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Games, Sports, and Moral Formation: Contesting Assumptions of Efficacy among Youth in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region

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Abstract

This study assessed the efficacy of games and sports in inculcating moral values among the youth in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region. The study was guided by Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory (1958), a cognitive-moral-reasoning framework. It targeted youth and clergy from the six synods of the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region. The study employed a descriptive survey design, using stratified random sampling to select participants. Data were collected via youth questionnaires and clergy interviews, analysed using SPSS Version 27, and presented through descriptions, tables, and pie charts. Findings revealed that several churches (59%) held games and sports in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region; a good number did not hold the programmes. The number of youth who did not participate in games and sports in their churches was more than those who participated. Additionally, a lack of variety in games and sports activities, poor organisation, and limited facilities were why some youth members failed to participate in games and sports activities in their churches. The findings and recommendations of this study are useful to the MCK Meru Region as they point to what needs to be adjusted to effectively inculcate moral values among the youth.

Key words: Efficacy, games and sports, moral decadence, synod, youth ministry.



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INTRODUCTION

Indecency is no longer appalling but has been accepted as normal, hence the high rate of moral decadence in America, as confirmed by Megan and Nicole (2022). As stated by Brown (2008), in the United Kingdom, there is evidence of an unprecedented and unsettling decline in moral values. He further asserts that social values have changed rapidly, such that things that caused outrage a generation ago are now celebrated.

The above situation is not unique to America and Britain because it is reflected in Asia. According to Reazul and Maffazzo (2018), it is estimated that about 30 per cent of the total population in Bangladesh is young people. Unfortunately, a significant percentage of them are involved in immorality. The two argue that the scenario is getting worse daily and, as such, needs to be given attention. Ethics have been compromised in China, leading to deterioration and disorderliness in society (Di Shang, 2016). Such a state causes worry in society.

In East Africa, the story is not any different. Nsaba (2019) argues that declining moral standards among the youth in Uganda are becoming a challenge in the 21st Century and thus a topic of discussion. On the other hand, Werunga and Simiyu (2021) posit that moral values such as honesty, mutual respect, civility and social responsibility are increasingly lacking among the youth in Kenya. This makes it difficult for individuals to live good lives and become productive contributors to the welfare of society. This argument is supported by Wamalwa (2016), who claims there is an outcry concerning the country's declining morals among young people. Moral decadence has set its roots all over Kenya, such that a day hardly passes without reports of drug abuse, violence, sexual abuse, killings, robbery, among other cases. Violent cases perpetrated by youth have been on the rise. According to the Institute of Economic Affairs Youth Compendium (2011), an estimated sixty per cent of the crimes reported to the Kenya Police Service are perpetrated by the youth.

In Meru County, research carried out by UNICEF (2008) revealed that many young people in the country drop out of school to be involved in cheap labour. This information is supported by research by Mutuma (2010), which confirms that in the Igembe District of Meru County, young boys run away from school to be employed as casual labourers in miraa plantations. The same young boys abuse alcohol and drugs. Ihuoma

(1995) feels that moral decadence is a social problem affecting many nations, and every community should put mechanisms in place to check its growth. Reazul and Maffazzo (2018) share Ihuoma's feelings as they argue that the issues of moral decadence among the youth should arouse concern in everyone.

The Methodist Church in Kenya derives from the life and teachings of John Wesley. Methodist churches focus on sanctification and the transforming effects of faith on the character of a Christian. They emphasise good moral values such as charity and support for the poor, needy, and the afflicted. These ideals are collectively known as the social Gospel and are practised by establishing hospitals, orphanages and schools. In schools, chaplaincy services focus on imparting knowledge and moral values to the youth for responsible living. This is true of the Methodist Church everywhere, Meru included.

The researcher is concerned that despite the evidence of Church programs meant to inculcate moral values among the youth, moral decadence has evidently remained a pertinent issue. The study thus concentrated on the efficacy of games and sports in inculcating moral values among the youth in the MCK, Meru region.

As a key pillar in the growth of any church, Youth Ministry develops and executes strategic programmes to instil moral values among the youth. Given this, the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region, has implemented strategies to mould the youth into holistic individuals. Despite these strategies, there was insufficient current analysis on the efficacy of different church programmes within the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region, in inculcating moral values among the youth. Consequently, there was no evidence that the programmes by the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region, successfully served the purpose they were intended to. Thus, there was a need to assess the efficacy of the strategies used by the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region, in inculcating moral values among the youth. Therefore, this study investigated the efficacy of games and sports in instilling moral values among the MCK, Meru Region young people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A close philosophical relationship exists between sports and Christian beliefs, which started in the middle of the 19th Century and advanced increasingly in the latter part of the second half of the 19th Century (Fasan et al., 2022).

Building on this historical connection, there has been increasing concern about youth antisocial behaviour and its impact on communities (Brown, 2013). Games and sports in the church setting are organised to promote social interactions and interrelationships, making people relate better. As the young people interact through games and sports, they get inspired to be more active and committed in the church (Carpenter, 2001).

According to Jarman (2022), the church should have games and sports activities to attract more participants who would be nurtured and eventually retained. This is possible since games and sports offer the youth opportunities to develop positive strengths and qualities (Massimiliano, 2020).

According to Angela (2023), youth sport programmes can be used to promote socialisation skills. Previous research has shown that sport and physical activity can reduce antisocial behaviour (Barnes, 2010). However, there was limited evidence to determine the extent to which sport and physical activity solely achieve this change. Because of the large number of young people participating in organised sports programs and the potential of these programs to positively and negatively impact youth development, youth sport advocates have strongly encouraged sponsoring organisations to acquire education and training for Youth sport volunteers and parents (Barnes, 2010). This study explored the experiences of young people in the games and sports programmes and the extent to which the programmes influenced the youth towards positive moral behaviour.

Young people start by interacting with their peers before attempting to change the attitudes and behaviours of the larger community. Youth's moral reasoning in sports is significantly influenced by the moral atmosphere of the sport as well as the focus on team performance as opposed to individual mastery, which determines how people should behave (Stanger, 2018). Calmeiro (2015) argues that young people who participate in team sports manifest moral thinking at higher levels than those who compete in solitary sports. Jenkins and Michael (2019) found that using athletics to minister to adolescents and young adults in the Normandie Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church in California effectively reaches religiously affiliated and non-religious youth and young adults. The study sought to determine whether the youth and young adults participating in these games are

exposed to a spiritual environment during games.

According to Muthomi et al. (2023), people develop morally through sports through imitation and initiation. Committing to sports as a moral practice means playing the sport as it should be, rather than in immoral ways. Those who play well display such virtues as responsibility, forgiveness, fairness, respect for people and the rules, and cooperation. Therapeutic programs that include sports have been said to be effective and beneficial to character building (Lev, 2019). They transmit moral ideals through cognitive and affective elements that support the youth' social relationships. Wheaton et al. (2017) assert that the most fruitful sports programmes use sport to draw young people to the project first before engaging them in formal teachings in personal development and social skills. From this, one can deduce that using sports to engage young people can be successful and can eventually result in the development of values and important life skills. However, this study was important since this argument had not been proven.

Hawkins and Weis (2017) note that programmes that apply preventative measures allow young people to remain busy and socialise outside of school or the workplace. Thomas (2018) argues that due to increased growth in adolescent problem behaviour, there is a need for programs such as sports which promote positive youth development. Most juvenile intervention programmes aim to lessen boredom and opportunity-led delinquency by relying on the belief that "the devil makes work for idle hands", as argued by Foss (2010). Such programmes educate young people who want to change their antisocial behaviour, take on greater communal duties, and raise their aspirations and self-worth.

According to Foss (2010), including athletics as a component of a comprehensive intervention strategy increases its impact. As such, sports alone can neither prevent nor lessen moral decadence. The value of the sports programmes is judged based on the values the participants uphold after the games. Games and sports should therefore be used objectively, together with other programmes such as evangelism, to make it impactful. This is because, as Andrews (2024) argues, sports can easily become an idol that demands a person's full attention and devotion. Andrews argues that as a youth pastor, he was often frustrated and disappointed to

observe young people give so much attention to sports and little or no attention to their spiritual life.

Fasan et al. (2022) advise that church games and sports require intentional and objective planning to balance the physical, moral, and spiritual benefits. They further warn that if the idea of balancing is ignored, the last two benefits will overshadow the first. Since it was unclear whether the church could keep the suggested balance, this study was necessary to fill in the gaps.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the theory of moral development established by a Christian psychologist named Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987). Kohlberg's perspective is quite similar to Piaget's in that Kohlberg stresses the structures of cognitive reasoning concerning moral judgment (Robert, 2008). Kohlberg is more concerned with structures or forms of the reasoning process that lead a person to decide on certain solutions to moral dilemmas. For him, moral reasoning is the primary and determinative factor of moral education (Robert, 2008). The theory also focuses on the thinking process when one decides whether behaviour is right or wrong.

Kohlberg's concern is not with whether an action is moral or immoral but with the level of reasoning at which one can justify or explain moral decisions (Perry, 1994). He

used moral dilemmas to enhance moral reasoning in a given moral predicament. The theoretical emphasis is on moral reasoning. Kohlberg argued that people learn moral values through active reasoning and that moral development follows a series of stages. The framework of this theory consists of six stages organised into three general levels of moral development: pre-conventional morality, conventional morality, and post-conventional morality (Perry, 1994; Robert, 2008).

The church's recognition of the youth' basis of moral decisions helps put in place relevant strategies to enhance the acquisition of moral values among them. As a respectable authority in society, the church is therefore well placed to impact the youth morally. Further, the ultimate goal of the strategies used by the church in inculcating moral values should be to enable progressive moral development in individual youth. This would ensure that one attains the autonomy stage characterised by universal ethical principles as seen in the post-conventional level of moral development. Such a person understands the meaning of right behaviour and chooses to act right, not because they fear punishment or expect external rewards or because they want approval of authorities, but because they are convinced selflessly that it is the right thing to do. This will promote responsible adulthood and order in society. Table 1 shows a summary of Kohlberg's moral development model.

Table 1: Kohlberg's Moral Development Model

Preconventional Level	Stage 1 (Ages 6-8)	Punishment and obedience orientation (Will I get caught? Will I get punished?)
	Stage 2 (Ages 8-10)	Instrumental relativist orientation. (What is in it for me?)
Conventional Level	Stage 3 (Ages 10-12)	Interpersonal, concordance orientation. (What do others expect of me? How can I please adults as the nice girl and the good boy?)
	Stage 4 (Ages 12-15)	Law and order orientation. (What does the law say? What is my duty?)
Post-conventional level	Stage 5 (Ages 15+)	Social contract and consensus orientation. (What is the group's agreement and my personal obligation in this matter?)
	Stage 6	Universal ethical principles orientation. (What is my principle that has universal significance?)

Source:(Robert, 2008)

METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive survey research design to investigate the efficacy of the strategies used by the MCK Meru Region in inculcating moral values among the youth. It was conducted using qualitative and in-depth interviews to examine individual people's views on the efficacy of the strategies used by the MCK Meru Region in inculcating moral values among the youth.

The study was conducted in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region. This geographical area covers Six Synods within the administrative structure of the Methodist Church in Kenya. The target population for this study was the youth and the clergy in the six Synods of the MCK, Meru Region. A total of 8326 youth members in the six synods were targeted. On the other

hand, the targeted clergy members were 251 from all six synods. A representative sample of 369 youth and 151 clergy was attained from the targeted population through stratified random sampling.

The study adopted questionnaires as the main tool of data collection. An interview schedule was also conducted with the clergy. Data was analysed using version 27 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Whether the Churches Hold Games and Sports for the Youth

Respondents were required to indicate whether their churches held games and sports for the youth. The results are indicated in Figure 1.

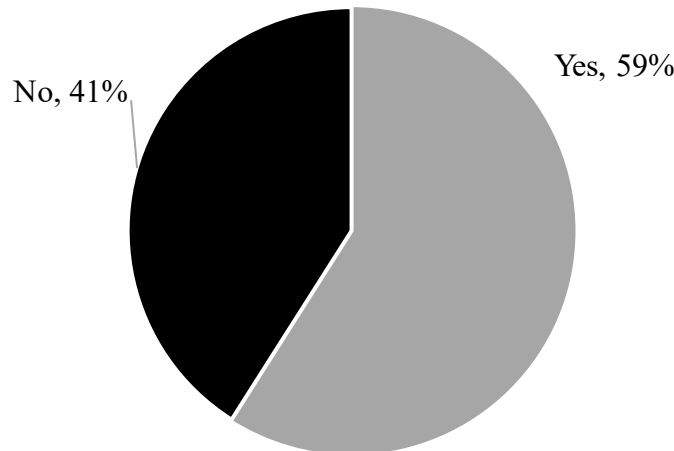


Figure 1. Churches holding games and sports.

When asked if their churches held games and sports for the youth (Figure 1), 59 per cent of the respondents confirmed that their churches held the programs, while 41 per cent stated that their churches did not hold games and sports for the youth. Some of the interviewed members of the clergy confirmed that their churches held games and sports in their synods, as seen in the words of Kelvin (2025), who stated;

Yes, our churches organise games and sports activities for the young people. The majority of the youth value sports, so it is a good programme to involve them in. Games and sports give the youth

leaders and pastors a good opportunity to interact with the young people, understand, and also raise out pertinent issues that affect them.

Regarding the same question, Martin, a clergy member, affirmed that their churches did not hold games and sports for the young people. He said;

We are not there yet. We are aware that in some churches, this programme is taken seriously, but for us, we have yet to start. Perhaps we need to come up with a committee to help brainstorm on

the same. I will propose the idea to my seniors, hopefully very soon.

Evidently, some churches in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region, held games and sports activities for their young people, but others did not. Also, some clergy members from the churches that did not hold games and sports appeared inspired by the idea of games and sports as a programme for the young people in their churches. This is as evidenced by the words of Martin, one of the clergy members in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region.

The idea of having games and sports activities as one of the programmes in the youth ministry is noble because it helps diversify the youth programmes, thus breaking monotony. It also helps cater to different interests and gifts among the youth. Young people get bored fast, and to avoid losing them to worldliness, they should be engaged in interesting activities. Fasan et al. (2022) clarify that games and sports activities in church began

way back in the middle of the nineteenth Century and gained popularity in the latter part of the second half of the same Century. From a Christian perspective, games and sports programmes balance spirituality and play (Julianna, 2020). Julianna asserts that in order to achieve a healthy youth ministry. The youth pastors, leaders and church management ought to be very thoughtful and strategise in a manner that helps the youth to live by the truths of God's Word without them feeling like it is an ancient thing they are practising. Therefore, the churches in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region, that have embraced the idea of games and sports as one of the programmes for their youth have made a commendable choice.

Whether Youth Participate in Games and Sports Organised by the Church

Respondents were asked whether they participate in games and sports. The results are indicated in Figure 2.

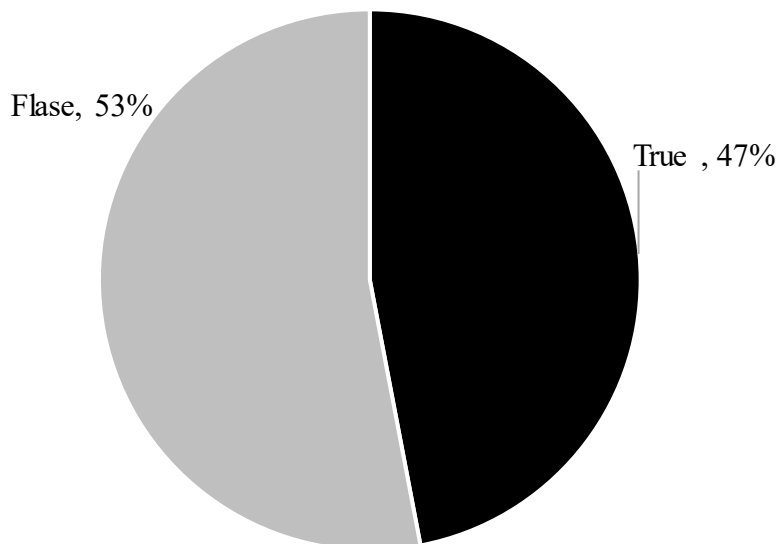


Figure 2. Participation in games and sports organised by the church.

The study further required the youth to indicate whether they participated in organised games and sports in their churches. As indicated in Figure 2, 159 (47%) of the youth confirmed that they participated in games and sports, while 176 (53%) indicated that they did not participate in games and sports in their churches. When

they were asked the same question, Regina, a member of the clergy, stated that;

A number of young people attend church-based games and sports, which seem to attract young people to church.

However, there are other young people who, although they are members of the youth group, do not take part in the youth games and sports. We assume that it's a matter of their attitude towards sports activities.

These results provide a rather peculiar situation in the sense that although a larger percentage of the youth confirmed that their churches held games and sports for them, the number of those who admitted that they participated in the said games and sports was fewer. From the study findings, it was clear that although the church may plan programmes for the youth, the youth may not always embrace the planned programmes as expected.

Reasons for not participating in Games and Sports

In addition to whether the youth participated in games and sports in their churches, the study required those who did not participate to give their reasons. The reasons were: lack of variety in games and activities, poorly organised sports activities and lack of facilities such as space and equipment for games and sports. Additionally, some churches lacked enough space to support basic games and sports. The members of the clergy who were interviewed on why some youth do not participate in games and sports in church associated the scenario with poor organisation of the programmes, lack of variety and young people being discouraged by their parents from participating in the games and sports programmes.

The current study noted the constriction of space, particularly in the urban churches, as a factor that made most of the young people miss out on sports and games. In the same vein, Konadu (2024) argues that young people may not take games and sports in church seriously because it appears that the church leadership is not enthusiastic in supporting the programmes, as seen in the fact that essential equipment often lacks, putting off the youth. Also, Fasan and Setonji (2023) state that the lack of variety of games and sports encourages boredom, thus putting off most young people. Additionally, they found out that the lapses witnessed in games and sports organised by the church were due to limited resources and poor support from the church leadership.

In addition, Ibrahimova (2023) noted that commendable activities only occurred once a year in churches where games were embraced. Karemu et al. (2024) assert that

games like soccer, a common sport for young people, would be useful in bringing young people together to learn. However, as Mudayat (2025) observes, the lack of adequate and good-quality balls makes it difficult for the young people to effectively benefit from such activities. Some games and sports require necessary protective equipment to enable the youth to minimise the chances of being injured when engaging in the activity.

Mudayat (2025) noted that not all the youth could participate in games and sports. This was because taking part required specific skills and zeal, which most youth lacked. Notably, most youth were into various sports to pass the time and have a good time, with only a handful showing interest in learning more about the game's rules. According to Mulili (2025), inconsistent training timelines, poor implementation plans, and intimidation of untalented youth by the talented ones have made it difficult for the church-organised games to directly benefit most of the youth; hence, some young people do not find the need to take part in the programmes. In comparison, Muteti (2024) complained that inadequate sports amenities to inspire the youth to engage in sports were common, especially in religious institutions. One major notable concern about games and sports was the lack of commitment, as noted through a series of studies such as Fasan et al. (2023), Karemu et al. (2024), and Mudayat (2025). These studies discovered that the success of the programmes was minimal, partly due to low support from the church leadership, lack of skills by the youth to engage in the available sport, and general lack of interest by the youth in games and sports.

According to Yaumuhak (2024), the sports and games agenda among most youth was ineffective and not given a priority. Angela (2023) avers that there was a lack of the leaders' effort to coordinate different youth groups and set different training and competition timelines, demotivating most of them from participating. Barnes (2010) indicated that underfunding in the youth ministry made it hard for the youth to coordinate games and sports in churches. A lack of serious focus on youth ministry can discourage people from committing to church youth programmes.

In many churches, the youth worker is stereotyped as a social worker whose primary task is to help the young people expend all their energy with constructive activities (Makewa, 2008). In most cases, there is a budget for the children and adults' departments, but none

for the youth (Makewa, 2008). For the youth worker to be able to come up with fun programs that capture the youth's attention and compete with television shows that professionals produce at a cost of a million dollars, they must be ready to spend a lot of money. Makewa (2008) recommends that the churches use at least one quarter of their budget on youth ministry. The church should also be willing to use the best personnel and acquire sufficient resources.

Chong-ho and Tameifuna (2014) argue that there is a general lack of interesting and inspirational youth programs in the mainline churches. These challenges make the youth non-receptive to church teachings and guidance, and sometimes cause the youth to move to other churches (Njoroge, 2019). These arguments call for churches to focus more on games and sports programmes in the youth ministry because, as Fasan and Sentoji (2022) found out, the church leadership doesn't give balanced support to all groups in the church. As a result, it is challenging to track the development and advancement of the individuals involved. Additionally, young people are likely to detest youth programmes, making it difficult for the church to get them back later.

For the churches that already have games and sports programmes for the youth but are experiencing low participation due to the challenges discussed above, it is paramount to improve the planning and attention they give to these activities. Failing to plan well for such a programme in the youth ministry gives the impression that the programme is not as important, which will attract very few committed participants, if any. It is biblical for a Christian to master the essence of giving such

programmes their due attention for maximum benefits. Proverbs 21:5 states, "*The plans of the diligent lead to profit.*" That means that proper planning is important for something to yield good results, as this is one way to avoid failure. In Luke 14:28-30 Jesus said;

For which of you intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it, lest, after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him

The implication of Jesus' words in the above context is that churches with games and sports programmes for the youth should give the programmes their best support to reflect good planning for the church. Those churches that wish to include games and sports in their youth ministry should take time to plan to ensure that the programmes are successful and that they serve the intended purpose. Further, those churches that have no games and sports programmes for their youth yet, but they would want to start the programmes, can benchmark with the churches where the programmes have succeeded, because Proverbs 15:22 teaches that with wise counsel, plans are bound to succeed.

The extent to which Games and Sports were Effective in inculcating moral values

The respondents were asked to state the extent to which games and sports in their churches promoted the acquisition of various moral values. The responses are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Extent to which Games and Sports Promote Moral Values

N=335	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Peace		
Not at all	29	9
Not sure	27	8
To a large extent	110	33
To a very large extent	169	50
Total	335	100
Respect		
Not at all	16	5
Not sure	20	6
To a large extent	147	44
To a very large extent	152	45
Total	335	100
Obedience		
Not at all	70	21
Not sure	57	17
To a large extent	42	13
To a very large extent	166	49
Total	335	100
Honesty /Truthfulness		
Not at all	37	11
Not sure	30	9
To a large extent	100	30
To a very large extent	168	50
Total	335	100
Love		
Not at all	33	10
Not sure	43	13
To a large extent	110	33
To a very large extent	149	44
Total	335	100
Cooperation		
Not at all	38	11
Not sure	92	27
To a large extent	109	33
To a very large extent	96	29
Total	335	100
Sexual Purity		
Not at all	45	13
Not sure	89	27
To a large extent	100	30
To a very large extent	102	30
Total	335	100

The Extent to Which Games and Sports Were Effective in Inculcating the Value of Peace

According to Table 2, the study findings revealed that 169 (50%) respondents indicated that games and sports effectively inculcate the value of peace among the youth. Those who indicated that games and sports were effective to a large extent were 110 (33%), while those who were not sure were 27 (8%). Finally, 29 (9%) stated that games and sports were ineffective in inculcating the value of peace among the youth.

When the members of the clergy were asked whether games and sports were effective in inculcating the value of peace, Jotham responded as follows;

Yes, games and sports in our churches are an effective way to inculcate peace among the young people. The participants are taught harmony amongst themselves and to value it within themselves. Although some games involve competitions, our youth fully understand that they must uphold peace as they play. This value is enhanced by other virtues such as justice and godly love. Those who might display disharmony or threaten peaceful coexistence are handled separately and as individuals. It is important to note that even on the days our young people are interacting in games and sports, other teaching activities are integrated into the programme. That is the time they learn about such values as peace.

From the study findings, it was evident that games and sports effectively inculcate the value of peace. Almost all games entail playing against a team, whether in friendly or competitive terms. Thus, for successful games, peaceful coexistence is paramount. Olayinka (2016) argues that religion alone has not been able to overcome conflicts in communities; it has to be combined with activities like games and sports, which have been found to work in some communities in Nigeria. Peace is an essential value in the community and should be sought after by all. Romans 12:17-18 states, “*Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live peacefully with all men*” These Bible verses encourage Christians to live peacefully with all people at all times.

The message is particularly important because young people are likely to offend one another during games. Young people who can embrace peace through games and sports would also uphold it in their fellowships, families, schools and society. Peaceful coexistence promotes development and progress.

The Extent to Which Games and Sports Were Effective in Inculcating the Value of Respect

In regard to the value of respect, 152 (45%) respondents felt that games and sports were effective to a very large extent. The number of respondents who felt that games and sports were effective to a large extent was 147 (44%), and those who were not sure were 20 (6%). The number of respondents who stated that games and sports were not effective at all in inculcating the value of respect was 16 (5%).

The members interviewed about the value of respect games and sports programmes that effectively inculcate the value of peace among young people. Moses said;

Yes, games and sports activities are effective in promoting respect among young people. Almost all games are played according to well-stipulated rules, one of which is respect for the other members, even if they are opponents. The participants are clear about the respectful language, attitudes, and actions expected of them as members of specific games. They are also aware of the consequences of failing to respect others and conduct themselves in respectable ways.

It was therefore clear from the study findings that games and sports were a useful method to inculcate the value of respect among the young people in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region. Perna (2025) views respect as the understanding that something or someone is important and should be treated appropriately. Participating in games and sports requires teamwork, and for one to fit in a team, respect is paramount since one has to regard other participants and their opinions. Further, games and sports are regulated through rules which the participants must observe.

The rules focus on embracing fairness in the games, upholding integrity, exercising self-control and accepting

the results of a game graciously. 2Timothy 2:5 states that an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. Kessel (2019) asserts that all parties participating in sports must show respect. Like many other values, young people would catch the value of respect better if it were modelled by the authorities. This is supported by Perna (2025), who explains that in modern days, young people will show respect if they are accorded the same. This should be practised in games, sports, and other sectors of society since it is easier to forget what one is told than what one observes.

Young people who participate in games and sports have a good chance to learn about the requirement for respect, and they would embrace it not only during sports activities but also in church, thus growing the youth ministry. They also display this in their homes and in the larger society. Such young people develop other important life values such as empathy and trust. They also make respectable decisions which help to improve life. Respect also begets trust and promotes understanding among people. This is a requirement in society today, where incidents of lack of integrity have eroded trust. Respectable and respectful youth in the church would boost growth in youth ministry and the whole church. They would also be good role models to the other young people in the society, and this would improve the general moral uprightness in the society.

The Extent to Which Games and Sports were Effective in Inculcating the Value of Obedience

Further, the respondents were asked to rate the extent to which games and sports effectively inculcate the value of obedience. Those who rated the programmes as effective to a large extent were 166 (49%), and those who felt that the programmes were effective to a large extent were 42 (13%). The number of respondents who indicated they were unsure was 57 (17%). Finally, the number of respondents who stated that games and sports were ineffective in inculcating the value of obedience was 70 (21%).

The interviewed members of the clergy confirmed that games and sports for the young people in the church effectively inculcate the value of obedience. On this, Charles said;

For those young people who participate in the games and sports organised by the church, I can confidently say that

they acquire the value of obedience. How can one be interested in sports and ignore the value of obedience? It is not possible. All games are played according to specific rules, which a participant must learn first. Then, as they play, they continue to perfect the value through application.

From the responses above, it was clear that games and sports effectively inculcate the value of obedience. Eric and Levy (2013) describe obedience as a form of conformity whereby a person adheres to instructions given by someone else or others. Jitendra and Brijesh (2017) argue that games and sports need not only a physically fit participant but also one who can understand and obey the guiding rules. Obedience should be based on an understanding that the instructions are worth following, that the person (s) giving the instructions have the right to do so, and that they are giving the instructions with a good motive. Otherwise, young people ought to be critical so they do not blindly obey instructions. Training for any game happens through the provision of a structure in which the participants are expected to adhere to particular rules.

This obedience is also extended to the authorities such as the coaches, referees and other authorities coordinating the sports (Kumar, 2023). Training oneself to obey may not be easy as it calls for self-discipline, humility and a focus on the benefits. Hebrews 12:11 reads, “*No discipline seems pleasant at the moment, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*” The Bible verse implies that adhering to rules and regulations may not be a smooth experience, as other forces may contradict the discipline. However, when one persists and acquires the value, there are many benefits connected to it.

Throughout history, obedience has been esteemed as a virtuous behaviour that serves as a noble foundation for order in society. (Eric & Levi, 2013). Thus, a requirement to obey specific rules in games and sports enhances order. Therefore, games and sports activities for young people in the church are a good opportunity for them to be taught and trained in obedience, which eventually leads them to lead orderly lives. Young people who are trained in obedience through games and sports programmes would display the same in the youth

ministry in their churches, leading to moral growth.

Obedience is a requirement in all aspects of life, ranging from families, school, workplace, and relationships. It strengthens relationships because people obey people whom they trust. Young people who can obey instructions are also likely to enjoy safety, especially when they do things the way they are supposed to be done or avoid what they are cautioned against. Also, obedience boosts other values such as humility and respect. People who obey have often trained themselves to be humble and to respect other people, including the authorities in their lives. This is crucial, especially for young people in church, as they would be able to listen to their leaders and pastors and therefore learn and grow to become responsible adults in all aspects of life.

The Extent to Which Games and Sports Were Effective in Inculcating the Value of Honesty

Regarding the value of honesty or truthfulness, 168 (50%) respondents stated that games and sports were effective to a very large extent in inculcating the value of honesty. Those who stated that games and sports were effective to a large extent were 100 (30%). 30 (9%) respondents were not sure about the effectiveness of the games and sports in inculcating the value of honesty among the youth. Lastly, the respondents who stated that games and sports were not at all effective in inculcating the value of honesty among the youth were 37 (11%).

The study further required the members of the clergy to rate the effectiveness of games and sports in inculcating the value of honesty. Emily responded as follows;

It is true that games and sports help to develop the value of honesty among our young people. This is one of the values participants are inducted in so as to ensure fairness in games. Cases of dishonesty get penalised and, in some cases, a person can be suspended from the game either temporarily or permanently depending on the level of dishonest. Most of the youth who love sports would fear such severe punishments.

From both the questionnaire and the interview schedule, it was clear that games and sports activities in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region, were

effective in inculcating the value of honesty. Honesty refers to the characteristic of being genuine, candid and open. It is derived from the Latin word “*honestitas*”, which means the ability to always work with the truth as a standard (Acciona, 2024). It is an important character trait, especially in today's world, where deceit and shortcuts are seen to be more rewarding. Games and sports allow young people to acquire honesty as they learn and practice the rules that guide each game, which is an important factor for anyone interested in games and sports. Takashi and Sasaki (2016) argue that the best part of rules and regulations in games and sports is their ability to enhance fair play, thus taking care of the interests of all people involved, as the future of any game lies in fairness.

The Holy Bible stipulates the value of honesty in various scriptures. For example, Psalm 101:6-7 reads, “*My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; He who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence.*” These Bible verses clarify the psalmist's choice to identify with trustworthy people. Here, those who practice deceit are alienated. This emphasises the importance of honesty and an honest environment. This implies that honest people are more appealing than dishonest ones. This is applicable to the young people in the church. A youth ministry in which young people value honesty would be an authentic one for holistic growth.

Proverbs 12:22 further brings out the value of honesty by stating that, “*Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight*” The meaning here is that God detests people who lie. Lying is a bad thing before God, but God is happy with people who are honest. Being an honest person strengthens a person's relationship with God. Likewise, 2Corinthians 4:2 reads, “*But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*” The verse brings out the commitment of Apostle Paul and his companions to a ministry that is sincere and honest, free of deceitfulness. It also denotes deceitfulness as something shameful to be involved in.

This is relevant for young people today who are involved in various aspects of duty and services in the

church, school and society. Learning to do things in an honest way is desirable and should be upheld. In Acts 5:1-10 is a story of a couple named Ananias and Saphira who lied to the Apostles about the amount of money they got from selling their piece of land. The two were destroyed not for giving less money but for lying about the amount they were giving. Honesty in Christianity and ministry is important, and a lack of it can interfere with a person's promising future. Many people today have suffered as students, in business, as employees and even in relationships for being dishonest. A learning institution, a church and society with honest youth would be a good environment to exist in.

The Extent to Which Games and Sports Were Effective in Inculcating the Value of Love

The study also required the respondents to state the effectiveness of games and sports in inculcating the value of love. From the study findings, 149 (44%) respondents indicated that the programmes were effective to a very large extent. The number of respondents who indicated that the programmes were effective to a large extent was 110 (33%), while those who were not sure were 43 (13%). Lastly, 33 (10%) respondents stated that games and sports were not at all effective in inculcating the value of love.

The members of the clergy who were interviewed also confirmed that games and sports helped to inculcate the value of love, as indicated in Mutema's words that;

Games and sports encourage genuine interactions among our young people. When they get involved in these activities, they get to know one another better and they also love one another. This is also one of the purposes for the church organising these programmes, so that the youth can have forums to practice what we teach them in the youth ministry. We know that they catch the value because we see them support one another and form lasting friendships.

It was clear from the study findings that games and sports promoted the value of love in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region. Love entails genuine affection and care for another person, whether blood relatives or otherwise. In games and sports, there is teamwork,

mutual respect and inclusion, all of which create a sense of belonging and shared experiences for the players and also fans. Games also provide a ground that is common for people who come from different backgrounds, whether social, economic, political or racial, to connect and bond. That way, people are able to extend empathy, care, and support to one another where and when needed; thus, the playground becomes a good environment in which to promote the value of love.

When people meet to play, they are first brought together by their love for the game and the joy it gives, but as they continue to play, they also gain love for one another because sports encompass the values that it teaches people for life, love being one of them. Games and sports create a conducive environment to show love through inclusion and acceptance (Gary, 2025). One of the key principles in games and sports that shows the value of love is: "*Sport is for All. Do all you can to help everyone take part in Sport. Do all you can to enable everyone to compete on equal terms*" (*sportforHumanity.com*). This sports principle, together with its effect of inculcating love, is important for the young people in the church. It teaches teamwork and support for one another, and this would enhance youth fellowship in the church. It would therefore help build a strong youth ministry and, individually, young people who care for and support fellow human beings in life. It would therefore create a society where people feel safe and valued.

The Extent to Which Games and Sports Were Effective in Inculcating Cooperation

In regard to the value of cooperation, 96 (29%) respondents stated that games and sports were effective to a very large extent. The number of respondents who indicated that the programmes were effective to a large extent were 109 (33%) while 92 (27%) stated that they were not sure. Finally, 38 (11%) respondents felt that games and sports were not at all effective in inculcating the value of cooperation among the youth.

Reports from the interviewed members of the clergy were that games and sports helped to inculcate the value of cooperation. Riara said;

Games and sports promote cooperation because first of the young people have to come together to form a team. They also have to cooperate on many things including the rules of the involved

games in order to continue together. In some of our churches, some young people have already formed their own sport clubs and all that calls for cooperation.

It is clear that games and sports helped to inculcate the value of cooperation among the youth in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru region. Cooperation has to do with people being able to agree with one another as they work towards the achievement of shared goals. It takes place when a team of people act together towards a collective benefit for a group. As Riara (05.05:2025) correctly stated, participating in a game starts with teaming up with others from different families and regions and agreeing to the terms of the game. Further, to be able to play the games successfully, the players must cooperate towards achieving a common goal, which is often to win the games or sports. The idea of working towards achieving common goals and developing communication as members of a team helps to build social bonds. That way, the participants experience strengthened relationships, which enhances oneness (Sherlock, 2024). Sports and games are useful tools for promoting regional cooperation and integration.

Kenya, in particular, employs sports diplomacy to advance its foreign policy objectives, such as regional integration and peace (Abdi et al., 2025). Sports offer platforms for developing genuine relationships, promoting understanding, enhancing peace and other shared values among people. Young people who reap such benefits from games and sports will manifest the same in church and in youth ministry, thus creating a more authentic environment to practice Christianity. In institutions of learning, the same virtues would be spread thus reducing tension and promoting oneness.

The Bible encourages cooperation among people. For example, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 states;

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone, when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two

can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

The Bible verses above underscore the importance of cooperation, which includes more success and better results, mutual encouragement and support, comfort and companionship, especially during challenges. Verse 12 particularly emphasises the power of people teaming up together in unity of purpose, which makes it difficult to fail. Ephesians 4:3 encourages believers to strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. This reveals cooperation as valuable among believers. By embracing collaboration, young people get the chance to learn from one another, and they acquire relevant life skills. The value of cooperation would thus benefit the youth ministry, the church and the larger society as the young people would team up to pursue common goals.

The Extent to Which Games and Sports were Effective in Inculcating Sexual Purity

The study further required the respondents to rate the extent to which games and sports were effective in inculcating sexual purity. From the results, 102 (30%) respondents stated that games and sports were very effective. Further, 100 (30%) indicated that the study was practical to a large extent, while those who were not sure about the effectiveness of games and sports in inculcating sexual purity were 89 (27%). The number of respondents who felt that games and sports were ineffective was 45 (13%).

The study also inquired the opinion of the members of the clergy about the effectiveness of games and sports in inculcating the value of sexual purity. The feeling was that the church had been struggling to instil the value of moral purity among the young people. The following were the words of Emily;

I would not say that games and sports help young people acquire moral purity. In fact, I think the relationships that develop as they form teams might encourage sexual relationships among the young people. However, those who are disciplined maintain their values.

The study findings reveal that games and sports were fairly effective in inculcating sexual purity among the youth in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru region. The findings agree with the argument of Meyer and

Meyer (2012) that games and sports have a dark side as they encourage all manner of sexual immorality, including homosexuality. Also, a study carried out by Yauma (2024) revealed that there are many vices in sports that serve as barriers to instilling values in students at primary and secondary schools in Kenya. Such vices include cheating, fighting, drug and substance abuse and irresponsible sexual activities. Likewise, a survey carried out by Wamboye (2013) revealed that about 49 per cent of the young people in church, between 18 and 24 years, were involved in sexual malpractices, including masturbation and pornography. The findings by Wamboye are similar to those of Maluki (2017), who found that youth involvement in sexual immorality in the Redeemed Gospel church in the Mathare settlement area in Nairobi County was rampant.

According to Jernander (2023), sexual immorality is a problem both in the church and in society. He argues that the problem results from poor upbringing, whereby he refers to dysfunctional families as the reason for poor upbringing. Jernander further argues that some young people engage in sexual immorality because of trauma as well as poor role models. Regardless of the causes, the Bible teaches against sexual immorality. For example, 1Corinthians 6:18-20 states:

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your Spirit, which are God's

From the Bible verses, Christians are supposed to avoid all manner of sexual impurity as a way of honouring God with their bodies.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour, not in passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God. (1Thessalonians 4:3-5)

Christians should respect their own bodies as precious vessels by shunning sexual immorality. Although it might appear to be a standard practice in society, the Bible is against sexual immorality, and this is what the young people should be taught. Facilitators of games and sports programmes in the church should ensure that they set rules that encourage young people to embrace sexual purity so that youth ministry can be more meaningful.

The results revealed that games and sports programmes were a good means to inculcate various moral values among the youth in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region. Nevertheless, the level of effectiveness of the programmes varied from one moral value to another. For example, it is clear from the study findings that the programmes were more effective in inculcating the values of peace, respect, obedience and honesty than cooperation and sexual purity. The above findings are supported by Barnes (2010), who argues that a sport activity like volleyball and soccer is a good means to train the participants in various values, such as love and obedience, as well as life skills, such as empathy and assertiveness. This is true especially because all games and sports entail rules and regulations to which the participants must adhere.

Jitendra and Brijesh (2017) confirm that sports and games have, for the longest time, played a key role in individuals' physical, moral, and spiritual development. The significance of games and sports as a tool to develop moral values has been regarded worldwide by the best teachers, social reformers, and religious saints. These programmes offer opportunities for individuals to build physical strength, perseverance, endurance, and capacity, which help their bodies overcome challenges. It is against that argument that Swami Vivekananda (qtd.in Murty 5) asserts, 'you will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the Gita' Through this assertion, Vivekananda was not in any way undermining the study of the Gita but rather emphasising the importance of physical strength and vigour for proper spiritual growth and understanding. He meant that a strong body and a healthy mind, which is cultivated through physical activities like football, offer a better basis for comprehending spiritual and moral concepts that are found in the Bhagavad Gita.

Jitendra and Brijesh (2017) add that sports and games inculcate positive character traits among the participants who use them not only inside the field but also outside it.

This is true because a sports person learns by following the guidance of their seniors and other best players from all over the world and across different games. A sports person is fully aware that sports activities and events are for winning the games as well as winning the hearts of the people and the competitors. Since a medal through dishonesty is not valued, no player wants to receive such. Fair play trophies or awards in international games are offered to develop moral values, which eventually shape the personality of those involved. Hence, good sportspeople will most often display moral virtues such as teamwork, discipline, cooperation, generosity and respect for team members and opponents as well as for the rules that govern the game.

As Jitendra et al. (2025) assert, games and sports are impactful in instilling positive social interactions among young people. He clarifies that games are a valuable tool in promoting togetherness and cooperation, especially in education forums. According to Mudavat (2025), various games with their various rules and social dynamics help young people to acquire empathy, respect and a sense of belonging. 2 Timothy 2:5 clearly states that 'an athlete cannot be crowned unless he competes according to the rules. Competing according to rules in this case denotes values such as obedience, honesty and cooperation.

Philippians 2:2-4 encourages Christians to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but instead through humility, considering others above oneself. The Bible verse in this scripture highlights the value of humility and love for others. Games and sports are a good strategy to encourage the youth to gather and, in the process, be taught, trained, and mentored. During games and sports activities, participants are expected to responsibly use the available facilities, equipment and amenities as well as

be able to share them with others. A study by Nwabuwe (2023) revealed that being able to share sports amenities and learning how to play together promoted love and teamwork. It also shunned self-centeredness as the players learn to celebrate one another's scores and respond to any failure to score or win with humility.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The findings revealed that although several churches (59%) held games and sports in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Meru Region, a good number still did not have the programmes. Further, the number of youth who did not participate in games and sports in their churches was more than those who participated. Additionally, a lack of variety in games and sports activities, poor organisation, and limited facilities were why some youth members failed to participate in games and sports activities in their churches. The study findings also showed that games and sport programmes effectively inculcate various moral values such as peace, respect, obedience, honesty, love, cooperation and sexual purity.

Recommendations: Based on the study's findings, the Methodist Church in Kenya should enhance its games and sports programs to better engage young people. Specifically, in the Meru Region, the church should focus on diversifying the types of games and sports offered and improving related facilities, such as fields and equipment, to encourage greater youth participation. The church leadership should also organise forums to educate youth on effective time planning and management, enabling them to balance their schedules and actively participate in Christian programs.

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