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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Assessment of the State and Effectiveness of Fitness Centres in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria**

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**| ABSTRACT**

Commercial fitness centers represent one opportunity to be physically active. This study is a descriptive survey with a population comprising all fitness centres in Ilorin metropolis. Convenience sampling method was used to select 11 registered and functional fitness centres in the metropolis. A pilot study was done across Ilorin metropolis to ascertain the number of fitness centres. Modified National Science Foundation's Checklist (NSF) and ACSM Health/Fitness Facility Standard and Guidelines (2019) was used for data collection. The researchers matched the available facility and equipment in the various fitness centres against the responses on the checklist in order to avoid response bias from the fitness instructors. Percentile ranking were used to analyse the collected data. The results from the study showed that only one fitness centre met up with the standard of having at least 80% required strength training equipment while three fitness centres did not meet up with the standard of having over 70% cardiovascular equipment to accommodate clients need. It was also discovered that majority of the fitness instructors are not professionally certified to handle health and fitness related physical activity judging from their lack of certification from professional bodies. Based on this premise, it was recommended that certification of fitness trainers be deemed important and more fitness centres be opened to accommodate the teeming population.

**| KEYWORDS**

Fitness centres, commercial, Ilorin metropolis, fitness instructors, training equipment, facilities.

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**1. Introduction**

Over the past 50 years, there has been a huge shift from a lifestyle that was physically active to one that is predominantly sedentary which is as a result of the emergence of technologies which is fast replacing human activities leading to increased occupational sedentary behaviours and also, the increased penetration of television and video devices have contributed greatly to physically inactive lifestyles (Dominic, Ibraheem, Seidina, Niyi-Odumosu & Owolabi, 2018). According to the American Heart Association (AHA), sedentary jobs have increased 83 percent since 1950. Physically active jobs now make up less than 20 percent of the workforce, down from roughly half of jobs in 1960 (AHA, 2010).

This has led to the promotion of physical activity as an important focus of both the public health agenda in Nigeria and the global health agenda for many nations. There is widespread acknowledgement that participation in physical activity is a fundamental means of improving the physical and mental health of individuals. As a result of the public health message and social awareness that individuals should regularly engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity, an increased level of interest and participation in fitness activities which has led to the proliferation of fitness facilities and/or gym centres (American College of Sport Medicine [ACSM], 2019).

The time and resources that are devoted to encouraging people to be physically active are supported by an ever-accumulating and impressive body of scientific literature that documents the innumerable health benefits of a physically active lifestyle and the

potential detrimental effects of sedentary living (Dominic, 2015; Talabi, 2016; Mallikarjun & Vijaykumar, 2017; World Health Organization, 2020). The authors agreed that physical activity can promote health and prevent the onset of disease including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis, forms of cancer, obesity and injury, reduce depression, stress and anxiety, improves self-confidence, self-esteem, energy levels, sleep quality and the ability to concentrate.

The fitness centre is a health, recreational and social facility, geared towards exercise, sports and other physical activities. It may be a non-profit commercial activities or a community institutionally supported centre (Mion, 2014; Dominic, 2018). Fitness centres are experiencing increasing expansion, because current clients are more and more concerned about quality of life. The patronage enjoyed by fitness centred is currently on an unprecedented increase as evidence have shown that in recent times, there have been a dramatic increase in and greater public awareness of the benefits of physical activity to human and societal developments (Aibueke & Ogbouma, 2011). Commercial fitness centers represent one opportunity to be physically active. The majority of fitness centers offer both group and individual activities. (Riseth, Torunn, Tom, Nilsen, & Aslak, 2019).

The fitness industry in Nigeria has experienced a proliferation of fitness centers, particularly in urban areas, due to rising health consciousness and the commercialization of sports and recreation. Adeyeye (2015) highlights the increased awareness of fitness centers' role in promoting health and physical fitness in Nigeria, noting that urban centers like Ilorin have seen a surge in private fitness facilities. However, this growth has been accompanied by challenges, particularly the lack of regulation and certification for fitness service providers. Adeyeye (2015) argues that many fitness centers are established by individuals with financial resources but lack professional qualifications, leading to inconsistent service quality.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

According to Agwubike and Ogbouma (2010), there is currently an increased awareness of the relevance of fitness clinics in the promotion of good health and physical fitness. It is therefore not surprising that there has in recent times, been an increase in the establishment of fitness centre in our society. To satisfy the need to stay fit and healthy, fitness clubs (or gyms) and weight loss programmes are setting up within and around neighborhoods, residential and office areas where people who need these services can easily access them.

However, it has been observed in a prior study conducted by (Dominic, Adeoye, Kolawole, Japheth, Ibrahim, & Niyi-Odumosu, 2016) that many of the fitness centres studied in Ilorin Metropolis are not adequately equipped to meet an expected standard of a fitness centre compared to the guidelines specified by the American College of Sport Medicine [ACSM], (2012). Many of the staff members lacked the professional qualifications and adequate knowledge to operate in such an environment. Even with well-established guidelines for physical activity, the majority of personnel in fitness centre in major cities in Nigeria have little or no formal education or practical experience in designing and leading exercise programmes.

This study is therefore geared towards reinvestigating the state and effectiveness of fitness centres in Ilorin Metropolis in order to establish if the recommendations and guidelines specified in the previous study were acknowledged and implemented.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

1. Do the available fitness facilities meet the standardized guidelines for fitness centres?
2. Do the fitness instructors possess necessary qualifications?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Personnel in Fitness Centres**

The dynamic growth and enthusiastic interest in fitness the last few decades have sparked an expansive evolution of the health and fitness industry. The employment of qualified professionals has significantly improved the credibility of health and fitness delivery systems. Career opportunities in the fitness industry include fitness club owner or manager, fitness director, aerobics director, special programs director, aquatics directors, teachers, exercise physiologists, and personal trainers.

An increasing number of employers require fitness workers to have a bachelor's degree in a field related to health or fitness, such as exercise science or physical education. The education and training required depends on the specific type of fitness work; personal training, group fitness, or a specialization such as Pilates or yoga each need different preparation (U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Fitness directors oversee the fitness related aspects of a health club or fitness center. They create and oversee programs that meet the needs of the club's members, including new member orientations, fitness assessments, and work out incentive programs. They also select fitness equipment; coordinate personal training and group exercise programs; hire, train, and supervise fitness staff; and carry out administrative duties (Kravitz & Rockey, 2014).

## **2.2 Safety Policies and Procedures in Fitness Centres**

Factors such as an aging population, obesity and type 2 diabetes around the globe have heightened the need for physical exercise promotion and as such, careful safety policies and procedures should be put in place at all health/fitness facilities. The primary intent of such policies and procedures is to minimize cardiovascular and/or medical risk for all members and users, including those with greatest potential for cardiovascular risk during exercise due to age, presence of existing cardiovascular disease, and any other medical or health concern that might be exacerbated during exercise participation. A vitally important procedure involved in optimizing safe exercise participation is to identify those individuals who may be at an increased level of risk for such events.

The primary purpose of pre-participation health screening is to identify those individuals considered to be at risk for an adverse event during exercise, as well as those people who would benefit from obtaining medical clearance before starting an exercise program. This objective involves identifying persons with known cardiovascular disease or symptoms of cardiovascular disease, metabolic disease (including diabetes), or renal disease or other major health concerns that may affect safe exercise participation.

## **2.3 Guidelines for Safety Practices in Fitness Centre**

According to ACSM (2019), an important challenge facing health/fitness facility operators is to provide the proper environment for stimulating interest and motivation toward exercise participation while simultaneously minimizing the potential risk of an adverse medical event occurring during or soon after exercise.

### **a. Guidelines for Exercise Pre-Participation Health Screening**

All members or users who have been identified (either through a pre-participation health screening or by self-disclosure to a qualified health care and/or health/fitness professional on staff) as having cardiovascular, metabolic, or renal disease or symptoms, or any other potentially serious medical concern, and who subsequently fail to get medical consultation should be permitted to sign a waiver or release (if permitted by law) that allows them to participate in the facility's program offerings. If a waiver or release is permitted by law, and such members or users refuse to sign, they should be excluded from participation to the extent permitted by law (ACSM, 2019).

### **b. Standards for Member Orientation, Education, and Supervision**

Fitness facilities should provide means by which members and users who are engaged in a physical activity program within the facility can obtain assistance and/or guidance with their efforts and also once a new member or prospective user has completed a pre-participation health screening process, facility operators shall then offer the new member or prospective user a general orientation to the facility.

### **c. Standards for Emergency Planning and Policies**

Fitness facility operators must have written emergency response policies and procedures, which shall be reviewed regularly and physically rehearsed a minimum of twice annually. These policies shall enable staff to respond to basic first-aid situations and other emergency events in an appropriate and timely manner. Facility operators shall ensure that a safety audit is conducted that routinely inspects all areas of the facility to reduce or eliminate unsafe hazards that may cause injury to employees and health/fitness facility members or users (ACSM, 2019).

### **d. Standards for Health/Fitness Facility Professional Staff and Independent Contractors**

The most important role that staff and independent contractors have as health/fitness professionals is to ensure that a health/fitness facility's members and users have positive experiences, including everything that should be done and could reasonably be done to ensure that members and users are exposed to the innumerable benefits of being physically active. Health/fitness professionals who have supervisory responsibility and oversight responsibility for the physical activity and exercise training programs, as well as the staff who administer them, shall have appropriate levels of professional education, work experience, and/or certification. Examples of health/fitness professionals who serve in a supervisory role include the fitness director, group exercise director, aquatics director, and program director.

## **3. Methodology**

This study is a descriptive survey with a population comprising all fitness centres in Ilorin metropolis. Ilorin metropolis is made up of three (3) out of the 16 local governments in Kwara State and has been the state capital since May 27, 1967. Ilorin Metropolis has a total population of 814,957 with a corresponding number of 19 fitness centres (National Population Census, 2006). There are so many aerobic groups operating within the metropolis without any housing facilities which made for exclusion criterion.

Convenience sampling method was used to select 11 registered and functional fitness centres in the metropolis. A pilot study was done across Ilorin metropolis to ascertain the number of fitness centres. Modified National Science Foundation's Checklist (NSF) and ACSM Health/Fitness Facility Standard and Guidelines (2019) was used for data collection. The researchers matched the available facility and equipment in the various fitness centres against the responses on the checklist in order to avoid response bias from the fitness instructors. Percentile ranking were used to analyse the collected data.

#### 4. Results/Findings

**Table 1: Percentages of the appraisal of state and overall effectiveness of fitness centres in Ilorin Metropolis**

S/N		Fitness Centre B	Fitness Centre C	Fitness Centre D	Fitness Centre E	Fitness Centre F	Fitness Centre G	Fitness Centre H	Fitness Centre I	Fitness Centre J	Fitness Centre K	Fitness Centre A
1.	<b>EQUIPMENT</b>											
	Strength	65%	75%	70%	70%	80%	70%	75%	70%	75%	75%	75%
	Cardio	80%	75%	65%	70%	75%	0%	65%	90%	75%	85%	90%
	Fitness accessory	70%	75%	70%	70%	65%	0%	60%	60%	0%	70%	65%
2.	<b>Space</b>	100%	100%	100%	0%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
3.	<b>Pre-Activity Screening</b>	0%	23.3%	69.9%	69.9%	69.9%	69.9%	69.9%	69.9%	69.9%	23.3%	23.3%
4.	<b>Safety &amp; Risk Mgmt</b>	53.3%	79.9%	53.3%	53.3%	79.9%	79.9%	79.9%	79.9%	79.9%	53.3%	53.3%
5.	<b>Supervision</b>	48%	80%	80%	80%	80%	80%	80%	80%	80%	80%	80%
6.	<b>Staffing</b>	20%	20%	40%	20%	60%	20%	40%	20%	40%	60%	40%
	<b>SCORE (100%)</b>	42%	53.5%	56%	54.2%	63.8%	40%	58.8%	58.8%	52.5%	55.9%	53.3%
	<b>RANKING</b>	10	7	4	6	1	11	2	2	9	5	8

This study assessed the state and effectiveness of fitness centres in Ilorin Metropolis. The table presents the level of availability of functional fitness centres and their rankings based on Fitness standards and guidelines of NSF and ACSM (2019). The assessment revealed that Fitness centre E ranked 1<sup>st</sup>; Fitness centre G and H, 2<sup>nd</sup>; Fitness centre C, 4<sup>th</sup>; Fitness centre J, 5<sup>th</sup>; Fitness centre D, 6<sup>th</sup>; Fitness centre B, 7<sup>th</sup>; Fitness centre K, 8<sup>th</sup>; Fitness centre I, 9<sup>th</sup> while Fitness centre A and Fitness centre F ranked 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> respectively. Fitness centre E was the only fitness centre that met up with the standard of having at least 80% required strength training equipment while Fitness centres' C, F and G did not meet up with the standard of having over 70% cardiovascular equipment to accommodate clients need.

According to ACSM's Health/Fitness Facility Standards and Guidelines (5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2019), the basic categories of fitness equipment that plays the most significant role in the fitness industry are cardiovascular equipment, variable resistance and selectorized resistance equipment, free weight equipment as well as fitness accessory equipment.

It was also discovered that majority of the fitness instructors are not professionally certified to handle health and fitness related physical activity judging from their lack of certification from professional bodies.

#### 5. Conclusion

Majority of the instructors in the fitness centres are not professionally certified to handle both health and fitness related physical activity. Hence the need for professionalism in the fitness industry. The fitness centres available within Ilorin metropolis are also not adequate to cater for the needs of the ever-growing population residing in this geographical area. It is thus imperative that an increase in the number of fitness centres be worked towards, so as to accommodate the teeming population.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest

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