



*Original Research Article*

# Benefits of participation in sport for people from refugee backgrounds: A study of the South Sudanese community in Melbourne, Australia

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Participation in sport provides different forms of capital for all, but particularly for those with refugee backgrounds who are facing settlement issues. Such people are caught in a challenging situation of dealing with settlement issues such as homesickness, cultural shock, lack of a background of social activities and networks, lack of employment, racism and discrimination. As a result of these settlement challenges and other social issues, a large number of young people become disengaged. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore a social benefit of participation in sport for the South Sudanese people from refugee backgrounds who are settling in Melbourne, Australia. For people with social isolation and other social issues, participation in sport can be a tool that assists those young people by providing physical benefits, a social network (thus breaking social isolation) and sometimes a form of income as a result of being noticed as a good player. Participating in sport can thus be a rewarding experience, particularly for young people, in overcoming settlement challenges. This research was conducted through an in-depth interview of 20 participants from the South Sudanese community. Major findings confirmed that social benefits of sport in relation to network, physical capital, psychological capital, cultural capital, economic capital

**Key word:** Benefit of sport, refugee and South Sudanese community

## INTRODUCTION

The (re)settlement of people with refugee backgrounds in a new country is a complex and ongoing process that requires support from the host community, government and non-government agencies to address the different layers of settlement challenges. Participation in Sport discussed in this article provides a platform of community engagement, ranging from informal sport to the organised sporting programs. In this article, "People with refugee backgrounds" are those refugees who have been resettled in Australia through humanitarian programs and who have been caught up with settlement challenges. It also includes their children who may be second generation refugees.

Sport is one of the strategies or activities which can assist newly-arrived refugees to overcome settlement challenges including social isolation. This paper discusses the definition of sport, benefits of sport to refugee community, gaps in the sport for refugee community, sport for social

changes, problems in sport and gender division in sport sociology.

In Australia, there are many local community sport centres which are run for different ages. Therefore, participation in sport is a good thing for both young people and adults who are seeking some connection and socialisation with peer groups. It provides an opportunity for connecting with others, not only as players but also as supporters or parents who choose to engage in sport by watching games. Many engage in local sport as part of community connection and the community's culture.

## Research conceptual framework

The social world is a multidimensional space of constructed ideas through discovering factors and differentiation of factors that are different or similar in many forms such as

different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Aldrich and Meyer, 2015). The conceptual framework for this research is based on Bourdieu's Capital theory. Different forms of capital are accumulated in society and are interrelated (Bourdieu, 1986). The five capitals conceptualised in this research are: social capital, cultural capital, economic capital, physical capital and psychological capital. According to Bourdieu (1986) human action is veined and self-centred based on securing relationships. Therefore, it is important to examine accumulative capitals for refugee community groups, particularly during the settlement period. For society to grow in a healthy way, people need resources and social connections for most of their living and systems to operate. People often display a sense of belonging and social connection in order to succeed and achieve (Stevens, 2005). The concept of Social Connection is more applicable and much needed by refugees as they have no or few networks in their new community and are looking for connections and a place to belong. Social capital exists in social connections, group membership and interaction with others; for instance, through participation in community associations, the workplace, public institutions and informal networks (Spaaij, 2012). Thus, social capital can be understood as a resource for collective action, which may lead to a broad range of outcomes including improved family life. Social capital researchers in the health and community sectors argue that the potential benefits of social capital need to be embraced. These include the long-standing recognition of the importance of social support for public health and community wellbeing (Stone, 2001).

Given the centralised, institutionalised structure of refugee settlement programs in which policy implementers are most likely to be professional service providers, refugee leaders are less likely to interact with the broader community, at least in the initial phases of settlement. Similarly, while there is certainly a connection between the faith-based community and refugees, it is not as extensive as it is in the United States (Allerdice, 2011). So, the content of this research stems from the lack of connection for the South Sudanese community with mainstream Australian community groups in many areas including sport and employment. McDonald et al. (2008) argued that social connectedness assists refugees in terms of their wellbeing, both physical and emotional. The notions of accumulative capitals have been explained as ways in which people position themselves in a social order.

## **METHOD**

The data presented in this research is collected from in-depth interviews of 20 participants from the South Sudanese community living in Melbourne, Australia. There were 9 females and 11 males with ages ranging from 18 to 64 years. The study is part of doctoral research with community with people from refugee backgrounds or who came through other humanitarian programs for resettlement.

Reliability and validity of data: first ethics application for this research was approved by the Victoria University's Ethics Committee which deemed it to be Safe, Respectful, and Responsible and of a High Quality with no harm to participants or community. All participants were provided with information sheets before interviews began which clearly stated that they were not obliged to take part in this study and that they could also voluntarily withdraw at any stage. The background of the wider South Sudanese community were cautiously considered because of their experiences in refugee camps or of oppression and political persecution, forced migration, and the trauma of civil wars in South Sudan. Pseudonym names of the participants were adopted and used in the presented findings to avoid identification of their real names

For this study, all in-depth interviews were audio recorded during interviews and transcripts made accordingly. Atem (2011) explained that often data for in-depth interviews are recorded in a wide variety of ways, including audio recording, video recording, written notes and stenography. The data from interviews were coded and analysed using a thematic analysis, which was used to extract and classify key themes in all the interviews. This process was done to identify similarities in interviews or conversations concerning settlement experiences, benefits of employment and sport using different forms of capital as a way to group themes for this study. This study was conducted within research protocols and this researcher is satisfied that the data is reliable and valid. Several scholars have argued that reliability of data requires a discussion of the procedures to justify claims made in respect of the accuracy of the data and it is about truthfulness, credibility in research findings (Sagor, 2000; Bryman, 2008; Neuman 2006; Graziano and Raulin, 2004).

## **Definition of sport**

There is a need to define sport in this study. Sport is an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes for entertainment and winning reasons. The current view of sport is generally understood to extend beyond competitive games. Coalter (2005) suggests that sport is a platform for all forms of physical activity including casual and organised participation with an aim at improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels. The Australian Sports Commission views sport as a human activity capable of achieving a result requiring physical exertion and/or physical skill, which, by its nature and organisation, is competitive and is generally accepted as being a sport (see Refugee Council of Australia, 2010). These definitions are also supported by the "United Nations Inter-agency Taskforce on Sport for Development and Peace" that defined sport as all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction. These include activities such as play; recreation; competitive sport and indigenous sports and

other forms of games (Right to Play, 2008). Sport is regarded as universal to all cultures regardless of socio-economic and political boundaries. People enjoy sport when it is done in a right way which is free of violence, corruption and other forms of aggression.

There are many types of sports played around the world. For example, there are 8,000 indigenous sports and sporting games listed in the World Sports Encyclopaedia. However, sports commonly enjoyed by refugees with African backgrounds include soccer, basketball, running, wrestling and Australian football. What is important in this study is that people benefit when they engage in sport. Sport provides physical benefits and opportunities to network. The benefits of participation in sporting activities include: physical capital, social capital, psychological capital and cultural capital. Refugees often face barriers in both sport and employment. Lack of participation in sport as well as in many other community programmes such as employment and education have contributed to many problems, including dissatisfaction within refugee groups. Lack of empowerment and engagement in strategic activities often result in both refugees and their local communities failing to decide how best to move forward. Young people can drop out from school and become aggressive as a result of not being engaged in relevant activities. This is a clear gap for young people but particularly for those with refugee backgrounds.

Playing sport can be a rewarding experience, particularly for young people. In some cultures, games and contests are grounded in folklore and religious beliefs. The focus is on the young men from wealthy families and society (Jay, 2011). Participating in sport is purposeful in many ways. It carries many benefits for the participants. Sport is a great way to have fun with friends, be productively competitive and stay in physical shape. Players can improve skills, make friends and learn how to be part of a team. It is a meaningful and pleasurable activity for anybody that engages in or follows sport. Physical activities and sports are integrally related to their social contexts. As social meanings and power shift in society, the purpose of organised sport activities and games also change (Bunde-Birouste et al., 2012).

In theory, people choose to engage in sport because of three main factors: (1) a person's abilities, characteristics and resources; (2) influence of significance including parents, siblings, teachers, peers and role models, and (3) the availability of opportunities to play sports in ways that are personally satisfying. Participants may be given an opportunity to take personal responsibility for the creation of a quality lifestyle (Leeann et al., 2013). Participating in sport has been shown to have other benefits, such as gaining employment through sporting networks. Networking is important because individuals in sports organisations often hire those they know personally. This is extremely important in many ways (Alan and Michael, 2013) and can be a great help for refugees and other migrants. This social capital cannot be ignored: it is also meeting people in the field who can be a great help as well

as a networking opportunity (Leeann et al., 2013).

Social networking is important in obtaining employment and career advancement. Recent studies have shown that networking is an important management skill that helps professionals to advance their careers. While the theory of practical experience continues in full force as the core of the educational experience, it has become increasingly apparent that an understanding of the power of networking must complement this traditional model (Alan and Michael, 2013). Social networking activities allow opportunities for sports participants to expand their network. Leeann et al. (2013) suggested a positive, direct relationship between social support and the beneficial effects of the intervention in networking. Looking beyond the physical benefits of sports, it also provides opportunities for networking and engaging in a process which can be beyond one's existing social capital or network.

Thus, participating in sport can help refugees and other migrants to overcome critical settlement issues and to integrate into mainstream communities. Sport is among the activities that can promote social inclusion for the newly arrived, disadvantaged groups. Sports provide benefits and greater opportunities for all, regardless of race, colour, religion, age, physical ability and economic circumstance, by connecting people with each other locally, nationally and internationally. Sporting programmes can be one-to-one, in a group, structured with rules and set outcomes or take on a freestyle approach. Structured programmes allow participants to experience consistency and to build trusting relationships within a team as well as extending their level of confidence in connecting with different, mainstream groups.

### **Benefits of sport for the refugee community**

Sport is one of the areas in which young refugees have not been well engaged in relation to settlement strategies, yet there are potential benefits which those young people miss as a result of that lack of engagement. The benefits of sport for refugee community groups are not only through participation by its individual members and a more general inclusiveness; participants and their community groups can increase their social connectedness with people from mainstream communities and such social connections can provide them with different opportunities. Connecting with friends through sporting programmes is a simple but important part of integration. Sport and recreation represent a practical and accessible entry point for addressing the needs of those young people in need. Sport provides links between and within communities (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2008; Bunde-Birouste et al., 2012)

Sport is well known for its potential in promoting positive societal outcomes and healthy living in term of leisure benefits and connections. Healthy communities are those in which people have physical and mental health fitness. Sport can address some well-being issues faced by socially-isolated individuals and communities as it can provide them with opportunities for doing something

productive in their daily lives compared with being couch potatoes all day. Young people want to be part of productive activities such as sport. Therefore, the benefits of sport and recreation programmes in relation to their effects on supporting and building healthy communities cannot be underestimated (Ware et al., 2013).

In some countries, sport is highly valued for its ability to bring people together from diverse backgrounds and to create a strong sense of community and national identity. Sport has many positive attributes in uniting people in diverse communities. Therefore, it has been frequently used by social policy makers and by those involved in community development as a source of engaging the community, particularly young people. These outcomes cover a multitude of policy areas including health, community cohesion and integration of minorities, urban regeneration and crime prevention (Spaaij, 2009; Coalter, 2007). The beneficial effects of participating in community sport programmes and employment for any person (including refugees) are wide-ranging (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010). "Participating in sport can improve the quality of life of individuals and communities, promote social inclusion, improve health, counter anti-social behaviour, raise individual self-esteem and confidence, and widen horizons." (Coalter, 2005: p 4) Sport has been a powerful tool in tackling social issues of anti-social behaviour and cultural exclusion. In some countries, sport is used to integrate ethnic groups and reduce youth disengagement and crime (Spaaij, 2009; Coalter, 2007). Lack of engagement by those in refugee communities in meaningful leisure activities is a major barrier to achieving successful resettlement. Thus, refugees and their community groups can benefit from participation in sporting activities with host community groups. There is a need to engage the former in sport for social development beyond their personal, social connections; it can lead to relationship building with the host community. Engaging participants from diverse backgrounds can provide better integration, building abilities both personal and groups, and links to the host community (Bunde-Birouste. et al., 2012)

Community Sport here means involvement in local sport centres and community centres, and participating in team sports. Some community sports programmes have aimed to bring local people together and provide physical activities and relevant information and advice on a wide range of sports and physical activities to make it easier for locals to get involved and engage in a more active and healthier lifestyle. Physical benefits include improving fitness and decreasing the risk of chronic health issues such as cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure, obesity, osteoporosis and some cancers (Coalter, 2005). Psychological benefits include building self-esteem, increasing mental alertness and counteracting stress and depression. Participation in sport also assists building social cohesion and reduces isolation, antisocial behaviour and crime (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010). In general, sports programmes can help counteract psychosocial problems and environmental and health issues as well as

stress and loneliness. They contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social integration by providing a safe forum in which anyone can develop physically, emotionally and mentally.

### **Gaps in sport for refugees and their community**

Refugees carry a number of experiences and significant barriers to sports participation at different levels. Those experiences, and lack of English, can hold them back from engaging in wider activities. This effectively diminishes their civil rights to participate in different levels of sporting programmes and reduces their chances of full integration (Cough; 2007). Participation is often regarded as a good thing as it is embraced by non-governmental organisations which work with refugee community groups, but most of the work focuses on the Anglo-Australian community and overlooks minority groups like refugee groups from African nations and other ethnic minority groups. This trend has been identified by minority community groups but nothing has been planned to champion engaging the refugee communities in participation in meaningful programmes and activities that could help them elevate settlement challenges and integrate with fewer difficulties. Participation can also be an important tool for empowering refugees because this can help them to understand and change negative perceptions which they carry, as well as providing opportunities for increasing self-esteem.

Participation often includes the involvement in planning and decision-making in community development (Cough, 2007). If this is the definition of participation, then refugee community groups are often excluded from such an important process of working with host communities. In many cases, a lack of initiative to engage with the refugee community may be a major reason for their lack of participation. This makes it easy to blame them, the community feeling the refugees are not willing or ready to participate in programmes. Lack of participation and engagement of refugees in meaningful programmes contradict the proud statement of the Government, "Australia has a long and proud history of resettling people in humanitarian need and the Australian Government is committed to helping new arrivals become active participants in the community as soon as possible." (Buckmaster, 2012: p6) Refugees from humanitarian programmes often face challenges additional to those faced by other migrants, which can be underestimated by the agencies working with them or which can sometimes cause misunderstandings.

Refugee community groups are under-represented in organised sport including local sporting programmes. This has not been recognised as an issue by formal sporting associations. The level of involvement in sport by young people or youth groups correlates with their countries of birth. Those born in Australia had participation rates of 27%, compared to about 10% for people born in non-English speaking countries (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2008). Sport and recreation can assist young people and

individuals with language acquisition, provide a positive point of connection with other members of the community and support a sense of purpose and direction for young refugees recovering from the traumas of their experiences or the impact of racism as they are re-settling. At some levels, new refugees show an interest in sport and recreation as a major priority along with housing, employment and education (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2008).

Research has indicated that young refugees and migrants often choose to participate in informal, unstructured games of badminton, soccer, table tennis and basketball because they have no connection with existing clubs. These sports have often been played by them before coming to Australia and are already familiar to them. (Buckmaster, 2012) It is important to understand that migrants from other cultural backgrounds are more likely to participate in sport in familiar and supportive environments such as schools and ethnic organisations, rather than through unfamiliar environments such as mainstream sporting clubs, associations and competitions. There is a clear gap between club associations and refugee community groups when it comes to general engagement of youth in sport. Therefore, there is a need to engage diverse community groups at all levels, including management. Diversity management is not being adopted widely among local sports clubs and this reduces the idea of a moral imperative to cater to people from different backgrounds (Spaaij et al., 2014). In terms of diversity management in sport, there is still a long way to go before reasonable and inclusive participation of disadvantaged communities occur in organised and structured sports programmes. Sports clubs and associations should consider safe and inclusive practice by embracing all community groups in their local areas regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexuality and religion (Spaaij et al., 2014). Sometimes ethnic communities have ongoing concerns about the challenges facing them in areas of social justice, developing diversity policies and implementation. This is an open discourse that needs consideration in both private and government sectors, especially when people are experiencing unfair treatment in sports programmes because of their cultural backgrounds. It is acknowledged that the language barrier is a probable, but not insurmountable, reason for the lack of engagement by community leaders in the management structure of more formal sports associations.

Buckmaster (2012) argued that emerging communities are consistently identified as communities requiring high levels of support and would need specialised services to support them with enough resources. Such groups, often lacking earlier generations of settlers or an Australian-born second generation, generally lack organised advocacy or social networks, have difficulty in accessing government services and may require substantial assistance and time to settle effectively.

For refugee communities, sport can ease their integration during settlement processes. It can be an avenue for creating and building trust with mainstream community

groups if they are welcomed and treated fairly. Participants from the mainstream community can be role-models by offering positive mentoring programmes for young refugees. The latter also have opportunities to meet and socialise with other participants which can break social isolation (Birousteet al., 2014). Sport activities are well known to be one the many activities that can bring different people and community groups together through celebration. Regardless of age, people can be involved in organised sport and physical activity as players, participants or competitors, and also in non-playing roles. The latter include: coach, instructor or teacher; referee or umpire; committee member or administrator; scorer or timekeeper, and medical support.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2008) suggested that sport and recreation can assist young people and individuals lacking English to build their self-esteem and improve their communication in English through interacting with other participants from English-speaking groups. It can also provide a positive point of connection with others and support a sense of purpose and direction for young refugees recovering from the traumas of the refugee experiences or the impact of racism as they are re-settling.

### **Sport for social change**

Sport can ring social changes in the community and in particular the disadvantaged community can benefit much from sport in terms of development and engagement of youth in healthy ways. Sport has become an attractive mode of delivery for community and individual development around the world; however, there is a dearth of research into the provision and management of sport for social change programs.

Sherry et al. (2013) argued that sport is a catalyst for change to build capacity and develop healthy and inclusive communities. However, one doubts that sufficient efforts in sports management are being made for social change in order to create more opportunities to work collectively with disadvantaged community groups. It is important for organisations to take sport seriously as an avenue to provide those changes. With sport, community programmes can be developed and delivered to marginalised community groups by the sporting organisations as part of their effective engagement with the community.

The only critical issue holding back this social change in sport is the lack of recognition of diversity in sport at the management level. There is no strong approach to the engagement of culturally diverse communities in sport. Australia has a multicultural society: Victoria is Australia's most culturally diverse State with over 23% of Victorians born overseas, coming from over 200 different countries, and about 72% were born in non-English speaking countries. This makes a significant proportion of the population (Centre for Culture Ethnicity & Health, 2006). Thus, there is a great need for changes in sport to

accommodate the needs of community groups, including fair recruitment and positive engagement of refugee and migrant community groups in sport. Sports clubs and associations should reflect the communities they are representing. Mobilising resources with a multicultural portfolio may help to meet those challenges and facilitate engagement to assist sports organisations in reaching out to people from diverse backgrounds. (Ware and Meredith, 2013; Sherry et al., 2013) Good sports programmes can provide safety and protection to vulnerable youth from diverse community groups that are at risk of isolation. The programmes can also provide a welcome relief from daily struggle. For people who have been displaced, who become disaffected or simply disengaged from their community, belonging to a continuing sporting programme or team can be a lifeline, especially in times of chaos where routine and stability are desperately needed and hard to find (Centre for Culture Ethnicity and Health (2006).

The level of social changes that sport can bring to people from refugee and migrant backgrounds includes real life issues and challenges that relate to the dislocation and tensions in the settlement process. These social issues can sometimes be misunderstood as a microcosm of life's issues, but they are serious issues that seriously hold back the progress and potential development of people with refugee and migrant backgrounds. Sports clubs can help by providing an environment where people from many backgrounds are welcomed, heard and supported when struggling with social issues (Ware and Meredith, 2013). The good news is that structured sporting programmes can unite people from different language groups and backgrounds by using activities with a common goal. This allows participants to engage at a higher level of participation who could otherwise face social isolation or disengagement (Centre for Culture Ethnicity and Health, 2006).

### **Problems of sport for refugee community**

Sport is not the only way of engaging refugee communities to settle more easily: it has limitations which require some understanding and awareness when promoting engagement of sport for refugee communities. Sport can bring different views in communities, both positive and negative. In terms of negativity in sport, racism, violence, doping, corruption and sexism are part of the sporting world and cannot be ignored. Sometimes, there are some visible expressions of aggression and violence in the field (Spaaij, 2013). For refugees, there are risks that too much focus will be given to sport, neglecting other important activities such education, employment and family. These risks are often perceived by parents who want their young people to focus on education more than other activities. These views are equally important and need to be discussed when it comes to the latter's engagement in sport in order to avoid conflict.

On a positive note, young refugees often show their

enthusiasm for sport as their desire is always driven by an aspiration to express themselves, to connect with their peers and to become professional players. Such enthusiasm and desires can be an indication of their selective adjustments of family cultural values to accommodate personal preferences (Spaaij, 2013). Using a sports program to facilitate the integration of young refugees into host communities' is relatively innovative as an intervention strategy. However, it is essential to acknowledge that engaging them in sporting activities can be a hindrance through some practical issues such as transport and costs. These issues can be barriers to participation in sports (Hancock et al., 200).

Brown et al. (2006) argued that sport should be viewed as a good way to meet people and to establish new friendships, but often their ability to participate is limited by many other responsibilities including school work. Some parents have a strong desire that their children perform well in education and can view sport as a distraction from academic directions. Also, some players have encountered negative experiences in sport clubs, including discriminatory attitudes which have caused some refugees to establish their own, mono-ethnic clubs. This experience of discrimination, aggression and violence on the field can create negative implications for community engagement and resettlement. Spaaij (2013) observed challenges in sport such as discrimination and aggression are some of the many concerns which are holding refugees back from engaging effectively in mainstream sporting clubs.

In 2014, there were many issues with many clubs. It was not a surprise, but it was a big shock for some. Once the game starts, opposing players or spectators respond by name calling: racial abuse was and still is an issue and, although you really want to move on, sometimes it holds you back. (Spaaij, 2013) Apart from discrimination and racial affiliation of minority groups in sport, it can be detrimental to disadvantaged groups because it exacerbates their disadvantage. This critical view is in line with the perception that regards sports as a false front which reproduces inequality by trapping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into a belief that sport is the ticket to a better life, diverting their attention and energies away from more likely pathways to upward mobility (Messner, 2007; Spaaij, 2013). Although family attitudes to sporting participation are slowly changing as more parents come to value its potential social and health benefits, their reservations indicate how recent migrants and refugees tend to prioritise other means of successful settlement: education and employment. Sport can be perceived as a distraction from these pursuits (Spaaij, 2013).

The downside in some sports includes financial problems. Sports clubs can be very expensive, particularly for disadvantaged groups. While there has been some shift in recruiting better players from lower socio-economic classes to be paid and participate at a high level, there are still implications of violence, discrimination and racism, the effects of bureaucracy, religion and gender implications.

Social bonds and bridges can be developed in the sporting context and assist in rebuilding networks in the community that have been eroded by war and displacement. However, bridging social capital in sport is relatively weak between refugee community groups and the host community. It is often hijacked by negative social encounters such as discrimination and aggression which cause and reinforce group boundaries. This makes it hard to access and use linking social capital, which is unequally distributed across gender, age, ethnic, and socio-economic lines (Spaaij, 2012).

The issues of discrimination and racism for minority and ethnic groups still exist in today's sporting activities and cannot be denied. Players from certain socio-economic groups were under-represented in some sports because of economic and neighbourhood differences as well as racial/ethnic tension (Kanters et al., 2012). Young players also encounter challenging experiences which are not always beneficial: they can get hooked up with coaches who are more interested in their own egos than helping young players to grow. Ideally, coaches should be there to facilitate and provide direction for those who work closely with young players and not to practice their individuality which may seem difficult to young players.

### Gender division in sport sociology

When it comes to the gender issue in sport, one can see a clear division in terms of the roles that are played. Gender identity is a critical part of sociology understanding in sport. Thinking about gender differences in sport, it is clear that many sporting activities are dominated by men. There are many unexplained reasons why women are often excluded in organised sports. Kanters (2012) observed that women from African, American and low-income backgrounds were more likely than their male counterparts to be left out of participating in sports. At some sports clubs, women are treated more harshly and ridiculed by boys and coaches. In addition, male coaches do more coaching while female coaches are more involved in organisational duties. These are examples of how gender plays different roles in community sports. Thus, participation in masculine sport creates gender identity conflict for females, while participation in feminine sports creates gender identity conflict for males. This is a systemic problem in different cultures in many parts of the world. There are sports typically dominated by boys/men in the contemporary sporting system. This is due to the influences of cultural values and beliefs in society. Families and institutional sports clubs often decide who is best to play in their teams while the family can think about the resources required to support those wanting to participate in sport at a high level. In some countries, some sports are often dominated by males, such as basketball in America and football or footy in Australia. This is an example of how sport has created a division in gender. The level of participation for females is often higher in athletics,

gymnastics, figure-skating, netball, and tennis and diving.

### FINDINGS

The benefits of sports for any community, including the South Sudanese community, are mostly in the range of social benefits of playing with other people or meeting friends through sport. So, the value of having people (and particularly young people) engage in sport is often underestimated. Engaging in physical activities such as sport is almost always rewarding in terms of health and fun. For young people, it is about having fun and being active. This also applies to adults who play or support sports. It is also important that people who play or engage in sport make friends, which enhances the feeling of belonging to a group or team. Another thing that people can get from sport is a different level of skills and knowledge. Involvement in sport can develop self-confidence and self-esteem through gaining a sense of achievement. Sport can help people from refugee backgrounds to connect with members of other community groups. This is good for both: it is one way for the former to make new friends and learn from the host community, while the latter can learn from refugees when they find a common interest through sport.

When people from the South Sudan came to Australia, many had no idea of the types of sport which young people play in Australia. Some have seen Australian youth playing Australian Football League (AFL) but they may have not have thought about playing this sport or supporting others. However, over the last few years the community has seen a few players emerge and play Australian Football League (AFL). These players include MajakDaouf of the North Melbourne Club and AlierAlier of the Sydney Swan Club. Then followed young players such as GachNyuon who was drafted by Essendon (Bombers), Reuben William who went to Brisbane (Lions) and MabiiorChol who was drafted by Richmond (Tigers). This raises the hope within the community that more of its young men will be joining AFL in the next few years.

We have few young South Sudanese that play Australia football at the moment and it is only a matter of time until we have more young people from the African communities in Australian football. My young brother plays both Australian football and basketball at the moment. **(P# 14, Joseph)**

Sport is a good thing that helps people health-wise, engages people by bringing them together and enjoying their time. You could also see some politicians running or going to sports events because sport is good for everybody. I think our people should engage in sport, young people and grown-ups, because it keeps them active and we can also contribute to Australian society because we are very athletic when it comes to sport. **(P# 13, Deng)**

The following five capitals are gained through participation in sport and the benefits have been described quotes as participants spoke about their participation in

sport.

### Physical capital

There are many reasons why young people are encouraged to be involved in sport. One reason is that playing sport is good for people in terms of learning coordination skills as well as being fun to enjoy the social part as a game is being played. Young people play sport or are involved in sport to have fun, to improve their skills and learn new ones, to meet friends, for physical fitness, to do something they're good at and for excitement in winning a competition (if possible). Participants described the fun part of sport and why they like to be involved in sport.

Basketball is fun when you put the skill into practice. For example, dribble and dung in the field is fun. Basketball helped me to learn skills and rules in sport which is great for me. Young people who are not engaged in sport have a lot of issues on the streets because they have nothing to do. Sport is good because it keeps young people off the streets and makes them healthy and encourages them to learn new skills **(P#14, Joseph)**

I don't play sport but I like it and watch it lots. Those who engage in sport have a lot of benefits because sport keeps them active. Sport becomes one of the important tasks in their daily routines. Sport helps you personally because you remain physically fit and healthy. You also have a fresh mind when you play. I think young people can benefit a lot if they are engaged in sport. **(P# 15, Maciek)**

Sport is very important for young people and adults, physically, mentally and even career-wise. When I started playing basketball, I was not intending to do it as a career but my main goal was to be fit, healthy and to encourage other young people who were isolated to do something meaningful. I also wanted those South Sudanese young people who were on the streets to get out of trouble because sport can help to engage them actively so they have no time for consuming alcohol or doing other things that are no good. I know sport has helped me to focus on my school work because I know what I was doing when I joined basketball. I was able to think positively and focus on my work because I know that I am going to play when I finish my school work. I had no time for other things except school work and sport. **(P# 6, Majok)**

I am a great fan of sport; I play basketball with girls of my age. We work hard for our team as players and learn lots as a team from our coach. The benefits when you play sport are that you meet people, network with them and become friends. We always meet on Saturdays and sometimes after school to discuss sports plan and skills we needed in order to be the best players. **(P# 12, Glory)**

A participant in the study was helped by a coach to connect with the team.

When you join the team, there is always someone who can connect with you. There is always a person with whom your personalities clicked and this person has to be a coach. When I started, my coach was so supportive in introducing me to the team, and I quickly made friends within the team.

All my friends in the team were so good for me; they always supported me and encouraged me to be myself when I am playing. I see myself now as a better player in the team. Having a network of friends is very important because you can help each other when one of you needs help. Friends always protect each other from unfriendly groups. I remembered the time when I was kid; we protected ourselves from other unfriendly groups or kids who were against us for some unknown reason. **(P# 14, Joseph)**

I played soccer and I believe that sport is good for young people because it keeps them from engaging in bad activities or crime that are not good for them. By participating in sporting programs, young people can network with many other young people from different communities. **(P# 2, Mading)**

### Psychological capital

Sport is full of fun and joy but particularly for the players when they win. This also applies to supporters as it fun for them to see the best players on the field. The psychological benefits of sport have been mentioned by the participants in this research. There is often a great feeling when a player is really doing well in front of supporters. Sport facilitates the connection with other people, players and supporters. For new community groups, sport can assist them to integrate with the mainstream community. One participant in the interview described how sport helped him to integrate and mix with other players, giving him a good feeling and a sense of belonging when sees his supporters while he is playing.

Sport has assisted me to integrate and settle better because when I came in Australia things were very different until I joined sport. I had no friends before but now I have a lot of Australian friends and that helps me to settle better and relax. People have supported me in terms of sport and I feel good because of that. I love sport as something that I wanted to do and that something is what I'm doing for a career as I don't want to finish with sport. Seeing good people supporting me makes me feel good and I play better. **(P#10, Kur)**

Another participant described how he enjoys playing basketball. He explains how sport assisted him to focus and have less time for unnecessary activities.

I enjoy playing sport - basketball - because it gives me joy and also means socialising. I find sport helpful for young people because when they play they have less time to go around and do unnecessary things such as consuming alcohol or doing things that can prevent them from things that could be better for their future. **(P#6, Majok)**

Sport helps to break down social isolation felt by young refugees. One participant explained that it is not just about physical fitness.

Sport can help those refugee young people who have no connection and have nothing to do at home. Sport can break social isolation which can lead into depression and depression is bad thing for those who are not engaged in social activities. You don't need to be the best player to



engage in sport; you can still come and play for fun. What you get from sport is not just physical fitness or a healthy lifestyle; it connects you with people outside your community or family. **(P# 4, Mayar)**

### **Social capital**

Participants in the interviews described the social benefits of sport, including community cohesion and social connection that sport brings to community. People may play different types of sports based on their cultural backgrounds and subject to the availabilities of local resources and support from others. Prior to migrating, young South Sudanese used to play soccer in their backyards. Some participants regard sport as an activity that brings the community together and cited the examples of the World Cup and community spirit toward it.

Sport contributes lots in terms of building a community. A good example is the World Cup sporting event which is always celebrated by many different cultures. It unites people and brings lots of enjoyment to young people and fans of sport. It is very important for a refugee community to be engaged in sporting activities for health, fitness and general exercise. Sport can bring people from different backgrounds together and I think if those in the South Sudanese community engage in sport, others will get used to them and the issue of racism in sport will diminish. **(P# 2, Mading)**

Young people from the South Sudanese community become disenfranchised because they are not engaged in fruitful activities like sport. We know that if young people don't have anything to do, they can go out and do something against the law. I was involved in organising sporting activities for young people and basketball is my area of interest and skills with which I helped other young people who want to play it. **(P# 6, Majok)**

Sport helps me to break social isolation: people need to participate and engage with people in sport. This can help you to connect and meet new friends. **(P# 4, Mayar)**

Some in the South Sudanese community want to be involved but they may not have found how, due to lack of connection with sports clubs. Some participants in this study have called for the wider community to show their skills and talents in sport allowing the young South Sudanese to participate in sporting programs as a way of helping them integrate into the mainstream community.

Sport brings a community together and I want to see African or South Sudanese parents bring their children into the Australian Football League. There are lots of African young people with talent in sport; they can do well in sport. I want my South Sudanese people to participate in sport; we will not go back. This is our country; our contribution and participation is important. **(P# 2, Mading)**

I think any sports can really help people in many ways, both adults and young people. Especially in Australia, we are living such an easy life. Our young people can benefit too from Australian sports like footy. Any athletic games are good for us if the young are engaged and well

supported. What matters in sport is discipline; focus and stay hungry to win your goal no matter what. **(P# 3, Malou)**

Being in basketball has opened me up as a sportsman now compared to the time I was not engaged actively in sport. I learned about teamwork because basketball is not like tennis where you play by yourself. It is something that requires teamwork and skills to work in a team. Sport helped me to gain a sense of belonging and to find my identity as a sportsman. I find that I have a sense of being recognised in my team because of my skills and hard work in the team. For my height now, I see that I am not tall for nothing but tall to contribute to the team and the community as I would like to be role model to other young people in sport. **(P# 14, Joseph)**

People who are involved in sport tend to learn particular skills which help them in the workforce or to manage other social issues. Skills such as teamwork, commitment and personal organisation are some skills learnt from engaging in sport. These skills are transferable when one learns or adapts them well.

I used to play soccer and our friends played better because there was a lot of cooperation, teamwork, commitment and discipline in their team. We learned from those experiences that I need to be committed, get organised, and manage my time and to be able to work with others. Playing sport also helps you to be healthy and fit; when you exercise, you are improving your lifestyle and that is huge benefit of engaging in sport. Also it helps you avoid some of the unhealthy things such as drugs and alcohol because you become aware of your body's needs. **(P# 8, Amath)**

Young people who choose to engage in sport have seen the benefits. Sport has assisted them to break away from the social isolation which they had previously faced. The participants reported that sport has given them a great opportunity to make and meet friends and stay connected with people who encourage them to continue to participate in sport.

The most important thing for us is to accept that we are Australians and not to think negatively of their lives in Australia. There are many opportunities that people can benefit from. Some of my friends did not like to travel far to play sport. I used to do that; it just helps you to manage your time and focus on goals. **(P# 4, Mayar)**

Sport can help you lots and you learn about leadership and team work skills. You can also learn lots from other players and build friendships. I have met and learned from many players who played basketball in America. Any sport can help you to define yourself and your goal if you work hard for it. In my case, basketball has helped me lots. You can build your network and friendships through sport. Sport has helped me as a young boy who came to Australia early; I have been around different races, different cultures and spent much time learning about other people and not doing much only about myself and where I want to be in future. Sport assisted me to define myself because sport is very vocal and I was not a vocal person but I became vocal

through sport- basketball now. Sport has put my personalities together - you know what I mean: I am now myself. I believe young people with a refugee background can benefit lots if they participate in sporting programs. South Sudanese are very athletic people naturally, what they really need to do is focus a little bit while engaging in sport. I know lots of South Sudanese young people in Australia now play basketball which helped them stay off the street and away from other problems. **(P# 3, Malou)**

Refugees who engage in sport do so for a social reason and this is vital in re-settling successfully and in the integration process. It is hard for people to settle if they do not have connections with the host community or with earlier migrants who can advise them about directions and how the system works. Participants discussed the benefits and importance of sport in several ways. One is that they see sport as a way of building their social capital with other communities and also internally.

I play basketball in Australia but I used to play soccer in Africa because it is a big thing there and boys learn it quickly in their backyards. Sport helped me to remain fit and healthy as well as helping me to connect with people whom I built friendship with. When I came to Australia, I started to play basketball although I was not good at it at first. I chose to play basketball because I'm tall and my basketball coach recommended that I join this sport. I was bit unsure of myself at first but eventually became a dominant player in the team. I really enjoy this and I have built many friendships through sport. **(P# 14, Joseph)**

Sport helps young people from refugee groups to gain a sense of belonging and participation. I know a group of young people who play sport - soccer at the moment - and it helped them to form their own small community and enjoy their time together. To me, sport plays an important role in assisting young people to integrate with other community groups because players from different communities can come together and play sport together. **(P# 9, Monique)**

Sport can bring people together, learn from each and share many things like having fun. It helps people to engage in positive and enjoyable ways which is a good way of controlling young people because they are not bored and cause problems. **(P#1, Dut)**

I played lots of sports, soccer, martial arts and gymnastics, which made me a sporty person; every day I play sport. Talking about sport, it has helped me as a person in many ways; it is not just about going there to get fit and healthy, it is more than that for me. It has helped me in my studies; it is about challenging myself and not to give up. My course is not an easy one; it can be stressful and challenging sometimes. However, I have learned sportsmanship where I treat everything as a challenge and not give up. For example, the way I look at my assignment is like when I am doing push-ups. If I can do 10 push-ups today I will do more push-ups tomorrow; this is the same way as I do my assignments. One might be difficult today but I look at it and say well, the next assignment may be easy; I cannot give up doing this assignment today. **(P# 4, Mayar)**

Sport assists in enhancing social connections within and beyond a community. A community with social and other human capitals often has better ways of supporting its members. Such support can include taking care of each other by forming teams and playing local sport. Parents can engage with their young people through sport; parents can also play important roles informally and formally by volunteering in that sport. Sport also contributes to a higher level of social capital as it brings the community together - young people and their parents - to celebrate seasons of sporting activities in their local communities as well as at national and international levels.

A man who played Australian "footy" or football explains the benefits of sport for him as something that has been useful in connecting with the right people in sports clubs. He said that sport helped him to gain many friends and supporters from both the South Sudanese and mainstream communities.

The benefit of sport for me has been going around meeting other people from my community and beyond. I met a lot of friends through sport and people who care about my sport career which is Australian-footy. I also have many friends in the South Sudanese community who care for me because I play sport and they know me around Australia. I was supported and encouraged by one of the sporting legends; he helped me to join up and meet people with good will and encouragement. **(P# 10, Kur)**

I come from a family where people viewed sport as a discipline that teaches people a lot of responsibilities and hard work. My mum played sport too. We love sport and I think young people can benefit lots from sport instead of loitering on the streets and causing problems due to lack of activities. Sport teaches you to be disciplined and it is something constructive for young people. I think sport is a great activity that can assist young people to integrate by meeting many other young people from different communities. **(P# 16, Sarah)**

The skills that people can learn through engaging in sport have been seen as benefiting other and more general skills within the community. Skills such as teamwork, leadership and time management are important skills for young people.

I see sport as an important activity for young people because I have seen the benefits of sport as a person from a refugee background that had no such connections. I was involved in basketball as a young person and became a coach for young people because I know the benefit of sport as an individual **(P# 6, Majok)**

I used to play sport when I was young but I do not play anymore. I still believe that sport is important for people; you can learn lots from engaging in sport activities because you can meet many people including coaches who can teach you lots about teamwork, leadership skills and responsibility within the team. Through sport you learn about group work, unity and cooperation as well as gaining a sense of belonging and social networking with your teammates. **(P# 7, Aguto)**

The leisure aspect of sport is something that has also

been seen to benefit those who engaged in sport.

Sport has taken my time mainly to socialise and meet other people in the community. It is good to meet people from different communities through sport. We used to encourage each other as young people that, you know, sport is better for us than what is happening on the streets. This later became a theme of influencing others to join us. **(P#6, Majok)**

Participants in this study reflected how sport can make people become famous within their own community and also in other parts of the world. One participant mentioned famous people in the South Sudanese community as part of the benefit of being involved in sports as an athlete. This appeared to be one of the factors that motivated some young people to play basketball.

When you become a successful athlete, you can always go to different places, meet different people and become well-known. I am thinking here about the South Sudanese basketball player, Luel Deng. He is well known now in the community and is respected because of his achievement in sport. If you become successful in sport, you can also help your community by establishing it there. I heard that Luel Deng has established his basketball academy in South Sudan to help that community. This is just one example of what sport can do. **(P# 5, Garang)**

### **Cultural capital**

There is an opportunity to build cultural capital through participation in sport: young people can meet others from different cultures and learn from them. This is good for young people from refugee backgrounds.

I met some of my friends through sport and we learned from each other. You can also learn lots about different cultures from friends as part of your social network rather than your own community members because sport is very multicultural and you can meet people and build friendships with different people from different cultures. These friends are very inspiring in many ways because they tell you their stories, how they manage some challenging issues. **(P# 19, Nyibol)**

I have learned things in sport, things you cannot learn at home. You learn them when you participate or engage in sport. Sport can really help people to integrate successfully and know each well. Sport can help young people to settle better. When I came to Australia, I had no friends because I didn't know many people but I decided to engage in school sports which helped me to connect with many friends. I got my first jobs through a friend who I met through sport. We discussed work-related issues and I told him that I wanted to work. Straightaway he advised me to submit my resume to him because he knew his manager was looking for someone to be employed **(P# 4, Mayar)**

I used to played volleyball but not anymore. I used to enjoy sport because of meeting all my friends that played sport with me and we would talk about sport and different issues as friends. But now I have brothers who play sports and that have helped them lots in their settlement. I also

know some other young people from the South Sudanese community who are doing well because they have chosen to engage in sport. I strongly believe that sport is good for young people and is a good activity to engage newly-arrived young people with refugee backgrounds. My brothers play sport every weekend and attend week-night training. It keeps them very busy and they all enjoy their time in sporting activities. One of my brothers plays rugby and he wants it to be his career. We are all supporting him in the family because sport keeps him busy and away from his wrong friends who are having some issues with drinking. **(P# 17, Rebecca)**

I play basketball and my brother play basketball too. We like sport because there are many benefits when it comes to sport, physically and psychologically. First, we know many friends through sport. We hang out together and socialise after and before games. **(P# 19, Nyibol)**

Talking about community sporting is not just about playing with registered clubs. It is also about self-care and general wellbeing. Some participants who used to play in local sporting clubs also found running to be useful for their self-care and wellbeing.

I used to play basketball when I was at school. What I do now is running and walking every morning just to keep healthy and fit. I believe physical exercise is so important for me and of course to people who want to keep their fitness and health. I think sport is good and there are a lot of physical benefits as well as psychological benefits from engaging in sport. I believe the South Sudanese young people can benefit a lot, as well as the community and families seeing their sons and daughters playing at any level of sport. **(P#11, Abiol)**

Sport is important to me for reasons including health and psychological wellbeing because it provides opportunity for networking, meeting people who can be useful in terms of support and learning opportunities. My first job which I got in a Safeway market was because of the girl I went to school with and whose sister used to work there and she also played netball with us. She helped me to get the job. Anything that creates a network is helpful for people in many ways. **(P#18, Susanne)**

### **Economic capital**

Some sport clubs have the financial capacity to pay their athletes when they reach a professional level. Financial benefits were discussed with those who get paid through sporting activities and they were very open in describing the financial benefits.

I got financial benefits through sport because the club pays me and this helped me to get to the games. I had no worries about transport or things that I want to buy for training. Therefore, the financial benefit in sport is so helpful. You don't have to be stressed when you have money; no worries about how I am go to get there: Do I have money for the train and so on. I play VFL in Victoria but I know there are some other South Sudanese who play sport in Australia and these guys are really enjoying their time

playing, meeting new friends and other supporters who like their games. My dream is to make it to the AFL level and for young South Sudanese to see me and join in. I want to be like MajakDau and AlierAlier. Majak plays for North Melbourne Footy Club and Alier plays for Sydney Swan Club. This is a good thing for the community and for them too. **(P#10, Kur)**

This is no small matter. Connecting with the right people through sport helped some people to get work. One of participants acknowledged the importance of being connected with right people in sport.

I got my job through a sport connection. A friend who played with me asked me to submit my resume. Within a few days I was interviewed and I got the job because my friend had already discussed it with his manager as he knew me well and believed in me that I could do that job. I believe in sport because it challenges you and takes you to the next level. My sportsmanship assisted me to connect with many important people who come to games. I remembered when I qualified for our soccer league; many important people came and talked to me. **(P# 4, Mayar)**

### **Gaps faced by the refugee community in sport**

There is a clear gap in sport for people from refugee backgrounds in the general sporting community. One of the many issues holding back such people from engaging in sport is a lack of connection with sports clubs. It is clear from the previous excerpts that they see or know the benefits of sport but they have no idea where to begin when they want to join.

In terms of sport, I think the South Sudanese community needs to work hard to address their issues and engage young people in sport. I think parents are not supporting their young people to engage in sport. This is two-way street; clubs need to do their part in welcoming newly-arrived or young people from multicultural community groups in their clubs. Racist preconceptions are barriers to the engagement of young people in sport. People refuse to engage in clubs because of a preconception that they will be rejected. **(P# 16, Sarah)**

The lack of connection with clubs and support from the community as well as local organisations have been identified as something holding back young people from engaging in sport, particularly for those with refugee backgrounds. Several participants expressed their concern and also wanted more support to be given to refugee community groups to engage the younger generations in sport.

I think clubs need to be open to welcome these young people from multicultural community groups and to be given a chance to try their best. If they don't perform well, the clubs have the right to refuse. Parents also need to support their young people to engage in sporting programs **(P# 16, Sarah)**

I think people need to be engaged in relevant activities such as sport, work, and music and dance programs to help them get away from psychological stress and isolation. The

community needs to stand up for itself and get involved in local activities to help them settle better. **(P# 12, Glory)**.

African young people and their communities have the physical power and ability to become involved with sport. What we need is support from agencies or the government to engage us in sport. Once we get in, we can show our skills and talents. We need to encourage our young people and introduce sport to them without discouraging attitudes. I would like to see more South Sudanese young people to actively engage in sport and work hard as good players in order to show their positive aspects and skills in sport. **(P# 13, Deng)**

### **Sport as a settlement strategy for refugees**

Sport as a settlement strategy was discussed by the participants. They described this as one of the many activities that can help to relate to young people.

Sport is so good in controlling young people and engaging them in terms of settlement services and integration. I know many young people who play basketball and soccer from the South Sudanese community, some play for pleasure and some take sport seriously as their career. I know some friends and family's friends went to America because of basketball. They are attending a basketball college there to become professional players. Basketball is very strong in America but I want our young people supported here to be better basketball players instead of going to America. **(P#11, Abiol)**

I am not suggesting that sport is the only way to settle better in Australia; there are many other positive activities that people need to be involved in to make their settlement easier and better. I know many young people and friends from the South Sudanese community who play soccer and basketball. I and other South Sudanese Australians who play footy want people to come and join us and love footy. I love footy so much now but not when I started it. **(P# 10, Kur)**

Our young people should engage in sport to keep them away from problems such as drinking alcohol and using drugs. If they are engaged in sporting activities, they will not have time to think about negative things that put their lives in challenging situations. **(P# 19, Nyibol)**

People need to engage in activities that are good for their health and future. I do see some good young people engaging actively in sport such as basketball. These young people have no time for thinking or spending in negative activities that have no benefit for their future. I would encourage South Sudanese to look for work if they are doing studies and engage sport to help them break social isolation. **(P# 8, Amath)**

Sport has helped me to see things from different angles rather than seeing things in a one-sided view. It has taught me to remain calm, to take time to challenge myself in a discipline. Sport also helped me to connect with the community, to meet friends and socialise with friends. Sometimes I may not understand what I am doing but I can check with friends and talk with them in which I learn or

get some clarity from them. This is a good way of using your social network and friendships from sports. The friendships you make in sport are the friends who very often see more than your family. This is really because you regularly meet them through sport, play with them and spend time with them. **(P# 4, Mayar)**

Sport helps young people by keeping them occupied, which helps them, and adults from refugee backgrounds, to do well by focusing on activities that are helpful to them. People who engage in a sporting program may have no time to spend on negative activities which may cause problems.

My cousin plays basketball and all the family are very proud of him. He does not have any time to think or spend with some of his peers who are not actively engaged in sport. I believe sport is a great thing that helps people to interact and learn lots from each other, and so become friends. **(P# 8, Amath)**

There is a noticeable improvement with South Sudanese emerging basketball players helping in their local community. The South Sudanese basketball in Sunshine suburb attracted many boys to play during weekends. This has brought about an observed improvement in the community although some also want girls to play and not to be left out.

I have seen young boys from the South Sudanese community engage well in sport which helped them in many ways such as keeping them busy and off the streets. The only issue of sport for me is that I want to see girls engage in sport and not only boys.

This is because sport creates networks and people get jobs through networking. **(P# 18, Susanne)**

I used to play sport at school but not anymore, my brother still plays sport and he loves it because it has engaged him very well and kept him away from other destructive activities. **(P#20, Malang)**

### **Problematic aspects of sports participation**

There are some problems in sport when it comes to participation by people from refugee backgrounds. Some of these issues have been discussed earlier. However, the main problematic aspects of sport for such people are the fear of becoming involved with an unknown group, and the lack of financial resources to support those who want to participate. Also, some parents lack understanding of the importance of sport as they have not engaged in sport before for themselves.

The lack of support from parents and community is a major barrier for many people to engage in sport. Young people, especially from refugee and migrant backgrounds, need lots of support and encouragement to get confidence. Those who are not engaged in sport are like people who are not employed. They have nothing to engage them socially and are more likely to be depressed or engaged in drinking. **(P# 15, Maciek)**

There is no enough support in the community for people who play sport. Parents don't support their children to participate in sport and this is a big issue preventing us

from being fully involved in sport. **(P# 20, Malang)**

With the lack of support by parents and cultural attitudes about sport, some parents keep their young people doing domestic duties which deny them the chance to engage in productive activities such as sports. The problem with some parents in the South Sudanese community is that they never participated in sport and some of them don't even know what sport is or its benefits. Sport is a new thing to those parents who never engaged in sport and it is hard for them to understand and allow their children to participate. For example, when I was growing up, I wanted to be engaged actively in sport but my mum wouldn't let me because she has no understanding of sport. **(P# 18, Susanne)**

I used to play a lot of sport and my mother disagreed with me all the time because she believes in education and not sport. I had started playing soccer in Africa and I played in many soccer competitions or leagues. When I arrived in Australia I fell in love with basketball; this engagement helped me to connect with many people. I still play both basketball and soccer. I represented my high school in basketball. I have benefited a lot because when I play sport I always feel that I have learned some new trick. I have met many friends through sport, including my best friend who has a Chinese background. We became best friends because we play together and sometimes talk about sport. I learned a bit about his culture and he learned about my culture in which we respect each other as best mates. **(P# 5, Garang)**

A lack of both parents to help young people to travel to games was another issue. The disadvantages of solo parenting seem to be holding some young people back from sport because their parent is busy with many other settlement issues. Some participants also mentioned financial obstacles as a reason why parents were not taking their young people to sports programs.

There is a lack of support from parents; some are single parents looking after a number of children. They find that they do everything for them, particularly those who want to engage in sport but are often left out because of lack support from their families. One of the barriers in sport is financial. Some are not able to pay the club fees. The young people from refugee backgrounds and their parents have no work. It is hard for them to pay fees including transportation to training. **(P# 17, Rebecca)**

This lack of resources and the fear of the unknown about the clubs appeared to hold some people back from getting involved. This opportunity is often denied to them by the lack of resources and support from families. Parents have no time to engage with or support their young people to actively engage in sport.

Lack of resources and opportunity to engage in clubs is because South Sudanese people are not known by sport clubs. **(P# 14, Joseph)**

The financial issue is another problem holding our community back from participating in sport. Many people are not working and they cannot afford to pay the fee for clubs or gyms, so people cannot be bothered when they know that it is costing them money that they don't have.

**(P# 20, Malang)**

Some young people are very clear in understanding sport and wanted to play as they grow up or are exposed to it. They see sport as an activity that engages them physically as well as an avenue for social capital. They can meet their friends and build their social network through sport.

I wanted to play sport but my mother always said no. The only person who used to support me was my uncle who was very young at the time and knew lots about sport. He always argued with my mum that sport is good for her as a young person growing up. My mum later on put her case to me: "Okay you can only play sport if you find your way to the game and training; I will not be with you driving you around to play sport all the time." She also added another condition that she would not pay the fees or for transport. Later I got a job for my sports but I was also able to do house work, cleaning and washing dishes to keep my mum. Sport is two ways; it needs commitment from young players. **(P#18, Susanne)**

**Racism and discrimination**

The issue of racism and discrimination in sport has been one of the many concerns for the participants. Some participants had seen some racist comments directed to people of minority and colour groups. The experiences of players like Adam Goodies, the indigenous player who was called "Ape" in a racist way, and Majok Dau, a player for North Melbourne and member of the South Sudanese community who was called or abused while playing, have raised some concerns within the sporting community. Sometimes, racism and discrimination are not openly discussed, yet it is a disease that is putting the confidence and good will of people down as they suffer racist comments. For minority groups, and particularly people from refugee backgrounds who do not have the knowledge or skill to speak up, it is a problem.

There are some problems in sport, although the government is trying hard to prevent racism in public areas like sport. Still, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds find it a bit difficult to engage in clubs because they find hard to fit in the big sports clubs. Sport needs to be promoted in a way that can attract young people from those backgrounds. Racist behaviour has deterred young people from participating in sports and this is a problem that needs to be addressed **(P#1, Dut)**

We are a multicultural nation, I love multiculturalism; we should be allowed to engage in sport actively as part of this society. It does not matter where you come from. **(P# 2, Mading)**

There are a few issues with sport clubs; they lack engaging with people from refugee or African backgrounds. Their talents are often played down and that is racism and discrimination. There is a need for a strong advocacy to promote more engagement of young people from refugee community groups to participate in sport. I remember when I tried to engage in modelling; I was told by agency worker that they don't work with dark skinned people

because it is hard to get jobs at the end with them. People don't take them for modelling show. **(P# 11, Abiol)**

People who experienced racism remained closed and were not ready enough to go beyond their comfort zone. This is a hard thing for many of our people. It is unfortunate that racism still exists and people can experience racism: the important message is not to let racism hold you back. When I came to Australia, I went through racism and discrimination. People used to say to us on the streets, "Go back to your country," and people said to mum, "She come from banana land, go back to your banana land." People used to spit at me and sometimes I went home crying, "Why did people treat me like this? What is wrong with me?" However, later I learnt that racism and discrimination should not hold me back. I have studied as much as I wanted to. I learned quickly that there are good people out there; there are good and bad people in every society. **(P# 18, Susanne)**

I think there is racism, (pause) and racism is something that will not go away for a while yet in Australia. It has been there for years and I have encountered lots of racism in Australia. It reached the point that it does not bother me when I am dealing with angry people. I just brush it off and play my sport or do what I have to do. Racism is not about the South Sudanese or Sudanese; it is applied to many other cultures although Australia is a multicultural society. Still, people like me have experienced racism and discrimination. We need to think about the history of black people in Australia which is not that good at all but I think people should not react to it because our reactions can give racist people an opportunity to get what they want. I think you must not react to racists; they are not equal to you and that is why they are racist. There is something missing in their lives, which is why they play the racist card. You should not react to it at all. **(P#3, Malou)**

There is often negative language or abuse in sport which can hold back minority groups and young people from engaging actively and freely.

I have been called a name that was not good in or outside the field but I just ignore them and keep playing because I was doing well and they knew that I was good and that was a reason for them to call me bad names. In sport, people can say things to you and if you react negatively and hit someone because of it you will get suspended and delay your progress as a player, while probably the name-caller may not lose anything. But you will lose your game or progress because you are focusing too much on negative things. **(P# 10, Kur)**

I have seen indigenous black Australians being treated negatively in sport. People like Adam Goodies have been called in a racist way while they were playing. This confirms that racism still exists in Australia. Some people hold negative thoughts in their minds but they cannot say it openly as a matter of law. Australia is a multicultural society and racism cannot be allowed to destroy this beautiful nation. **(P# 20, Malang)**

You must have a certain mindset when you are playing sport because anything can happen to you which can

destroy your play. You can hear some racist comments directed at you when you are doing well in the field. I was prepared by my best friend who advised me, when you are in the game you must know that there will be people who will say things to you to make you react and that is part of their strategy to destroy you or your game. I asked him what I could do to manage such a situation. He said, "If you are playing in the field and you know that you are doing well, do not listen to what they are saying to you. You keep playing good to beat them by seeing you do well in the field and that is the best option for you to ensure that you hurt them by scoring goals or doing well in fields. When you keep doing well or good things you can hurt people who are racist to you by beating them. Some of them will give up and say, 'Wow, this kid is doing well by ignoring negative aspects and does well in the field.'" (P# 10, Kur)

## Conclusion

**Participation in Sport:** As part of engaging young people with refugee backgrounds towards settling better, sport can help to assimilate them in the mainstream community and build connections with others. Engaging migrants, and particularly the younger generations, in sport assists them to enhance **social capital** because sport plays a role in helping youth to integrate and to break down potential social isolation. It is a great source of connections and social interaction with participants from mainstream communities. Sport also helps young people to enhance **psychological capital** through gaining confidence and resilience skills from training and coaches. Thus, the benefits of engaging sport by refugees have been identified by the participants in this study and have also been presented in quotations. Some challenges were mentioned as being of concern, such as lack of finances to access sport, lack of connection with sporting clubs or fear of getting involved with an unknown group of people, racism and discrimination, lack of support from parents and organisations.

Although there are challenges in sport for people from refugee backgrounds, those challenges such as meeting education and family's needs are often overcome or outweighed by the benefits from participating in sport. For isolated people and newly arrived refugees, sport is a very valuable and powerful way of connecting with others in the community. Sport is an essential tool in bringing people together such as players, teams, coaches, volunteers, spectators and other community members who want to watch the game. Sport creates relationships at different levels - individual and community - which are a useful asset provides them with a positive sense of belonging.

The inclusiveness in sport is an important source of social networking which helps people from disadvantaged and isolated communities to enhance their relationships with others. This can assist them to combat isolation and other mental health problems. The Refugee Community can benefit from sporting programs with good values such as

inclusion, fair play, teamwork, cooperation and respect for opponents. These provide those people who may fear to participate (perhaps because of prior traumatic experiences) to acquire life skills with positive social relationships, collaboration and mutual support.

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