, Dolan, Fahlen, Hoekman, Lennels *et al.* 2020).

Further, agricultural businesses that supply food to the sports fraternity, vendors at sport venues particularly women and children, it is argued, are most likely suffer from extreme poverty due to the closure and suspension of sport business (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2020). The informal sector was seen to be at a greater risk of employment losses especially amongst vulnerable groups such as women and migrant workers (FAO 2020; International Labour Organization (ILO) 2020).

2.2.2 Covid-19 and Players' Professional Development

The postponement of sporting activities had a devastating effect on player development in the profession (Evans, *et al.* 2020). The enforcement of social distancing had an impact on the way coaches impart skills to players. Social distancing promoted individual practices within the home premises and in quiet outdoor spaces by players in order for them to remain fit. Individual training had the effect of destroying team spirit amongst the players. However, individual sporting activities in outdoor spaces has since gained popularity in Europe (Evans *et al.* 2020; Scheerder, Breedveld, Borgers 2015). It is envisaged that there is more likely to be a paradigm shift in the way coaching skills are to be imparted in sporting activities in the future. E-sport, online courses on sporting and digitalization has gained momentum during Covid-19 (Evans, *et al.* 2020; Gerrish 2020).

Restricting players to the home due to lockdown and isolation impacted greatly on athlete training. The intensity of each player's training is reduced and it was argued that this may reverse the player's performance attained in the past. It is believed that reduced training by players due to lockdown can reduce the player's strength, endurance and performance (Gondin, Duclay & Martin 2006; Djaoni, Wong, Pialoux, hautier, Da Silva, Chamari & Dellal 2014) as well as decrease the flexibility of the player (Caldwell & Peters 2009) and result in a loss of muscle mass (Mallinson & Murto 2013). In addition, isolation and the quarantine of players may lead to poor nutrition, poor quality sleep, loneliness, stress and anxiety. There could be also an increase in body fat and ultimately an increase in body weight (Ajisafe 2009; Jukic, Calleja-Gonzalez, Cos, Cuzzolin, Olmo, Terrdos *et al.* 2020). Thus, the negative impacts for individual players being in isolation, is extensive.

However, scholarship indicates that there are positive attributes attained from individual training due to lockdown and isolation. It has been contended that the player can concentrate on developing certain physical abilities he/she needs to improve on (Jukic, Malanovic, Svljar, Njaradi, Calleja-Gonzalez, Castellano & Ostojic 2018). Further, lockdown restrictions can allow players to refocus, and recover from certain mental stress and injuries as well (Djaoni, Wong, Pialoux, hautier, Da Silva, Chamari & Dellal 2014).

2.2.3 Covid-19 and Socio-cultural Impacts on Sport and Society

Covid-19 has socio-cultural impacts on society stemming from the lockdown and travel bans that impacted on businesses and sporting activities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2020) reported certain discernable impacts of Covid-19 for communities. It was reported that there is likely to be skewed access to education as rural children have challenges in accessing e-learning unlike their urban counterparts. Further, women and girls have been exposed to gender-based abuse and violence due to lockdown restrictions. Women are reported to suffer more as they try to fend for the family (UNDP 2020). Covid-19 has increased inequalities especially amongst the vulnerable groups such as the aged, women, migrants, the poor and the disabled according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA 2020). The aged, disabled and children cannot support themselves while in isolation resulting in anxiety, stress and pain. These categories cannot easily

access health care nor practice hygienic like washing hands and cleaning the home. The UN DESA (2020) reports that, the youth suffers from high unemployment due to Covid-19. The closure of schools and the suspension of sporting activities has also impacted heavily on the youth of school going ages. Collectively, due to inactivity, the youth are said to suffer from mental stress, anxiety and a lack of fitness and income (UN DESA 2020).

2.3 Impacts of Covid-19 in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, total lockdown started on March 30, 2020 and extended initially for a period of twenty-one days (*New Zimbabwe 2020*) but it has since altered, similar to other countries, based on infections and mortality rates. The lockdown started at level four. People were required to stay at home except when one is travelling to obtain essential services such as medication. The Covid-19 induced lockdown led to the closure of learning institutions, industries and the banning of public transport except for Zimbabwe Passenger Company (ZUPCO) buses and Public Service Commission buses which are operated by the Government (*New Zimbabwe 2020*). Attendance at funerals were limited to fifty people in order to adhere to the social distancing rule (*New Zimbabwe 2020*). Stage four lockdown was extended by two weeks to May, 3, 2020 in an effort to curtail the number of infected people (*Times Live 2020*).

In level 3, mining operations were allowed to operate under strict health guidelines and requirements such as regular testing of workers, having their temperature taking and ensuring maximum hygienic conditions such as washing of hands and the use of sanitizers. Lockdown at level 2 gave way to the opening of more essential services such as banks, hardware and retail shops. However, schools, beerhalls, night clubs and sporting activities remained closed. (*The Herald 2020*). The lockdown impacts shattered the economy of Zimbabwe which was already suffering from shortages of foreign currency, power outages and a shortage in food supplies (Thomson Reuters, 2020). Zimbabwe's lockdown was at level 2 since 1 May, 2020 but then it again changed due to increases in infections and mortality. Industries and schools were opened in phases while international borders partially opened to passengers with strict adherence to Covid-19 guidelines on social distancing, sanitisation and putting on of masks.

Despite the initial easing of lockdown restrictions in other sectors, the sporting fraternity suffered. Sporting activities from grassroots level to

professional clubs remained banned (*New Zimbabwe* 2020). Inactivity by players can have health impacts for example it can increase the chances of them suffering from heart diseases, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, anxiety and depression (Ajisafe 2009; Ojeme & Uti 1996). Furthermore, the banning and postponement of sporting activities resulted in the loss of income and employment to the sports fraternity and associated businesses (EOC 2020; FAO 2020) as was earlier reported.

3 Aim of the Study

This study intended to establish the socio-cultural and economic impacts of Covid-19 on sporting activities and society in Mutare community in Zimbabwe during the first six months of the lockdown in 2020. In view of the lockdown restrictions on sporting activities it was also pertinent to explore the various strategies that could be adopted to promote sporting activities in view of the current Covid-19 and any other future contagious viruses.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the socio-cultural impacts of Covid-19 on sporting activities and society in Mutare in Zimbabwe?
2. How did Covid-19 impact on economic activities in Mutare community?
3. Which strategies can promote sporting activities in times of the corona virus and other related contagious diseases?

3.1 Research Design and Methodology of the Study

The study is located within the interpretive paradigm, and explored the impacts of Covid-19 on sporting activities and related business activities in Mutare community which is situated in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) found that the interpretive paradigm is useful in gathering information from participants who may have different perspectives on a phenomenon. The research design adopted allowed the researcher to obtain the views of Mutare community members on how Covid-19 impacted on their socio-cultural and economic lives. The interpretive framing acknowledges that reality emerges from different people who may have

contrasting views about a phenomenon (Mack 2010). Keane (2013) observed that qualitative methods, which were used in this study, were appropriate in generating data where an in-depth study of a phenomenon is required.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants in the study. Purposive sampling has been described by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2018) as a situation in which the researcher ‘hand picks cases’ with particular characteristics being sought based on one’s judgment. Physical Education tutors were selected in the study since they are knowledgeable as these tutors teach Physical Education in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. Sports fans, sponsors, sports business people and players were purposively selected for their interest and links to sporting activities. These selected participants are likely to express their feelings on how they have been impacted socially-culturally and economically by Covid-19.

A community case study of Mutare allowed in-depth data generation as suggested by Creswell (2013). The study used individual and group WhatsApp chats and telephone interviews to generate data from the participants. An interview guide was used to gather information from the participants. Participants were asked to explain the social, cultural and economic impacts of Covid-19 on the sporting fraternity and Mutare community. The participants were also asked about the strategies that could be adopted to ensure continuity of sporting activities and businesses during Covid-19 to reduce the harsh impact of the disease on the community.

WhatsApp is an instant messaging application that uses digital tools such as mobile phones to connect people on different platforms (Anglano 2014; WhatsApp 2016). Individual WhatsApp chats were used to generate data from five (5) sports fans and five (5) informal traders. The informal traders were useful participants as they expressed how their businesses have been affected by Covid-19. Telephone interviews were used to generate data from two (2) sports sponsors and two (2) sport-related business owners. WhatsApp group chats were useful in generating data from twelve (12) players and four (4) Physical Education (PE) tutors. Players and PE tutors were selected for they have an appreciation and understanding of sporting activities globally. Group chats were useful in generating large amounts of information within a short space of time given the constraints of the pandemic. Patton (2015) and Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) alluded to the idea that more data is generated by participants who add more contributions after hearing what other group members have said. Further, group chats were used to access rich data from

the participants. Krueger and Casey (2000) noted that the participants themselves provide checks and balances on the information articulated by group members thereby eliminating falsehoods. Individual WhatsApp chats were important for further interrogation on the impacts of Covid-19 on sports and sport-related business. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) support the use interviews which can uncover underlying attitudes and personal feelings about an aspect under study. Participants were able to express their feelings on the effects of Covid-19 on their lives and community.

Data was analysed through a thematic approach as recommended by Creswell (2013) for a qualitative study. Verbatim quotations from individual and group chats and interviews with the participants provided an in-depth understanding on the impacts of Covid-19 on sports and Mutare.

4 Findings

The research findings are discussed according to the research questions. For anonymity and ethical considerations, participants were identified using codes for example participant number one (1) was identified as P1 and so on in numerical order. Direct quotes by the participants were presented followed by discussions of the findings.

4.1 Socio-cultural Impacts of Covid-19 on Sporting Activities and Society

A selection of the main socio-cultural impacts of Covid-19 on players and society in Mutare are discussed in this section.

4.1.1 Migration Impacts

The Covid-19 pandemic restricted people to their homes as revealed by participant P1¹:

Covid-19 restricted me here in Mutare yet my family is in Harare. I miss my family and I am now stressed. I have failed to attend the

¹ For Anonymity and ethical considerations, the participants were identified using codes for example participant number one (1) was identified as P1 and so on in numerical order.

funeral of my uncle who passed due to Covid-19 imagine. How do I feel, its painful and stressful? P1

P1 suggested that lockdown restrictions impeded the movement of people. The lockdown in business both formal and informal in Mutare community forced some of the community members to illegally migrate into Mozambique as illustrated by P13:

Some people have resorted to illegal business such as going to Mozambique through illegal points to buy second hand clothes and smuggling illegal beer for sale as people try to survive from the closure of formal business as Flea markets (such as that which operates outside the sport stadium selling sporting goods). Pirate taxis that have been banned are now finding business to ferry illegal goods and returning migrants through illegal points. P13

The views by P13 shows that, Covid-19, despite restricting movements, it enhanced illegal cross border migration. The closure of informal business activities in Mutare such as banning of taxis and closure of flea markets in order to control the spread of the corona virus prompted some people to illegally go to nearby Mozambique to import goods like beer and second-hand clothes for resale in order to earn a living. Additional economic impacts are discussed later in this chapter.

4.1.2 Psychological Impacts for Players and Businessmen

The Covid-19 pandemic had psychological impacts for players and businessmen. One of the players in a football league team in Mutare explained:

Most local league teams are failing to pay salaries for their players. If you could go through the group chats for the players you would realise that there is anger, frustration, despair and anguish. Some players have even relocated to their rural homes after failing to buy food and pay rent for accommodation in the city. P14

It is evident from P14 that some premier league players were frustrated and in a state of despair after failing to get their salaries due to the suspension

of games. This forced some of the players to migrate to rural areas where life in terms of food and accommodation are affordable.

A businessman, who runs a sporting shop in Mutare urban expressed his anger and despair due to loss of business, he had this to say:

Yes, I operate a sports shop and specialise in sporting ware and equipment. I borrowed a loan from a local bank, but I am failing to pay back the loan due to absence of sales caused by a ban in sporting activities and closure of schools that were my major market. I don't know what I can do. P7

Business people in Mutare dealing with sports ware and equipment were hard hit by the ban of sporting activities. The Businessman expressed despair in saying, 'I don't know what I can do' induced by lockdown restrictions. It is evident that the businessman was psychologically impacted by his failure to repay a bank loan. Similarly, players who could not afford financially to remain in urban areas and meet their economic needs had to migrate back to their rural homes.

4.1.3 Health Impacts Dependent on Restrictions

Covid-19 impacted on the health of players and the general community of Mutare in different ways given the restrictions and later relaxation of restrictions. One of Physical Education (PE) tutors has this to say initially of all sport that was stopped:

People are not allowed out in public spaces, hence blocking sports persons and other people who enjoy jogging regularly. This has resulted in an increase in cardiovascular diseases: hypertension, type II diabetes, heart attacks. P3

The PE tutor thought that, lockdown restrictions confined people in the home thereby restricting people or preventing them from exercising daily. The inactivity by the community can contribute to heart related diseases such as hypertension and diabetes. However, some participants viewed Covid-19 as a blessing in disguise since it promoted a culture of cleanliness as expressed by P17.

Covid-19 has promoted hygienic conditions within the sporting community since you are always required to wash your hands and sanitizing your environment. P17

P17 believed that the Covid-19 pandemic promoted hygienic conditions through a culture of regular washing of hands and sanitising the homes, playing grounds and environments. Further, P17 observed that restricting people to the home and later local surroundings due to a reduction in restrictions, inculcated a culture of jogging among players and the community:

Morning jogging was at first painful for me but I now enjoy it. I now feel healthy and strong due to the morning jogging. P17

P17 seem to suggest that Covid-19 was a blessing in disguise as it promoted a culture of jogging in the Mutare community as a way of overcoming the boredom associated with confinement at the home and needing to remain in the local environment. P17 believed that jogging was keeping him fit and healthy.

4.1.4 Loss of unhu/ubuntu

The loss of income, lockdown restrictions and measures imposed to thwart the rapid spread of Covid-19 impacted on *unhu* values (African values such as respect, integrity, honesty and love) among some Mutare community. A sporting fan explained:

The lack of sporting activities increased juvenile delinquency and drug abuse since people had nothing to do. More so, Loss of income by players have prompted some of the players to engage in money games (gambling) in order to earn a living. In some cases, people ended up fighting with each other. P21

P21 experienced that a lack of sporting activities in Mutare had led to young people being inactive resulting in them engaging in delinquent behaviour and drug abuse. Players were also involved in gambling in order to earn a living. These money games often led to violence and the use of abusive

language, an emerging culture which goes against *ubuntu/unhu* values.

One of the netball players added her voice on the loss of *unhu* values due to Covid-19:

In our culture we are used to shake hands when we greet each other at a match but this social distancing does not allow us. It's like you are despising someone when you do not shake hands, we share, we eat and discuss together as a family but this Covid-19 is destroying all this culture which is important in developing team spirit in a game. P18

The Covid-19 induced lockdown enforced social distancing such that people were no longer allowed to shake hands. Among the *Shona* (major tribe in Zimbabwe) in Zimbabwe, greeting by shaking hands is a sign of oneness, respect and love for each other (*unhu*). Hence, enforcing social distancing has resulted in the loss of *unhu* values in sport since greeting by shaking hands is prohibited.

4.1.5 Training and Infrastructure

Lockdown restrictions also destroys other aspects of developing good team spirit in training as was explained by one of the PE tutors:

Players are engaged in individual training this destroys team spirit among the players. Team performance is also degraded . P12.

The PE tutor believed that, team cohesion and team spirit is lost when players train as individuals. The effect would be a lack of coordination and poor performance by the players.

However, another player had a different view:

The suspension of sporting activities allowed players to have more time to prepare and improve on their weaknesses through individual training. P10

Social distancing and lockdown restrictions allowed coaches to carry out individual training for their players which may not have been possible in a team session. The Covid-19 pandemic promoted individualised training and an

opportunity for players to have more time to prepare and improve on their weaknesses through individual training.

Further, the suspension of league games was viewed as an opportunity for sports associations to renovate playing grounds as observed by one of the players:

Stadiums can be renovated during the lockdown for example Sakubva stadium has playing grounds, changing rooms, media rooms and a VVIP enclosure which have been renovated. P13

The postponement of local leagues allowed Mutare city council to renovate Sakubva stadium (a stadium in Mutare), its changing rooms, media rooms and VVIP (Very Very Important Persons) area. It is evident that, though lockdown restrictions prohibited team training, it however allowed, individual players to improve on their weaknesses through individualised training. At the same time, sports associations had time to improve their playing grounds.

4.2 Covid-19 Impacts on Economic Activities

The section extends the initial discussion on the economic impacts of Covid-19 on players and Mutare community.

4.2.1 Impact on Sport-related Business Activities

The Covid-19 induced lockdown caused the closure of sport-related businesses and loss of income. P3 explained businesses that has closed:

Everything literally came to a halt and businesses closed, save for a few registered retailers. Covid-19 has also done a great blow to people who work at sport and fitness centres, instructors, trainers, managers, owners, etc. Their source of income has been taken away in an instant. P3

Business activities in Mutare which were viewed as high risk for the spread of Covid-19 were forced to close by the government. Businesses that closed included sporting clubs, gyms and stadia for different sports to enhance social distancing. This had an effect of eroding the livelihoods of players such

as sports managers and trainers. Professional league matches were impacted, for example Mutare Diamonds which used to play in Sakubva stadium incurred large losses from revenue they use to get from their sponsors and the gate takings.

One of the vendors elaborated on how Covid-19 impacted on different sport related informal businesses:

Sport gatherings were banned thus cutting income for vendors who depended on sport gatherings. In addition, flea markets and street vending that relied on sports fans around Sakubva stadium have been illegalized rendering thousands of people jobless. P9

It was evident that, the enforcement of lockdown restrictions impacted negatively on the source of income for the street vendors and flea market businesses that relied on sport gatherings at stadia such as Sakubva in Mutare. This resulted in the loss of jobs to many people within Mutare community.

4.2.2 Emergence of New Businesses

The lockdown which was put in place by the government resulted in the proliferation of both legal and illegal business in Mutare community. P6 has this to say:

There has been emergence of street tuck shops as those informal traders with markets closed due to Covid-19 restrictions established make-shifts markets at their homes. This involved selling of food stuffs usually bought from large supermarkets in town whose access was temporarily suspended. Some smuggled illegal beer from neighbouring countries for sale to the local market. P6

P4 added:

There has been sprouting of backyard agricultural activities including gardening and selling of farm produce at household levels and along streets as people tried to survive. Some produced home-made masks. P4

It was apparent from the chats that, the closure of formal markets and

designated selling points for various wares including sports related equipment caused the flourishing of street tuck shops, makeshift markets and backyard gardening at homes as people strived to fight poverty induced by the lockdown and business closure. Small gardens sprouted wherever there was space, partly because people had nothing to do. Participants reported a brisk business of selling masks from their homes as it was mandatory to move around using a mask. The smuggling of illegal beer from neighbouring countries also increased as people sought to survive financial ruin after closure of formal and informal business activities in and around the sports stadium.

4.3 Strategies to Promote Sporting Activities

The section discusses the strategies suggested by the participants that could be adopted by players and sports associations during the period of Covid-19 or any other contagious pandemic in future. Many of the participants believed that a full ban on sports events should not continue and made suggestions on sport consumption.

4.3.1 Testing and Sanitising of Players and Infrastructure

In order to promote playing during periods of contagious diseases participants proposed compulsory testing, sanitising of the players and disinfecting players' venues as elaborated by P3:

Covid-19 will be around for a while. Sporting activities should resume. Measures have to be put in place to minimise transmission such as compulsory testing for all participants; Use of protective clothing by all concerned whenever possible, before and after, when interacting with fellow athletes, coaches and managers and disinfecting sporting venues. P3

P3 believed that, Covid-19 pandemic was going to last for some time and this should not derail sporting activities. The participant was confident that, players and sporting managers could be tested and sanitised regularly in order to resume sporting activities. The regular disinfectant of playing grounds and venues was viewed as a panacea to participate in sporting activities during the period of Covid-19 or any other related infectious disease.

The collaboration of various stakeholders towards the fight of Covid-19 was viewed by P8 as a way of ensuring that every player and sport person has access to testing and sanitisation:

Test kits for Covid-19 must be availed for free. Government, sports organisations and private sector could partner in securing testing kits for sports persons. P8

It is evident from P8 that, the partnership of the Government, sports organisations and private sector is crucial in ensuring that sporting activities during Covid-19 take place. The stakeholders are important in securing sanitisers and testing equipment required by players.

4.3.2 Controlling the Number of Spectators at an Event

Participant, P6 suggested that, the number of spectators entering the sports venues could be reduced during Covid-19 to ensure continuity in sporting activities:

While playing in empty stadiums is a measure against the spread of the pandemic, it is a hard blow as there are no financial benefits in terms of gate takings. There is need to limit the number of fans entering stadia to a reasonable figure for teams to get something. P6

In order to enforce social distancing and to minimise the spread of the corona virus, few fans or supporters could be allowed to enter the playing venues so that sports associations could get revenue from gate takings. In order to compensate for the loss of income from the limited number of supporters entering sporting venues, P3 suggested the following solution:

To compensate for loss of income broadcasting rights should be enforced as a source of revenue. Advertisers and those few allowed to enter sporting venues should also pay more. P3

Sports organisations are supposed to ensure that broadcasting rights and advertising charges are paid. Most players during the lockdown in Mutare had their salaries slashed or not paid therefore reducing the number of

participants and spectators, as well as getting additional income from broadcasting rights and advertisers ensures that sports organisations can have revenue to pay players' wages and other running costs.

4.3.3 Individual Training

Players could engage in individual training in order to adhere to Covid-19 social distancing regulations. P11 and P14 narrated:

Players could be engaged in individual training particularly in individual sport like boxing and tennis. This has the advantage in that the player can improve his /her weakness unlike when you train as a group. However, for team sport like soccer I feel individual training can affect team coordination. P11

P14 added:

Players can engage in individual physical exercises such as jogging around the home in order to keep fit. Coaches for different sports can prescribe scheduled physical activities to individual players. P14

It was revealed by the participants that players can engage in individual training and scheduled physical activities from the coach such as jogging in order to enforce social distancing regulations. The participants felt that individual training helps the player to identify his/her own weakness and improve on them. Players can also engage in physical activities such as jogging in order to keep fit. Individual training could be successful in individual sporting activities such as tennis. However, for team sports such as soccer, individual training could destroy team spirit and reduce the performance of the team due to a lack of coordination.

4.3.4 Use of Multimedia and Technology

Sporting activities can be promoted through the use multi-media platforms by coaches of different disciplines during the time of Covid-19. P23 explained:

I think for social distancing to be achieved players could be trained as individuals using different platforms for example a coach could give

instructions on physical activity to be performed by a player through phone call, video call, or playing videos whereby the players can learn and acquire demonstrated skill from the coach. P23

Participant, P23 thought that coaching instructions could be conveyed to the player by the coach through interactive multi-media platforms such as phone and video call in order to avoid physical contact during the prevalence of Covid-19. P23 believed that multimedia platforms allow coaches to demonstrate a skill to the player.

P22 concurred with P23 on the use of multi-media in imparting skills to the player:

Coaches can send videos, voice recording as well as holding virtual meetings with players upon which the coach can demonstrate skills to be mastered by the players. P22

It is evident from the two participants that, the use of multi-media platforms can be an effective strategy by coaches to train players and athletes during the time of Covid-19 whereby social distancing has to be observed to curtail the spread of the virus.

5 Discussion of Findings

Covid-19 had socio-cultural, economic and health impacts on Mutare community which as a struggling poor urban council was further devastated in multiple ways. Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions impacted on sport and society. The Covid-19 pandemic has created a bumpy playing ground characterised by numerous challenges including the loss of income due to closure of some formal and informal businesses and the suspension of sporting activities. The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the emergence and decline of some business activities. There has been a paradigm shift in the operations of sporting activities. This paradigm shift induced new innovative ideas for businesses and technological developments to promote sporting activities during a pandemic like Covid-19.

5.1 The Pandemic: A Threat to Lives and Livelihoods

There were return migrants from neighbouring countries like South Africa that

flooded into Zimbabwe due to loss of income as businesses closed in SA. Some of the migrants were deported and some returned voluntarily as they felt they would miss their families due to lockdown restrictions. As businesses closed in Mutare some residents on the brink of poverty with little hope of food provision for their families illegally migrated to Mozambique to buy second hand clothes and to smuggle illegal beer for sale in an attempt to survive. Keevy, Green and Manik, (2014) and Manik (2005) in their study of return migrants observed several factors that can force migrants to return home including feelings of isolation from their loved ones as was in this case but with a new caveat, namely that of a spreading pandemic threatening the lives and livelihoods of people. Covid-19 led to the closure of sporting business and agricultural markets. FAO (2020) revealed that lockdown restrictions caused massive losses in agricultural business. Further, scholars (Li Ng & Serrano 2020) noted that, Covid-19 caused the closure of sport-related business forcing most communities into poverty and suffering.

5.2 Sport and the Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic curtailed sporting activities in Mutare community. This caused psychological harm: emotional stress, anxiety, and pain among the sporting fraternity. Ajisafe (2009) observed that inactivity can lead to depression, anxiety and heart diseases. Further, emotional stress resulting from loss of income, loss of employment and boredom as people were restricted within their environs can further promote heart diseases (Jukic, *et al.* 2020; Ojeme and Uti 1996). The study revealed that many people engaged in physical activity in the form of jogging up the mountain terrain around Mutare in order to keep fit and to get rid of boredom from lockdown restrictions. Physical activities such as jogging promotes endurance, self- esteem and generally good health (Babalola 2010).

Covid-19 impacted on the adoption and practice of new models of coaching players and athletes in order to promote sporting activities. Sporting managers across the world coached their players using technological devices such as videos and telephone calls. These sports coaches advanced individual training as opposed to the common team sessions. Sports meetings are now virtual meetings. Evans *et al.* (2020) revealed that e-learning, online training and courses as well as digitalisation are becoming more popular during Covid-19. Further, findings by Evans *et al.* (2020) unveil that, in Europe individual

training has gained in popularity. With developments in technology and communication, e-sport is likely to be an alternative mode of training in sport in view of contagious diseases such as Covid-19.

5.3 Socio-cultural Practices and the Pandemic

In order to reduce the rapid spread of Covid-19, people have been encouraged to put on masks, practicing social distancing and hygiene through regular washing of hands. (Farfan-Cano 2020; IOM 2020). The adoption of these preventive measures impacted on how people communicate and interact as well as people's lifestyles on implementing hygienic conditions. Among the *Shona* (major tribal group) people of Zimbabwe greeting each other is usually done through shaking of hands as a sign of respect, oneness and love. This culture of shaking hands when greeting is no longer being practiced due the impact of Covid-19 that encouraged social distancing and hygiene. The study revealed that culture is dynamic and is now changing due to the influence of the pandemic.

Juvenile delinquency and gender abuse increased as a result of lockdown restrictions on population movement. These immoralities infringed upon *unhu/ubuntu* values that cherish honesty and integrity amongst Shona people of Zimbabwe. UNDP (2020) reported lockdown restrictions, unemployment, poverty as contributing to gender-based abuse and violence.

5.4 Adaptation to the Pandemic

The study unpacked that people are adaptive to changes in the socio-cultural and economic environment. The Covid-19 pandemic caused the closure of agricultural markets and other businesses. Mutare community adapted through developing backyard businesses such as tuck shops and street vending. Some changed their diet as they opted for cheaper and available substitutes such as *mbambaira* (sweet potatoes) yet some resorted to jogging and home-based physical activities in respond to lockdown that restricted movement of people. Women are the ones mostly engaged in backyard businesses, gardening and street vending in order to survive. The ILO (2020) observed that Covid-19 caused loss of jobs and this was bound to push particularly women to engage into informal activities.

6 Recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic and the accompanying lockdown restrictions had numerous impacts on Mutare community. People were physically and psychologically stressed and suffered from heart related diseases due to inactivity. The study recommends not just the expansion of hospitals, which all countries have been undertaking, but also that of counselling centres to expand the health system to assist those affected.

The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on economic activities including the closure of sporting businesses. This resulted in the loss of income and employment for numerous individuals. There is a dire need to put aside funding in order to resuscitate sport businesses. Other sources of income such as advertising should also receive more attention to compensate for their losses in gate takings. The government should partner with private sector to source funds that could be used to support and cushion the informal sector and small-scale enterprises which are most vulnerable to collapsing during the pandemic.

Sporting activities have been affected by lockdown restrictions. Various strategies should be adopted to ensure continuity in sports which has become a delicate sector due to the pandemic. The following strategies are recommended for individuals and organisations:

- Adopt new training models such as online and individualised training using different multi-media platforms to cater for professional sports persons and the community in general.
- Testing and sanitising of people, sports venues and infrastructure regularly.
- Controlling the number of events held and spectators entering sports venues to reduce risk of the virus spreading.

7 Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic had multiple devastating impacts on the community of Mutare in Zimbabwe. The pandemic had serious economic impacts on businesses, related-businesses, schools and players. The lockdown restrictions and consequent closure of businesses resulted in a loss of income and employment. This caused anxiety, frustration and emotional stress within society in general and in the sporting fraternity. Consequently, the loss of

income and employment opportunities is resulting in the mushrooming of illegal business activities such as street vending, illegal tuck shops and illegal border crossing to acquire goods for sale. Lockdown restrictions also confined people to their homes thus prompting inactivity and the emergence of diseases due to sedentary behaviour. Inactivity and frustrations due to lockdown restrictions resulted in loss of *unhu/ubuntu* as some youngsters engaged in juvenile delinquency and drug abuse. In view of the lockdown restrictions, various strategies were suggested for adoption by the participants to ensure the continuity of sporting activities. Some of the strategies proposed included compulsory testing and sanitisation of players, controlling the number of events, officials and spectators at sporting venues, individual training and use of multi-media in sports training.

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