

A Note to Captivate the Most Out of the Definition of the Sport during the COVID - 19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka's Festive Season

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Abstract

Sport is a significant business for some countries while people in many countries rarely afford to use sports facilities, as their sole concern is survival. Since the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, the survival of human being and coping with the effects of pandemic related preventive behaviours have become the hugest concern of the affected countries including Sri Lanka. This note was written to suggest that 'sport' could be used as a tool to overcome the adverse effects of staying home during COVID -19 regardless of the purchasing power of any person in Sri Lanka. Even though, the insights provided through this could visualise limitations in implications across all socio-cultural backgrounds, the author hopes the suggestion would benefit most citizens to think and act in a creative way by strengthening their family bonds.

Keywords: COVID – 19, Physical Activity, Recreation, Social Distancing, Traditional Sports.

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INTRODUCTION

World Health Organisation (WHO) already declared an emergency due to the COVID - 19 outbreaks (WHO, 2020). People are advised to stay home, minimise public contacts, and maintain hygiene practices (WHO, 2020). Even though the month of April is Sinhala-Hindu New Year season in Sri Lanka (Amarasinghe & Seelawansa, 2014; Ahubudu, 2008; Knox, 1681) and May is to celebrate Buddha's birth, nirvana and the passing away (Muesse, 2004), Sri Lankan government would follow strict procedures to control the spreading of New Corona Virus (both the festivals are national festivals which have been celebrated in Sri Lanka for centuries). Many people started to work from home, some could not continue with their jobs, and some citizens started working long hours if their service was mandatory. Consequently, many Sri Lankans, like many other people in the world, are negatively affected by the recent social transform of not socialising as they were used to. Some people could not follow the regulatory sanctions such as curfew and other social distancing rules imposed by the government of Sri Lanka and reported breaking the law without staying home (news.lk, 2020; 2021).

The word sport means different things to different people (Torkildsen, 2011). More than 95% of the world population would think of competitive sports or Olympics once they hear the term sport(s). The

Council of Europe in its Sports Charter defines sport as "all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental wellbeing, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels" (Katsarova & Halleux, 2019). Casual and organised participation in physical activities includes play/active recreation, organised/competitive (involving participation in the structured competitive activity and involving talent development), sport and informal sports/games (which are unstructured sporting activities such as street sports, kick-about or scrimmages).

Based on this definition, it can be clearly stated that sport can build mental wellbeing, physical fitness, and an excellent social relationship in a family where the epidemic is present. But how? In obtaining an answer, it is essential to have an idea of play/active recreation, as it is suggested to promote play/ active recreation as a form of sport to promote staying home. The concept of leisure is the root, which bears the tree called play and recreation. 'Leisure is introduced either as a type of time, as a set of activities or as a state of being' (Torkildsen, 2011) where play is a freely chosen activity that brings joy and satisfaction (Torkildsen, 2011). Leisure is a form of experiencing, unpaid and chosen in relative freedom that is personally satisfying and can lead towards self-actualisation (Torkildsen, 2011). If so, there are plenty of opportunities (activities

such as exercise, hide and seek play, dancing, walking, or cycling, traditional indoor games and skipping) to reduce mental and physical health problems by considering the time that the people spend at home leisurely. Because, when people play or engage in leisure time activities, it would give pleasure with improved quality of life (Torkildsen, 2005) to an isolated person or an isolated institution called family. Recreation, which is some scholars also introduce as leisure, is a (re + creation of) experience that can be consumed by the inner spirit of a human being. Engaging in recreation activities stimulates a person's thoughts and senses. Because of the ongoing epidemic, many people are emotionally distracted and physically inactive compared to their past social life. Hence, there is a need to stimulate the spirit and senses of the persons in the home. Should there be an opportunity to promote recreation activities, there would be a drastic reduction of numbers who would violate the rules imposed by the government and law enforcement authorities, which were imposed to prevent or minimise the spreading of the epidemic.

On the other hand, the experts' view of how these activities arose was very appealing. Even knowing the origin of recreational activities would motivate a person to stay home and protect themselves from the epidemic. Since the existence and survival of humans being widely recognised, people wanted to seek personal care. The resources needed to ensure personal care was produced and obtained through work. People who worked for this purpose wanted to relieve their tiredness and enjoy themselves during their free time (leisure). Thus, they engaged in various activities (recreation) to stimulate themselves with pleasure. Even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Declaration mentions that everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay (Article 24), and everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and... (Article 27) (UN, 1984). An important message can be socialised saying that being home and involving in recreation activities is like enjoying one's human rights.

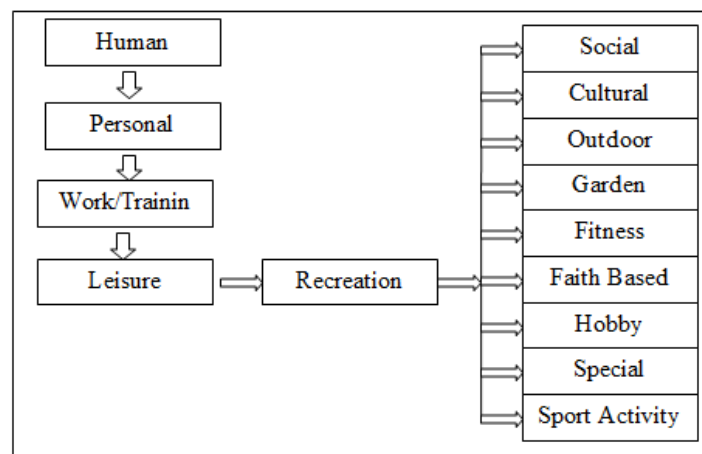


Fig-1: Different Recreational Activities

Source: (Torkildsen, 2005)

Now two essential questions are about to arise. Can people engage in recreation at home? What type of recreational activities can Sri Lanka promote? A home is also a place where leisure and recreation demands and facilities available (Torkildsen, 2005). There are plenty of resources for social recreation, entertainment, hobbies, and pastimes (Torkildsen, 2005). A recent study in Sri Lanka also suggested several physical activities by different age categories that can be exercised amid the pandemic (Talagala et al., 2020). Many people will also find outdoor facilities at homes such as gardens and open spaces, allotments, play areas and private swimming pools if there is enough outdoor space in one's residence. According to the classification of different recreational activities, there are sport activities, special events activities, hobby activities, faith-based activities, fitness activities, garden activities, outdoor activities, cultural activities and social activities (figure 1) for a person to engage in. On

the other hand, some of these activities can be experienced within the limits of one's current residence.

Vice versa, one's work can be someone else's leisure. A farmer who grows vegetables would not consider growing vegetables as his/ her leisure time activity. But an office worker would consider growing vegetables after coming home as his/ her leisure time activity. Yet, the most important fact is that there must be freedom from obligation if an activity to be recognised as leisure. Example: Since the era of Kingdoms, Sri Lanka is known as a country with an agricultural base. When farming, farmers used to sing or recite poems to avoid tiredness and to feel excited. These folk songs and poems were passed down to generations due to using time as a mode of recreation. Many citizens of Sri Lanka nowadays tend to individually even at home with only having a serious relationship with either the television, personal

computer or smartphone. So they would not eat at the same time in a designated commonplace. They instead would prefer taking their meals to his/ her room and eat that while peeping into the television or an innovative digital device. Therefore, when having meals at home during this pandemic, anybody could create a social event at home with what they eat. The family can eat together at a designated place (dining table) at home by enjoying the food. Because eating is a leisure activity when it is a social occasion with family. Writing is work for a writer, but writing would be an option for a person staying home due to the curfew finding a purpose in life.

When there is hardly any opportunity to do any creative activity during free time (leisure as a type of time), people could do any available activity at home during leisure (leisure as a set of activities). Of course, some scholars perceive leisure as a freely chosen activity. Several traditional/ folk sports and Sinhala-Hindu New Year Games played in Sri Lanka, especially during the Sinhala-Hindu New Year season (Dalupotha, 2020). The significance of these traditional games is that people can get involved in indoors on the floor regardless of age. People can freely choose such activities as a way to consume their leisure time. Being cultural activities another type of recreation, traditional New Year activities such as Pancha Dameema, Olinda Keliya and Cadju Dameema, Pol Geme Tharagaya (coconut scarping contest), Pol Athu Wiveema, (coconut weaving), lemon on spoon run, sack race, three-legged race, Onchili pedeema, Raban geseema and Placing the eye on an elephant can be used by the people at home as leisure activities by converting the game into a home-friendly version or by doing the game as it is. However, it must be mentioned that there are only seven games in Sri Lanka that considered as Sinhala-Hindu New Year games, such as An Keliya, Pora Pol Keliya, Kathuru Onchillawa, Wel Onchillawa, Olinda Keliya, Pancha Dameema and Thirikka Onchillawa (Dalupotha, 2020). Other games played during this season are considered folk games (Dalupotha, 2020).

Example: Pancha Dameema, also known as Pancha Keliya/ Kavadi Dameema/ Bello Dameema is played indoors with shells for centuries. Pancha is played with five tiny seashells, a coconut shell, and a chart in two groups of people. Many houses still have a set of shells to play Pancha. So that the household can do this activity as a method of relieving their stress and confusions. This game can be modified with any available material at the house (i.e. players might use marbles). Olinda Keliya (Mancala Game) is another traditional indoor game played by two players. This game needs a board with nine holes called (olinda kolombuwa/ poruwa) and thirty-six Olinda seeds. Should there be any difficulty finding Olinda seeds players at home, it could do modifications to the game and be used as an excellent opportunity to interact with

elders to get to know about the game. As most children are less aware of the rules of most of these traditional games, playing such as cultural recreation would set an interactive platform for parents, other elders and children at home. 'Coconut-scraping' contest is where women sit on little benches with a coconut scraper attached to its end. 'Coconut weaving' is a game where each participant is given a coconut branch and has to weave the leaves as quickly as possible. Instead of a game during a festival in Sri Lanka, coconut scraping and coconut weaving is a daily house chore conducted by a typical Sri Lankan mother who cooks at home. When all the members are available at home, thinking of what to do these two deeds can be done as either a hobby or a particular event activity by other members. This would also reduce the person's workload in charge of cooking and support the family to tighten its psychological bond.

Onchili Padeema (Going on the swing) is a traditional outdoor game played mainly by women and children. Singing traditional poems (onchili waram), this game is played on the swings strung on trees. This game can be modified with any available strong string, which could be used to fix a swing in a safe space. If there is enough space inside the house or outdoors within one's residential premise, the same cultural activity, the lemon and spoon race, can be done as a fitness activity. If lemon/ lime is not available at home, there are plenty of items to replace lemon. This game is about running with a spoon in the player's mouth by balancing a lime or lemon. The first person to reach the finish line without dropping the lime/lemon wins. During this extended stay at home, citizens could use this activity to practice balancing, which is essential to maintain fitness. Players at home could engage in Raban geseema either as a special events activity, garden activity, outdoor activity, cultural activity or social activity. In the Sinhala and Hindu New Year season and other occasions such as traditional Sinhalese weddings Raban geseema is used. The game is mainly played by elderly women. Yet this event attracts children and youth as this game aims to express joy and feel happy by singing and playing a traditional drum. Any interested party can borrow the concept behind Raban geseema and enjoy themselves by creating a musical atmosphere. Placing the eye on the elephant would be an enjoyable experience where participants are blindfolded and have to spot the elephant's eye. With the family members, it is possible to draw any animal and try to spot an animal's eye being blindfolded.

Engaging in such recreational activities would be a healthy intrinsic motivation for Sri Lankans (especially for the people who used to urban culture with busy work lives) to cope with the country's existing situation. Even for a person who is not interested in traditional games, gardening and cooking as a hobby, western games such as Monopoly, darts, or

card games would be a better solution to avoid e-games, and mobile phone activities drag a person emotionally away from other family members. However, watching television, playing video or e-games, swimming, arts, crafts, listening to music, dancing, exercising, playing musical instruments, gardening, reading, relaxing, sleeping, cooking, playing ball games, walking a dog, walking for pleasure, jogging, running, pressing flowers, making cards and writing are also play/recreational activities that would enhance the wellbeing of the citizens. A working mother who used to take her children to a day-care centre can now play with children as it is a home-based leisure activity (Torkildsen, 2011). Even during Sinhala and Hindu New Year, Vesak festival people follow rituals. These rituals are also faith-based activities, such as behaving according to the moral teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism.

Sri Lanka has a culture enriched with Buddhism. Hence, meditation is not a new concept to

the country. Should there be a person who could not perceive leisure as an activity, then he/ she can perceive leisure as a state of being/ mind (being at peace with oneself). Meditation and other faith-based activities are also supporting people to re-create oneself. Therefore, people at home can also try faith-based recreation activities as a mean of leisure. It is recommended to engage in Metta Bhavana, a form of meditation to control anger, frustration and other negative feelings towards the individual and his/her surroundings (Kalansooriya, 2020). These activities would help people reflect on themselves and attain self-actualisation as another option to manage stress and other psychological disturbances to avoid regular socialisation. Faith-based recreation activities such as meditation training improve people's state, including emotional intelligence (EI) and reduce perceived stress and adverse mental health (Beehner, 2019; Schreiner & Malcolm, 2008; Chu, 2009).

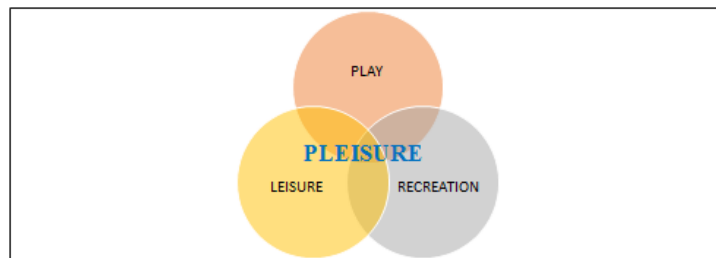


Fig-2: The concept of PLEASURE

Source: (Torkildsen, 2005)

Despite the disturbances and differences that occur during the pandemic situation in Sri Lanka, people would find times to acquire a feeling of immense satisfaction of fulfilling their duty of staying home or of wellbeing to maintain quality of life once a play, leisure and recreation (which are components of sport) promoted as worthy concepts to practice at home. Eventually, when people are engaged in play, leisure, and recreation, 'PLEASURE' (Torkildsen, 2011) would be gained as a result of obeying the orders to stay home by the Sri Lankan government during this pandemic (figure 2). Completing a daily journal or electronic diary with what each person of the family did every day as a sport to keep their lives excited would tell how the citizens obtained pleasure through play, leisure, and recreation once this pandemic comes to an end. Health promoters may use virtual platforms and e-health interventions to promote the physical activity engagement of the citizens after carefully analysing the e-resource capacities of the country. And it is also a responsibility of local field experts in sport studies to use the definition of sport comprehensively to creatively promote play, leisure, and recreation among the residents of Sri Lanka (especially among the people from urban culture who are emotionally and physically affected) to support them to maintain wellbeing during this pandemic.

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