Global Well-Being Index: Building Social Cohesion through Sport

COMMUNITY PAPER
JULY 2021

Executive summary

From political and social inclusion to building trust, social cohesion is vital to society to ensure the well-being of all its members. But, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social cohesion within communities is facing significant challenges. Long periods in lockdown over the last year have limited access to sport and have hampered motivation for self-care. Additionally, public service announcements during the pandemic have prioritized isolation over encouraging people to focus on their well-being while staying safe, ultimately leading to increased levels of loneliness, stress and depression.

To start a conversation on increasing community well-being through sports and physical activity, the World Economic Forum’s Global Future Council for Media, Entertainment and Sport is leading a call to action for governments, corporations and non-profits to explore building a global well-being index that focuses on sports and physical activity. The aim is for the index to indicate how prosperous and cohesive a society can be.

Impact of COVID-19 on global well-being and social cohesion

Studies are emerging on the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on a person’s overall well-being, with many focused on the impact of confinement and the reduction of physical activity. While the short and long-term impact of restrictions and confinement will take years to completely understand, not surprisingly the initial findings are showing a positive correlation between government-regulated confinement, a decline in total physical activity, and poorer mental health and well-being.

An early study was conducted within the first 2-6 weeks of government-mandated restrictions in the United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand and Australia. This study, published in the Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport1 was based on a survey of 8,425 adults aged 29 to 59 years old. The study concluded that participants whose physical activity decreased during the initial lockdown demonstrated “poorer” mental health and well-being. It also concluded that those who maintained or increased their physical activity during this time reported no negative impact on their mental health and overall well-being.

Another survey2 of 1,723 people across 18 countries in the Middle East and North Africa was published by PLOS, a nonprofit open access publisher for researchers and scientists. While the survey was conducted by individuals in higher education institutions, including students, staff and faculty members of different universities, the findings also support the hypothesis that mental well-being is positively related to medium to high levels of physical activity. The conclusion states: “In brief, the state of mental health during confinement was reported to be better among participants who adopted a healthy lifestyle in terms of physical activity, dietary and sleep behaviours. Physical activity was the best predictor of mental health, followed by health status.”

While the global physical activity community responded swiftly to the confinement in the form of online yoga, dance classes, remote fitness classes and even free YouTube tutorials, people living in poorer communities and developing countries have not had the same access to this virtual world. Additionally, low-income families may be disproportionately affected by the lockdown and are especially vulnerable to mental health issues due to sub-standard living conditions and limited physical space for indoor physical activities. As the need for physical activity for all members of society is global, developing sports and fitness programmes that focus on society’s most vulnerable communities is crucial to building overall social cohesion and well-being.
Current indices on global well-being and social cohesion

Sharecare’s Community Well-Being Index looks at community health or well-being in the United States according to 10 factors: physical, financial, social, community, purpose, healthcare access, food access, resource access, housing and transportation, and economic security.

The Social Progress Index measures 50 social and environmental indicators across three broad dimensions of social progress: basic human needs, foundations of well-being, and opportunity. Under the “foundations of well-being dimension, pillars include access to basic knowledge, access to information and communications, environmental quality, and health and wellness, with the latter focusing on life expectancy at 60, premature deaths from non-communicable diseases, access to essential services, and access to quality Healthcare.

As part of its Better Life Initiative, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) measures well-being of its member countries in an effort to bridge the gap between current well-being metrics and policy measures. Their framework’s key dimensions include: income and wealth, work and job quality, housing, health, knowledge and skills, environment quality, subjective well-being, safety, work-life balance, social connections, and civil engagement, as well as future well-being indicators such as natural, human, economic and social capital.

Additionally, the Ipsos Social Cohesion Index (ISCI) measures citizens’ attitudes relative to: social relations (trust in other people, shared priorities with others and diversity); connectedness (national identity, trust in the political system and fairness of treatment); and common good (helping others, respecting laws and corruption). In its most recent analysis, findings show that twice as many global citizens are “weak” (41%) than “solid” (21%) in their sense of social cohesion based on a survey of over 20,000 adults in 27 countries.

Though the aforementioned indices are quite comprehensive and measure well-being and social cohesion using varying frameworks, none currently include sports participation as a metric for well-being at a global level.

FIGURE 1 Social cohesion in the pandemic age: Is social cohesion under assault around the world?

We asked over 20,000 people in 27 countries about:

- **Their social relations**
  Trust in other people, common outlook on life, diversity

- **Their feelings of connectedness**
  Their country identity, trust in government, and the belief that they’re treated fairly in their country

- **Their focus on the common good**
  Helping others, respecting laws, belief in society

Their answers formed the Ipsos Social Cohesion Index (ISCI)

Ipsos Social Cohesion Index (ISCI) reveals that almost twice as many global citizens are looking more “me” than “we”.

| Solid | 21% |
| Soft, wavering | 38% |
| Weak | 41% |

Source: Ipsos
Note: “solid” = “solid” on all three of the sub-indices or “solid” on two and not worse than “soft, wavering” on one.

The Olympic Games and barriers to sports participation

In a recent survey conducted by Ipsos in 28 countries, participants were asked what they thought the impact the Tokyo Summer Olympics had on the wider society. On average, 80% worldwide said that the Olympics inspire younger generations to participate in sport and two-thirds (65%) agreed with the unifying power of the Olympics.

While spectator sports have the power to unite, there are greater obstacles in encouraging broader participation. In another Ipsos survey, participants were asked: “What barriers, if any, stop you from practicing sports as much as you like?” Thirty-seven percent of respondents stated a lack of time, 18% a lack of money, 17% the weather and 13% a lack of facilities.
FIGURE 2  The Olympics inspire tomorrow’s generation to participate in sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Country Average</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey  
Note: Base: 19,510 adults in 28 countries, 21st May – 4th June 2021

FIGURE 3  What barriers, if any, stop you from practicing sports as much as you like?

- Lack of time: 37%
- Lack of money: 18%
- Weather is too hot/too cold: 17%
- Lack of facilities where I live: 13%
- Lack of people I know to play with: 13%
- Too Old: 10%
- I have a disability/illness: 10%
- Overweight: 10%
- Lack of people in my local area to play with: 9%
- Facilities are unsafe to use/unsuitable: 8%
- Not culturally or socially acceptable to practice sports in my country: 8%
- There are no barriers - I don’t want to play/take part: 22%

Source: Ipsos  
Note: Global country average overview based on the response of 21,503 adults aged 16-74, June-July 2021.

In light of such obstacles, below are examples from the private sector and governments on how investing in sports and physical activity can lead to meaningful change in the well-being of citizens.
Case studies on fostering well-being

**Major League Baseball**

During the pandemic, the baseball community delivered unique and innovative ways to connect with its youngest fans and participants. With kids all across the United States and Canada studying virtually, Major League Baseball (MLB) and its partners supplemented at-home curriculum by encouraging parents, teens and young people to be active through positive, fun and creative baseball/softball-related activities by launching the PLAY BALL AT Home campaign. This effort provided content and information to demonstrate ways the game can be played at home. Launching around the time when youth baseball and softball leagues were typically starting, the campaign offered an intimate and digital connectivity between families, fans, players and leagues.

As a complement to this effort, USA Baseball launched the Fun At Bat programme. A joint MLB and USA Baseball youth programme, Fun At Bat was designed for physical education classes in schools to promote fun and active lifestyles for children while teaching the fundamental skills of bat-and-ball sports. The programme included a guide book with exercises, activities and tips for using alternative equipment with the aim of enabling children to learn the health-enhancing benefits of bat-and-ball sports, in addition to the fundamental skills and rules, all from the comfort of their home. USA Baseball highlighted an “Activity of the Day” with an instructional video to accompany each segment of the guide book. Additionally, MLB – including its youth academy and development networks and Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) programmes – regularly had wellness checks with youth members to ensure they were not only still connected to the sport, but also were placing an appropriate focus on their mental health.

As a collective, the baseball world maintained genuine and positive connections with the larger baseball and softball community. As a result, the American Sports & Fitness Industry Association reported that in spite of the pandemic (and ensuing closures of youth baseball and softball leagues), casual participation in baseball rose +22% in 2020 to nearly 8.1 million participants. Since 2014, the year prior to the launch of the PLAY BALL initiative, casual participation has grown +88.3%.

**Majid Al Futtaim**

The Majid Al Futtaim group in the United Arab Emirates is integrating space for sports within shopping malls that it owns as a way to involve the local community. An example of this is the Zahia Sports area in the City Centre Al Zahia mall, which includes indoor facilities for football, basketball, frisbee, tennis and dodgeball. In recent years, UAE malls have transformed into social hubs, becoming a place for individuals to connect, socialize and be entertained, alongside shopping.

Additionally, the Dubai Fitness Challenge, which is a city-wide social movement committed to long-term health through active lifestyle, offered free workout events and initiatives at various malls in the Emirates; in 2020, 1.5 million participants took part, a 35% increase from the previous year. Given that 2020 has been an exceptional year with the COVID-19 pandemic, the emphasis on movement for 30 minutes in 30 days through the Dubai Fitness Challenge continues to inspire participants to exercise.

Whether it is through fitness challenges or sports hubs, Majid Al Futtaim’s shopping malls in the UAE facilitate social cohesion and are a place where the community connects. Malls are using their spaces by transforming them into workout centres and have the capacity to attract the attention and involvement of individuals who might not typically take part in outdoor activities and events.

**Additional case studies**

In Asia, ONE Championship worked with Global Citizen on outreach programmes to provide encouragement to young kids in extreme poverty through martial arts. These programmes typically involve ONE Championship global ambassadors who visit and train kids in these communities in partnership with local non-profit organizations. For example, ONE and Global Citizen brought local professional athletes to an event in Mandaluyong City, the Philippines, to encourage youth to participate in physical activities.

**The Olympic Refugee Foundation** runs sports-based projects to support refugee populations across the world. The focus of these projects is to create safe and accessible sports facilities for children and young people in areas where there are refugees, and develop sporting activities that can be successfully implemented within these safe environments. The International Olympic Committee (IOC), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Terre de Hommes have also created a sport for protection toolkit for young people in forced displacement with good practice examples from these projects that highlight improvements in their well-being. It has run pilot and ongoing programmes in eight countries, including Colombia, Congo, Kenya, Mexico, Rwanda, Turkey and Uganda.

---

**Conclusion**

The Swiss Society for the Common Good defines social cohesion as the quality of community life within a given territory and is made up of resilient social relationships, a positive emotional bond with the community and a pronounced sense of orientation towards the common good. As the pandemic has made people think of health holistically, it has become evident that higher levels of sports participation and physical activity lead to greater well-being overall and are means to strengthen social ties. As governments, corporations and non-profit organizations continue to invest resources to increase sports and physical activity levels in society, one way to measure that progress is through a Global Well-Being Index.

**Acknowledgements**

This community paper was written by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Ipsos MORI, Kudelski Group, Major League Baseball, Majid Al Futtaim Holding and ONE Championship.
Contributors

Members of the Global Future Council on Media, Entertainment and Sport

Nada Ghaoui Abou Saab
Director, Marketing, East Region, Shopping Malls Business Unit, Majid Al Futtaim Holding, United Arab Emirates

Nancy Goldberg
Executive Vice-President, Chief Marketing and Sales Officer, Kudelski Group, Switzerland

Erica Kerner
Senior Vice-President, Head of Marketing Strategy & Partnerships, ONE Championship, Singapore

Aneesh Madani
Head of Global Digital Partnerships and Social Media for the Olympics, International Olympic Committee (IOC), Switzerland

Ben Page
Chief Executive, Ipsos MORI, United Kingdom

World Economic Forum

Marcus Burke
Research Analyst, Media, Entertainment and Sport

With thanks to

Steven Arocho
Senior Director of Communications, Major League Baseball, USA

Chris Marinak
Chief Strategy Officer, Major League Baseball, USA

Endnotes


3. Sign up to receive the Community Well-Being Index 2020 State Rankings report and access previous reports at https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/reports.


