

Article Title:

Exploring the Potential of Reverse Integration and Inclusion through Wheelchair Basketball

Article Citation:

Ramsden R, Hayman R, Potrac P, Hettinga FJ. Sport Participation for People with Disabilities: Exploring the Potential of Reverse Integration and Inclusion through Wheelchair Basketball. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2023 Jan 30;20(3):2491. doi: 10.3390/ijerph20032491. PMID: 36767857; PMCID: PMC9915882.

Adaptive Sport/Rec Categories:

- Inclusion
- Reverse integration
- Paralympics
- Ableism
- Wheelchair basketball

Study Type:

A qualitative design using relativist ontology involving semi-structured interviews

Summary:

This study evaluates perceptions by participants of reverse integration on a national wheelchair basketball team. Reverse integration is defined as the inclusion of able-bodied people into disability sport. Reverse integration has been increasingly used in disability sports to increase participation by adding non-disabled members to complete a team. This study used guided interviews to assess the attitudes and perceptions of 11 participants aged 18-41 years competing on a national league wheelchair basketball team in the UK. Four teammates were not disabled and 7 had disabilities which were not specifically described other than 5 were due to injuries and 2 were present since birth. All participants agreed that wheelchair basketball participation was beneficial psychosocially and for increasing activity in both able bodied and disabled participants. The primary reason stated for the combined team was lack of people with disabilities to make up enough teams. Differences in opinion between the two groups were 1) whether the able-bodied participants should be allowed to participate internationally, such as at Paralympic events and 2) whether the other group had an advantage. The able-bodied group thought they should be allowed to compete in international Paralympic competition and the disabled group thought they should not. The disabled group felt the able-bodied group had an advantage because they could use a higher wheelchair and reach higher due to their core strength and stability. The able-bodied group felt the people with disabilities had an advantage because of their experience with wheelchair use.

Article Strengths:

- Consistent questions asked of each participant with enough time allowed to answer in depth.
- Supports the positive activity and social benefits of team participation

- Addresses a current “hot topic” – while participation of non-disabled players can improve access to wheelchair or other adaptive sports to increase physical activity it can have unintended consequences. For example, wheelchair basketball faced exclusion at the International Paralympics for including athletes that didn’t meet IPC eligibility. <https://apnews.com/article/a10e35a074886d3402c5c7fb84c17ee4>
- Stimulates discussion of ableism, reverse integration, reverse discrimination and inclusion and their roles in improving health and social interaction in the disability community..

Article weaknesses:

- Small number of participants
- Lack of references regarding Paralympic and IWCBF disability classification systems
- Level of disabilities of participants unknown
- No discussion regarding any perceived gender differences

Take Home Messages

- Reverse integration of team sports can be helpful in initiating a sport that wouldn’t be possible without including non-disabled participants due to numbers or just encouragement.
- Team participation had psychosocial and health benefit to both disabled and non-disabled participants.
- There continues to be confusion about the purpose of international Paralympic competition exclusive to people with disabilities and how they are defined.
- Reverse integration allows for an appreciation of the physical skills and athleticism required of athletes who play wheelchair basketball

Impacts on Clinical Practice

- Reverse integration of a team sport can be a good way to provide physical activity and social support for participants with disabilities. This strategy can be used successfully to get disability sports initiated and find enough players to play. Coaches can recruit able-bodied players to supplement teams and enhance understanding of disabled sports by all involved.
- Before a coach or clinician advises an individual that they are eligible to compete at the international Paralympics the categories allowed should be reviewed. <https://www.paralympic.org/classification> Many people have medical limitations such as arthritis, diabetes, asthma and hypermobility, but these conditions do not fit into the Paralympic model for international competition.