

International Journal of Psychology (IJP)

**Influence of Organized Recreational Sport Program Participation on Social Cohesion of
Child Offenders in Rehabilitation Schools in Kenya**

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Influence of Organized Recreational Sport Program Participation on Social Cohesion of Child Offenders in Rehabilitation Schools in Kenya



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Article History

Received 8th March 2026

Received in Revised Form 6th April 2026

Accepted 4th May 2026



How to cite in APA format:

Mureithi, P., Rintaugu, E., & Kathungu, B. (2026). Influence of Organized Recreational Sport Program Participation on Social Cohesion of Child Offenders in Rehabilitation Schools in Kenya. *International Journal of Psychology*, 11(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ijp.3738>

Abstract

Purpose: Child offence in Kenya poses a challenge, with rehabilitation schools using sports to improve emotional, psychological, and social skills, but limited research exists on sports' impact on social cohesion in these settings. This study examined the effect of participation in an organized recreational sports program on social cohesion among child offenders in Kenyan government rehabilitation schools.

Methodology: Adopting a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design, the research involved 188 purposively selected participants (boys and girls aged 11–18 years) from five schools (Getathuru, Wamumu, Kabete, Othaya, and Kirigiti/Dagoretti). The 8-week intervention consisted of structured soccer sessions for boys and netball for girls, delivered three times weekly for 60 minutes per session by trained coaches, with emphasis on teamwork, fair play, communication, inclusion, and interdependence. Social cohesion was measured using the Teamwork Scale for Youth, administered pre- and post-intervention to 129 participants.

Findings: Descriptive statistics revealed a substantial increase in mean and standard deviation teamwork scores from 20.45 ± 7.99 pre-intervention to 34.36 ± 5.42 post-intervention. Categorical analysis showed a dramatic shift: low teamwork skills decreased from 68 to 3 participants, while high teamwork skills rose from 22 to 104. A Mann-Whitney U test confirmed a statistically significant difference ($Z = -11.363, p < 0.001$), rejecting the null hypothesis and indicating profound improvement in social cohesion following the program.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: These findings align with Hirschi's social control theory and positive youth development frameworks, demonstrating that structured team sports strengthen attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief in prosocial norms, thereby enhancing harmony, mutual support, and a sense of belonging. Organized recreational sports emerge as a low-cost, effective rehabilitative strategy to mitigate isolation, reduce deviant tendencies, and facilitate reintegration. The study recommends integrating gender-sensitive sports programs into weekly rehabilitation schedules, allocating dedicated resources, and conducting longitudinal research to assess sustained impacts on recidivism and community outcomes.

Keywords: *Organized Recreational Sports, Child Offenders, Social Cohesion, Rehabilitation Schools, Psychosocial Well-Being*

JEL Codes: *L83, K42, Z13, I28, K42*

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INTRODUCTION

Sports are widely recognized as one of the most prevalent extracurricular activities for adolescents, not only combating obesity and related health issues but also fostering essential social bonds and psychological resilience (Dumith et al., 2011). Non-participation in physical activity (PA), including sports, has been linked to elevated cholesterol levels, psychological illnesses such as low self-worth, and diminished psychological well-being, including anxiety and depression, which often emerge during puberty and persist throughout life (Bassett et al., 2015). Engagement in organized sports and physical activities nurtures teamwork, social skills, and a sense of belonging, contributing to overall well-being (McMahon et al., 2017). Regular PA has been associated with enhanced physical health, psychological well-being, and social functioning among adolescents (Freire & Ferreira, 2018). In the context of youth delinquency, sports-based youth development programs serve as interventions to support at-risk youth and prevent involvement in deviant behaviors (Spruit et al., 2018a; Spruit et al., 2018b).

Organized recreational sports, in particular, hold potential for promoting social cohesion by reducing crime and recidivism in vulnerable populations (Berdychevsky et al., 2019; Jugl et al., 2023). Youth sports are often positioned as a primary strategy for preventing juvenile delinquency, predicated on the development of prosocial relationships with coaches and teammates (Haugan et al., 2021; Jugl et al., 2021). These programs, especially in team-oriented settings, outperform individual sports in exploiting benefits such as solidarity and interdependence (McKiernan, 2016). Research indicates that at-risk youth participating in sports exhibit lower school dropout rates and improved occupational prospects, suggesting that physical activity and sport (PAS) can mitigate the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and curb criminal behavior through life skill development (Walsh et al., 2010). A systematic review by Piggott et al. (2024) highlights that PAS-based programs foster life skills and reduce delinquency among youth at risk, enhancing personal character and social connections.

Psychosocial well-being, encompassing psychological, social, and communal dimensions, is achieved through a balance of challenging and rewarding experiences (Martikainen et al., 2002; Dodge et al., 2012; Yoo & Ryff, 2019). Social cohesion, a key component, refers to the extent of connectedness, harmony, and interdependence within a group, leading to a sense of belonging and mutual support (Manca, 2014; Urzua et al., 2019). Low social cohesion is associated with increased depressive symptoms and harmful behaviors, while recreational activities contribute to healthful temperament, positive social relationships, and emotional strength (Budruk & Stanis, 2013; Kozak & Dođantan, 2016). Sports align with values like fair play, cooperation, and respect, which are essential for social cohesion and peacebuilding (Sherlock, 2024). For instance, sports participation influences psychosocial health by strengthening social networks and reducing deviant behavior, thereby illustrating stronger social bonds (Rodríguez-Bravo et al., 2020).

In Kenya, child offence has historical roots in colonial-era institutions, with rehabilitation schools established to manage youth offenders through education, counseling, and vocational training (Gachara & Wasanga, 2011). These schools, including Getathuru, Wamumu, Kabete, Othaya, and Kirigiti, integrate recreational sports as per U.N. rules and UNESCO declarations, emphasizing participation in physical exercise and leisure for delinquents' rights and well-being (Muchemi, 2010; Ouko, 2017; UNESCO, 2013; Ndaita, 2017). Studies reveal that Kenyan child offenders in rehabilitation often face low self-esteem and emotional issues, yet recreational activities have been used to enhance social skills, teamwork, and cohesion

(Kithaka & Kariuki, 2018; Mucemi, 2010; Wahu et al., 2020; Wangui, 2021). However, empirical evidence on the specific influence of organized recreational sports on social cohesion remains limited, despite their potential to ease reintegration and reduce recidivism (Spruit et al., 2016; UNODC, 2018). This gap underscores the need to examine how participation in structured programs like soccer and netball impacts social cohesion among child offenders in Kenyan rehabilitation schools, informing policy and practice for more effective rehabilitative strategies (Kinyanjui & Darani, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Juvenile delinquency in Kenya remains a persistent challenge, with children in conflict with the law often exhibiting deep-seated emotional, psychological, and social issues that contribute to deviant behaviors (Kinyanjui & Darani, 2021). Rehabilitation schools, such as Getathuru, Wamumu, Kabete, Othaya, and Kirigiti, are mandated to provide structured programs—including education, vocational training, counseling, and recreational activities—to facilitate behavior modification, skill development, and successful reintegration into society (Government of Kenya, 2010; Kinyanjui & Darani, 2021). Despite these efforts, challenges persist, including inadequate psychosocial support, poor living conditions, bullying, theft, insufficient teacher training, and limited resources, which hinder effective rehabilitation and contribute to ongoing emotional distress and recidivism risks (Kariuki et al., 2019; Muema, 2024; Wangari, 2021).

Organized recreational sports, such as soccer and netball, are incorporated into these programs and hold promise for enhancing social cohesion by fostering teamwork, positive peer interactions, conflict resolution, and a sense of belonging (Spruit et al., 2016; UNODC, 2018). Participation in sports can mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences, reduce deviant tendencies, and promote prosocial relationships with coaches and peers (Haugan et al., 2021; Jugl et al., 2023). However, empirical evidence on the specific impact of structured recreational sports on social cohesion among Kenyan child offenders remains scarce. Existing studies in rehabilitation settings primarily focus on general offenses, emotional intelligence, program challenges, or broad rehabilitative benefits, with limited regulated interventions examining sports' role in psychosocial outcomes (Mucemi, 2010; Ndaita, 2017; Wahu et al., 2020).

This gap is critical, as low social cohesion exacerbates isolation, depressive symptoms, and harmful behaviors, impeding reintegration (Urzua et al., 2019). Without targeted research, rehabilitation schools may underutilize sports as a tool for building interdependence and harmony, potentially limiting long-term behavioral change and community safety. The current study addresses this by investigating the influence of organized recreational sport participation on social cohesion among child offenders in Kenyan rehabilitation schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess the effect of participating in organized recreational sport on the social cohesion of child offenders in Kenyan rehabilitation schools.

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated for testing;

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in social cohesion among the child offenders in rehabilitation schools in Kenya after of participating in an organized recreational sport program.

Theoretical Framework

Independent Variables



Dependent Variable



Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of child offence in Kenya traces back to the colonial era, when the concept emerged as a formal concern amid urbanization, migration, and colonial administrative needs. Prior to colonialism, traditional African societies managed youthful misconduct through community-based mechanisms emphasizing restitution, reconciliation, and social control, rather than institutional punishment. The imposition of British common law introduced formal penal structures, including police, courts, and prisons, which conflicted with indigenous practices (Kercher, 1981).

Child offence gained official attention in the early 20th century. Between 1910 and 1912, the Kabete Approved School (initially a reformatory) was established to detain male youth, often for failing to carry identity cards (kipande) or other minor infractions, reflecting colonial efforts to control African populations (Kwallah, 2001; Campbell, 2002). By the 1930s, amid growing urban migration and perceived public disorder among youth, colonial authorities commissioned reports and enacted legislation to modernize juvenile management, aligning with British metropolitan policies on age-specific institutions and rehabilitation (Campbell, 2002). The first Approved School opened in 1934, followed by another in 1937, influenced by the English Children and Young Persons Act of 1933. During the Mau Mau Uprising (1952–1963), challenges in determining legal ages for juveniles complicated handling, with facilities like Kabete and Dagoretti serving as key centers for male offenders (Bell, 2014).

Post-independence, the Kenyan government retained and expanded these institutions under the Children Act (initially 2001, revised 2022), shifting focus from punishment to rehabilitation through education, vocational training, counseling, and recreation (Government of Kenya, 2010). Currently, there are nine approved rehabilitation schools: eight for boys (e.g., Kabete, Wamumu, Kakamega, Kericho, Kisumu, Likoni, Othaya, Getathuru) and two for girls (Dagoretti and Kirigiti). These institutions accommodate children aged 10–18 in conflict with the law, with programs aimed at behavior reform, skill acquisition, and societal reintegration, often limited to three years.

Child offence persists as a concern, influenced by poverty, family breakdown, unemployment, peer pressure, and urbanization. Recent trends show fluctuating but concerning involvement, with boys dominating offenses, though girls' cases have risen marginally. Property-related crimes, robbery, and substance abuse remain prevalent, underscoring the need for effective rehabilitative interventions (KNBS, 2018). Despite progress in formal structures, challenges like overcrowding, limited resources, and recidivism highlight ongoing gaps in addressing root causes and ensuring successful reintegration.

Influence of Recreational Sports on Social Cohesion

Social cohesion implies the degree of attachment and harmony amid parties in the public; it recognizes the feeling of being affiliated to a community and the associations amongst associates contained in the community (Manca, 2014). Social cohesion relates to how well the team members appreciate each other's company and to what extent does each team member enjoys each other and interrelates appropriately (Richardson, 2013). These forces of cohesion work collectively to generate solidarity in a sports team that supports them accomplish victory.

A report by Sherlock (2024) showed that taking part in sports by itself is a single machinery through which sport may influence connectedness and social networks. It was noted that sport contains the capability to offspring an extensive array of exterior outcomes involving health gains, decline in offence, scholastic achievement, social ability, and unity. Further, the report shows that sport may help lessen social segregation and upsurge social cohesion.

Poole et al. (2025) notes that sports-friendly schools aggressively and intentionally cultivate individuals as complete personalities by leveraging experience to innovative overtures and persons, empowering students with sovereignty, and nurturing eminence social connections. A study to examine if sports have an impact on social cohesion among the children under rehabilitation programme in Kenya is important for comparison with the report of studies in London.

Lee and Lim (2019) examined the causative associations amongst social, sporting activities, and ecological features, and juvenile aggression involving 2378 adolescents from 98 schools across South Korea using PE lessons conducted in schools over the period of 7 years. The findings established that sports activity had statistically considerable impact on the viable social ecological factors, teacher, as well as friend relationships. Further, the study found that sustainable social environment influenced juvenile personal hostility including the others, moreover, sports activity lacked direct influence on juvenile's self-hostility and to others. This implies that sporting activity impacts youthful violence via viable communal setting, this positively enhanced one's networks with instructors and friends, therefore, decreasing aggression for both self and others. This study was descriptive longitudinal research across all the Korean schools. The current study used Quasi-experimental design among (n=152) child offenders under rehabilitation in Kenyan rehabilitation schools for a period of 8 weeks to focus on the effects of participating in organized recreational sports on social cohesion of the child offenders in government rehabilitation schools in Kenya.

Clark (2016) report on Jordan social cohesion notes that sports related activities have supported peace and social cohesion across the communities in Jordan and Syria leading to reduction in violence within the parts of Jordan. Similarly, Rodgers (2020) observes that recreational sports program in Kenya has significantly changed the perception of social cohesion among refugees in Kakuma and Turkana community of Northwestern Kenya. These studies involved residents of communities that have been in crisis for many years and lacked peace. The studies were realized by the use of focus group discussions with community representatives of all ages. The current study focused on child offenders in Kenyan rehabilitation schools who filled both pre-test at the beginning of the program and post-test after an intervention of participating in organized recreational sports for eight weeks.

Ulma and Amung (2025) note that partaking in sports can support to improve the social skills, like teamwork, communication, leadership, and empathy. Further, association in sports can result to enhancing emotions, self-esteem, social links, and a sense of belonging in children

and adolescents. This supported Sansi, Nalbant and Ozer (2021) earlier study on effects of an inclusive physical activity program on the motor skills, social skills and attitudes of students with and without autism spectrum disorder which proved that children who are mostly engaged in sports have improved social proficiency and emotion directive since exercise increases social interactions, the expansion of positive connections, and the capacity to accomplish feelings that arise through activities. On the other hand, Research by Hiremath (2019) proves that children who engage in team sports displayed substantial developments in social skills and self-confidence, which was consistent with the results of a study by Kahn, Bailey & Jones (2019) that indicated participation in team sports assists children improve communication and collaboration skills, which are imperative for healthy social interactions. Some of the studies were systematically reviewed while others used both experimental and the control group, this study was guided by quasi-experimental design.

Mganda and Kamudhayi (2013) found that Tegla Lorupe Peace Foundation (TLPF) has utilized sports to mitigate cattle raids and associated conflicts via use of peace races to create community grassroots peace discourses and dispute resolution amid Kenya-Uganda border section which gained success. The initiatives have shown the power of sports in a reconciliatory process where the individual behavior among the participants has been changed. The study in Kenya targeted public members but the current study sought to investigate if recreational sports can offer the same cohesion to the deviant population.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design to examine the influence of participation in an organized recreational sports program on social cohesion among child offenders in Kenyan rehabilitation schools. This design was selected due to practical constraints in randomly assigning participants in institutional settings, allowing pre- and post-intervention comparisons within the same group to assess changes attributable to the intervention (Spruit et al., 2018).

The target population comprised 352 child offenders (boys and girls) aged 11–18 years enrolled in ten government rehabilitation schools across Kenya. The sample consisted of 188 participants (boys and girls) purposively selected from five schools: three boys' schools (Getathuru, Wamumu, Kabete, Othaya) and two girls' schools (Kirigiti, Dagoretti). Quota sampling ensured representation from both genders and schools, with inclusion criteria requiring participants to be active residents without severe medical conditions precluding sports participation. Exclusion criteria included those unwilling to participate or with attendance issues.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising demographic items and the Teamwork Scale for Youth, focusing on aspects like team confidence, inclusion, communication, and interdependence. An attendance checklist monitored participation. Instruments were pre-tested for validity (expert review and content validity index) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70). Research assistants and coaches were trained on data collection, ethical protocols, and intervention delivery.

The intervention involved an 8-week organized recreational sports program: soccer for boys and netball for girls, conducted three times weekly for 60 minutes per session under qualified coaches. Sessions emphasized teamwork, rules adherence, fair play, and group activities to foster social cohesion. Pre-test data were collected before the intervention, followed by the program, and post-test immediately after.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 24. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) summarized demographics and scores. Paired-sample t-tests or Wilcoxon signed-rank tests (depending on normality) compared pre- and post-test social cohesion scores. Significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Ethical considerations included obtaining approvals from Kenyatta University Ethical Review Committee, NACOSTI, school administrators, parental/guardian consent, and child assent. Participation was voluntary, confidential, and free from harm, with provisions for first aid and withdrawal without penalty.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Response Rate

The study attained a response rate of 129 participants from the sample of 188. All 129 respondents participated in the pre-test, providing baseline data on resilience. Following the recreational sports intervention, the same 129 participants completed the post-test, allowing for the evaluation of changes in resilience. This made up a 68.6% percent response rate. The non-participation of the 59 juveniles was primarily due to absences from the intervention sessions, withdrawal/refusal during the study period and those whose questionnaires were unusable. According to the coaches and facility administrators, these cases stemmed from disciplinary issues, medical reasons, or voluntary opt-out after initial briefing. However, the response rate of 68.6% was considered sufficient. In social science and psychological research, response or completion rates above 60% are generally viewed as acceptable for supporting the validity of findings (Fincham, 2008).

Impact of an Organized Recreational Sport Program on Social Cohesion

The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of an organized recreational sport program on social cohesion among child offenders in rehabilitation schools in Kenya. Participants were asked to rate how the statements on social cohesion applied to them both before (pre-intervention) and after (post-intervention) the program.

Descriptive Statistics on Social Cohesion/Teamwork of the Participants

The Teamwork Scale for Youth was used to measure social cohesion, and the descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-intervention scores are presented in Table 1.

The teamwork scores before the intervention ranged from 9 to 40, with a mean and standard deviation 20.45 ± 7.99 . This indicates a wide spread of teamwork abilities, with some child offenders demonstrating low levels of social cohesion and others showing more developed teamwork skills. After the intervention, the scores ranged from 13 to 40, with a mean and standard deviation (34.36 ± 5.42) . The increase in the mean score indicates a significant improvement in social cohesion. This suggests that most participants showed improved social cohesion after the program.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Social Cohesion (Teamwork) Scores (n=129)

		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teamwork						
Composite	Pre-intervention	129	9	40	20.45	7.99
	Post-intervention	129	13	40	34.36	5.42

Comparison of Social Cohesion Scores before and After Intervention

The teamwork scores were categorized into low teamwork, moderate teamwork, and high teamwork skills, as shown in Table 2.

Before the intervention, 68 participants were categorized as having low teamwork skills, 39 participants had moderate teamwork skills, and 22 participants had high teamwork skills. In contrast, after the intervention, the number of participants with low teamwork skills dropped significantly to only 3, while the number of participants with high teamwork skills increased dramatically to 104.

Table 2: Pre- and Post-Intervention Mean Social Cohesion / Teamwork Scores of the Participants (n=129)

		Category		
		Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	Percentage
Teamwork	Low Teamwork Skills	68	3	27.5%
	Moderate Teamwork Skills	39	22	23.6%
	High Teamwork Skills	22	104	48.8%

Testing Hypothesis – Paired Comparison of Social Cohesion

The hypothesis (H_{01} : There is no significant difference in social cohesion among the child offenders in rehabilitation schools in Kenya after an organized recreational sport program) was tested using the Mann-Whitney U test, with the results presented in Table 3.

Before the intervention, the mean rank for social cohesion scores was 76.78, with a sum of ranks of 9904.5. After the intervention, the mean rank increased to 182.22, with a sum of ranks of 23506.5. The Mann-Whitney U statistic was 1519.5. The Z-value was -11.363, and the Asymptotic Significance (p-value) was 0.000.

Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis (H_{01}), indicating that there is a significant difference in social cohesion between the pre- and post-intervention groups.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U Test Results on the Pre-and Post-Test Scores on Social Cohesion of the Participants (n=129)

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks		
Teamwork	Pre-intervention	129	76.78	9904.5	Mann-Whitney U	1519.5
	Post-intervention	129	182.22	23506.5	Z	-11.363
					Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
					a Grouping Variable:	
					Category	

Discussion

The findings provide strong evidence that the organized recreational sport program successfully improved social cohesion among child offenders in rehabilitation schools in Kenya. This is evidenced by the positive changes in teamwork skills observed between the pre- and post-intervention assessments. Prior to the program, participants displayed a wide range of teamwork abilities, with many exhibiting low or moderate levels of cooperation, communication, and mutual support. Following the intervention, teamwork skills improved substantially, with a clear reduction in the proportion of participants showing low teamwork

abilities and a corresponding rise in those demonstrating high teamwork skills. This shift highlights the program's effectiveness in fostering essential social competencies that are particularly valuable in rehabilitation settings, where cooperation and group support contribute to personal growth and collective well-being.

The substantial improvement in overall teamwork scores, along with reduced variability among participants, indicates that the program enabled most juveniles to enhance their social cohesion abilities. These outcomes align with recent studies showing that structured, group-based activities such as sports can enhance social integration, cooperative behaviour, and group cohesion. While many such studies have been conducted with ordinary adolescents in school or community settings, similar positive effects on teamwork and social connectedness have been reported in interventions targeting at-risk and deviant youth populations (Anderson et al., 2025; Jones, 2024; Spruit et al., 2015). The structured nature of the sport program in this study likely served as a platform for participants to practise key social skills including trust-building, effective communication, and collaboration within a safe and goal-oriented environment.

The distribution of teamwork skills across low, moderate, and high categories further illustrates the intervention's positive impact. Before the program, the majority of participants fell into the low to moderate categories, with only a small number demonstrating high teamwork proficiency. After the intervention, the distribution shifted markedly toward the high category. This change reflects the program's role in strengthening participants' capacity to work collaboratively and support one another. These findings are consistent with literature indicating that sports participation improves not only physical fitness but also psychological and social outcomes, such as teamwork and social connectedness. Such benefits have been documented among both general adolescent populations and at-risk or deviant youth, where team-based activities promote shared goals and positive peer interactions (Sinha, 2024; Piggott, 2025). In line with existing research, social cohesion emerges as a vital component of effective rehabilitation for child offenders. By enhancing teamwork abilities, the program appears to have supported broader improvements in social skills, which in turn may facilitate healthier relationships and smoother societal reintegration (Casimir, 2023).

Analysis of pre- and post-intervention data revealed a statistically significant improvement in social cohesion following the recreational sport program. The mean rank for social cohesion was substantially higher in the post-intervention assessment, confirming that the organized recreational activities produced a meaningful positive effect. These results corroborate recent research on the benefits of structured interventions, such as recreational sports, for enhancing social cohesion among at-risk youth populations (Persson & Eriksen, 2025).

The observed improvements align with the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, which underpinned this study. PYD emphasises the creation of structured, supportive environments that help young people build social competencies, a sense of belonging, and cooperative skills through meaningful activities (Bruner et al., 2024; Bowers et al., 2021; Butts et al., 2010). In the context of juvenile rehabilitation, PYD shifts the focus from deficit-based approaches to strength-based ones, viewing participation in team sports as an opportunity to develop assets such as interpersonal skills and prosocial bonds. The current findings support this perspective by demonstrating how the recreational sport program contributed to enhanced social cohesion within a high-risk population.

The findings of this study carry important implications for the design and implementation of rehabilitation programmes for child offenders. The marked improvement in social cohesion and teamwork suggests that similar structured sports interventions should be integrated into

rehabilitation strategies. Beyond physical benefits, these programmes offer valuable opportunities for social and emotional growth that are essential for successful reintegration into society. By promoting cooperation, trust, and shared goals, recreational sports can help child offenders develop the interpersonal skills needed to navigate social environments more effectively. Such improvements may contribute to reduced antisocial behaviour, better social functioning, and more positive rehabilitation outcomes (Jones, 2024; Klemmer et al., 2023; Thomas, 2022).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concluded that the organized recreational sport program significantly improved social cohesion among child offenders in Kenyan rehabilitation schools. Social cohesion improved substantially, as evidenced by stronger teamwork and collaborative skills. Overall, the findings confirm that structured recreational sports serve as an effective psychosocial intervention for at-risk youth in rehabilitation settings.

Recommendations

Rehabilitation school administrators and the Department of Children's Services should integrate structured recreational sports (soccer for boys, netball for girls) into weekly timetables, allocating at least three 60-minute sessions per week with trained coaches. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection should allocate dedicated budgets for sports equipment, field maintenance, and coach training to ensure program sustainability. Gender-sensitive approaches should be prioritized, addressing potential differences in engagement and outcomes between boys and girls. Partnerships with NGOs, sports federations, and private sector sponsors are recommended to provide resources and long-term support. Finally, longitudinal follow-up studies should track the persistence of improved social cohesion post-release to evaluate long-term impact on recidivism and community reintegration.

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