

Increasing Dimensions Of Maintaining Psycho-Physical Health Through Physical Activities Among Keep Fit Groups In The City Of Yaounde, Cameroon A Contribution To Anthropology Of Health

MONJU Calasanctius MATSIALE (PhD)

*Assistant Lecturer, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, University of Buea, Cameroon*

Abstract

Background: *Maintaining or restoring health is a major problem faced by humans as far as wellness is concerned. In recent years there has been an increasing dimension in the practice of physical activity in the city of Yaounde to maintain psycho-physical health. It is well established that sedentary lifestyle and other medical dispositions have exposed a majority of people to psycho-physical challenges related to health. This article aims to examine why there has been an increasing dimension in the practice of physical activity among keep fit groups.*

Methods: *To verify the hypothesis that there are diverse psycho-physical factors that account for the increasing dimensions of maintaining psycho-physical health through the practice of physical activity, data was collected through qualitative method and documentary sources. Individual interviews, focus group discussions, observations and documentary literature were therefore combined to collect data that was analysed using content analysis.*

Results: *The results showed that diverse psycho-physical factors accounted for the increasing dimensions of practicing physical activity in order to maintain health.*

Conclusion: *After examining the benefits of physical activities in the management of psycho-physical related health problems, it is therefore established that the increasing dimension of maintaining health through physical activities is due to the benefits people derived from it.*

Key words: *Psycho-Physical, Health, Physical Activity, Practice, Keep Fit, Maintain*

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I. Introduction

“The human organism is designed to be physically active. The need to be physically active is associated with the need to find food, fight predators, and to flee for safety” (Efuetcha, 2012). In the context of a write up of this caliber on physical activities, the quotation by Efuetcha seems to be a very suitable point of departure. In ancient times, humans wandered from place to place to look for food or run away from danger. Before the advent of machines, humans were highly engaged in physical activities in building settlements, automobiles, roads and working on farms. In later years, with the start of technological advancement, machines started replacing humans in most physical activities. For example, trekking was replaced by automobiles; heavy lifting was replaced by machines. Humans witnessed a change in their lifestyle in some parts of the world; thereby exposing them to a sedentary lifestyle that started resulting to certain health, social, physical and psychological set-backs.

The United States Agency for International Aid (USAID) identified that participation in physical activity have countless benefits for individuals. Among the most obvious, positive outcomes are improvements in physical health, such as weight control, strength building, increased flexibility, enhanced coordination and motor skills, improved cardiovascular health and pain reduction. Besides the obvious, USAID also reiterated that the beneficial aspect of physical activity is the impact that it has on psychological and emotional healing and well-being. It provides a positive outlet for stress and aggression. Participation in physical activity can help alleviate depression or anxiety. Physically active people also often experience enhanced self-confidence, improved self-image and some evidence has revealed that participation in sport improves concentration and mental functioning. The affirmations from the USAID report makes more sense to why physical activity is an area of interest in this article.

Also, the importance and need of physical activity has been a key concern in many international as well as national conferences, resulting in the enactment of laws that are supposed to govern it under the canopy of sport. Internationally, such laws include the International Charter of the Physical Education and Sports of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (21st November 1970) which adopted guidelines for the practice of physical education and sports. It states that: "Sport is a fundamental human right for all citizens, and that Physical Education and Sport is an essential element for permanent education within the global system of education".

In Cameroon, physical activity is practiced extensively by the population. It is supported by the national government. Canoeing, racing, tug of war and wrestling are traditional sports in Cameroon. In some of the initiation rites and other ceremonies of the Bakweri and the Douala, wrestling has always featured. Cameroon's Ministry of Sport and Physical Education brought the practice of physical activity to order by creating the federation of "Sports for All" in 1999. According to the decision n° 24/MJS/CAB of 1st April 1999, the federation of sports for all is supposed to perform the following functions: Organize the activities in the sporting sector, ensure that the activities are carried out in conformity with the prescriptions of the federation, extend or propagate its activities such as entertainment, distraction, socialization and leisure to the entire country. In fact, the task of the federation is to cater and control the sports activities of the population with emphasis on physical activity. Its activities are non-competitive but directed towards the well being of the population.

The creation of the federation of "Sport for All" was a follow up of Law N° 96/09 of 05th August 1996 that fixed the charter on physical activity and sports, enacted by the President of the Republic in 1996. The law fixed the role of physical education and sports, the creation of sports associations, sports federations, the coordination of physical activities and sports. The charter emphasizes on the goal of physical and sports activities which aimed at enhancing health, education, culture and the development of the individual. Meanwhile, in order to perpetuate sports and physical activities through the youths, sport and physical education was enshrined into the teaching curriculum in Cameroon. Registered under the dispositions of law n° 96/09 of 5th August 1996 fixing the charter on physical education and sports, Cameroon has elaborated priority and fundamental options for the teaching of Physical Education and Sport (PES) in the school milieu.

In recent years, walking through some neighbourhoods in Yaoundé, I realized that more and more city inhabitants were running up and down the city hills, some exercising on the renovated keep fit track, while others play group games like football on week-days evenings or on week-ends mornings. What particularly caught my attention was the fact that the city dwellers were exercising in groups that most often did not disperse at the end of their sessions but sat somewhere in a bar or on the field to discuss issues not directly related to physical exercises. Observing this situation, many questions came to my mind: Why are they practicing in keep fit group physical activities? What are their benefits? All these questions urged me to settle on the phenomenon of physical activity among keep fit groups in Yaoundé as my research interest.

This paper therefore, examines why there is an increasing dimension of maintaining psycho-physical health through physical activities among keep fit groups in the city of Yaoundé, Cameroon. Physical activities have become an important component of health and primary healthcare providers are more and more facing the responsibility of offering to patients, expert advice on remedial aspects of physical activity. Sedentary lifestyle and other medical dispositions have exposed a majority of people to psycho-physical challenges related to health, thereby pushing them to engage in physical activity as a means to restore healthy lifestyle.

The findings of this article support the worldwide discussions surrounding the benefits of the practice of physical activity which is aimed at ameliorating the psychological and physical wellness of human beings. Physical activity, as demonstrated by many studies is vital in the treatment of non-communicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes and autism. The statement above is reflected in the works of Efuetcha (2012) and Abondo (2010) who attempt to show the direct relationship that exists between the practice of physical activity and the treatment of certain diseases as mentioned earlier.

This article is built on the assumption that there are diverse factors that account for the increasing dimensions of maintaining psycho-physical health through the practice of physical activity in keep fit groups in Yaounde. The practice of physical activity has become of utmost importance in the maintenance of psycho-physical health in recent memories. Krüger (1999:9) argues that: "Modern sport entered the twentieth century largely as the private fiefdom of the new social strata born of industrialization and urbanization. It was a social innovation, confined to national boundaries that had its roots in the emergence of new forms of sociability" (Krüger, 1999:9). Again, the psycho-physical dimensions in the maintenance of health falls in line with the definition of health by World Health Organisation (WHO), which defines health as: "A state of social, mental and physical wellbeing of individual and not necessary the absence of diseases or infirmity".

Pioneer anthropologists, such as Edward Burnet Tylor (1832-1917) and Culin Stewart (1858-1929), studied physical activity and games of non-Western tribal and pre-literate peoples. From these initial efforts, anthropologists carried out some sophisticated studies of sport and/or physical activity from across-cultural

perspectives, examining how physical activities were carried out. For instance, Chandler et al. (2002:18&19) citing Blanchard (1995) noted a number of major theoretical concerns that guide anthropologists studying sport and physical activity and Malina (1983) equally made ground breaking contributions to our understanding of the significance of physical activity to normal growth and development, and the impact that both excessive and minimal amounts of appropriate physical activity can have on the human organism, its structure and function.

Study Location

Yaoundé falls completely within a Type A or Guinea-type climate, like other towns in the Centre Region. This gives the city a high humidity and precipitation, with rainfall averaging between 1,000-2,000 mm each year. Yaoundé features a tropical wet and dry climate with constant temperatures throughout the year. However, primarily due to the altitude, temperatures are not quite as hot as one would expect for a city located near the equator. Yaoundé features a lengthy wet season, covering a ten month span between February and November.

Yaoundé, otherwise known as Ongola (*closure in beti language*) is the administrative capital of Cameroon, Centre Region and Mfoundi Division respectively. Yaoundé occupies an estimated surface area of 180m². Yaoundé is situated in the centre Region of the country and falls between latitude 3° 52’ north and longitude 11° 31’ east of the Greenwich meridian. Mfoundi Division, which hosts the city of Yaoundé, is divided into seven administrative sub-divisions; the sub-divisions are Yaoundé I, II, III, IV, V, VI and VII. The sub-divisions are boarded by Mefou and Akono, Nyong and So’o, Mefou and Afamba, and Lekie Divisions.

Shows the seven sub-divisions of Yaounde



Source :Extracted from Ntoumba, G.E.(2007) Planification Urbaine du Cameroun: Cas de la Ville de Yaoundé. Une Présentation du Plan Directeur d’Urbanisme de Yaoundé (PDU) horizon 2020. Yaoundé : CUY

II. Methodology

Data for this paper is collected by using qualitative method and documentary sources. This design facilitates a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. Individual interviews, focus group discussions, observations and documentary literature were therefore combined to make maximum use of the relevant benefits, at the same time, overcoming the shortcomings of each means of collecting data. This paper is extracted from my Ph.D thesis defended in 2019. The study started in 2015 and was finalised when it was deposited at the graduate school for review in 2018.

III. Results and Discussions

The results of this paper will be presented as the discussion unfolds. From field work, it was realised that diverse factors accounted for the increasing dimensions of maintaining psycho-physical health through physical activities in groups. In order to make it easy and understandable to readers, the factors were presented and analysed under psychological and physical factors respectively.

A-Psychological Factors

Psychological factors that are at the basis of maintaining health push some city inhabitants to engage in physical activities. Considering that the psychological state of man is always considered when defining health, we learned from some respondents that physical activities play a significant role in maintaining or re-establishing their psychological health. Instable psychology could lead to mental conditions that are very uncomfortable to certain individuals. WHO says that: *“Mental health is a level of psychological well-being, or an absence of mental illness. It is the “psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioral adjustment”.*

From our fieldwork and literature reviewed, we established a relationship between psychological/mental health and physical activities. From the established relationship we concluded that the propagation of physical activities were partly due to the psychological remedies the participants derived from it, especially as in groups. Robinson *et als* (2016:40) have support that:

People who exercise regularly tend to do so because it gives them an enormous sense of well-being. They feel more energetic throughout the day, sleep better at night, have sharper memories, and feel more relaxed and positive about themselves and their lives. And it’s also powerful medicine for many common mental health challenges(Robinson et als, 2016:40).

In a nutshell therefore, the psychological/mental benefits are related in the first place to depression relief. Physical activities *“promotes all kinds of changes in the brain, including neural growth, reduced inflammation, and new activity patterns that promote feelings of calm and well-being”*, (Robinson *et als*, 2016:41). The aforementioned authors observed that *“physical activities also releases endorphins, powerful chemicals in the brain that energize the spirits and make one feel good”*.

Secondly, physical activities also curb anxiety. Considering that over anxiety can lead to stress, physical activities could be an excellent remedy in regulating it. In order to further illustrate the role of physical activities in relieving anxiety, Robinson *et als* (2016:43) have pointed out that:

Physical activity is a natural and effective anti-anxiety treatment. It relieves tension and stress, boosts physical and mental energy, and enhances well-being through the release of endorphins. Anything that gets you moving can help, but you’ll get a bigger benefit if you pay attention instead of zoning out (Robinson et als,2016:43)

Consequently, physical activity has a direct effect on treating anxiety. It is therefore very obvious that most members of the *“deux zéro”* groups did not only take part in physical activities to strengthen muscles but also to work on their level of anxiety, a condition that could be fatal if not arrested earlier.

Thirdly, physical activity can also relieve stress. Stress can be felt when the muscles may be tensed, mostly in the face, neck, and shoulders, leaving one with painful headaches, back or neck pain. Sometimes, one may feel tightness in the chest, muscle cramps or a pounding pulse. Such conditions could be relieved by physical activities, *“by releasing endorphins in the brain, physical activity helps to relax the muscles and relieve tension in the body. Since the body and mind are so closely linked, when one’s body feels better so, too, will your mind”* (Robinson *et als*, 2016:43).

Besides the above authors, Fox *et al* (2000) reveal that *“physical exercise was considered as one of the alternative treatments to mental problems in Great Britain”*. Again, Carless *et al* (2010) explored the ways in which various forms of physical activity and sport contribute to recovery among people who have at some time in their life been diagnosed with a mental illness.

In a bid to support the views of the above authors, data collected during fieldwork revealed that many individuals used physical activities to relieve stress. According to Bila, member of *Laverie Mbia* group, interviewed on the 29/05/2015 at Nkolbissong, said: *“I always practice physical activity sometimes once or twice a week; I always feel relief and light after practicing physical activity. Even though I may be tired immediately after, but the next days I always feel smarter”*. From the statement of the respondent above, it is evident that physical activity helps him to relieve stress and other psychological disturbances. As a consequence, the practice of physical activity is beneficial to the treatment of mental illness. Perhaps, this and other psychological factors examine below have a bearing on why there is an increasing dimension of physical activity in the city of Yaoundé.

i-Emotional health

Another aspect of health in relation to physical activity is the emotional stability that participants can derive from exercising. To be emotionally stable means a person is able to remain calm when faced with pressure or stress. Someone who is emotionally unstable is more unstable, which means the person faces an increased risk of reacting with violent or harmful behaviors when provoked. Considering that many city inhabitants go through diverse daily experiences and encounters, many of them develop emotional instability thus leaving them very volatile to handle their daily activities. Bailey *et als* (2012) explains the emotional benefit individuals participating in physical activity in the following words:

The [emotional] benefits associated with physical activity, including increased levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, reduced depression and anxiety, reduced social isolation, and a greater ability to process stressful events (Bailey et als,2012:1053).

From the words of the above authors, it is very evident that the practice of physical activity is valuable in building self-esteem and reducing social isolation. In African culture, though is not very evident to determine persons with emotional instability, physical activities consciously or unconsciously help some of them to overcome emotional related problems.

ii-Build body image

Sport could help some city inhabitants build the image about their body. Forest *et al* (2007), cited by Brudzynski *et al* (2010:15) explained that “*body image has been defined as the subjective concept of physical appearance and can be either positive or negative*”. Some participants, who were exposed to body criticism or criticized the body of others, failed to recognize that they had their own specific shapes and for that reason were obliged to learn how to appreciate their uniqueness. They said such category of people were determined to intensify their physical exercises in order to lose weight and thus reshape their bodies. The failure to realize the uniqueness of their bodies pushed some of them to develop a very poor image about their bodies, thus leading to emotional instability. Some of them felt shapeless, ugly and sometimes isolated.

In some cases, physical activity helps to reconstruct the mind set of such people since they do not only interact but practice physical activities that could help reshape their bodies. On the field, we searched to understand whether some participants were satisfied with their bodies after physical activities. The responses we obtained are numerically presented on the table below.

Table 37: Satisfaction about body image

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	227	90.8
No	23	9.2
Total	250	100.0

Source: Monju (Fieldwork)

The data on the table shows that 227(two hundred and twenty seven) people, representing 90.8 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that they were satisfied with their body image after practicing physical activities. 23 (twenty three) people, representing 9.2 percent of the respondents said they were not satisfied with their body image after the practice of physical activities. The data shows that most respondents were satisfied with their body image after practicing physical activities, despite this, a small proportion of the respondents were not satisfied. Perhaps the practice did not yield the expected results leaving their bodies to be in the same shape as before.

In an attempt to sample the opinion of some respondents why they felt dissatisfied with their body image after practicing physical activity, one of them, Mme Emilia, member of the Bell’s Fitness and Kinesitherapy Group, interviewed on the 22/05/2015 at Ngoa-Ekelle, said that:

My aim was to reduce the fat on my body and retake my formal shape but it seems I am still fat and shapeless. Anyway, maybe it is because I am not consistent with my practice. Some of my friends also say I should not eat a lot of fatty foods when I am practicing in physical activity (Madam Emilia, interviewed on the 22/05/2015).

Madam Emilia expresses her opinion why she is not satisfied with her body shape after practicing physical activity. Surely, others who dissatisfied share her opinion.

Concerning the role of physical activity in shaping the body, Mambo (2010) has studied the practice and development of tennis as a sport in Bamenda II sub-division and has exposed that it is a keep fit activity par excellence. According to her, Tennis is therefore practiced as a sport in order to lose weight and maintain body shape so as to keep oneself in good health. Tennis gives mental strength, self confidence and builds team spirit. Thus physical activity could help shape the body image of most people in the city of Yaoundé, thereby reducing emotional instability related to the shape of the body.

iii-Self-esteem

As an emotional aspect, self-esteem can be built through the participation in physical activity. Self-esteem is generally understood as a situation where an individual has confidence in his/her own worth or abilities and self-respect. Many respondents we discussed with on the field were of the opinion that through their participation in physical activities, they always felt worthy and developed the sense of self respect, since they could participate and interact freely with other members.

During a focus group discussion with women on the 08/06/2015 at Efulan, one of the respondents talked of “*self discovery*”. The respondent expressed “*the level of self-confidence that she developed after participating in physical activities*”. The above statement is supported by Bailey (2004:52) as he reviewed how Samuel transformed his self-esteem by participating in physical activities. The quotation below is the words of Samuel expressing his opinion on the role of physical activity in his life.

[...]I discovered a capacity within myself that I never knew I had. I wasn't just physically stronger than I expected, I thought of myself as a different person, as someone with more potential, broader horizons, bigger possibilities. I saw that I could push myself and take risks, not just in sports, but elsewhere, too. The competition in sports, as in life, was not with someone else, it was with me. To "compete" was to discover my own potential to do better, to hold my own self to a higher standard, to expect more of myself and deliver (Bailey,2004:52).

Physical activity therefore operates as a platform in restructuring the confidence individuals have about themselves. The possession of the qualities mentioned in the quotation above are very vital in maintaining and sustaining the well-being of individuals who participate in physical activities, since emotional adjustments can be achieved.

Some authors such as Taylor (2000) have researched and contributed in showing how physical activity treats some stress and anxiety developed by individuals in the society. Taylor for instance, examines the evidence for using exercise for the prevention and treatment of anxiety and stress disorders. Ewoudi (2008) brought out the significance of physical activity in re-establishing the health of people living with autism. In view of the above, the quest for emotional adjustment could be one of the factors that account for the increasing dimensions of physical activities in the city of Yaoundé.

B) Physical Factors

Physical factors were also identified to account for the increasing dimension of physical activities in Yaoundé because of the health benefits individuals derive from it. One of the principal preoccupations of humans has always been the restoration of health. Literature from enothomedicines explains how early people used natural herbs and barks of trees to treat muscular related complications that could be life threatening or limit mobility, this view is shared by Kwan (1995). In recent past, with the inception of the industrial revolution and now the new information and communication technology, many health hazards have emerged and remain a challenge to Mankind. As a reminder, health is defined by World Health Organization (WHO) as “*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*”. The quest for restoring and maintaining physical health accounts for the reasons why individuals practice physical activities. Thus, the meaning they make out of physical activity is that it can maintain and sustain health.

a-Physical health

Physical health is one aspect of health that is very common and visible especially as fitness is concerned. During fieldwork, we realized that many people participated in physical activities in order to either maintain their physic or body fitness. Physical health can be viewed as that part of the general health of an individual, which includes everything from physical fitness to general wellbeing. In the same line Koipysheva (2018) has support the above statement by examining and defining physical health. There are diverse physical benefits as we identified during fieldwork related to the following aspects: Burns fat, build muscles, create a body rhythm, relaxes body, loosen joints.

i-Burn body fat

Burning of body fat was identified as one of the physical health benefits that many people who participated in physical activity derived (Weil Richard, 2002). Body fat can be caused by a natural disposition or by the consumption of saturated fat from vegetable oils, palm kernel oils, coconut and dairy products such as cheese, butter, ice-cream, concentrated milk and fatty meats, this explanation has been supported Friedman (2009). The aforementioned products cause the body to grow fatter and sometimes take shapes that some individuals do not appreciate. Consequently, they resort to physical activities with the hope of burning the fat from the body.

Most people we talked to during their participation in physical activity were strongly convinced that their body fat will give way after physical activity. Some had excessive saturated fat on different parts of the body, for instance, on the laps, stomach and buttocks. That is why we also discovered that some group members

had combined and endured (Mbo et al, 2017) body physical activity which was meant to burn fat from a particular part of the body.

One of the cases we recorded on the field was that of Lillian, who is a member of *Bel's Fitness and Kinesitherapy* Group in Yaoundé III sub-division. Her reason for belonging in the group was to work out her protruding stomach. Interviewed on the 28/02/2015, at Golf court area, she said: *"my stomach makes me uncomfortable especially when I wear certain fitting cloths. My aim is to reduce it through physical activity in order to have a fitting shape"*. Another case still in the same group mentioned above had a different problem. Her preoccupation was that, she was very fat and thus needed to do everything to burn her body fat. She told us that besides participating in physical activities, she also follows a food recipe in order to burn her body fat faster.

Most often, some group members claimed to work out one part of the body or another to take shape, ended up succeeding or failing. Seemingly, some after burning calories ended up eating food rich with fat and drinking beer that replaced more calories than they had burnt. However, each and every member of a physical activity group had his/her objective before adhering to the group, especially concerning burning body fat. Getting away with the excessive body fat, enabled some of them to stabilize their psycho-social states, thereby integrating them fully into the societal mainstream. The desire to burn body fat and restore or remain healthy, pushed some individuals to engage in physical activities.

ii-Build muscles

Another aspect of physical health that motivated some city inhabitants to practice physical activities and restore health is the building of muscles. Muscle building is not a recent activity; it has been since man started organizing competitions in the form of sport (Kraemer William et al, 2002). Muscle building has become a whole game that is presented at the International Olympic Games. During fieldwork, we realized that some individuals built their muscles to restore or maintain health or to be hired by some people or companies to serve as guards at night clubs or snacks.

We observed the process of building muscles mostly in gyms and among some groups that had specialized material to assist them build their muscles. The activities involved in muscles building were lifting heavy objects with the hands, arms, shoulders and legs. The idea behind this was to strengthen the arm, shoulder and leg muscles. We understood during fieldwork that muscle building takes a longer time to be very effective. Contrary to some individuals who have a lot of fat on their bodies, people involved in muscle building instead need fat in their bodies in order to help sustain their muscles when it grows fatter.

We recorded the case of Mathias, aged 29 who is a member of *Club Santé* group at Mendong area, Yaoundé VI sub-division, interviewed on 12/03/2015. He said: *"I have been practicing muscle building for the past four years. I decided to take muscle building as part of a physical activity because I worked as a guard in one of the Night Clubs in the city of Yaoundé"*. He continued ... *"I needed to build my body muscle to look strong to help me in my job side"*. Cases such as the one explained above abound in the city of Yaoundé. Thus contributing to the explanation why city dwellers join groups to participate in physical activities in Yaoundé.

iv-Create body equilibrium

Body equilibrium or stability is another aspect of physical health that pushed some individuals to join groups and participate in physical activities. The notion of equilibrium or stability reminds us of how an individual can resist physical exercise like standing or sitting for long without any instability. However, if we go by the definition of equilibrium by Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary, it will mean: *"A state of balance between opposing forces or actions that is either static (as in a body acted on by forces whose resultant is zéro) while stability will mean the quality or state of someone who is emotionally or mentally healthy"*. The two concepts are not opposing but explaining the notion as it is supposed to fit to individuals of who perform physical activities in groups. From fieldwork, and some related literature, we realized that the practice of physical activity can maintain or re-establish body equilibrium or stability. The effectiveness depends on the intensity at which physical activities are performed. Thus effective and long lasting equilibrium can be achieved if individuals practice physical activities regularly and consistently.

The case of those who practiced physical activities and needed a lot of stamina were found among the groups that took football as a principal activity. In a focus group discussion with men, organized on the 07/03/2015, one of the participants, supported by members of the focus group discussion, told us that: *"In order to play, football, one is supposed to have stability or equilibrium. That is why they always perform exercises and body stretches to ensure body equilibrium even if they are not playing a football match"*.

Fokumlah (2010:18) demonstrates the place of physical activity in maintaining body equilibrium. According to her, the insertion of Cameroon cultural dances into the secondary school curriculum justifies the fact that dance as a physical activity favors the development of certain qualities and capacities. The qualities as

enumerated by her are “*resistance, suppleness, and equilibrium*”. These give room for a harmonious development of the body which is at the centre of all physical activities.

Considering dance as a physical activity, she explains that: “*dance works the entire body, thereby contributing to the breaking down and flexion of all body articulations*”. Thus, dance is a complete sport or physical activity. Fokumlah equally thinks that dance has a very significant contribution in shaping the body. She reported that: “*dance as a means to condition the body physically, permits the body not to be crispy in any form even through extraversion*”. Dance according to her therefore gives humans the opportunity to have proportionate physical build up. Dance as a physical activity, shapes the body and gives one a good physical presence. It equilibrates the body leaving no part to be disproportionate.

vii-Cardiovascular diseases

After presenting the benefits of physical activities to physical health, we are going to turn our attention to the benefits of physical activities to human cardiovascular diseases. Human cardiovascular diseases are as old as human life on earth, the diseases remain a menace to human existence and efforts are being made to bring them under control. According to National Health Service (NHS-England), cardiovascular disease refers to “*conditions that involve narrowed or blocked blood vessels that can lead to a heart attack, chest pain or stroke*”. The NHS-England also included that: “*Other heart conditions, such as those that affect the heart's muscle, valves or rhythm, also are considered forms of heart disease*”. Generally, other health conditions include hypertension and diabetes which are related to the above mentioned diseases.

From data collected, we understood that physical activities had a positive impact in either preventing or treating the above mentioned diseases. Some respondents we met on the field were of the opinion that their participation in physical activities was motivated by the fact that they wanted to fight against heart diseases, hypertension and diabetes. According to statistics from the Ministry of Public Health, over 4 million Cameroonians, that is 25 percent of the total population, suffer from high blood pressure. “*In 1994, the prevalence rates were 8.3 percent and 1.1 percent for hypertension and diabetes in adult population respectively. In 1998 these rates increased to 17.6% and 6.2% respectively in the urban areas*” (Kegne, Awah, Fezeu& Mbanya, 2007).

The propagation of the television network and other entertaining gadgets like the computers and the telephones in recent years has increased the sedentary lifestyle of many Cameroonians. Thus, if the percentages from the Ministry of health are reviewed, one might discovered that the proportion has increased. Equally, physical inactivity is now established as: “*An independent risk factor for cardiovascular morbidity and mortality, an effect that is similar to that of high blood pressure, high levels of blood lipids, and smoking combined*” (Wisløff *et al* 2000:20).

The means through which physical activity can help in treating cardiovascular conditions are perhaps very technical to explain, but Stocchi *et al* (2007) quoted by Taylor (2000:5), attempted to explain the link between cardiovascular diseases and physical activities in the quotation that follows:

Though we do not fully understand the metabolic changes brought about by physical activity, we do know that aerobic exercise is able to promote the expression of a significant number of nuclear and mitochondrial genes responsible for mitochondrial biogenesis, an important metabolic process which increases aerobic capacity. This new steady-state condition of the skeletal muscle cell contributes to an individual's overall health, playing a role in the prevention of modern-day chronic diseases and improving the quality of life(Taylor, 2000:5).

From information we gathered on the field, physical exercises could be very remedial to the problems of cardiovascular and related diseases. Some of the activities identified included jogging, walking, stretching, and others which are non-competitive and which have as objective the attainment of good health. Mazzeo (1996), quoted by Mambo(2010:10) supports by writing that a good program of exercise for the above diseases would include exercise for each of the following: “*cardiovascular fitness (endurance), strength (physique and figure), controlling weight, flexibility, motor fitness (skill related fitness)*”. Some city inhabitants participated in physical activities in order to seek for remedy to cardiovascular diseases which are very common in recent times.

In the same line as above, De Feo *et al* (2007) have demonstrated the importance of physical activities to the treatment of obesity and diabetes. They explained that “*Obesity, diabetes and the metabolic syndrome are increasing mainly because many people no longer participate in physical activities in their daily lives*”. From the quotation, it therefore means that physical activity can cut down the rate of obesity, diabetes and other metabolic syndrome that are prevalent in recent memories. De Feo *et al* also argued that: “*Physical exercise might be utilized to improve insulin sensitivity and endothelial dysfunction*”. Thus physical exercise is necessary to facilitate the sensitivity of insulin thus leading to the treatment of dia betes.

Other authors who had researched on the importance of physical activities in the treatment of chronic diseases include Abondo (2010) who seeks to demonstrate the role of physical exercise to the wellbeing of

apnea and obese persons. Fialho *et al* (2009) who opined that heart disease, high blood pressure and some cancers are caused by sedentary lifestyles and consumption of energy dense foods. According to them, physical activity reduces risk and provides therapeutic benefits for people that suffer from several health conditions. Thus to conclude, they reiterated that: “physical activity reduces the risk of many chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and certain types of cancer”. However, what should be noted is that the intensity of the practice of physical activity should be respected; otherwise it can stress up the heart muscles and instead cause constant dead.

According to Mr. Frederic, member of *Les Veteran “deu* group, interviewed on the 29/05/2015 at quartier Fouda, said: “I am above 57 years old, I always practice physical activities every weekend to stay healthy and also to check out certain diseases that are due to [...] I can say inactivity”. The diseases Mr. Frederic might have been checking out at his age could be cardiovascular diseases which are very common among people who are attaining his age bracket. Thus staying healthy at that age bracket is necessary through the practice of physical activity. After looking at the benefits physical activities have in the management of certain cardiovascular diseases, it might therefore be possible that the increasing dimension of maintaining health through physical activities in the city of Yaoundé is partly due its prevalence.

IV. Conclusion

The article has examined how physical activity maintains and sustains psycho-physical health. Following the assumption that, that there are diverse psycho-physical factors that account for the increasing dimensions of maintaining psycho-physical health through the practice of physical activity, we found out that psycho-physical factors influenced the increasing dimension in the practice of physical activity in the city of Yaounde. Some authors like Graig *et al* (2008) has studied the social dimensions of groups as a whole. Taylor (2000), Peggy *et al* (2006), De Feo *et al* (2007) on their own part, have examined the implications of physical activity to health and concluded that it explains why some people are engaged in physical activities. Corbin *et al* (2008), Carless *et al* (2010) and Ekane (2010) looked at the relationship between participating in group activities and the cultural background or aspects of individuals. While Humpel *et al* (2002) and Bolivar *et al* (2010) added their voices by examining the role of social environment in the increasing dimension of physical activities in some cities of the world.

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