

‘Do know harm’: Examining the intersecting capabilities of young people from refugee backgrounds through community sport and leisure programmes

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Abstract

Young people from refugee backgrounds have been repeatedly denied the ability to lead a life that they value. Community sport and leisure has been positioned as a tool to foster positive wellbeing experiences for these young people living in Western resettlement countries. Drawing on qualitative data from a Participatory Action Research project in London, England, we apply Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach to examine how the young people made sense of and negotiated their interconnecting capabilities through the sport and leisure programme. We examine three key interconnections between the capabilities of (a) life, bodily health and play; (b) affiliation and emotion and (c) bodily integrity and control over the environment. The findings are significant in ensuring sport and leisure provides opportunities for young people from refugee backgrounds to engage in positive wellbeing experiences and for enabling them and those supporting them to know and challenge harmful practices that may restrict capabilities.

Keywords

capabilities, refugee wellbeing, forced migration, sport for development, participatory methodologies

Introduction

Currently, over 89 million people have been forced to flee their homes as a result of conflict, climate change or persecution, nearly half of who are aged under 18 years old (UNHCR, 2022). As a result of past traumatic experiences and hostile policies in the

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resettlement country, young people from refugee backgrounds experience a multitude of challenges in maintaining their wellbeing, increasing their risk of social exclusion and mental health challenges (Brough et al., 2003). The Capabilities Approach is a useful framework for understanding what matters most to the wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds and examining factors that may enhance and undermine wellbeing (Chase and Allsopp, 2021). The Capabilities Approach (CA) as articulated by Nussbaum (2011) is a comparative quality of life assessment and basic theory of social justice that examines wellbeing through functionings, wellbeing achievements and capabilities, the opportunities and choices that people have to choose what matters to their wellbeing and achieve these (Nussbaum, 2011). Through asking the key question ‘what is each person able to do and be?’, the CA is focused on understanding local and contextual notions of wellbeing and increasing wellbeing through expanding capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011: 18).

During displacement and transit many young people experience significant denial of capabilities through war, violence, trafficking, and loss or separation from family members and friends. Upon arrival in the UK, the policies and political discourses can intensify the damaging impact of displacement on the wellbeing of young people (Chase and Allsopp, 2021). Evidence suggests that immigration policies serve to create a hostile environment in a bid to deter prospective irregular migrants and encourage voluntary return (Goodfellow, 2019). While we use the term ‘young people from refugee backgrounds’, we emphasise this is a heterogeneous group and policies impact young people’s wellbeing in diverse ways depending on policy categories (e.g. refugee, asylum seeker, unaccompanied asylum-seeking child) (Bakewell, 2008). For example, currently, young people with refugee status are granted leave to remain in the UK, can access public services and gain paid employment (Home Office, 2022a), while young people with asylum seeker status are undergoing the lengthy and uncertain process to determine whether they will be granted refugee status. During this time, they are at risk of detention and deportation, live poorly with a £40.85 weekly allowance, are prohibited from working and have restricted access to some public services (Home Office, 2022b). Young people aged under 18 years old who arrive alone are given unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) status. Despite being entitled to the same rights and support as ‘looked after children’ (Home Office, 2019), they experience unique challenges to their wellbeing through age determination processes, unregulated housing, and are typically only granted discretionary leave to remain until they reach 17.5 years old, then they may be subject to deportation (Chase and Allsopp, 2021). Against this backdrop, there is growing interest from policy makers, practitioners, and academics in developing workable and effective solutions to support the wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds (Chase and Allsopp, 2021).

This paper provides a significant contribution to critical debates about the possibilities and challenges of community sport and leisure programming for fostering positive wellbeing experiences for young people from refugee backgrounds. Despite the well-intentioned nature of such programmes and research, scholars have critiqued the limited attention to lived experience and narrow epistemological framing (De Martini Ugolotti and Caudwell, 2021; Nunn et al., 2022; Spaaij et al., 2019). Concerns have addressed the over-reliance on Western policy-relevant frameworks including integration, psychological/emotional wellbeing, and social inclusion and questioned whether these frameworks capture what matters most to young people from refugee backgrounds

(Nunn et al., 2022; Spaaij et al., 2019). This emphasis on top-down outcomes has also minimised attention towards the processes and opportunities through which individual wellbeing may be experienced or restricted within the programme (Nathan et al., 2013). In response to these critiques, this is the first paper to utilise the CA to examine the wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds within community sport/leisure contexts. Nussbaum's (2011) CA is a more recent extension and development of Sen's (1981) original thinking on the Capability Approach, although this point is rarely explored in detail, and has been utilised to examine how sport-based programming in development contexts may support people to lead a life they value (see Dao and Darnell, 2022; Dao and Smith, 2022; Darnell and Dao, 2017). Considering the relatively recent application of the CA in this field, research has focused predominately on theoretically examining the compatibility of the CA within practice, policy and research. The small number of empirical papers have typically focused on opportunities that support capability expansion (Dao and Darnell, 2022; Jarvie and Ahrens, 2019), centred the perspectives of community sport organisers and practitioners (Açıköz et al., 2022; Rossi, 2015) and provided limited critical analysis of the potential negative consequences of community sport and leisure.

When considering that the very environments in which people seek safety are often the ones that continue to do harm and that research has historically been a site of exploitation and limited benefit for refugee communities (Mackenzie et al., 2007), we were keen to consider the ethical principles of harm and benefit in the context of capabilities. Our theoretical approach to examining capabilities alongside our participatory methodology and the play on words in the title indicates our commitment to *do no harm* in actual practice through knowing/addressing any harms that may arise and seeking to facilitate reciprocal benefit through research. We also argue that researchers and practitioners need to critically reflect on the planned and unintended consequences in community sport and leisure and unpack the assumption that there will always be positive outcomes.

The analysis of extensive qualitative data from a 3-year Participatory Action Research (PAR) study with a refugee charity, *BelongHere* (pseudonym) in London, England takes a critical and youth-centred perspective on understanding the potentials and pitfalls of community sport and leisure provision for young people from refugee backgrounds. To do so, our work is framed by Nussbaum's (2011) CA to examine how young people from refugee backgrounds understand their capabilities, the complex ways they contest and negotiate those capabilities, and why/ how there can be negative unintended consequences for their wellbeing in and through community sport and leisure. This paper contributes to the growing literature on forced migration and sport through enhancing understandings around what matters most to the wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds within community sport and leisure. We first provide an overview of the CA and a detailed account of our methods. Nussbaum's (2011) CA is then used to examine how the young people experienced the interconnections between (a) life, bodily health and play; (b) affiliation and emotion and (c) bodily integrity and control over the environment within the sport and leisure programme.

The capabilities approach

In this paper, our thinking is framed by Nussbaum's (2011) Capabilities Approach (CA). Nussbaum extends the work of Sen (1981), who initially developed the Capability

Approach as an alternative to traditional means of conceptualising and measuring well-being through using GDP, a measure of overall economic output as a proxy for wellbeing (Alkire, 2002). Sen (1981) argued that while increased economic growth may correlate with outcomes such as increased life expectancy and reduced infant mortality, this narrow measure does not consider the unequal distribution of wealth within society, nor capture the diversity of wellbeing dimensions that people actually value as worthwhile in their lives. In her conceptualisation of the CA, Nussbaum (2011) considers both comparative quality of life issues and seeks to develop a basic theory of social justice. Here, wellbeing is defined as the freedoms and opportunities one has to lead a life that they value and the approach seeks to expand people's opportunities to optimise wellbeing.

The CA examines wellbeing on the basis of functionings and capabilities. Functionings are achievements of wellbeing (Sen, 1999) and the active realisation of capabilities that people value, for example, being well-nourished, educated, warm, possessing a job (Nussbaum, 2011). However, resources alone do not lead to functionings, for example, one can possess a bicycle but that does not mean that they have the knowledge of how to ride it, a safe environment to cycle in, or live in a culture where it is acceptable for them to ride a bicycle. Rather, the ability of an individual to convert resources to functionings is dependent on a combination of contextual, personal, social, political, and environmental factors, or 'conversion factors', which can constrain agency and opportunities (Sen, 1985). Capabilities then are 'substantive freedoms' (Sen, 1999); the opportunities and choices that people have to decide which set of functionings are meaningful to them and achieve these (Nussbaum, 2011).

CA scholars advocate for examining wellbeing through a core focus on capabilities, as this allows us to consider whether a person has the freedom to choose and achieve the things that they value (Alkire, 2022; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1985). This agency to choose or refuse to act in line with individual values and goals is morally significant as it respects people's right to self-determination (Nussbaum, 2000). Nussbaum (2011) usefully differentiates between different types of capabilities. Internal capabilities are individual traits and abilities developed via interaction with the external environment (e.g. self-confidence, ability to read, knowledge of the political system), whereas Nussbaum's combined capabilities are closely connected to Sen's (1981) substantive freedoms and include internal capabilities plus the freedoms afforded within the socio-cultural-political-economic environment. For example, an asylum seeker may possess the educational credentials to participate in the resettlement country's labour market, but ultimately be denied this freedom as their credentials are not recognised and they do not have the right to work. As such, Nussbaum (2011) argues that it is the state's responsibility to protect and support combined capabilities, and that any failure to do so is a result of social inequalities and injustice.

In Nussbaum's (2011) CA, she identifies a list of central capabilities which, she argues, underpin core elements of human functioning and flourishing and act as the basis for fundamental political principles. Previously, Sen (1981) did not outline a list of key capabilities and instead sought to develop a flexible approach, whereby societies were free to decide which capabilities should be protected depending on local context. Through the central capabilities, Nussbaum sought to address concerns from scholars

regarding how the CA could be operationalised and applied in policy and practice. This list of 10 capabilities was intended as an open-ended and non-hierarchical proposal, which could be ‘contested and re-made’ to allow individuals and communities to define their own freedoms and set thresholds depending on needs and context (Nussbaum, 2000).

The ability to live a long life without fear of it getting cut short is first an important capability for Nussbaum. If this capability is not protected, all other capabilities may fail to hold relevance (Nussbaum, 2011). The capabilities of practical reasoning and affiliation then organise and suffuse all other capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999). Practical reasoning allows an individual to be able to make sense of what they value and what they understand as good and bad, thus providing the filter through which a person makes choices and activates capabilities. Affiliation is the ability to engage in social interactions, care for others, and be treated with dignity, all of which have policy and legal relevance and are significant in enhancing wellbeing. Affiliation intersects with the capability of emotion; the ability to foster and sustain emotional attachments to people, places, and things and experience the full spectrum of emotions. Emotions influence other capabilities as they can help us to sense what feels good and bad, thus shaping behaviour and life goals. Senses, imagination and thought is the ability to engage one’s senses; to imagine, think and reason in an informed way as cultivated by education. Nussbaum (2011) also argues that protecting and living among other species such as animals, plants, and nature is instrumental in leading a fulfilling life. Another important capability for Nussbaum (2011) is bodily health; the ability to meet the physiological needs required to sustain and live life in good mental and physical health through secure access to shelter, medical care, nourishing food, and exercise. Bodily integrity then involves the ability for autonomy and self-determination over one’s body. This includes being able to make informed choices e.g. in matters of reproduction, medical treatment, and sexual activity and to be able to move freely between places while being secure against violence and abuse (Nussbaum, 2000). Bodily integrity is often shaped by degrees of control over the environment. This capability refers to the ability to have control within (a) material contexts through owning a house and having a job and (b) political contexts through having the right to participate in political decisions that govern life and freedom of speech (Nussbaum, 2000). Last, the capability of play is the ability to have fun, laugh, and engage in recreational activities. Although play is often de-prioritised in light of harsh social-economic conditions, it is an innate part of human behaviour (Nussbaum, 2011).

While each individual capability can be claimed as having instrumental value in leading a worthwhile life, capabilities are inextricably intertwined and cannot be viewed in isolation as they interact and build on each other (Nussbaum, 2011). Recognising this interwoven nature of capabilities, Nussbaum (2011) adopts three useful concepts from Wolff and De-Shalit (2007): tragic choice, fertile functioning, and corrosive disadvantage. *Tragic choice* involves two or more capabilities colliding and any course of action involving harm, for example, protecting life through fleeing one’s homeland may involve foregoing bodily integrity at the hands of a smuggler. A *fertile functioning* may promote related capabilities, for example, education may support a family’s social mobility, while *corrosive disadvantage* represents deprivation

in one domain (e.g. lack of education, poverty) impacting other functionings, for example, health and bodily integrity.

It is important to note that the young people rarely discussed capabilities in isolation, rather, they understood their capabilities as interwoven and articulated complex and contested processes of capability negotiation, denial, and growth. Through these discussions, the young people identified three groupings of interconnected capabilities that shaped their wellbeing and lived experiences in the community sport/ leisure programme. Prior to our analysis, we examine how the CA has been applied in sports contexts with marginalised groups.

Capabilities, sport and marginalised groups

Issues surrounding capabilities and participant groups have been explored within sports studies and most of this work is situated within sport for development (SfD). In broad terms, Silva and Howe (2012) and Svensson and Levine (2017) suggest that the CA can provide an effective theoretical framework for understanding meanings of and enhancing individual wellbeing through sport. For Jarvie and Ahrens (2019), the Homeless World Cup provides a resource of hope and collective site of agency for homeless players. Through soccer, people experiencing homelessness were provided with opportunities to develop capabilities by improving and broadening social and friendship networks and obtaining material, educational, and emotional support. In a critical account of SfD and the capabilities of Indigenous Australian peoples, Rossi (2015) suggests a contested domain in which enhanced capabilities such as sense of place and belonging are juxtaposed against the culture of dependency resulting from recipient–donor relationships. The latter operates as an ‘unfreedom’ (Sen, 1999), and has the unintended consequence of limiting capabilities. Similarly, in the context of a football youth programme in Turkey, while Açıkgöz et al. (2022) found that capabilities such as skill development, sporting and educational opportunities, and positive emotions could be enhanced through sport, the dominance of football within SfD programmes neutralises any potential capability gain as it restricts choices and opportunities available and reproduces social exclusion.

Employing Nussbaum’s CA specifically, Darnell and Dao (2017) argue that SfD programmes can foster capabilities including play, bodily health, practical reasoning, affiliation, bodily integrity, and senses, imagination and thought. They also suggest that insights from the CA can inform the study and practice of SfD highlighting the intrinsic value of sport as play in leading a just and worthwhile life. Theoretically speaking, Dao and Smith (2022) suggest that Nussbaum’s capabilities have empirical value but that Crocker’s development theory–practice should be used alongside the CA to more effectively guide decisions and implementation within SfD projects. In a further analysis of a football youth programme in Vietnam, Dao and Darnell (2022) suggest that programmes can provide young participant’s with opportunities to experience intersecting capabilities including affiliation and emotion; bodily health and practical reasoning; and play, all of which may support them in leading a life that they value.

This growing body of evidence suggests that the CA is an appropriate theoretical framework in SfD. Through focusing on processes and opportunities, rather than

outcomes, the CA is useful in untangling the participant's nuanced experiences within sport-based programmes (Zipp et al., 2019) and may support the expansion of people's opportunities and choices to lead a full and dignified life (Svensson and Levine, 2017). The useful analytical tools provided through the CA also provide a platform for sport and wellbeing experiences to be examined within wider policy and structural contexts (Svensson and Levine, 2017; Zipp et al., 2019). Yet, empirical studies applying Nussbaum's CA are limited in number and minimal attention has been directed towards examining the experiences of programme participants, including how they negotiate the interconnected nature of capabilities, and aspects of provision that may restrict capabilities. The CA has also not yet been applied to examine young people from refugee backgrounds in sport. Given this, our study sought to examine how young people from refugee backgrounds make sense of and experience intersecting capabilities within a sport-based programme.

Methods

Data was collected as part of a three-year PAR study exploring relationships between community sport and leisure and the wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds in London, UK. The core principles of PAR underpinned our approach including: valuing local knowledge, democratising the research process, developing trusting and reciprocal relationships, embedding ethical and reflective practices, and being committed to social transformation (Freire, 1972; Smith et al., 2022; Spaaij et al., 2018). Capability scholars suggest that these PAR principles also align with the CA (Alkire, 2002; Robeyns, 2017). Alkire (2002) argues that the traditional research process, often driven by Western research agendas rather than the needs and priorities of local populations, may lead to paternalistic, westernised assumptions about which capabilities hold value in people's lives. Through shifting power hierarchies and involving community members in developing the research process, participatory approaches may provide the tools for communities to decide which capabilities hold value within the local context and promote capability expansion through stimulating local action (Frediani, 2015).

The research was a collaboration with *BelongHere*, a charity in London, UK that provides support services alongside sport and leisure programming for over 200 young people from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds aged 12–24 years old with asylum seeker, refugee, and UASC status. Activities included: case work, therapy, English classes, football, girls' group, youth club with rotating sport and leisure activities, leadership group, wellbeing workshops, and social outings. The first author initially spent nine months volunteering with *BelongHere* to build trust and rapport (Spaaij et al., 2018), before collaborating with staff and young people over one year to co-design, deliver, and evaluate a new sport and leisure programme which aimed to enhance wellbeing. During this time, the young people and staff were involved in various aspects of research design including co-designing ethics processes and data collection methods and collecting the data. We took an iterative approach to ethics, submitting five separate applications prior to each data collection method through the Brunel University London Ethics Board (21131-MHR-Feb/2020-24778-2). This approach allowed for flexible involvement of the young people and supported on-going collaboration (Mackenzie

et al., 2007). Considering the ethical complexities of PAR, we collaboratively negotiated ethical challenges with stakeholders as they arose. Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper on participant request to protect anonymity. In our earlier paper (Smith et al., 2022), we provide a detailed overview of navigating ethical complexities.

Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with community stakeholders involved in the *BelongHere* programme. Interviews fostered a two-way dialogue and reflexive space for sharing insights and experiences in a deep and meaningful way. Stakeholders included three youth workers, two volunteers, and an art therapist at *BelongHere*; and project partners included a social worker, two managers at refugee charities, a youth worker and community programmer at a museum. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to recruit interviewees via email. Participants were selected as they had worked with the first author and could provide in-depth information about refugee youth wellbeing within sport/leisure contexts. Interviews were conducted over Zoom, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Interview length varied between 18.13 and 75.15 min, lasting on average 57.02 min. Interviews were guided by questions on: conceptualisations of refugee youth wellbeing; community sport and leisure programme design, and programme delivery/evaluation.

Photo voice was co-designed by and utilised with six young leaders who were involved in *BelongHere*'s youth leadership programme to examine lived experiences in the programme and create a space for co-learning/research. The first author had known the young people for one year prior to data collection and relationships were built on negotiations of trust and reciprocity (Smith et al., 2022). A purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) of young leaders were invited in-person or via telephone to participate. The young leaders had lived in the UK for at least 2 years, were aged between 17 and 19 years old, and had been *BelongHere* participants for at least 1 year. The three female participants arrived via UNHCR refugee resettlement schemes with their families from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq, and were granted leave to remain in the UK, whereas the three male participants were from Chad and South Sudan, held UASC status and granted discretionary leave to remain. The first author, who conducted the fieldwork, was a white, young, British Woman, who was immersed in the research site as a youth worker and her PhD was supervised by the second and third authors. As we describe in (Smith et al., 2022), we engaged in multiple reflexive practices including a detailed researcher reflexivity diary, informal de-brief sessions with young people and staff, and regular critical supervisory discussions. Such tools underpinned our PAR approach and allowed us to reflect upon how our lived experiences, emotions, and identities shaped the process.

Photo voice is a well-established visual method used to generate critical dialogue about lived experiences using participant-generated photographs (Wang and Burris, 1997). Young people at *BelongHere* would regularly take photos on their smart phones of programme activity, people, and places and share these in the *BelongHere* WhatsApp group chat alongside reflections. As this approach was already familiar to the young people, they decided to use photo voice method to evaluate the youth programme. Prior to the photo voice interviews, we asked young people to send their favourite photos that represented their experiences with the programme to a secure WhatsApp group. The photo voice interviews were held over Zoom and lasted between 56.03 and 111.45 min; they were participant-led and semi-structured. The first author initially

asked the young people to describe why they chose these photographs and asked probing questions such as ‘what is happening here?’, ‘tell me about your relationship with ...’ and ‘how did you feel here?’ This led to wider discussion around their experiences in the programmes, including relationships, what they liked/disliked and the value of sport/leisure in their lives.

Framework analysis (Gale et al., 2013) involved the first author in a multi-step framework process including: (a) familiarisation through (re) reading transcripts; (b) conducting open coding across transcripts and iterative coding reflecting theoretical concepts; (c) synthesising and categorising codes to develop a framework; (d) applying the framework to other transcripts; (e) charting relevant data into a matrix; and (f) interpreting key themes. The young people were given the opportunity to co-produce the framework, yet due to lack of interest/time, decided not to engage in this process. In this paper, we offer an analysis of their lived experiences within a community sport/leisure programme using Nussbaum’s (2011) CA. In the following sections, we explore three key ways that the young people articulated capabilities as interconnected: (a) life, bodily health and play; (b) affiliation and emotion and (c) bodily integrity and control over the environment.

The value of life, bodily health and play in leading a worthwhile life

Above everything, the young people valued the freedom to live life safely. Nussbaum (2011) argues that the ability to lead a long life without fear of it getting cut short is a central capability that must be protected at all costs. During displacement and transit, many of the young people were not free to live safely and death was a daily experience. Upon arrival in the UK, young people expressed relief that their lives were safe and they had enhanced freedoms. Whilst arrival was associated with safety, young people with asylum seeker and UASC status lacked *capability security* (Nussbaum, 2011), they experienced a sense of fragility in being safe as they were waiting to find out whether they would be deported to their home country, where their lives would be again at risk. Jerad (youth participant, 19, M) noted ‘Like most important things to me are safety and documentation [getting refugee status], this is my priority here, my future’.

Staff were cognisant that the young people’s safety was undermined by the slowness and complexities of the asylum process and therefore aimed to support the capability of life in different ways. As also discussed in Dao and Darnell (2022) and Suzuki (2017), *BelongHere* staff emphasised the importance of fostering a safe alternative space. Aala (programme manager, M) said ‘the feeling of safety means the physical and the emotional have to be provided otherwise we are duplicating what they experienced in their lives’. Similarly, the young people spoke of the importance of the programme being a safe space free from ‘abuse’, ‘judgement’, ‘bullying’, and ‘punishments’. However, ultimately the young people associated living safely with gaining refugee status in the UK. Here, refugee status was perceived as a *fertile functioning* (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007), fostering *capability security* (Nussbaum, 2011) in other areas and expanding opportunities and choices available. As such, many of the young people initially came to *BelongHere* to access a case work service which aimed to support the capability of

life through assisting young people with their asylum case and age assessment process. Jerad (youth participant, 19, M) said 'like the sport and the programme not my priority I came [to BelongHere] to get help with home office and my application [asylum]'. We can see here how Jerad made a *tragic choice* (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007), through de-prioritising leisure time activities (*play*) to direct his energies towards attaining refugee status (*life*).

In articulating their experiences of valuing a safe life, the young people described connections to bodily health. Indeed, Nussbaum (2011) asserts that if bodily health is not protected, the capability of life may not be upheld and can fail to hold value. The staff aimed to provide an empowering experience whereby young people were provided with opportunities and knowledge to realise the real value of health in their lives. Nussbaum (2011: 333) defines bodily health as 'the ability to live life in good health' and draws reference to objective wellbeing measures through adding 'to have adequate shelter and be adequately nourished'. For the young people, health was perceived as holistic wellbeing, encompassing physical, mental, spiritual, and social dimensions. Mohammed (youth participant, 18, M) said: 'you know it's like your health, mental health, friends, your religion'. BelongHere staff recognised such a holistic concept and sought to embed it within the programme. The young people also noted that their freedom to live in good health was restricted by *conversion factors* (Sen, 1985) such as poverty, isolation, trauma, language barrier, inaccessible health information, cultural values, the asylum system and welfare policies. While BelongHere could not always directly address such structural determinants of health, through offering holistic services such as case work, therapy, English classes and health and wellbeing workshops alongside sport and leisure programmes, the programme aimed to empower the young people to realise the value they assigned to their wellbeing even in momentary or short-term ways. Indeed, Jarvie and Ahrens (2019) and Dao and Darnell (2022) also describe how non-for-profit sport organisations play a vital role in supporting participant health capabilities when the state fails to do so.

Recognising these vast health inequalities, young people often initially attended the programme to access support in securing basic physiological needs to sustain health such as food, shelter, and sleep. Jerad (youth participant 19, M) said:

I first come to BelongHere to get help with housing. They help me with all that then introduce me to Aala [youth worker] who says therapy could help me. I wasn't sure you know, I didn't finish but it helped me a lot... Then I join youth club and football programme.

After securing these basic functionings, Jerad came to see the programme as a way to access other opportunities that he came to value in relation to his health for example therapy, social activities, and sport. He was initially wary about seeking support for his mental health. Indeed, while many of the young people experienced symptoms of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety or PTSD, they had limited knowledge of mental health and noted this was highly stigmatised within their cultures. Aina (youth participant, 19, F) said: 'there is not even a word for it, they just say you're crazy'. Health capabilities are intrinsically connected to possessing knowledge. Through workshops, therapy, and games, the young people were able to enhance their knowledge of mental health and develop their *internal capabilities* (Nussbaum, 2011).

The young people and staff highlighted that supporting the capability of health was a long-term and individualised, yet contested process. Funders set high targets for new participants and stipulated that after six sessions, young people had completed the programme and could no longer be counted for evaluation purposes. These targets were contradictory to how staff and young people conceptualised the capability of health and restricted opportunities and choices available. Youth worker, Gerri (F) said:

But what about those who've been coming regularly? They need support and like how do they know what wellbeing means to [name redacted]? For me, we find solutions that are not necessarily you know, bringing the participants up for the funders but that can be impactful for that small group of people.

We can see here that at times, staff exerted agency to provide long-term and tailored opportunities to support the young people's capability of bodily health.

In articulating their experiences of bodily health, young people also drew connections to the capability of play in providing opportunities to support mental health through releasing stress and feeling pleasure. Nussbaum (2011) highlights the value of laughter, enjoyment, and recreational activities in leading a worthwhile life. Young people noted that *BelongHere* sport and leisure activities should be fun, diverse, and fairly unstructured with time for youth-initiated play such as dancing and listening to music. The programme also provided opportunities to participate in otherwise inaccessible recreational experiences including high ropes, kayaking, and rock climbing. However, as also discussed by Açıkgöz et al. (2022), these one-off experiences may have increased aspirational functionings while not expanding the real opportunities available for young people to choose these activities in the future. Overall, the young people valued the intrinsic nature of play and opportunities to have fun, laugh, and feel pleasure in and of themselves (see also Darnell and Dao, 2017). Roya (youth participant, 17, F) expressed: 'We can just be fun and silly when at youth club, way less formal than school. Can be ourselves, laugh and dance listen to music, just have so much fun, like we are always laughing'. Furthermore, in recognising the *fertility* of play to cultivate additional capability growth (Dao and Darnell, 2022), opportunities provided a space for relieving negative emotions and escaping the stress of the asylum/resettlement process (see Koopmans and Doidge, 2022). Karin (youth participant, 18, M) said: 'when here with everybody, and we are doing activity together, all those worries go away, stop the overthinking'. However, considering the young people's significant agency denial, these positive wellbeing experiences were often bound to the time and space of the programme.

Refugee youth journeys and the negotiations of affiliations and emotions

Affiliations to friends and community were central to the young people's wellbeing. This finding is testimony to Nussbaum's (2011) claim for affiliation as an organising capability suffusing all others. The young people's capabilities of affiliation and emotion were inextricably intertwined as affiliations often came with complex emotions that supported and/or subverted decisions to act in line with what they valued in life (Nussbaum, 2001).

Nussbaum (2001) asserts that formative experiences with others can both nurture and negatively impact the development of emotional intelligence, with lifelong consequences for building attachments. During displacement, many of the young people lost social connections that they knew and loved as a result of death or separation, resulting in intense emotions of grief and sadness. Mohammed (youth participant, 18, M) was separated from his family during displacement and at the time of data collection, did not know whether they were alive. He said: 'I miss them so much, you know for us, family is so important because without family we are nothing'. Alongside separation and loss, many young people experienced violence, abuse or exploitation from adults in positions of power, restricting their ability to be treated as dignified humans. The negative emotions derived from these affiliations, such as sadness and fear, often motivated young people to avoid attachments that may foster further vulnerability (Nussbaum, 2001).

Upon arrival in the UK, the capability of affiliation was further restricted through minimal knowledge of norms/values, limited English proficiency, and hostile policies that fostered a culture of fear and stigma. Karin (youth participant, 18, M) explains:

Maybe I think they didn't speak to me because I am a refugee (nervous laugh)... I think maybe difficult to make friends with someone from this country because sometimes maybe they ignore us, making fun that we can't speak English.

Karin was denied the ability to affiliate with others and experienced negative emotions of shame and alienation. Nussbaum (2001) reminds us that shame can evoke feelings of inadequacy, thus motivating us to avoid social interactions with those who cause us shame.

The programme aimed to create a space and place for young people to potentially rebuild affiliations and attachments. Affiliation operated as a *fertile functioning* (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007), supporting the young people's capability of emotion and this happened through (a) feeling part of a community, (b) building friendships to young people, and (c) developing relationships with staff.

Considering how relationships with others shape one's choices, actions, and sense of identity (Sen, 1999), Nussbaum (2011) recognises that group affiliations can support individuals to realise their capabilities. In a bid to reduce harm and optimise opportunities for community building, group membership at the programme was restricted to young people from refugee backgrounds. Young people noted how shared experiences of resettlement and displacement fostered emotional safety and solidarity as individual struggles became collective (Webster and Abunaama, 2021). Roya (youth participant, 17, F, refugee status) expressed:

There are people from all different cultures, who speak different languages, different religions but we feel like more comfortable. Because at school you are afraid of people laughing at you if you say this or you say this wrong, here nobody cares because everybody is same situation

These experiences of affiliation were inextricably connected to positive emotions (Nussbaum, 2001), such as comfort, acceptance, and appreciation which helped the young people to foster an emotional attachment and sense of belonging to the

community. Due to discrimination and hostile policies, these feelings of belonging rarely transcended to the wider community, yet young people sought local spaces of diasporic belonging (see Nunn et al., 2022) and many of these connections were developed through peer networks at the programme. Although positive experiences dominated, group settings can be a space of affiliation denial (Nussbaum, 2011). Recognising the heterogeneity and power hierarchies among the young people, stigmatising relationships occurred on the basis of intersecting characteristics. Black males from Sub-Saharan Africa with UASC status, LGBTQ+ young people, and Muslim girls reported experiencing discrimination and othering. Bahar (youth participant, 19, F) highlighted that she felt uncomfortable in some mixed-gendered programmes as ‘some of the boys keep making fun and asking me out’. To ensure each person is treated as equal (Nussbaum, 2011) and protected from harm, the young people noted that stronger rules around non-discrimination should be developed within the programme.

Affiliation also occurred through young people building relationships with other young people. Nussbaum (2011) highlights that close social relations matter most to humans and can foster positive wellbeing. Young people typically had few close friends in the UK prior to the programme and felt isolated. They valued the opportunity to build friendships through *BelongHere*. These friendships and the positive feelings derived often motivated young people to attend the programme. Roya (youth participant, 17, F) explains: ‘the reason why we go is because of the people and how they make us feel’. Friendships often extended outside the programme and were a source of laughter and enjoyment, alongside emotional, social, and material support (Chase and Allsopp, 2021). This peer support acted as a *fertile functioning* (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007) enabling knowledge sharing about the asylum/resettlement process. Peer–peer relationships also helped to foster hope by seeing peers successfully negotiate the complexities of refugee identities and experiences including developing positive relationships and understanding their rights in the UK.

The young people also noted the value of building attachments with adults through the programme. Considering experiences of past agency denial and existing power hierarchies, adult affiliations initially often evoked fear and mistrust. The young people noted that the sport/leisure activities provided organic opportunities to interact and connect with staff over shared experiences, gradually helping to foster emotional safety. Aina (youth participant, 19, F) explains:

We were moving, playing games and enjoying our time and so that makes us connected, makes us feel like we know and can trust each other ... That helped me a lot and I start talking and I gain confidence, it takes the pressure off.

These relationships often facilitated access to opportunities around education, health, and the asylum system, opening up choices for the young people in line with what they valued. Relationships may have also supported emotional capability expansion through offering an experience in which positive emotions such as safety and support can be felt and attachment wounds can begin to heal. Mohammed (youth participant, 18, M) was separated from his family and had been repeatedly let down by social workers. Through the youth programme, he was able to have a contrasting relational experience

with adults and valued being able to depend on them to act in his best interests. He said 'with you guys, I learnt that I can trust some adults'. However, considering the high turnover of staff and overreliance on placement students, at times, these relationships reproduced emotions of sadness and abandonment.

Supporting bodily integrity through fostering control over the environment

During migratory journeys, many of the young people experienced significant challenges to their bodily integrity as they were unable to move freely within their own country and across borders and were often subject to traumatic experiences of violence and abuse. Nussbaum (2000) asserts that a lack of bodily integrity can impede other capabilities through undermining one's conception of the self and the world around them. These traumatic experiences are stored in the body and can be re-lived through triggers associated with the past traumatic event (Ley et al., 2018).

Participation in sport and leisure can pose a site of further harm through reactivating traumatic memories of conflict, violence, and exploitation (Ley et al., 2018). In recognising the significance of capabilities, staff noted how they had witnessed young people become triggered during water sports, capoeira, and football. In the context of water sports, programme manager Aala (M) said:

He lost his friend in the water in the sea, and he didn't tell us anything before. And then we fell on the water and then he just had a panic attack... I had to really like grab him to keep him pushing above water, put my hand on his hands and breathe together and I was like 'I'm here, you're not gonna drown'.

Aala highlights the importance of embedding a trauma-informed approach to reduce the potential harm to the young people's bodily integrity through predicting potentially triggering situations and having the knowledge to identify and respond appropriately when a young person is triggered (Bergholz et al., 2016; Ley et al., 2018; Quarmby et al., 2022).

Upon arrival in the UK, policies further restricted the capability of control over the environment; young people with asylum seeker and UASC status were denied the agency to choose functioning's that they valued as decisions relating to their immediate environment were made by the Home Office or social workers. Jerad (youth participant, 19, M) notes:

we don't know what is happening, so how we feel safe? The social workers, they didn't tell me anything, I didn't know my rights. I didn't even realise I could stay here in the UK. They just give me money to live. They just tell me you stay here in this house.

This lack of control over the environment stemming from insecure immigration status, acted as a *corrosive disadvantage* (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007), negatively impacting other domains, such as rights, safety, and housing. Here, we see how lack of control over the environment further restricted bodily integrity through re-producing feelings of unsafety felt during trauma and increasing vulnerability to violence and abuse.

While the programme could not mitigate the controls put in place by the state, the young people noted the importance of having opportunities for control over the programme environment. Nussbaum (2000) asserts that mobilising control over the environment can support bodily integrity. While Nussbaum is specifically referring to political and material control, as previously noted, these are often unattainable to the young people. We argue that the ability to experience control within other environments can support bodily integrity through providing a means to exert agency within the context of the hostile asylum process. As such, we expand this definition to include diverse forms of control valued by the young people within the programme environment including (a) structure and routine, (b) degrees of choice, and (c) shared-power in decision making.

Having structure and routine within community sport and leisure programmes can foster feelings of security and safety for marginalised youth (Quarmby et al., 2022). Recognising that the Home Office controls time through the prolonged asylum process, the young people noted that the programme provided an opportunity to regain some control over time through offering routine and a temporal marker in the week (see Webster and Abunaama, 2021). Mohammed (youth participant, 18, M) said: 'every week yeah, I like it, I know we're going to meet them and we'll get some fun, like part of my routine like I go to school, gym'. In addition, programme manager, Aala (M) expressed the importance of shared rituals in creating routine and fostering feelings of control in the space:

We start with check in, activity, food, chill time, and then we have closing circle and say goodbye...I feel like ritual is something very healthy for young people, they know what to expect, how to connect.

In supporting the capability of control over the environment, staff and young people also highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for young people to make choices. Nussbaum (2011) asserts that having the freedom to choose to act in a certain way is valuable in and of itself and can empower people to shape their social environment. Set against the choice restriction day to day, the young people valued the flexible drop-in nature of the programme and staff highlighted the value of young people engaging in the programme through free choice. Youth Worker Gerri (F) noted:

It has to be something very, very free, something very flexible as their lives are so chaotic and uncertain.

The young people valued having choice over how they engaged in the programme depending on what was valuable to their individual wellbeing at that moment. Quarmby et al. (2022) highlight that offering choice provides a degree of autonomy, which has been previously denied through trauma. At the onset of the programme, choice was restricted with one activity on offer per session, which was chosen by staff. Through the young people's insights within the co-design sessions, staff later attempted to optimise choice through introducing an opt-out space with diverse leisure activities including games, table tennis, and art activities. Indeed, Suzuki (2017)

argues the importance of offering a variety of leisure activities to promote freedom of individual choice.

The young people also noted their desire to have control over the environment at the programme space through holding power within decision-making processes. Denial of bodily integrity occurs in situations of unequal power relations, thus challenging power asymmetries promotes freedoms (Robeyns, 2005). At the programme onset, all decisions were made by staff and the young people did not express desire to hold power in decision-making processes. This *adaptive preference* (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007) may have developed as a result of unfavourable circumstances during displacement/resettlement processes, whereby the young people adapted to not holding power and internalised the idea that they did not deserve it and/or it would lead to undesirable consequences. Youth involvement in decision-making processes was gradually incorporated through co-design sessions, surveys, and a youth leadership group and despite initial reluctance, the young people later came to value these opportunities. Bahar (youth participant, 19, F) said: 'It is important for me to feel like my voice is being heard, that actually I can make decisions and I can change things that are important to me'. However, at times, these displays of power-shifting were tokenistic. *BelongHere* delivered quarterly youth co-design sessions, which were a requirement of funders; volunteer Becky (F) noted 'they are doing all these co-design sessions, but what is the point, the activities are already planned for the quarter'. We see here that despite the appearance of involving young people within decision-making, this was not a real opportunity as decisions had already been made prior to consulting participants.

Conclusion

Our work demonstrates that young people from refugee backgrounds have a wealth of capabilities which frame their wellbeing, and these can be harnessed and negotiated in diverse ways through community sport and leisure to support them in leading a life that they value. *BelongHere* worked well to develop the young people's capabilities, particularly in terms of nurturing affiliations and attachments, providing opportunities for control and bodily integrity within the programme environment, and developing a holistic programme that prioritised capabilities the young people valued the most, for example, life and safety. However, our work has also shown that the programme had the ability to re-traumatise young people, re-produce unequal power hierarchies through tokenistic involvement in decision-making, and that stronger rules around non-discrimination should be developed. Despite the well-intended nature of these programmes and research, these findings highlight the need to bring to the fore complex issues of ethics and specifically to identify and address potentially harmful practices. In ensuring community sport and leisure can optimise capabilities and protect against harm, our overall recommendation is to prioritise young people's safety and security and value their experiences, identities and contributions. As we have shown, sport and leisure programmes which take a holistic approach, paying attention to physical, mental, spiritual, and social dimensions of capabilities are significant. In addition, fostering environments that develop secure and trusting relationships with peers and staff, and where young people are protected from emotional, physical, and psychological harm should be a core principle of sport and

leisure design and delivery. Moreover, co-creating opportunities in which young people from refugee backgrounds are able to make choices and genuinely be involved in joint decision-making processes about sport and leisure programmes must underpin the ethos of opportunities provided.

Through this paper, we offer a unique contribution to knowledge, theory development, and the theory–practice gap when it comes to understanding and enhancing wellbeing gains through community sport and leisure. We provide a significant theoretical contribution to re-thinking Nussbaum’s work through highlighting the complex and intersecting nature of capabilities and examining how such capabilities are understood and negotiated by the young people themselves.

We argue for the use of participatory approaches with young people from refugee backgrounds to develop more culturally relevant, gendered, and local understandings of capabilities and to utilise these insights within programme co-design and delivery. Finally, we urge sports scholars to consider the contested nature of capabilities and examine the complex intersections between capabilities, rather than focusing on single capability issues in making sense of the role of sport and leisure for young people from refugee backgrounds in leading a dignified and worthwhile life.


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