

Exercise Delivery Services Codes of Conduct: Awareness and Adherence of Fitness Trainers in Ghana

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Abstract

Background: Ethical competency plays vital in the services of any profession including Fitness trainers (FT). There has been upsurge in the number of FT in Ghana in recent time with scarce information on the awareness and adherence to exercise delivery services codes of conduct (EDCC) that should guide their practice. This study investigated the awareness and adherence of FT in Ghana to EDCC in fitness industry.

Method: This exploratory research study had 30 FT recruited through a three step multi- stage sampling technique (Mean_{age} = 25.75 ± 3.86years) from fitness and wellness centers and gyms in Ghana. A close-ended questionnaire adapted from the British Association of Sports and Exercise Science codes of conduct was administered. Descriptive statistics and factor analysis were used for data analysis.

Result: FT were aware of the existence of EDCC internationally (total awareness contribution = 67.99%) but none in Ghana hence did not adhere to any. A regulatory body to set up, monitor and enforce rules and regulations governing fitness in Ghana was significantly unavailable (Chi-square = 2.449, P > 0.05).

Conclusion: Activities of FT in Ghana were not regulated by any professional body. Relevant stakeholders need to develop EDCC legal document for FT to ensure ethical conduct in the fitness industry across Ghana. It is recommended that accredited higher institution of learning in Ghana should develop certificate and refresher courses for FT. There should be stakeholders' engagement to birth FT regulation in Ghana.

Keywords: Exercise Delivery Services, Codes of Conduct, Adherence, Awareness, Fitness Trainer.

Introduction

Recently, there has been a steady rise in recorded cases of non-communicable diseases in Ghana that cannot only be treated pharmacologically.^{1,2} The cost of pharmacological intervention continues to be on the increase although it has greater adverse effects.³⁻⁶ Recommendation of regular physical activity by health practitioners for the prevention and treatment of these conditions lately culminates to increase patronage of the

services of Fitness Trainers (FT).⁷ Many people from all walks of life now register with wellness and fitness centers to satisfy personal strive to prevent or reduce non-communicable diseases and stay healthy.^{8,9,10} FT is an individual who creates and delivers safe and effective exercise programs for healthy individuals and groups, or those with medical clearance to exercise. They motivate clients by collaborating to set goals, providing meaningful feedback, and by being a reliable source for

accountability. FT are recognized preventive health care providers, using exercise as a service, with professional codes of conduct and followed standard ethical practices in advanced world¹¹⁻¹⁴ and contribute significantly to lessening the overwhelming epidemic of non-communicable diseases globally.^{3,6} Exercise delivery services are all the dispensation of activities by fitness trainers who attend to the needs of clients that register with the fitness center to satisfy their exercise/fitness needs. Adherence is attachment or commitment to a person, cause, rules or belief and principles outlining what is expected of a staff. Awareness is a concept about knowing, perceiving and being cognizant of the values, rules, standards, and principles outlining what employers expect from staff. It is also a state wherein a subject is aware of some information when that information is directly available to bring to bear in the direction of a wide range of behavioral actions.

Although FT in Ghana are contributing to quality health and standard of living of Ghanaians through exercise delivery, non-adherence to and ignorance of exercise delivery codes of conduct (a set of values, rules, standards, and principles outlining what employers expect from staff within an organization) in the fitness industry will attracts unresolved attention^{15,16} Studies established that the usefulness of codes of conduct positively correlates with the level of awareness of such codes^{17,18} that awareness of codes of conduct is fundamental, and an essential aspect of the quality of service offered.¹⁹ The motion to benefit maximally from the contributory roles of FT in Ghana could be unproductive without their awareness of, and adherence to standard EDCC. The issues of unprincipled practices in the sports industry^{20,21} coupled with dirge evidence of unethical practice in the fitness industry makes it erroneous to admit that Ghanaians FT are aware and adhere to EDCC to meet the requests of yearning clients due to scarce information. Investigating the awareness and adherence to EDCC among FT in Ghana is a vital first step toward meeting optimal health needs of teaming Ghanaians who painstakingly pay to access wellness and fitness services. This study determined the various components of the exercise delivery code of conducts that FT are aware of and their adherence to them.

Method

Study Design

This descriptive exploratory research design study recruited thirty FT from fitness and wellness centers and gyms that registered with associations under the National Sports for All Association, Ghana (NASFAAG) through multi-stage sampling technique. First stage is selection of FT from gyms and wellness

centers registered under NASFAAG, second stage is based on densely populated regions for fitness and wellness activities in Ghana and the third stage is the selection of FT who have acquired at least high school certificate. At the first stage, all the fitness and wellness centers and gyms registered with NASFAAG were identified. At the second stage, the identified registered centers were arranged based on population density for fitness and wellness activities in Ghana. The centers were contacted via mobile phone calls and written letters. Bolgatanga (Upper East), Kumasi (Ashanti) and Accra (Greater Accra) were observed to be densely populated regions for fitness and wellness activities. At the third stage, thirty employed FT who had acquired at least high school certificate served as the sample for the study. They were purposively and conveniently recruited.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria: FT were included if they had at least high school certification, registered with NASFAAG, located in the densely populated regions for fitness and wellness activities in Ghana, not living with any disability, not on known psychiatric medication and not insane. Exclusion criteria: FT who were not educated to at least high school level, registered with NASFAAG, located in the densely populated regions for fitness and wellness activities in Ghana were exempted.

Instrumentation

The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) codes of conduct sets out the principles of ethics guiding members to, among other things, exercise professional skills and judgment to the best of their ability, discharge professional responsibilities with integrity, and serve as an example to others; have regard at all times to the public interest; do all in their power to ensure that their professional activities do not put the health and safety of others at risk; give a professional opinion with objectivity and reliability and never engage in corrupt practice. Following these, professionals are expected to maintain informed consent; confidentiality; professional conduct; competence; professional and personal conduct.²²

Professional conduct and research ethics sections of BASES' codes of conduct adopted as awareness and adherence exercise delivery codes of conduct questionnaires (AAEDCCQ) was administered. The administered instrument has items on professional and personal conduct (6 items), data protection and responsibility (4 items), informed consent (3 items), confidentiality (3 items) and competence (8 items). A test-retest reliability analysis showed that AAEDCCQ

has Cronbach's = 0.74. Ethical approval was obtained from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Committee on Human Research, Publications and Ethics. The reference number of the approval is (Ref: CHRPH/AP/064/18).

Statistical Analysis

Socio-demographic information was presented in frequency table. Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 was used to compute for factor analysis to determine level of awareness and adherence in the sample. P<0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

Results revealed that most active individuals in fitness and wellness were within 18-30 years, males FT were 28(93.3%), high school certificate holders with 1-3years working experience. The mean age was 25.75 ±

3.86years. In greater Accra region, two of the factors contributed 38.96% and 29.02% respectively to the total awareness of the codes of conduct (CoDs). 37.76% contribution implied that FT in Ashanti region viewed CoDs education as needed. Professionalism cannot exist without codes of ethics (contributed 30.84%) and aware of unethical and legal issues between FT and clients contributed 22.28% to total awareness of CoDs on exercise service delivery. The awareness level was higher in Ashanti region with 90.90%. FT in Ashanti region are mostly (38.9%) aware that fitness centers should adhere to standard ethics in exercise service delivery (table 1). Tables 2 showed the factorial distribution of adherence to codes of conduct by FT. In table 3, 6.67% disagreed, 20.0% were neutral as 73.4% agreed to the awareness of any exercise delivery service regulating body internationally. In Ghana 40.0% of the sampled population claimed to be aware of existing exercise delivery codes of conduct, 6.7% remained undecided whereas 53.3% disagreed.

Table 1: Awareness of Codes of Conduct by Fitness Trainers

Region	Awareness of Codes of Conduct	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	%
Ashanti	Fitness centers should adhere to standard ethics in exercise	0.614*	0.187		38.97
	Staff of fitness centers need codes of ethics education	0.939*	0.145		29.02
Greater-Accra	Fitness centers should adhere to standard ethics in exercise	0.934*	0.152	-0.145	37.77
	Staff of fitness centers need codes of ethics education	0.945*	-0.245	0.053	30.85
	Professionalism cannot exist in fitness centers without codes of ethics	-0.15	0.945*	-0.103	22.29

A factor loading of 0.05* and above was considered in getting the factors that the FT were mostly aware of in the table above

Table 2: Adherence to Codes of Conduct by Fitness Trainers

Factors	UPPER EAST				ASHANTI				ACCRA			
	1	2	3	%	1	2	3	%	1	2	3	%
Data protection and responsibility												
Clients do get access to colleagues' information on issues they share with me	0.55	0.828*		40.37	0.967*	0.128		60.73	0.922*	0.15		32.26
Clients have never complained of unfair data publication	0.989*	0.146		58.85	0.037	0.961*		25.61	0.724*	0.554		53.52
Informed consent												
I seek clients' opinions on anything I introduce to them	0.994*			88.04	0.894				0.945			
I give instructions and updates on everything introduce	0.942				0.937*			76.28	0.974*			66.33
Confidentiality												
Its permissible to discuss clients' issues with friends without their consent	0.987*			94.29	-0.082	0.969*		38.29	0.032	0.975*		33.91
Clients have ever complained of disclosure of issues to the third party	0.987*				0.710	0.635			0.815	0.263		
Clients find it difficult to discuss their issues with me	-0.939				0.961*	-0.131		54.86	0.863*	-0.161		47.98
Competence												
I am always able to meet clients desire with integrity	0.931*			82.41	0.906*			57.54	-0.864			
I use to prescribe drugs to clients to aid in achieving goal	0.818*				-0.863				0.893*			54.25
Professional and Personal Conduct												
First thing to do is pre-exercise risks factor assessment before exercise	-0.398	0.846			0.929*	-0.095	-0.215	35.03	-0.245	0.915*	0.161	29.98
All clients present referral letter before I offer them exercise service	0.988*	0.047		58.83	0.587	0.429	0.331		0.896*	-0.003	0.225	44.19
Clients' wellbeing is not important when training goals are achieved	-0.988	-0.047			-0.190	0.424	0.713*	16.64*	0.870*	-0.031	-0.193	
I force to work when best results won't be obtained so clients won't be disappointed	0.988*	0.047		35.72	-0.100	0.856*	0.438	31.05	0.240	0.942*	-0.108	
Clients at times compel me to work against ethical conduct	-0.043	0.999*			0.857*	0.075	-0.052		-0.726	0.596*	0.268	
There is insurance cover for all my clients	0.944*	-0.280			-0.005	0.107	-0.950		0.019	0.143		

*P<0.05 was considered statistically significant

Table 3: Existence of exercise delivery regulatory bodies and codes of conduct

Variables	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
Existence of regulatory bodies internationally	27(6.6)	6(1.5)	376(91.9)
Existence of Exercise Delivery Codes of Conduct (EDCC) in Ghana	67(16.4)	27(6.6)	315(77.0)

Discussion

Based on the specific objectives of the research work, the awareness of codes of conducts of exercise service delivery by FT was examined. For upper east, at least one of the variables has a variance of zero therefore no further statistics could be computed.

Results for the greater Accra region, level of awareness was condensed to two factors and results indicate that FT were of the view that code of conduct education is commendable for the wellness and fitness service providers and attest that code of conducts will have a significant improvement in the activities of the wellness and fitness industry. These components contributed 38.96% and 29.02% respectively to the total awareness of the code of conduct. Similarly, in the Ashanti region, three components were considered. Trainers were of the view that code of conduct education is important with a contribution of 37.76% of the total awareness, trainers were also aware that professionalism cannot exist without code of conduct and the component contributed 30.84% and then aware of unethical and legal issues between trainers and clients contributed 22.28% of the total awareness of the code of conduct of exercise service delivery. The awareness level is high in Ashanti region with a total of 90.90% awareness and greater Accra with 67.96% which is expected because most of the FT are elites. The results indicates that FT were aware of international codes of conduct (CoDs) in exercise delivery services but none in Ghana. Finding of this study showed that FT significantly have the awareness of the existence of exercise delivery services regulatory bodies internationally while others were of the opinion that its existence in Ghana is misrepresentation. Effectiveness of the activities of FT would rather be relatively subjective given the submissions that existence of codes alone may be less effective and less impactful than expected in the absence of regulatory enforcement bodies.^{23,24} This means the awareness and existence of regulatory bodies

strengthens the biting teeth of code of conducts and prevents unethical behavior.²⁵⁻²⁷

The level of education (senior high school) of most trainers in this study could also have significant negative contributions to awareness of the code of conduct in exercise service delivery.²⁸ Studies indicated that FT would function professionally and legally if they have experience in numerous types of education and certifications.^{29,30}

According to Table 2, results from the upper east region indicate that from the upper east region clients complain of unfair display of information and clients do get access to the information of other colleagues with 58.85% and 40.37%. The Ashanti region recorded 25.46 percentage and 60.72% for these 2 components while that of greater Accra, trainers are of the view that clients never complain of unfair publication of information and clients do get access to colleagues' information making contributions of 53.52% and 32.26% respectively. Clients' identities were less protected in the Upper East region followed by Ashanti and Accra of Ghana. This may be due to clients' poor knowledge of fundamental human right and crave for optimal health. Study showed that demands for professional codes of ethics positively relate to the level of familiarity with the codes.^{31,32} Literature revealed that transfer of data to third parties should only take place with identifiers removed or with clear consent from those individuals concerned.³³⁻³⁵ On the aspect of data protection, FT did not adhere to EDCC.

Results on informed consent showed that FT seek clients, approval on anything they do with 88.04% for the upper east region, 76.28% for the Ashanti region and 66.32% for greater Accra region on the factor which is a major aspect of adherence to the codes of conduct. Its however unclear if FT give unrestricted freedom to make choices of voluntarism or disclosure from clients. Clients may not have authorized FT on some specific exercise delivery services if duly notified with unrestricted freedom to make choices which authors are tempted to perceive an unusual practice of FT. Studies from clients viewpoint gives contrasting conclusion on inform consent aspect of adherence to the code of conduct by FT which places a major focus on what constitute a valid inform consent.^{36,37} There is major concern to stress the issues of clients' consent in any health care delivery as the primary end users.³⁸ Clients should have unreserved right of consent in whatsoever healthcare delivery obtained.³⁹

Authors are tempted to admit a high exploitation of clients by trainers without recur to any ethical rules

peradventure for their personal gains because studies suggest that clients are introduced to substances without their consent by trainers.^{24,25} Violation of human right may also be insinuated among the trainers in this study because it was observed in this study that most FT in the upper east region work compulsorily under the dictate of employers. However, studies indicate that one of the determinants of adherence to codes of conduct is the provision of a comfortable work environment where staff are not forced to work beyond their limits and capabilities.²⁵ This implies that meeting ethical conducts is at the instance of employers rather than in existence professional code of conduct. It obviously suggests that trainers do not adhere to any codes of conduct in the upper east region. The same cannot be said of Ashanti and Greater Accra regions where trainers submitted some level of independent freedom of practice.

Results from the field assessing whether there are regulating bodies both internationally and in the country shows that internationally there are existing regulating bodies as confirm by a total of 23 respondents out of 30 attesting to this fact. However, response on the existence of exercise delivery code of conduct in Ghana indicates that 53.3% of the 30 respondents agree that code of conduct exist while the remaining either disagree or are indecisive. Although, 53.3% is significant but not highly convincing hence confirms that though there is code of conduct for the wellness and fitness centers in Ghana a good number (46.7%) of the trainers are not aware of it. Doig and Wilson (1998) suggest that the existence of codes alone may be less effective and may have less impact than expected if no regulatory bodies to enforce it. A chi-square test of significance was done to assess the significant difference of respondents' awareness of regulating bodies internationally and code of conducts in Ghana in terms of the extent to which they strongly agree and agree. A chi-square value of 2.449 with significance level of 0.118 indicates that there is no significant difference in the extent of their awareness of regulatory bodies governing and enforcing ethical conducts of wellness and fitness centres in Ghana. This showed that FT significantly have the awareness of the existence of exercise delivery services regulatory bodies internationally while others were of the opinion that its existence in Ghana is misrepresentation. Effectiveness of the activities of FT would rather be relatively subjective given the submissions that existence of codes alone may be less effective and less impactful than expected in the absence of regulatory enforcement bodies.⁴⁰ This means the awareness and existence of regulatory bodies strengthens the biting teeth of code of conducts and prevents unethical behavior.^{41,42}

Owing to the finding on the nonexistence of codes of conduct and regulatory body, authors were tempted to

assume that the issue of adherence would hinge on experience, knowledge and is circumstantial.⁴³⁻⁴⁵ Most FT might adhere to what is read online, observed among colleagues and practiced over time.^{46,47}

Conclusion

FT in Ghana are in the productive age and are aware of international codes of conduct on exercise service delivery without much adherence. EDCC should set up regulatory body to monitor fitness and wellness activities for standard professional practices in Ghana are unavailable. There is proactive need to develop legally documented EDCC for health, wellness and fitness industry in Ghana. Certification and refresher courses for fitness and wellness operators, managers, FT from higher institution of learning are recommended.

Ethical consideration: Ethical approval was obtained from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Committee on Human Research, Publications and Ethics. The reference number of the approval is (Ref: CHRPH/AP/064/18).

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