

# West African Journal Of Physical & Health Education

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APPRAISAL OF THE HEALTH AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT  
AND SOCIAL RECREATIONAL NEEDS OF WEST AFRICAN  
STUDENTS IN U.S.A.

by

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Abstract

The health and physical development and social recreational needs of West African students enrolled in American Universities have not received the kind of attention given to other problem areas these students face in American Institutions. The response of West African students to the Mooney Problem Checklist revealed that a substantial percentage of these students have some concern in the problem areas of health and physical development as well as social and recreation activities. These problem areas also appear significant to the students under study. More attention to these problem areas will enhance the academic success of the students which is the ultimate goal for going to the United States.

Introduction

It sounds logical to assume that the main goal of a student in a school is to attain his or her academic objectives. Thus, it could be further assumed that such activities as comprehending the subject matter, utilization of appropriate study habits and regular attendance of classes would be given priority by the student, while enrolled in the course of study.

To achieve these objectives, it becomes imperative that the student maintains good physical and mental health. Poor physical condition, physical trauma and emotional problems are some of the factors that could limit a persons capacity or capability for full realization of his potentials and could also prevent the optimal fulfillment of the individual.

Schutz (1967) described man as a biological, psychological and social animal, whose joy comes from these sources. He further postulated that the first point of inhibition in the biological nature of man is in his physical structure.

In counselling, and other helping professions, the physical posture exhibited by the client is also a significant cue to the helper as to the energy-level, at which the client operates, this according to Carkhuff (1973) is one of the non-verbal communica-

tions the helper takes into account while attending physically and psychologically to the client.

Social and recreational factors are also being recognized as contributing to the emotional and healthy development of the individual. Acute disturbance may be prevented by helping foreign students deal with situational stresses, lack of social contact, poor physical health and inadequate recreational facilities.

#### Literature Review:

The problems facing foreign students while they study in the United States are being studied from time to time.

Spaulding and Flack (1976) however noted that the educational and financial adjustments of the students seem to dominate such studies, while the health care needs of these students have received less attention in research studies. The social problems of the foreign students also seem to have received more attention in comparison to the recreational problems or social recreational problems of the students which appear very limited in research studies. Some of the studies on social problems of foreign students include those of Hagey 1968; Zain (1965 and Klein, Alexander, Tseng et al. 1971.

Apart from the limited studies on the health care needs of foreign students, studies on the health care needs of the dependants of those residing with them in the U.S. seem to have received even less attention. Kripke (1971) in his comparison of health services offered to American students with those of foreign students, found that the dependants of foreign students were less likely to use dental and child care services as expenses was a primary deterrent to medical care. General dissatisfaction with their health care was another concern expressed by the students. Thompson and Fung (1978) as part of their study on foreign students at Pennsylvania State University gave a questionnaire to 95 international students dependants concerning their health related experiences in the U.S. They found among other things that the University health care services specifically designed for dependants of international students were inadequate or non-existent.

#### Study Objectives:

There seem to be the indication that, the health care needs, and the social recreational needs of the students need to be given more attention. Furthermore, it appears that there are more studies on the problems of students from other countries in the U.S. while the studies on African students and the West African

students in particular appear comparatively limited. In view of these observations, the main purpose of the study, is thus to highlight the needs of the students under study in the problem areas of health and physical development and social recreational activities, with the hope that from such knowledge, meaningful counselling and help may be rendered. If the health care facilities are not adequately utilized by the students as revealed in the literature review, knowledge of their needs in the area of health and physical development and social recreational activities may give the preliminary informations on the students, and through counselling and prompt other interventions, related problems may be prevented.

Methodology:

Subjects: The subjects in the study were two hundred and six West African students attending institutions of Higher Learning in a metropolitan city in America. The subjects were from the following countries:- Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra-Leone.

Procedure: The Mooney Problem Checklist (1950) was administered in anonymity to three hundred West African Subjects who had been selected by stratified random sampling. The factors taken into consideration to ensure a representative sample were: the nature of school attended, country of origin, academic classification and sex. The data in this study are based on the responses from (206) approximately sixty-nine percent of the subject.

Instrument: The college form of the checklist used in this study comprised eleven problem areas which are:

- Health and Physical development (HPD)
- Finance, living conditions and employment (FLE)
- Social and recreational activities (SRA)
- Social Psychological relations (SPR)
- Personal Psychological relations (PPR)
- Courtship, sex and marriage (CSM)
- Home and Family (HF)
- Morals and Religion (MR)
- Adjustment to school work (ASW)

Future vocational and educational adjustment (FVE)

Curriculum and teaching procedure (CIP)

There were 330 items in the eleven problem areas 30 items in each problem area. Thus, sixty items were taken into consideration in the analysis of the health and physical development and the social recreational activities of the subject, which appear to be the neglected problem areas of study and the main focus of this article.

Data Analysis: The problems or items of "some" concern and of "most" concern were derived by following Mooney's suggestions.

Thus, the problems identified by each subject, in the first instance, in each problem area constitute the problems of "some" concern. The problems of "some" concern were then evaluated; in the second instance to reveal problems of "most" concern.

The number of items marked (the score) in each problem area is assumed to reveal the problem "count" of the student in the particular problem area. The means of the items identified to be of "some" or "most" concern in each problem area was deduced by dividing the total number of items identified by the respondents, by the number of subjects responding to that particular problem area, thus making it possible to deduce problem areas with greater concentration of problems marked and those with the lesser concentration of problems. It is assumed that the student with **more problem** count or score experiences more problem while the area with greater concentration of problems is assumed to be of more concern compared to the problem area with lesser concentration of problems. Additional informations were analyzed from the open-ended questions of the checklist relating to the health and physical development and the social recreational activities of the subject.

#### Findings:

The data in Table 1 reveal the responses of the West African student subjects' to the checklist in the problem areas under consideration, the health and physical development and the social recreational activities. The data further reveal that approximately seventy-five percent (155) of the West African subjects responded to the problem area health and physical development as of "some" concern to them and the problem mean was found to be 2.5. Approximately forty-five (92) of the respondents identified the problem health and physical development to be of "most" concern to them, the problem mean was 1.74.

In the problem area social and recreational activities, approximately ninety-six percent (197) of the respondents identified the problem area to be of "some" concern and the problem mean was 4.45. Approximately eighty-eight percent (182) of the respondents felt the problem area was of "most" concern while the problem mean was 2.87.

Table 1

Responses of Subjects to Problems Areas Health and Physical Development, Social Recreational Activities (N = 206)

	Health and Physical Development (HPD)		Social and Recreational Activities (SRA)	
	Some	Most	Some	Most
Number of Subjects Perceiving problem in problem area	155	92	197	182
Total number of Items checked by respondents in problem area	397	160	877	523
Mean of Item Checked in problem area	2.56	1.74	4.45	2.87
% of total subjects responding to problem area	72.2	44.7	95.6	88.3

The data in Table 2 reveal the frequently mentioned statements (problems) in the two problem areas of study; the physical and health development and social and recreational activities. The most frequently mentioned statements were; not enough time for reaction, wanting very much to travel, too little time to myself, feeling tired most of the time, boring weekends, too little chance to pursue a hobby, frequent headaches and needing a medical advice.

Table 2

Specific Statements Frequently mentioned in Health and Physical Development and Social Recreational Activities (N = 206)

Statement	Numbers of Subjects Checking Statement	% in Sample
Not enough time for recreation	69	33.5
Wanting very much to travel	58	28.7
Too little time to myself	53	25.7
Not getting enough exercise	42	20.4
Feeling tired most of the time	22	10.8
Boring weekends	18	8.7
Too little chance to pursue a hobby	17	8.3
Frequent headaches	16	7.8
Needing medical advice	15	7.3

In the open-ended section of the checklist, fourteen subjects had summarized their main problems in the problem area Social and Recreational Activities. The main concerns of the students in this problem area include their recognition, of the needs for social recreational activities. They also pointed out that the thoughts of how to pay their fees on time (financial problems) and maintaining academic excellence (academic concern) often limit the extent of their participation in social or recreational activities.

In the problem area health and physical development, the concerns expressed in the open-ended section of the checklist include the fear of high hospital bills in case of poor or ill-health, the fear of disruption of classes when ill and the concern that the health insurance available to them in their institutions do not cover their spouses and children. Four subjects also summarized their chief problems in the problem area health and physical development expressing their concern over problems such as

sleeplessness, inability to concentrate, frequent headaches, and the need for medical advice.

Discussions:

The data in table 1 seem to suggest that the problem areas health and physical development and social recreational activities are equally of concern to the foreign students just as the problem areas, finance, educational problems that usually receive the attention of researchers. Alao, (1979) found the problem area social and recreational activities to be among the top three problem areas, with greater concentration of problems marked by West African students as of "most" concern, in the eleven problem areas identified by Mooney.

Apart from the problem area finance, living conditions and employment, social and recreational activities was found to be of more concern to them, than the other nine problem areas in the checklist.

In the same study, the other problem areas, under consideration, health and physical development in comparison to other problem areas appear to be low in hierarchy of concern but was considered to be important than social psychological relations and the problem area, home and family.

Possible explanation for greater responses to the problem area, social and Recreational Activities compared to the Health and Physical development may be the alien environment in which the subject are studying. The frequently mentioned statements of concern seem to suggest that the students experience loneliness, bore-dome, mild health problems, and lack of time to engage in recreational activities. The nature of problems expressed here, it could be assumed depend to some extent on the items included in each problem area.

Severe health problems were not expressed by the subjects in the open-ended questions either. Nevertheless, the urge to maintain good physical health was apparent in the responses of the subjects. Foreign students with emotional problems have some times been observed to be isolated in social contact with fellow nationals and Americans. Perhaps more active participation in social and recreational activities by the students, may be helpful in preventing other related problems in the future. It is also being assumed that the needs in these two problem areas under consideration, if given attention, may prevent other related problems.



There are some demands on and expectations from these students by their sponsors, parents and other agencies financing them abroad, mainly, that the students achieve their main goal which is academic success. To facilitate the academic success, of the foreign students, attention may need to be directed to the health and physical development and the social recreational activities of the students as well. It is becoming increasingly clear that the importance of body functioning to emotional state cannot be ignored. It is also accepted that body organisation, formation and physiology can influence other feelings, therefore sustaining their good physical health coupled with meeting their social and recreational needs, may contribute in a positive direction towards the realization of the over-all objectives of the students.

Summary:

The problems experienced by foreign students are many and varied. Though they vary in importance, no problem area may be totally ignored as the problems are sometimes interwoven, one relating to another. Exploring any problem area that may be of concern to the student has its own contribution to the optimum growth adjustment of the student. Effective counselling as the problems emerge, may be helpful in preventing further development of the problem or other related problems.

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