

## **Stakeholder's Perceptions about Role of Sports in Resolving the Conflicts**

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### **Abstract**

*Sports are regarded as very effective instrument for conflict resolution and peace building. In this context a study was launched in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to analyze the perceived agentive role of sports in resolving the conflicts. Teachers and the Parents, as well as students and sportsmen/women were the population of the study. To select the sample convenient sampling approach was used. A closed form questionnaire built on "five point Likert scale" was utilized to cognize the perceived agentive role of sports in conflict resolution. For analysis of data Percentage and ANOVA was used as statistical technique. Statistical analysis of the data disclosed that stakeholders consider sports as very successful tool for creating a space for peaceful dialogue and reducing anger and defuse tension between rival groups. The stakeholders accepted that sports give relief in middle of conflict and make a significant contribution to conflict reconciliation and promote a culture of peace.*

**Keywords:** Perception, stakeholders, sports, conflict resolution, peace building.

### **Introduction**

Sports are all kinds of physical activities that contribute to physical development and fitness, mental wellbeing and social interaction, such as competitive sports, organized sports, indigenous games and sports, play and recreation (UNITFSDP, 2003). Conflict is an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, dissonance or disagreement within or between social entities. Moreover conflict starting with disagreement and followed by verbal abuse and interference (Rahim, 2011).

Conflict resolution may be defined as the process by which two or more parties use to find a peaceful resolution to a dispute or conflict among them. The dispute or conflict may occur between countries, groups, and communities etc. (Doyle, 2019). Role of the sports in resolving the conflicts has been a topic of discussion for quite a long time. Those peoples who criticize the sports say that sports have nothing to do with fair play. It involves jealousy, violation of rules, and hatred (Sugden & Stidder, 2003). Sports activities increase hostility between rival groups and if not appropriately controlled it can strengthen division of ethnicities (Majaro-Majesty, 2011). Although sports connect the peoples with one and other but it is not a universal solution for social

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problems. Sports may deliver social separation, social discrimination, and differences particularly on the grounds of nationality, ethnicity, sex, physical ability, and social class (Dorokhina, et al., 2011). For players of all ages there is consistently risk of injuries in sports. In addition to injuries sports may place feeling of worry, stress, and social pressure on the young players and they are vulnerable to a variety of overuse injuries (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). The expectations of spectators, general public, team manager, coach, and family on players for good performance during competition build pressure on them, therefore players feel uneasy and they may lose their confidence (Huggins, 2018).

Supporters of sports program assert that sports has been using in conflict resolution and peace building from ancient times. In support of their claim they give the examples of Olympic truce of 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C and Christmas Truce of 1914. In 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C Olympic Truce which is also called “ekecheiria” began from Ancient Greece. “Ekecheiria” means “lying down arms”. Actually this was an agreement between the rulers of “Pisa, Sparta and Elis” for temporary suspension of fighting (Gardiner, 1925). The organizers of the Olympic Games announce the truce on the occasion of Olympic Games for its proper implementation (Toohey & Veil, 2007). Because of “Olympic Truce” it was possible for the players, officials, and viewers to make a trip towards the “Olympic Games” city and come back homes secure n safe without any danger (IOC, 2015). Besides during the period of Olympic truce weapons were resting, war between the rival states forces were suspended, no one was allowed for threatening the games, legal disputes, and major punishment such as death penalties were banned. The date of commencement and termination of Olympic Games were announced by special announcers and they request the opponent armies of rival states for implementation of ceasefire during Olympic Games (Georgiadis & Syrigos, 2009). Therefore safe passage was provided to all players, coaches, managers, officials, and spectators normally for 21 days (UN News, 2012).

Famous Christmas truce of 1914 is another case of the utilization of sports for conflict resolution. During First World War English and German troops stopped antagonism, interchanged gifts on the event of Christmas. The both opponent soldiers played a football match on the battle field. The football match provided temporary relief to opponent troops in shape of an unofficial temporary cease fire. This act of opponent troops clearly shows that they ratified the power of sports for reconciliation and peace building (Cardenas, 2013).

There is incredible and powerful connection between sports and peace. Sports can bring the peoples of opposing groups together and closer, break down barriers, and cross boundaries. Playgrounds, courts, gymnasiums, and other playing fields are best source for social contact between rival groups. Sports may be used for recommencing social dialogue, breaking down prejudice and highlighting the similarities between people. Sports convey the peace message powerfully (Gaur, 2014). Professor

Woodhouse said that sports develop such values which are necessary for conflict resolution and peace building processes. Sports cross the boundaries, unite the people, develop social inclusion, respect and tolerance (Howie, 2012). Moreover sports might be utilized to develop values necessary to lessen tension, create harmony, and prevent conflict (Krafchek, 2012). One of the capacities of sports is to develop social interaction; hence sports maintain open channel of communication in tense and conflict situations. People badly affect in conflict and post conflict situations and in such situations sports may help to build useful outlet for affected people, therefore tension and hostilities may be reduced (SADC, 2005).

Round the globe sports are used for conflict resolution, and peace building. Columbia has severely affected during interior clashes and war. Various peacemaking steps including utilization of sports were taken to resolve the armed conflict of Columbia. Different types of sports activities were utilized for the motivation behind peace building. In war impacted Columbia sports added to peace building through different ways with other harmony and peace activities. Cardenas said that in spite of the fact sports alone can't end the fifty five year long armed conflict in Columbia, however sports based program helped a great deal in conflict resolution and peace building in Columbia (Cardenas, 2015). There was an ethnic clash among Catholics and Protestant in Northern Ireland (Storey, 2004). Games of Football and Basketball were used to bring Catholics and Protestant together and closer with other peace initiatives (Cardenas, 2015). Sports promoted connections among both communities, which helped in conflict resolution and peace building (Cardenas, 2016). Additionally sports were used to cultivate understanding between both rival groups in Northern Ireland (Cardenas, 2017). In Sierra Leone Football festivals were conducted during the civil war to unite the peoples. During these festivals, matches of soccer were played between opposing groups. During football festivals civil war was suspended (Van Der Niet, 2010). Sports were utilized for social inclusion during second civil war of Liberia. In addition with the help of different sports programs peoples learned to resolve conflicts in peaceful manners (Pozovi, 2014).

In various countries of the world the research on role of sports in resolving the conflicts and building the peace is becoming more important for policy makers, sports organizations, sports associations, international organizations and funding agencies but research findings in this regards are not conclusive and decisive. The reason is that in certain countries in certain circumstances sports develop tolerance and harmony while in some other countries in some different circumstances it creates conflict (Giulianotti, 2010).

Whether sports activities resolve conflicts or create conflicts remain a topic of controversy and debate. The capacity of sports in resolving conflicts is not fully understood. Therefore in the above perspective the present study was planned to explore the role of the sports in resolving certain conflicts.

## Material and Methods

The researcher used “survey research design”. The study was “descriptive in nature”. For this study population composed of “the Teachers and the parents as well as students and the sportsmen and women” from the Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. Initially five districts of KPK were randomly selected including district Dera Ismail Khan, Peshawar, Mardan, Swat and Abbottabad. Convenient or available sampling procedure was adopted for choosing the sample. Total 540 questionnaires were distributed at the ratio of 128, 140, 140, and 132 among parents, teachers, students and sportsmen/women respectively. Out of 540 questionnaires 512 received back including 125 parents, 131 teachers, 130 students, 126 sportsmen/women. To give equal representation to each stratum, 125 questionnaires from each stratum (total 500) were taken for analysis purpose. Closed form questionnaire on “five point Likert scale” consisted of 10 questions was used for collection of data. The researcher personally visited sample districts, distributed the questionnaires among the stakeholders and got back dully completed by them. The data gathered were treated statistically through SPSS. The data was analyzed with the help of percentage while ANOVA was used to test the four hypotheses.

## Results

The results of the study are shown in below Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency of the responses of participants’ to the queries*

Questions	S.A		A		N.S		SDA		D.A	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Sports lessen the gap among different groups.	70	14.0	301	60.2	12	2.4	107	21.4	10	2.0
Sports may be used to break the ice among clashing groups.	106	21.2	228	45.6	37	7.4	104	20.8	25	5.0
Sports bring assorted groups of adolescents together and closer.	80	16.0	299	59.8	12	2.4	100	20.0	9	1.8
Sports create a space for peaceful dialogue.	80	16.0	255	51.0	32	6.4	118	23.6	15	3.0
Sports may be used as a communication platform.	71	14.2	324	64.8	16	3.2	85	17.0	4	0.8
Sports activities help to reduce anger.	60	12.0	264	52.8	27	5.4	134	26.8	15	3.0
Sports help to defuse tension between different groups.	80	16.0	302	60.4	19	3.8	86	17.2	13	2.6
Sports give relief in middle of conflict.	69	13.8	284	56.8	33	6.6	102	20.4	12	2.4
Sports can make a valuable contribution to conflict reconciliation.	79	19.4	231	52.6	33	1.8	135	24.8	22	1.4
Sports promote a culture of peace.	72	14.4	314	62.8	11	2.2	97	19.4	6	1.2

\*Note: f = Frequency, SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, NS = Not Sure, DA = Disagree, SDA = Strongly Disagree”

*Inferential Statistics*

**Table 2**

*There is no significant difference of perception among all categories of stakeholders regarding role of sports in reducing the distance between disparate groups*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Between Groups	0.488	3	0.163	0.152	0.928
Within Groups	530.320	496	1.069		
Total	530.808	499			

Table 2 above illustrates that  $F(3, 496) = 0.152$ ,  $p = 0.928 > 0.05$ , which indicates that null hypothesis is accepted. This means that all categories of stakeholders have similar perception about role of sports in abridging the distance among disparate groups.

**Table 3**

*There is no significance difference of perception among all categories of stakeholders regarding role of sports in creating a space for peaceful dialogue*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Between Groups	10.566	3	3.522	2.912	0.034
Within Groups	599.856	496	1.209		
Total	610.422	499			

Table 3 above reveals that  $F(3, 496) = 2.912$ ,  $p = 0.034 < 0.05$ , which assert that the null hypothesis has been rejected. This means that there prevails a noteworthy difference in the perceptions among entire groups of the stakeholders about role of the sports in making a space for peaceful dialogue.

**Table 4**

*There is no significance difference of perception among all categories of stakeholders regarding role of sports in reducing tension among different communities*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Between Groups	0.472	3	0.157	0.152	0.929
Within Groups	514.528	496	1.037		
Total	515.000	499			

Table 4 above shows that  $F(3, 496) = 0.152$ ,  $p = 0.929 > 0.05$ , which upholds that the hypothesis i.e. the null, is accepted. This means that all categories of the stakeholders have similar perceptions about capacity of sports in reducing tension among different communities.

**Table 5**

*There is no significant difference of perception among all categories of stakeholders regarding role of sports in providing respite in the midst of conflict*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Between Groups	2.608	3	0.869		
Within Groups	532.160	496	1.073	0.810	0.489
Total	534.768	499			

Table 5 above illustrate that  $F(3, 496) = 0.810$ ,  $p = 0.489 > 0.05$ , which yields that null hypothesis is accepted. This means that all categories of stakeholders do perceive alike concerning the ability of sports in providing relief in the conditions where a conflict arouses.

## **Discussion**

The researcher found that stakeholders see exceptionally positive prospects of the sporting activities in resolving conflicts. It was noted that 74.2% stakeholders said that sports might be utilized as an instrument for lessening the gap among different groups. Comparable has been statement of Schulenkorf (2010) who contended that sport may be an appropriate instrument for lessening the distance between different groups. Stidder and Haasner (2007) also endorsed this statement.

The greater part of the stakeholders (66.8 %) admitted that the sports activities might be utilized to “break the ice” among clashing groups. Johnston (2017) also contended that sports work as ice breaker between clashing groups. Giulianotti (2011) expressed that as indicated by the authorities of United Nations “breaking ice” is the prime commitment of “Sports for Development and Peace projects” to establishing a tranquil type of worldwide common society.

It was brought about by dominant part of respondents (75.8%) that sports have the capacity to gather assorted groups of adolescents “together and closer”. Outcome of the aforementioned study is nearly relating to the statement of Eitzen and Sage (2003) who expressed that sports and games unite the assorted people and bring them closer. Rader (1999) affirmed that sports unite the various groups. Jones (2001) expressed that sports have the capacity to gather individuals of various social settings, in this way add to a serene and better society.

It was seen that majority of the stakeholders (67 %) concurred with the theme that sports have the capacity of making room for dialogue leading to peace. Rookwood (2008) delineated sports can naturally make situations into “teachable moments” where individuals have dynamic discourse with one another so as to take care of an issue or problem. This is likewise prove by SDP (2008) who expressed that sports have been utilized to make the way for serene discourse and to diminish political strain among different nations.

Seventy-nine percent of the respondents viewed that sports might be utilized as a “communication platform”. The same has been bolstered in the work of Hirasawa (2003), who expressed that sports can urge communicating and create discernments between different peoples and groups; along these lines sports can help lessen conflict and advance harmony. This proof is likewise bolstered by United Nations (2003) who expressed that because of its all the inclusive intrigue, convening power and numerous positive affiliations sport is one of the most remarkable specialized communication instruments of the universes. Sports can impart messages, for example, co-operation and co-existence. As an amazing platform to impart messages, sports can likewise be a field to advance United Nations objectives for improvement, harmony and peace.

This was the view of 64.8% stakeholders that sports help to decrease anger. Different studies confirmed that sports participation help to diminish outrage and improve the behavior while other research studies demonstrated that sports participation improve the behavior and control the annoyance of peoples (McMahon & Belur, 2013).

Total 76.4 % stakeholders conceded that sports help to defuse tension among various groups. Guha (1998) claim that game like cricket assists with understanding the gaps and strains of a profoundly partitioned society and gives significant bits of knowledge about the histories of religion, caste and race in the nation. Murray and Pigman (2013) expressed that in 2002 after Kashmir emergencies left the Pakistan and India about to start a major world conflict war, yet in 2004 a progression of cricket matches were encouraged by the two governments to lessen strain and investigate the chance of normalizing relations, opening border and continuing direct security exchanges.

Larger part of the respondents (70.6 %) accepted that sports give relief in middle of the conflict. Armstrong (2004) expressed that during the civil war of Liberia, thousands of warriors tossed their arms and reached to the football arena together to see football matches and harmony was kept up during entire matches despite of recognizing the fact that enemy is present in their midst.

Significant part of the respondents (72 %) conceded that sporting activities play a quite effective role in resolving the conflicts. Sugden and Wallis (2007) found that painstakingly planned program of sporting activities makes significant commitment to strife compromise.

This was the opinion of lot of the stakeholders (77.2%) that sports activities help improve and promote a culture conducive for peace. Bouzou (2010) inferred that sport can be effectively used for peace building. Dossal (2006) narrated that the sports can be used as an effective tool for preventing conflicts and advancing sustainable harmony and peace. Sports have incredible potential for combining peoples, developing resilience, solidarity, affection and harmony between peoples, which are fundamental fixings in the advancement of harmony and peace. During a match the supporters of

both teams communicate with one another and acknowledge the victory of opponent team with open heart. It makes a culture of fairness, harmony, and reasonableness in the public arena, which emphatically adds to the way of life of harmony and peace.

Statistical analysis of data indicated that sports programs have been a great achievement in reducing anger, defusing tension, and encouraging communication between different opponent groups. Accordingly the results of this research study can help execute sports program for compromise, harmony building, conflict resolution and peace building, and sports might be utilized as an apparatus for propelling peace plan.

### **Conclusion**

The prime purpose of present research was to analyze the perceived role and capacity of sports in conflict resolution. The researcher used questionnaires to explore that how sports contribute to resolve the conflicts. It is concluded that sports lessens the gap among different groups, breaks the ice between different conflicting communities, bring assorted groups of adolescents “together and closer” and make possible the dialogue for peace. It was also concluded that the sports activities can also be utilized as “communication platform”, help to lessen anger and tension among various groups. Sports give relief in middle of conflict; make important contribution to conflict reconciliation and advance a culture of harmony and peace. On the basis of research findings, the researchers strongly recommend and support the utilization of sports for the motivations behind improving the communication between conflicting groups, conflict resolution and peace building. The researchers advocate that government, Non-Government Organizations, and other donors support to fund the “sports for peace projects” to resolve conflict; promote peace building between countries, disparate communities and conflicting groups.

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