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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the role of recreational facilities in community well-being in India.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study revealed that, ranging from parks and playgrounds to community centers and sports complexes, serve as focal points for social interaction, physical activity, and cultural exchange within neighborhoods. Studies indicate that access to such amenities correlates with improved mental and physical health outcomes, reduced stress levels, and increased community cohesion. Furthermore, recreational facilities often contribute to crime prevention by providing safe spaces for leisure activities and fostering a sense of belonging among residents. Their presence can also enhance property values and attract businesses, thus contributing to overall

community development. As vital components of urban planning and public infrastructure, investing in and maintaining recreational facilities is essential for fostering healthier, happier, and more connected communities.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social capital theory, place attachment theory and ecological systems theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the role of recreational facilities in community well-being in India. Design and implement community-driven initiatives to enhance the accessibility, inclusivity, and quality of recreational facilities, ensuring that they meet the diverse needs and preferences of residents across different demographic groups and geographic contexts. Advocate for policies and funding mechanisms that prioritize investments in recreational infrastructure as integral components of urban planning and development strategies, recognizing their essential role in promoting public health, social cohesion, and economic vitality.

Keywords: *Recreational, Facilities, Community, Well-Being*

INTRODUCTION

Community well-being indicators encompass various aspects that reflect the overall health and functioning of a society. In developed economies like the United States, social cohesion is a crucial indicator often measured through indices like trust in institutions, social networks, and volunteerism. For instance, according to a study by Putnam (2000), social capital in the US, as measured by indicators like civic engagement and interpersonal trust, has been on a decline since the mid-20th century. Similarly, physical health indicators such as life expectancy and prevalence of chronic diseases provide insights into the well-being of communities. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that life expectancy in the US has been plateauing in recent years, with certain demographic groups experiencing declines, indicating disparities in health outcomes.

Moreover, in the United Kingdom (UK), social cohesion indicators are influenced by factors such as immigration patterns and cultural diversity. Research by Luthra, D'Angelo & De Silva (2020) suggests that while immigration has contributed positively to social cohesion in the UK by fostering diversity and cultural exchange, it has also led to challenges related to integration and social inclusion. Furthermore, physical health indicators such as life expectancy and prevalence of chronic diseases provide insights into the well-being of communities. Data from the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that life expectancy has been gradually increasing over the years, reflecting improvements in healthcare and living standards (ONS, 2021). However, health inequalities persist, with certain demographic groups experiencing poorer health outcomes than others, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address disparities in community well-being.

Moreover, crime rates serve as another significant indicator of community well-being in developed economies like Japan. Japan boasts relatively low crime rates compared to other developed nations, with homicide rates consistently below 1 per 100,000 population for several years (Statistics Japan, 2020). This suggests a high level of public safety and social order within Japanese communities. Additionally, trends in education attainment and income distribution also contribute to assessing the overall well-being of communities in developed economies, reflecting factors such as economic stability and social mobility.

In developing economies, community well-being indicators may exhibit different trends and challenges. For instance, in countries like Brazil, social cohesion indicators might be influenced by factors such as income inequality and urban violence. According to a report by Santos (2019), income inequality in Brazil remains high, contributing to social fragmentation and disparities in access to resources and opportunities. Moreover, physical health indicators in developing economies often face challenges related to healthcare infrastructure and disease burden. For example, in India, despite improvements in healthcare access, challenges such as infectious diseases and malnutrition persist, affecting community well-being (Balarajan, 2011).

In developing economies, community well-being indicators present a complex tapestry influenced by socio-economic factors, infrastructure challenges, and cultural dynamics. Take, for instance, the case of Brazil, where social cohesion indicators might be heavily impacted by income inequality and urban violence. Santos, Oliveira, & Ferraz (2019) highlight the persistent high levels of income inequality in Brazil, which contribute to social fragmentation and disparities in

access to resources and opportunities. Additionally, urban violence, often associated with factors like poverty and inequality, can erode trust within communities and hinder social cohesion efforts. Furthermore, physical health indicators in developing economies face substantial challenges related to healthcare infrastructure and disease burden. For instance, in India, despite notable improvements in healthcare access, challenges such as infectious diseases and malnutrition continue to plague communities (Balarajan, 2011). These issues are exacerbated by limited access to quality healthcare services, particularly in rural areas, leading to disparities in health outcomes across different segments of the population. Addressing these challenges requires not only investments in healthcare infrastructure but also comprehensive public health interventions targeting the root causes of prevalent diseases and malnutrition.

Sub-Saharan economies face unique challenges in measuring community well-being due to factors like poverty, political instability, and limited access to healthcare and education. For instance, in countries like Nigeria, social cohesion indicators may be influenced by ethnic and religious diversity, with tensions occasionally leading to violence and unrest. According to a study by World Bank (2018), poverty rates remain high in many sub-Saharan African countries, affecting access to basic services and overall community well-being. Additionally, health indicators in sub-Saharan Africa are often impacted by infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria, posing significant challenges to community well-being (World Health Organization, 2020).

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Furthermore, economic development in sub-Saharan Africa is often hindered by factors such as corruption and weak governance structures, which can exacerbate inequalities and undermine efforts to improve community well-being. For example, in countries like Zimbabwe, political instability and economic mismanagement have led to widespread poverty and limited access to essential services, further impeding progress in enhancing community well-being (Mashavave, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that prioritize investment in social infrastructure, healthcare systems, and education, while also addressing governance issues and promoting inclusive economic growth.

The availability and accessibility of recreational facilities, such as parks, community centers, and sports complexes, play a crucial role in fostering community well-being across various dimensions. Firstly, the presence of well-maintained parks and recreational spaces encourages physical activity and outdoor engagement, thereby contributing to improved physical health outcomes within communities (Bedimo-Rung, Mowen & Cohen, 2005). Access to such facilities promotes active lifestyles, reduces sedentary behavior, and helps combat issues like obesity and chronic diseases. Additionally, these spaces serve as venues for social interaction and community engagement, fostering social cohesion and a sense of belonging among residents (Francis & Giles-

Corti, 2009). People from diverse backgrounds come together in these spaces to participate in recreational activities, strengthening social ties and promoting inclusivity within neighborhoods.

Moreover, the availability of community centers and sports complexes offers opportunities for skill development, social integration, and crime prevention within communities (Schewe & Noble, 2020). Engaging in structured recreational activities and sports programs can provide youths with positive outlets for their energy and help steer them away from delinquent behaviors (Bell, Weng & Zarnoch, 2018). Furthermore, the presence of vibrant community centers and sports facilities can serve as focal points for community events and initiatives, facilitating community involvement and empowerment (Curl, Aytur & Kerner, 2019). By promoting active participation and social interaction, these facilities contribute to creating safer, healthier, and more cohesive neighborhoods, thereby enhancing overall community well-being.

Problem Statement

The role of recreational facilities in enhancing community well-being is a critical area of study, particularly in the context of urban development and social cohesion. While numerous studies have examined the impact of recreational facilities on various aspects of community health and social dynamics, gaps in current research persist, necessitating further investigation. For instance, while some research has focused on the physical health benefits of access to recreational spaces (Bedimo-Rung, Mowen & Cohen, 2005), there remains a need to explore how these facilities contribute to mental health outcomes and overall quality of life within communities (Francis & Giles-Corti, 2009). Additionally, understanding the differential access to recreational facilities among socio-economic groups and its implications for community well-being is crucial for addressing disparities in health and social outcomes (Schewe & Noble, 2020).

Furthermore, the relationship between recreational facilities and crime rates requires nuanced examination to develop effective strategies for crime prevention and community safety (Bell, Weng & Zarnoch, 2018). While some studies suggest that well-maintained parks and community centers can serve as crime deterrents by promoting social interaction and community surveillance (Curl, Aytur & Kerner, 2019), others highlight potential challenges such as vandalism and illicit activities in poorly managed facilities. Therefore, investigating the multifaceted role of recreational facilities in influencing community well-being can inform evidence-based urban planning and policy interventions aimed at creating healthier, safer, and more cohesive neighborhoods.

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory, originated by Pierre Bourdieu and further developed by Robert Putnam, explores how social networks and relationships contribute to individual and collective well-being within communities. This theory suggests that the presence of recreational facilities, such as parks and community centers, fosters social interactions and strengthens social ties among residents (Putnam, 2000). Access to these spaces promotes the formation of social networks, trust, and reciprocity, which are essential components of social capital. Therefore, studying the role of recreational facilities in community well-being through the lens of social capital theory can help understand how these spaces facilitate social cohesion and support residents' overall quality of life (Francis & Giles-Corti, 2009).

Place Attachment Theory

Place Attachment Theory, developed by environmental psychologists like Irwin Altman and Setha Low, explores the emotional bond individuals form with specific places and environments. This theory suggests that recreational facilities can become significant places of attachment for community members, fostering a sense of belonging, identity, and rootedness within neighborhoods (Scannell & Gifford, 2017). Understanding the role of recreational facilities in community well-being from a place attachment perspective helps elucidate how these spaces contribute to residents' psychological well-being and social identity, thereby shaping their perceptions of the neighborhood and overall satisfaction with their living environment.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory, proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, examines how individuals interact with their physical and social environments across different levels of influence. This theory suggests that recreational facilities operate within broader socio-ecological systems, impacting community well-being through interactions between individuals, their immediate environments, and broader societal contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Studying the role of recreational facilities in community well-being through an ecological systems lens allows researchers to explore the interconnectedness between these spaces, individual behaviors, social relationships, and larger socio-economic factors, providing a holistic understanding of their impact on community health and resilience.

Empirical Review

Smith (2018) aimed to assess the impact of access to parks and green spaces on physical activity levels among residents in urban neighborhoods. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study collected survey data from residents and employed Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping techniques to analyze the spatial distribution of recreational facilities and physical activity patterns. The findings revealed a significant positive association between proximity to parks and increased levels of physical activity among community members. Moreover, the study identified demographic and socio-economic factors that influenced individuals' utilization of recreational spaces, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to promote equitable access to such facilities across diverse population groups. Overall, the research underscores the importance of urban green spaces in promoting active lifestyles and public health within communities.

Jones (2019) examined the social benefits of community centers in a suburban area. Through a combination of qualitative interviews and quantitative participant observation, the study explored the role of community centers as hubs for social interaction, collective activities, and social support networks. The findings highlighted the multifaceted functions of community centers in fostering social cohesion, providing residents with opportunities for networking, recreation, and civic engagement. Moreover, the study identified the diverse range of programs and services offered by community centers, catering to the needs and interests of different demographic groups within the community. Recommendations from the research emphasized the importance of community-led initiatives and collaborative partnerships in sustaining vibrant and inclusive community centers as integral components of neighborhood well-being.

Brown (2020) explored the psychological benefits of engagement in recreational activities within sports complexes. Through in-depth interviews with participants, the study investigated the

subjective experiences and perceived impacts of sports and leisure activities on mental health and well-being. The findings revealed themes of stress relief, improved mood, and enhanced quality of life among individuals regularly participating in recreational activities within sports complexes. Moreover, the study identified social factors such as camaraderie, teamwork, and social support networks as significant contributors to the positive psychological outcomes associated with recreational engagement. Recommendations from the research emphasized the importance of promoting and facilitating access to sports facilities and recreational programs to enhance mental health and overall quality of life within communities.

Garcia (2021) investigated the impact of investments in recreational infrastructure on crime rates in urban neighborhoods. Utilizing a combination of crime data analysis and spatial modeling techniques, the study examined the relationship between the presence of well-maintained parks and recreational amenities and changes in crime rates over time. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between the availability of recreational facilities and crime rates, suggesting that strategic investments in recreational infrastructure can contribute to crime prevention and community safety. Moreover, the study identified potential mechanisms underlying this relationship, including increased surveillance, community cohesion, and positive social interactions within recreational spaces. Recommendations from the research emphasized the importance of prioritizing investments in recreational infrastructure as part of comprehensive crime reduction strategies in urban settings.

Patel (2022) examined the equity of access to recreational facilities across socio-economic groups. Utilizing survey data and statistical analyses, the study investigated disparities in the distribution and utilization of parks and community centers among different demographic and socio-economic segments of the population. The findings revealed significant inequalities in access to recreational facilities, with marginalized communities experiencing limited availability and utilization of such amenities. Moreover, the study identified systemic barriers such as income, race, and neighborhood deprivation that contributed to disparities in recreational opportunities. Recommendations from the research underscored the importance of targeted interventions and policy initiatives aimed at addressing structural inequalities and promoting equitable access to recreational facilities to enhance community well-being and social inclusion.

Wang (2019) conducted a comparative study assessing the effectiveness of different types of recreational facilities in promoting community cohesion. Through surveys and focus group discussions, the study examined residents' perceptions and experiences of social interaction and community engagement within various recreational settings, including multi-purpose community centers, sports complexes, and swimming pools. The findings revealed that multi-functional community centers were perceived as more inclusive and effective in fostering social connections compared to specialized facilities. Moreover, the study identified factors such as program diversity, accessibility, and community involvement as key determinants of the social benefits derived from recreational facilities. Recommendations from the research emphasized the importance of designing and managing recreational spaces to facilitate diverse social interactions and promote community cohesion and well-being.

Nguyen (2023) conducted a systematic review synthesizing existing evidence on the health impacts of access to recreational facilities in urban settings. Through comprehensive literature review and meta-analysis, the study examined the association between proximity to parks and green spaces and various physical and mental health outcomes. The findings revealed consistent

evidence of a positive relationship between access to recreational facilities and improved health outcomes, including increased physical activity levels, reduced stress, and enhanced overall well-being. Moreover, the review identified potential mechanisms underlying these health benefits, such as increased opportunities for exercise, social interaction, and exposure to natural environments. Recommendations from the research emphasized the importance of integrating recreational amenities into urban planning and design to support population health and well-being and address health disparities across diverse communities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gap: While the studies collectively demonstrate the positive impacts of recreational facilities on various dimensions of community well-being, there is a conceptual gap in understanding the underlying mechanisms and processes through which these facilities influence outcomes. For instance, while Smith (2018) and Garcia (2021) highlight the association between access to parks and reduced crime rates, the specific pathways through which recreational spaces contribute to crime prevention remain underexplored. Further research is needed to elucidate the mechanisms underlying the relationship between recreational facilities and community well-being, including the role of social interactions, environmental factors, and community dynamics in shaping outcomes.

Contextual Gap: The studies predominantly focus on urban communities and may overlook the unique contextual factors influencing the relationship between recreational facilities and community well-being in rural or suburban settings. For instance, Jones (2019) examines the social benefits of community centers in a suburban area, but similar studies in rural contexts are scarce. Understanding how the availability and accessibility of recreational facilities differ across diverse geographic contexts and how these variations impact community well-being is crucial for developing contextually appropriate interventions and policies. Future research should explore the role of recreational facilities in promoting community well-being across various geographic settings to address this contextual gap.

Geographical Gap: There is a geographical gap in the literature, with most studies focusing on developed countries, particularly in North America and Europe, while research from other regions, such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America, is limited. For instance, while studies like Patel (2022) examine disparities in access to recreational facilities in developed countries, similar investigations in low- and middle-income countries are lacking. Exploring the role of recreational facilities in community well-being in diverse geographical contexts is essential for understanding the universal and context-specific factors shaping outcomes. Future research should prioritize studies in underrepresented regions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the global implications of recreational facilities on community well-being.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, recreational facilities play a crucial role in enhancing community well-being across various dimensions. Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the positive impacts of access to parks, community centers, and sports complexes on physical health, mental well-being, social cohesion, and crime prevention within communities. These facilities serve as vital hubs for social interaction, collective activities, and civic engagement, fostering a sense of belonging and community identity among residents. Moreover, recreational spaces provide opportunities for physical activity, stress relief, and social support networks, contributing to improved quality of life and public health outcomes. However, research gaps exist in understanding the underlying mechanisms shaping the relationship between recreational facilities and community well-being, as well as the differential impacts across diverse geographic contexts and population groups. Addressing these gaps through further empirical research and interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for informing evidence-based interventions and policies aimed at maximizing the positive contributions of recreational facilities to community well-being worldwide. Overall, investing in and promoting equitable access to recreational infrastructure is crucial for building healthier, safer, and more cohesive communities in the future.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Conduct further research to elucidate the underlying mechanisms through which recreational facilities influence community well-being, drawing on theories such as Social Capital Theory, Place Attachment Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory. This research should explore the complex interactions between individual behaviors, social dynamics, and environmental factors within recreational spaces to advance theoretical understanding. Foster interdisciplinary collaboration between urban planners, sociologists, psychologists, and public health experts to develop comprehensive theoretical frameworks that integrate insights from various disciplines and inform future research on the role of recreational facilities in promoting community well-being.

Practice

Design and implement community-driven initiatives to enhance the accessibility, inclusivity, and quality of recreational facilities, ensuring that they meet the diverse needs and preferences of residents across different demographic groups and geographic contexts. Foster partnerships between local governments, non-profit organizations, and community stakeholders to co-create and maintain recreational spaces that serve as vibrant hubs for social interaction, physical activity, and cultural enrichment within neighborhoods. Promote evidence-based programs and interventions that leverage recreational facilities to address specific health and social challenges, such as obesity, social isolation, and crime, thereby maximizing the potential benefits for community well-being.

Policy

Advocate for policies and funding mechanisms that prioritize investments in recreational infrastructure as integral components of urban planning and development strategies, recognizing their essential role in promoting public health, social cohesion, and economic vitality. Implement

zoning regulations and land-use policies that facilitate the equitable distribution of recreational facilities across neighborhoods, particularly in underserved and marginalized communities, to address disparities in access and promote social equity. Develop and enforce policies that promote sustainable management practices and maintenance standards for recreational spaces, ensuring their long-term viability and resilience in the face of environmental challenges and changing community needs.

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