

# A Study on the Sociological Approach on Sports, Social Capital and Healthy Society in Korea

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## ABSTRACT

*Social capital is regarded as the alternative plan and the index of healthy society for constructing social tie through solving social problems on the basis of causal relationship between sports, social capital, and healthy society, in order to accomplish sound society. The role of sports to construct healthy society and social capital is emphasized here. To accomplish healthy society amid various social deviations nowadays, the value of sports should be newly recognized and highlighted among the general public. To attain this purpose, organizing sports club as a voluntary association and facilitating its activities, securing confidence for the sports organization and policies, developing and popularizing sports program to form community and civil society should be embodied. The research field of sports sociology should inquire into the most suitable condition in constructing healthy society and social capital, and should make efforts to find out realistic solutions to satisfy this that purpose. To examine this aspect, cooperative research on micro scale and macro scale of trust as social capital interdisciplinary research into the field of psychology and sociology, research on the methodology of the social network, and critical research are required.*

**Keywords:** Sports, Social Capital, Healthy Society.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the suicide rate of Korea has so rapidly increased that it ranks top in the world, owing to the global economic crisis. Furthermore, unprecedented various social deviant behaviors have drawn attention. These phenomena result from the fact that social trust as well as social solidarity and bond has been weakened as a result of a sudden increase of indifference and alienation, and political distrust and economic instability. In the case of a family suicide caused by economical poverty, such as loss of job or business failure, its primary cause is attributed to the fact that they are not affordable to have even minimum living standard. However, the phenomenon that family suicides take place intensively in a certain period can not be explained by economic poverty of an individual or a family, but by the answers to these questions; how equal is the society?, is there any effort to form social sympathy and systematic devices in order to realize an equal society?, and how and to what extent is social equity to be pursued for distribution of social wealth?

In Unhealthy Societies, Wilkinson(1996) argues or says that

the United States, one of the richest countries in the world has lower life expectancy than European countries which are poorer than the United States, and this phenomenon is due to the fact that social trust has been weakened in the United States[1]. More importantly, the health of the whole society is more influenced by the way the whole wealth of the society is distributed equally, not by the amount of the wealth. In this case, this economic discrimination has an indirect effect on social health, like life expectancy or death rate, through social capital of social solidarity and bond, rather than a direct effect. In short, the cause and effect relationship can be explained as follows; economic discrimination → social capital → social health.

Considering the empirical causality model of Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, and Prothrow-Stith (1997), who studied quantitative research on the path model embodied in the relationship between social capital, income inequality, and social health, we find that this fact is clear. They examined that the effect of income inequality on death rate intervened social capital. According to this path model, income inequality has an effect on the whole death rate via the variable of social capital[2].

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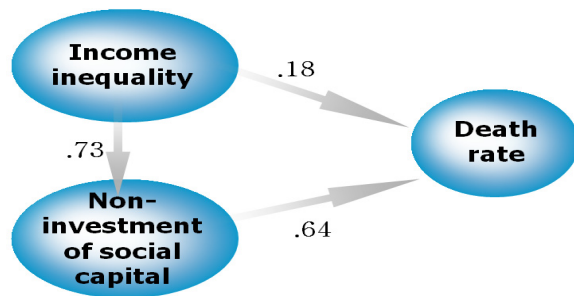


Fig. 1. Income disproportion, social capital and the causation of the death rate (Kawachi et al, 1997:1496)

The fact that social capital affects public health is obviously observed in our society. For example, we can deduce that the rapid increase of a family suicide in Korea is due to the aggravation of social capital along with the deepening of economical discrimination. The extreme action like a family suicide would not have occurred if the social relationship where they could rely on one another heartily had been formed, if the families pressed for money had had time and opportunities to get a support and a help, and if the rich had helped them.

Sports can play an important role in making social capital and network healthy by promoting the social relationship(Kim, 2008) and interaction of the members of the society where its traditional human relationship has been collapsed and kept being atomized. This is why sports can strengthen participants' solidarity regardless of their sex, age and social status. The group identity or solidarity which an individual can experience in sports participation is essential for healthy society[3].

Harris(1998) claimed that physical activity was a necessary required element of civil solidarity and social capital. She belongs to the game group of communities, a healthy exercise classroom, And the clubs which are citizen's having the same taste to do sports mainly on being active offer an opportunity to form new friendship. Hang-gliding, various adventure like sky Thailand Bing and the sport sub culture doing sport activity of the natural affinity with a master solidify the public by producing cohesive power. The view sports are the main culture space that offers joint ownership value experience and the mutual understanding of the community to a lot of the people, Sports are core activity with the main subject of the talks that men exchange ideas with friends. In addition, the sports activity lets you often get family members together. The concept for the teamwork through the game becomes the representation of strong group consciousness to support society as I said [4].

Healthy society doesn't simply mean that the members of the society are physically healthy. Rather, it undergoes significant influences through the action of social function, such as inequality. In other words, social inequality has an indirect effect on the formation of healthy society through the action of social function like social capital. The sports, such as life-time sports, have unlimited potential value for constructing better healthy society and social capital which is featured by trust, norm, and network, for they are based on equality of opportunity to participate in them. Despite the importance of sports, social capital, and healthy society, the detailed

discussions (discussions => discussion) about them has been insufficient in the research field of sports sociology. Therefore, this study will examine the role of sports to form social capital as an indicator of and social capital, based on the cause and effect relationship between sports, social capital, and healthy society, and discuss the research aim of sports sociology.

## 2. SOCIAL CAPITAL AS AN INDICATOR OF HEALTHY SOCIETY

It can be one of the questions above time and space which society is good to live in. That is, since the beginning of the human history, there have been constant theoretical and practical efforts in order to construct Utopia. Most of the macro or micro social system and organization theories, such as democracy, capitalism, communism, and socialism, have presented their own utopian vision. However, along with the symbolic failure of socialism as a result of the Soviet Union's collapse, in the West the rapid social structural and cultural changes have occurred according to the post capitalism order and the development of globalization. As a result, it was claimed that existing utopian visions were not suitable for new order any more, the interest in the new concepts meaning health and development of the society were raised.

In this situation, social capital is considered as a new resource and strategy of the social development in the West. Social capital, resulting from voluntary community participation, is the concept that presents the quality and the feature of the social members or the relationship between the groups[5]. Social capital means social systematic features such as trust, mutual benefits norm, and network, which make cooperation possible. The concept of social capital has been spread by Bourdieu. Bourdieu's concept of social capital is characterized by a specific individual's or group's private commodities. That is, the individuals who have large capital have advantageous social network for pursuing their profit, and maintaining and improving their social condition.

One of the Bourdieu's social capitals in Korean society is nepotism network such as academic, regional and blood ties. The definition of social capital as public property has been spread by James Coleman, Robert Putnam and Francis Fukuyama. Putnam(1993) argued or said that personal trust should be shifted to social trust so that personal trust may be developed into the whole society's positive effects, and that to do so, citizen participation in terms of social norm is required [6]. The network of citizen participation has an important role in accumulating social trust by extending social contact range. Putnam(1993) argued or said that the secondary and horizontal relationship network, such as citizen participation network is more advantageous in forming social capital as social trust than the first and vertical one, such as kinsman or blood relation, which is limited to a specific group[7]. Therefore, if we understand Putnam's citizen participation network as a voluntary organization, we can find that the network of the sports clubs belongs to typical secondary and horizontal network as citizen participation network does, and that it can play an important role in forming social capital.

Putnam(1995), in his treatise *Bowing Along*, pointed out that

the decline of social capital in the United States past decades years to the decreased number of the blowing clubs, stressing the importance of social capital and sports communities such as sports clubs[8]. For example, for the past 30 years, the turnout of voters has been sharply decreased, and the rate of the participation in various gatherings related to communities and schools has been constantly decreased. Between in 1980 and 1993, the population of blowing increased by about 10%, while the number of the blowing clubs decreased by about 40%. In this way, the increase of the population who plays blowing alone and the relative decrease of the population who plays blowing in the club was pointed out as the evidence showing the decline of social capital in the United States.

Putnam(1993) argued or said that the formation of healthy social capital can provide American society with essential solutions for the social problems. In order to solve these social problems, the investment should be given not only for economic capital, human capital and cultural capital but also for social capital, and these kinds of capital should be complementary, not competitive. For example, the investment for job stability and education becomes more effective when it is directed toward the improvement of trust and cooperation in the community. Putnam(1993) said the church's role in the guarantee for drug abusers or school dropouts raise the productivity of the community's economic market function as well as give them opportunities for social participation by relieving those who are deprived of social opportunity. Similarly, in the case of school education, the participation of the parents and the local residents in the whole school activities is more utility than the education for an individual student in classroom. In conclusion, Putnam(1993) attributes the various social problems faced by American society to the decline of social capital such as the community bond and social trust, and argued or said that in order to solve these social problems we should be aware of the importance of social capital, develop specific programs, and make good use of them. Thus, social capital can be considered as an important indicator for healthy society.

One of only a few substantial discussion explicitly directed to sport and social capital is presented by Uslaner(1990)and is rated enthusiastically in favor of sport as an arena adequate for building social capital[9].

Sports build social capital because they form self-confidence and teach respect for rules.... Sports widen our social contact. They spread tolerance and egalitarian values on the sly. People don't play games to make themselves more moral. Morality lessons are a by-product, not the main event, in athletics.

While this is whole heartedly a defense for sports, it also suggests what it is that actually makes sports activity contribute to social capital. Three processes are at work: building self-confidence, social contacts and morality lessons. Yet, it is not obvious that sports are more conducive to the first two processes than other voluntary organizations, and it is not clear how moral lessons have social and political effects relevant to outcomes addressed in the social capital discourse[10].

### 3. SPORTS FOR FORMING HEALTHY SOCIETY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

The program aiming to prevent deviation or misdeed and realize healthy society through sports is to solve psychological or social problems of individual or particular groups or make good use of time for socially marginalized groups. According to Statistics Korea[28] and Juveniles Violence Prevention Foundation[29], the suicide rate(see table 1) and school violence rate(see table 2) of juveniles is very serious.

Table 1. Suicide and suicide rate of juveniles(5~24age)

(Unit: %)

year	Total		Man		Women	
	Death toll	Suicide rate (hundred thousand per)	Death toll	Suicide rate (hundred thousand per)	Death toll	Suicide rate (hundred thousand per)
2002	695	4.6	388	5.2	271	4.0
2003	845	6.0	510	6.9	335	5.0
2004	738	5.3	439	6.0	299	4.5
2005	888	6.4	447	6.2	441	6.7
2006	664	4.9	357	5.0	307	4.8

Table 2. School violence rate of juveniles (Unit: %)

year	Damage rate	Violence rate
2006	17.3	12.8
2007	16.2	15.1
2008	10.5	8.5
2009	9.4	12.4

The goal of sports program study is to examine how government and organization can prevent peoples from deviant behavior of suicide and violence. Theoretical basis of this sports program is the study of deviation and misdeed based on structural functionalism and the study on youth development in terms of pedagogy and psychology. In particular, the study aiming to examine the effect of physical activities and sports activities for preventing deviation or delinquency of juveniles was one of the important research topics from 1960 until 1980 in the field of sports sociology and sports pedagogy. Recently in North America many attempts to develop program for developing character and social behavior connected with local community beyond the limit of school or correctional institution were made. Physical activities and sports activities were regarded and used as the most important in the program [24][25].

Social agreement on value of sports activities as effective strategy to prevent deviation and realize healthy society was formed from embryonic stage of modern sports activities and sports activities to prevent deviation and realize healthy society were recognized as active social development strategy to solve modern diverse social problems. However, scientific research so far showed that the sport program that can prevent deviation and realize healthy society was not established well and the study on sports program needs to collect empirical data to reach a specific conclusion[26][27]. But most scholars may agree that sports activities have positive influence on preventing deviation and realizing healthy society. Main concern is how to develop sports resources and service and how to effectively provide them.

The efficiency of sports on forming healthy society and social capital depends on the participants' spontaneity. That is, various and well-organized sports programs can be attractive promoting factors which can provide close relationship and autonomous social relationship based on trust for the citizens who didn't have these relationships. For example, the turnout in local self-government election can be an indicator of mature civil society. The improvement of the turnout can be attained more effectively by the accumulation of social capital, such as community bond and strong solidarity, rather than elected governments' campaign and education. More people participate in the gathering or the event for enjoying sports activities than in the election education of the local government office. When these sports clubs and social relationships become various and are supported constantly, the members can have an opportunity to share community's issues and problems formally or informally, getting more active attitude toward the solution to the community's problem. The important thing is how the sports program should be organized in order to contribute to the formation of healthy society and social capital. The suggestion to offer sports resource and service for the formation of healthy society and social capital is as follows;

First, sports clubs should be encouraged to be organized and acted as voluntary clubs. Considering the examples in the developed countries, in order to develop the public-oriented citizenship, it is important to join the various groups which have loose bonds such as sports clubs or hobby clubs, which are beyond the first tie-in group. Putnam(1993) refers to this as an effect of bowling club, and argued or said that the decrease of the number of people who go to bowling alley shows the reason of American society's problem and the decline of social capital. On the other hand, since the late 1980's Japanese big cities which enjoyed their restoration have shown some common characteristics. These are various lifelong education programs operated voluntarily by citizens, the vigorous increase of open clubs, and active support for these clubs from local governments. Organized support and network activities are essential factors to accumulate social capital and form healthy society. Unlike tie-in groups, voluntary groups make it possible to mobilize resource resources to solve the problem and to attain common goals.

Secondly, the fairness of sports policy should be ensured so that the policy and sports organizations may win public confidence. This means that the benefit of sports policy should not be focused on a specific class, but be distributed to all the classes equally. For example, if a policy is promoted only in favor of golf, which is considered upper class-dominated, the distrust about sports policies and sports organizations will become serious.

Thirdly, the sports program for the formation of the community and civil society should be developed and offered. In developing sports programs, the formation of the community and civil society should be a final goal. The providers of sports resources and services should pay attention to the development and distribution of various theoretical, politic, and practical programs to form the community and civil society by accumulating social capital, not personal programs to meet consumers' needs such as recreation, effective use of time, opportunity to refresh citizens, and improvement the quality of

life. Especially, they should be aware that group-centered sports programs are more conducive to the formation of social capital or group identity than individual-centered ones. As is generally known, the values of sports received attention only at the individual level such as recreation, effective time utilization, refreshment, cultivation of character and improvement of life. The importance of individual level in value of sports should not be neglected but it is also important to establish analytical concept about social meaning and role of sports such as social capital or sense of community and develop and disseminate sports programs for its development. For example, In the case of value of life quality, though there is insufficient evidence that improvement of individual life quality necessarily leads to improvement of social life quality, promotion of improving life quality through sports was used to mean constructing better and healthier society at social level as well as individual level. The concept of social capital can be used valuable analytic concept that can study wider social value of sports. It is necessary that more systematic study on specific definition and measurement should be conducted.

Fourthly, sports activities should improve basic factors of healthy social capital, such as autonomy, trust, cooperation, and open communication so that sports programs may form healthy society and social capital. We should bear in mind that if the sports program generate the value or the behavior resulting from isolation or distrust, it will result in the negative effect on the formation of social capital. For example, the case of a sports activity based on a specific culture(that is, reckless social culture based or conspicuous consumption of luxury goods of upper class) could strengthen their own solidarity and be meaningful, but this could have a negative effect on improving human relationship of the community which they belong to or the whole members of the society, promoting relative sense of deprivation, distrust, insecurity.

#### **4. THE ORIENTATION OF SPORTS SOCIOLOGY RESEARCH**

Social capital as an indicator for healthy society has been discussed in the general sociology field rather than sports sociology field. Considering that sports can contribute to the formation of healthy society and social capital, the role of sports is more important. Nevertheless, the fact is that the effort to study the formation healthy society and social capital is not sufficient. From now on, more realistic matters, like healthy society and social capital, should be emphasized in sports sociology field. The followings are research subjects to be aimed for the formation of healthy society and social capital.

Firstly, the issue of social capital, trust, and distrust at the micro level needs to be analyzed and connected those at the macro level. The macro level means national systems, laws, and the governance structure, while the micro level means local systems, network, norm, and value. At the micro level, the explanatory variable with which social capital at the macro level can be predicted needs to be identified[5]. Also, structural-cognitive aspect needs to be analyzed. Structural aspect includes institution of the state and network. Cognitive aspect includes governance and trust, norms values.

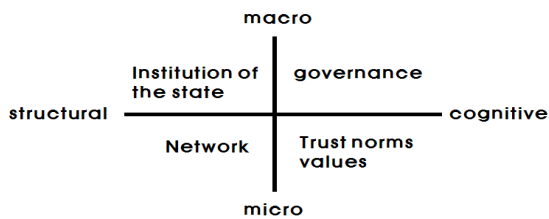


Fig. 2. Structure of Trust

Secondly, the interdisciplinary research is required for the study of trust as social capital. The research on trust and distrust as social capital has been conducted in the field of psychology and sociology separately. The common denominator from each research of both fields should be deduced, and research interchanges between both the fields should be promoted actively for the expansive research.

Thirdly, social network analysis approach is required for social capital. Social network analysis approach is widely used in general sociology, where we can take advantage of both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the sports sociology field, only a few research has been done concerning this[11] [13]. Social network analysis contributes to the understanding of the structural features of the social relationship as well as of the number or the intensity of the social relationship. For example, Kim(2009) performed a study on the structure of trust network and the exchange of social resources among soccer club members by utilizing social network analysis and theory. This study contributed to extend the scope of the study of sports sociology related with social capital, and to examine causal relationship of structure and behavior. The study that applied social network analysis method and theory so far were insufficient but can be summarized and presented from two standpoints (Yong-Hak Kim, 2007). First, research that examines the characteristics of objects is in progress (Dae-Joong Kim, 2002; Wan-Gi Baek, 2000; Se-Hwan Lee, Woo-Seong Kim, 2008). These studies mentioned above reported that activities in the network can be reasonable but does not need to be reasonable (Duk-Jin Chang, 2000). These studies aimed to describe social phenomenon in terms of relationships instead of individual attribute. Second, the study on effect of network is in progress (Kyong-Sik Kim, 2009; Woo-Sik Kim, 2001; Seon-Jun Park, 2001; Duk-Jin Chang, 2000). These studies placed emphasis on examining positive and negative result that structure of network generates. Two standpoints above are different. The one is related to network as standpoint that explains social phenomenon that takes position of understanding orientation while the other is related to the position of improvement orientation that regards social network as a tool for goal achievement (Kyong-Sik Kim, 2010; Hyo-Jeong Kim, 2006). Diverse studies on these two standpoints should be conducted in the field of sports sociology.

Fourthly, critical researches on social capital need to be conducted. Too often, the concept and the theory of social capital tend to be used imprudently. In sports sociology, the concept and the theory should be reflected and discussed, and then applied to our field. For example, its positive result was mainly focused, but recently its negative result is being presented by a concept, social debt. Especially there should be

empirical researches on the possibility that at the level of group or society, social relationship keeps and worsens existing inequality.

Fifthly, sports sociology research field should include the discourse on cyber community's social capital[14] [15]. which is being dealt with in social science. Internet helps sports clubs to be built up and spread. Sports clubs of on-line facilitate the communication of members, and strengthen the solidarity, trust, norm. Sport sociology needs to investigate the reality, type and effect of social capital.

Besides, we should develop measurement device for practical research on social capital. Measurement device should include the characteristics of sports clubs as voluntary organization.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The reason of social deviant behaviors in Korean society can be found in the collapse of traditional social bonds that were based on morality. Rapid change in Korean society caused the post – modernistic individualistic features to be presented, which led to fragmentation and isolation of social relationship. This study examined social capital as an alternative proposal to the formation of social bonds and as an indicator for healthy society, and emphasized the role of sports in forming healthy society and social capital. Today, to realize healthy society from various social deviant behavior problems, we should help the general public recognize the value of sports and should stress it. To do so, we should encourage them to organize a sports club as a voluntary club and to participate. Also, we need to ensure the trust of sports organization and policy, and to develop and distribute sports program to form community and civil society. Government and sports organization lacked development and distribution of sports program for the alienated class. I wonder how we have trust in sports policy of sports organization. Sports sociologist must present critical views to solve problems of sports policy. Sports sociology needs to explore optimal condition to form healthy society and social capital, and at the same time, to try to find out realistic means to meet this condition. To do so, we need research on social capital combined at both micro and macro level, interdisciplinary research with the help of psychology, researches based on middle range theory, and critical researches. Sports sociology will be constantly developed by paying attention to the study trend on healthy society and social capital, and producing and providing practical knowledge needed to solve practical problem.

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