

Effects of Athletic Sports Competitive Events on the Performance of Para Athletes in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Competitive events are pivotal to the development and performance of para-athletes, spanning talent identification to elite performance. This study examined the effects of competitive event structures on the performance of Kenyan para-athletes, aiming to understand how competitive event approaches influence para-athlete outcomes. An exploratory case study was conducted involving twenty para-athletes selected from a larger population of sixty-six. In-depth interviews and observational data were collected, with validity and reliability ensured through a pilot study involving five para-athletes. Data analysis followed a Straussian grounded theory approach, involving open, axial, and selective coding to identify core categories and develop a theoretical framework. The study revealed a critical gap in competitive opportunities for Kenyan para-athletes, with participants reporting minimal exposure to such events. The research further demonstrated that the existing parasport governance framework significantly affects the nature and availability of competitive events. To enhance para-athlete performance, a strategic overhaul of the parasport structure and leadership is imperative. This includes fostering an environment conducive to increased competitive opportunities, aligning with the performance characteristics derived from the athlete brand image model: athletic expertise, competitive style, sportsmanship, and rivalry. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to bridge the gap in competitive opportunities and support the development of para-athletes. Future research should focus on developing a robust parasport system to optimize competitive event accessibility and para-athlete performance, ensuring that para-athletes can achieve their full potential. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of tailored training programs and support systems to address the unique challenges faced by para-athletes. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can create a more inclusive and competitive environment for para-athletes in Kenya and beyond.

Keywords: Competitive Event; Athletics Expertise; Competitive Style; Sportsmanship; Rivalry; Para Athlete; Grounded Theory

INTRODUCTION

Athletic competitions serve critical functions in the sports industry, providing athletes with opportunities to gauge their training progress and assess whether they are meeting their performance objectives. Exposure to competitive events can motivate athletes by offering focal points for their training when organized at the appropriate level and frequency (Jackson, 2014). At both professional and amateur levels, athletes exhibit varying degrees of desire for success and fear of failure. Research by Sotiriadou (2005) emphasizes the vital role of competition exposure in athlete development. Additionally, stakeholders involved in these events often leverage competition as a means of engaging their target audiences, whether as markets or customers.

Para-athletes who take part in competitive sports demonstrate higher levels of hedonic well-being compared to disabled individuals who do not participate in competitive sports (Puce et al., 2023). Furthermore, major Paralympic events not only stimulate social development but also positively alter public perceptions of disability (Fadian et al., 2024). Despite these positive impacts, people with disabilities are at an inherent risk for low engagement in physical activity and face significant barriers to participation, including poor knowledge of available para sports, lack of social support, poor accessibility, and the societal devaluation of para sports (Fagher et al., 2022).

Sport performance trait anxiety refers to the tendency to perceive athletic situations as threatening, leading to different reactions that include increased levels of worry, self-criticism, and distraction (Smith & Smoll, 2004). Athletes with heightened performance trait anxiety tend to worry more about errors, performance, and outcomes compared to their low-anxiety counterparts. This heightened anxiety can severely affect performance, reduce enjoyment, and diminish overall satisfaction with participation, as athletes may fear negative evaluations from coaches, parents, and peers (Brustad, 1988). The mental well-being of Paralympic athletes is crucial, as studies have shown that those with a dominantly a motivated profile have less adaptive outcomes, while autonomously motivated athletes have better actual performance at the Paralympic Games (Van Biesen & Morbee, 2023).

The stages of participation in sports significantly influence how athletes approach competitions and, therefore, their outcomes. As athletes progress through distinct phases - sampling, specialization, and investment years (Cote, 1999) - each stage imparts unique experiences that shape their readiness for competition. For instance, during the investment years, athletes typically dedicate more time to training and skill development, leading to greater confidence in their abilities. This transition is crucial, as heightened confidence can translate to improved performance outcomes in competitive settings.

Understanding the dynamics of participation levels reveals how they affect athletes' preparedness and mindset leading into competitions (McKay et al., 2021; Arnold & Sarkar, 2014). With the global nature of events such as the Olympics, where external pressures and expectations from stakeholders heighten, how athletes navigate their participation stages can profoundly affect their performance (Gould et al., 2002; Hardy et al., 1997). Thus, recognizing the interconnectedness of participation levels and competition outcomes is essential, forming a foundation for athletes to experience success in their chosen sports (Andersen et al., 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The dynamics of athletic participation and competition outcomes are critical to understanding the performance of para-athletes (Allan et al., 2017; Marques & De Jesus Alves, 2021; Walters

et al., 2022). This section reviews existing literature on the stages of sports participation and their impact on competition outcomes, providing a foundation for examining the specific challenges and opportunities faced by Kenyan para-athletes.

Level of Participation

Athletes experience various stages throughout their careers, each characterized by distinct traits. Cote (1999) identifies three phases of sports participation: sampling, specialization, and investment years. During these investment years, athletes typically dedicate more time to training, focusing on skill and strategy development. Adequate emotional and financial support is essential for fostering participation (Cote, 1999). To navigate setbacks such as injuries and motivational challenges, participants require proper guidance. A recent systematic review of para-athletes' training processes highlighted that coaches and families have a significant influence on the training process, and barriers such as a lack of financial support and limited media visibility can hinder performance (Rodríguez Macías et al., 2022).

Peak performance necessitates a high level of commitment and concentration, especially when preparing for major championships. Gould and Maynard (2009) note that many athletes face numerous distractions, including increased media attention, social invitations, and family demands for support. One prominent example is the Olympic Games, which occur every four years and represent a coveted opportunity for many athletes. Athletes gain both media exposure and public attention during the Games, all while residing in a common Olympic Village (Birrer, Wetzel, Schmid & Morgan, 2012; Blumenstein & Lidor, 2008; Gould & Maynard, 2009). This platform allows athletes to showcase their skills and potentially attract sponsorships and endorsements (Kiptembur, Ng'ang'a, Otuya, & Makomere, 2024).

Successful athletes often participate in media programs that enhance their personal image and brand. However, inexperienced younger athletes may struggle with the pressures associated with these responsibilities. Elite athletes, familiar with various competitions, are generally less affected by the environmental variations of different events. In contrast, newer athletes may find such experiences particularly challenging. A study on elite German para-athletes found that females and athletes with less than five years of experience were at a higher risk of sustaining substantial health problems. It also revealed that new overuse injuries were mainly reported during training camps, while acute injuries peaked during competitions (Busch et al., 2025). Studies on the Olympic Games suggest that mental training should be customized to address the unique barriers athletes face in this competitive environment (Birrer et al., 2012; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Samulski & Lopes, 2008). The impact of unforeseen events like the COVID-19 pandemic can be significant, as demonstrated by a study on Polish athletes with disabilities, where the majority had to train at home and reduced their weekly training time by almost half during lockdown (Urbański et al., 2021).

Participating in athletics allows athletes to prepare for diverse event environments, helping them anticipate and respond to challenges effectively. Research indicates that athletes should expect unforeseen circumstances regardless of their preparation levels, emphasizing the need for sports psychology consultants to be integral members of the Olympic support teams (Arnold & Sarkar, 2014; McCann, 2008; Pensgaard, 2008; Salmela, 1989). Another critical component is classification, which is essential to parasport, but participants often report having limited access to information on the topic (Walters, Lawson, Latimer-Cheung, & Davey, 2022). The need for specific policies and processes for para-athletes is underscored by the fact that tailoring national sport policies to the specificities of the Paralympic domain can provide a competitive advantage (Pankowiak et al., 2023).

Transitioning from levels of participation, the effect of these experiences becomes apparent as we delve into competition outcomes. An athlete's approach to an event, shaped by their participation stages, ultimately influences their performance during competitions. Therefore, understanding these relationships can provide insights into improving para-athlete outcomes.

Competition Outcome

Athletic performance evaluation during competitions is closely tied to the athlete's mental approach. Confident athletes who believe their rigorous training has prepared them for success may perform differently from those who are less assured. Contributions from Chalabaev et al. (2008), Elliot et al. (2006), and Schantz and Conroy (2009) underscore the link between training and competition performance. Conversely, studies focusing on performance under competitive conditions have shown varied outcomes (Stoeber, Uphill & Hotham, 2009). Physiological challenges, such as musculoskeletal and thermoregulatory dysfunctions, are particularly prevalent in wheelchair athletes with spinal cord injuries and can negatively impact exercise performance (Perret, 2024). Therefore, in addition to mental preparation, tailored strategies such as nutrition are vital for para-athletes, as they have unique energy, nutrient, and hydration needs that are often overlooked (Ghazzawi et al., 2025). To facilitate consistent comparisons of track and field performance, standardizing performance metrics is vital (Donovan & Williams, 2003). Assessment of elite athletes can be conducted by comparing results with competitors using performance tables from the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) for recognized events. Performance data is recorded in multiple formats, such as yearly rankings, world records, and event categorizations. Ultimately, understanding how varying levels of participation influence competition outcomes sets the stage for a critical examination of the existing gaps in research on para-athletes. While previous studies have explored numerous facets of sports marketing - such as sponsorship and competition events - there remains a significant gap regarding their specific effect on para-athletes. New research, however, is beginning to fill this gap by identifying factors that enable para-athletes to excel, such as local para-sports events, a supportive environment, media, and international aid (Ojwang et al., 2025).

Statement of the Research Problem

While numerous sports marketing studies have been conducted (Williams, Walsh & Rhenwick, 2015; Gladden & Milne, 1998; Kerr & Gladden, 2008; Ross, 2006; Arai, Ko & Ross, 2014; Arai, Ko & Paplanidou, 2013), there remains a critical gap concerning the effects of competitive event strategies on Para athletes' performance. Previous research has primarily focused on sponsorship within sports competitions to promote products and services. However, there is insufficient information analyzing how various competitive event strategies influence the performance outcomes of Para athletes. This gap underscores the significant need to evaluate the exposure and competitive strategies employed in the Paralympics, particularly within the Kenyan context, and their effect on athletic performance. Historically, Kenyan able-bodied Olympic athletes have exhibited superior performance at major competitions compared to their Para athletics counterparts (World Athletics, n.d; International Paralympic Committee, n.d.), despite both groups operating under similar conditions. For instance, while the Kenyan able-bodied team consistently achieves notable success at the World Championships in Athletics (International Olympic Committee, 2024), the Paralympic team faces significant challenges, highlighting disparities in support, training, and competitive opportunities (International Paralympic Committee, 2024). Understanding the competitive event strategies utilized by Para athletes and their effect on performance is essential, particularly given that both able-bodied and Para athletes in Kenya function under similar situational contexts. Therefore, this study aims to explore this critical gap through in-depth interviews that assess

the effects of competitive event strategies on the performance of Kenyan Para athletes. The findings could not only contribute to academic discourse but also inform coaching strategies, policymaking, and the overall development of sports for individuals with disabilities.

METHODOLOGY

The research design employed was an exploratory case study method, which is particularly useful for gaining deep insights into complex phenomena (Yin, 2018). Primary data were collected through both structured and unstructured interview questions administered to 20 Kenyan Para athletes, aligning with best practices for qualitative research that emphasize adaptability and depth (Creswell, 2013). All interviews were transcribed verbatim, meaning the responses were recorded exactly as spoken by the participants without grammatical correction or modification. This approach preserves the authenticity of the athletes' voices, including code-switching between Kiswahili and English, informal expressions, and linguistic nuances that reflect their lived experiences. Verbatim transcription is widely recognized for enhancing the rigour and accuracy of qualitative data, particularly in applied research settings (Hill et al., 2022). The Straussian approach to grounded theory was used for data analysis, focusing on the systematic generation of theory from qualitative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2008). This approach incorporates three main coding processes: open coding, which involves identifying initial categories; axial coding, which helps to relate categories to subcategories; and selective coding, which integrates and refines the theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1968).

Open coding is the first step in the data analysis process, designed to break down the data into discrete parts for examination (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this phase, the researcher reads the interview transcripts line-by-line, identifying significant concepts and categories (Charmaz, 2006). Each piece of data is labelled with codes that represent the underlying meaning, facilitating a detailed exploration of the participants' experiences (Boeije, 2002). This process enables the identification of important themes, patterns, and relationships within the data, which is crucial for developing a grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For instance, a statement from a Para athlete regarding their training challenges might be tagged with codes such as barriers to training or environmental challenges, highlighting specific issues faced by the athletes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following open coding, axial coding involves reassembling the data that was fragmented during the initial coding phase (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During this stage, the researcher focuses on the relationships between and among categories to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Axial coding allows researchers to identify subcategories under each primary category, exploring how they relate to each other and the overall phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). For example, if barriers to training were identified during open coding, the researcher might examine the conditions that led to these barriers, such as a lack of facilities, or the consequences stemming from these barriers, like their effect on performance. This process creates a network of connections around the core category, providing a richer context for interpretation (Boeije, 2002; Charmaz, 2006).

The last step, selective coding, involves identifying a central theme or core category that integrates the other categories developed in the previous coding processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this phase, the researcher critically analyses the data to validate the relationships between categories and to develop a coherent narrative (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The goal is to select one core category that encapsulates the essence of the data and to corroborate this category with data from the interviews, thereby ensuring a robust theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2006). This process not only highlights the main findings but also provides a

theoretical explanation of the phenomena under study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For instance, if the core category identified is overcoming obstacles, the researcher would illustrate how various strategies described by athletes in their interviews connect back to this overarching theme, demonstrating the interplay between individual experiences and broader socio-environmental factors. Throughout the coding process, consistent with the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990), the researcher attained theoretical sensitivity from diverse sources, including literature, as well as personal and professional experiences. This sensitivity is crucial as it aids in recognizing the significance of emerging patterns and categories during analysis, enhancing the depth of interpretation (Charmaz, 2006). The principle underlying the selection of appropriate cases was a preference for information-rich cases relevant to the topics under investigation, ensuring that the data collected would provide meaningful insights (Patton, 2002). Consequently, theoretical sampling was employed until theoretical saturation was achieved, where no new information emerged from the data (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is important to note that the goal of this research is not to generalize findings to the broader population of individuals with disabilities worldwide, but rather to gain insight into the unique experiences of the interviewed individuals and to present their perspectives in a nuanced manner (Merriam, 2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Most respondents (10) reported participating in the international level of competition, while 8 respondents competed at the national level, as depicted in Figure 1 below. The participants revealed that the Para Athletics Kenya team always begins its journey to international competitions at the regional level. For example, Respondent 14 stated: “*Zetu hakuna, za Para we always begin in regionals.*” “*We don’t have ours, Para, we always start in regionals*” (Excerpt Range: 1479-1530).

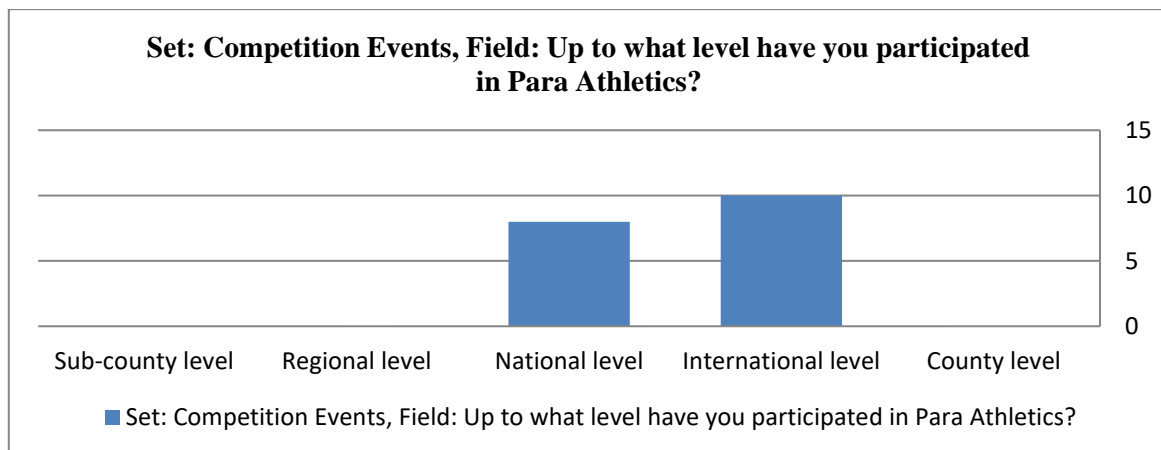


Figure 1: Respondents' Level of Participation in Para Athletics

In response to the question, "What was your last competition event you participated in?" various responses were recorded, including national trials, the World Para Athletics Championship, and the Para Athletics Grand Prix. For instance, Respondent 10 remarked: “*Ya mwisho ni ya juzi ya mwezi wa saba. Last year. World Championships*” “The last is the recent one on July. Last year. World Championships” (Excerpt Range: 1393-1463). When asked how participating in Para Athletics competitions at different levels influenced their athletic expertise, the majority acknowledged positive influences at all levels, with only two stating that the regional level did not influence at all, illustrated in Figure 2:

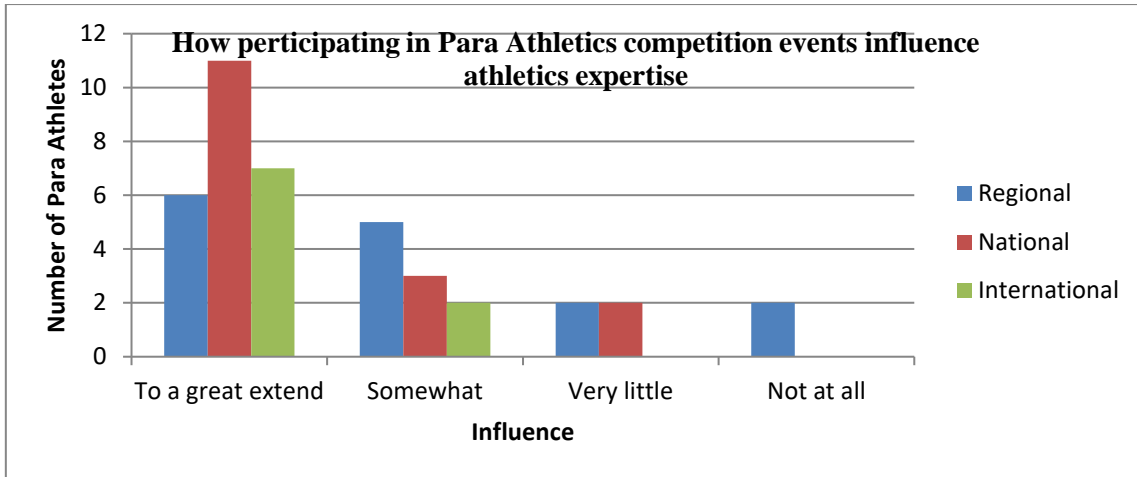


Figure 2: How Participating in Para Athletics Competition Event(s) Influenced the Respondent’s Athletics Expertise

Participants also reported similar trends regarding how competition levels influenced their competitive styles. Most respondents acknowledged positive influences across all levels, with four indicating that the regional level had no influence and one stating that the national level did not influence at all, as shown in Figure 3 below.

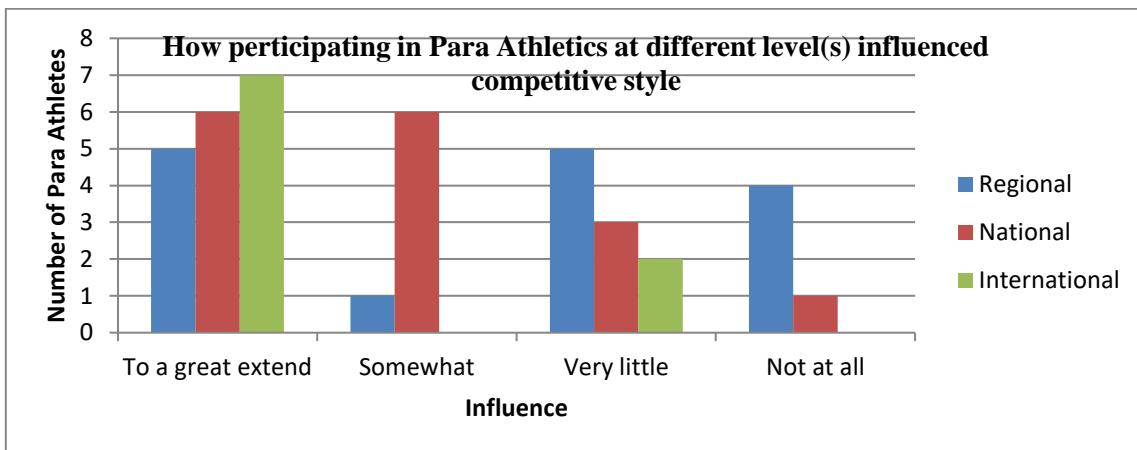


Figure 3: How Participating in Para Athletics at Different Level (s) Influenced the Respondent’s Competitive Style

When participants were asked how competing in Para Athletics at different levels influenced rivalry, most acknowledged a positive effect across all levels. However, three respondents mentioned that the regional level had no influence, while two said the national level had no influence. This is shown in Figure 4 below.

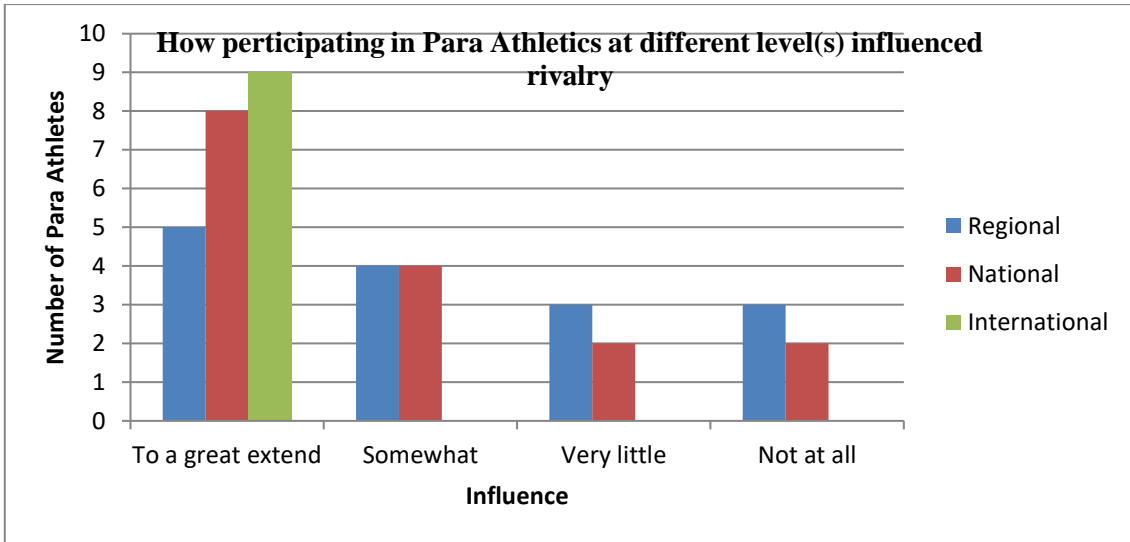


Figure 4: How Participating in Para Athletics at Different Levels Influenced the Respondents' Rivalry

When discussing sportsmanship, most respondents indicated that all levels influenced their approach, with only one stating that the regional level had no influence. This is depicted in Figure 5.

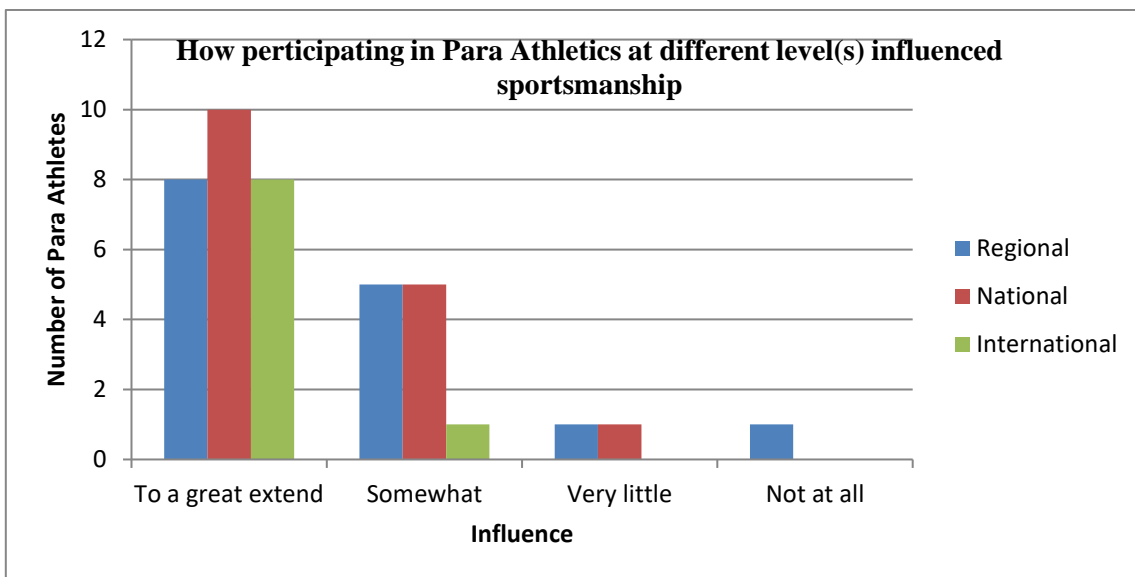


Figure 5: How participating in Para Athletics at Different Level(s) Influenced the Respondent's Sportsmanship

About 72% of those interviewed indicated that they participate in Para Athletics competition events about once a year on average, as shown in Figure 6. Respondent 12 pointed out: “*Mara moja tu*” “Only once” (Excerpt Range: 3090-3103). Another comparable observation came from Respondent 11, who said: “*Maybe once or none. Ni kama regionals, ukose kuenda nationals na imeisha ivyo, and you stay another two years kama usipoambiwa unakosa.*” “Maybe once or none. It's like regional, you don't go to nationals, and it ends, and you stay another two years if you're not told you miss” (Excerpt Range: 10006-10141). Moreover, Respondent 13 added: “*Kama nationals. Moja tu. Moja kwa mwaka. Kama provisional moja, nationals moja. Last year, nimoja. This year, sija compete yeyote. Ni mazoezi tu*” “Like

nationals. Only one. One per year. As one provisional, one national. Last year was one. This year I have not competed. It's just training” (Excerpt Range: 9448-9595).

On the same issue, Respondent 10 argued: *This year hatujaenda mahali. Last year tulienda Nyayo. Na tukaenda London. 2016 nilienda Tunisia. Nikaenda Morrocco tena by mwezi watano. Nilienda mwezi wa tatu, na nikaenda Morrocco mwezi wa tano. 2017 mara moja pekee yake. Hakuna trials this year.* “This year we haven't gone anywhere. Last year we went to Nyayo Stadium. And we went to London. In 2016, I went to Tunisia I went to Morocco again by May. I went in March, and I went to Morocco in May. In 2017, once alone. No trials this year” (Excerpt Range: 3591-3839).

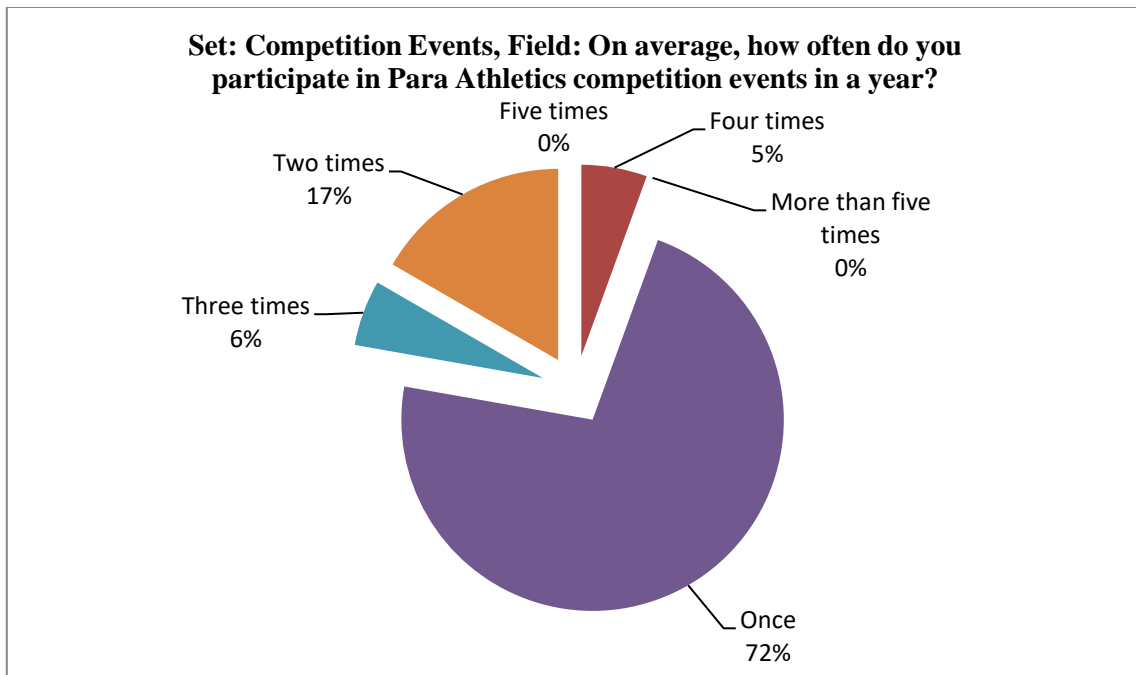


Figure 6: Respondents' Average Number of Participation in Para Athletics Competition Events in a Year

In total, about two-thirds of the respondents reported winning competitions at various levels in Para Athletics, while about one-third admitted not winning any competitions. For example, Respondent 19 confessed: *“Bado”* “Not yet” (Excerpt Range: 3449-3454). While Respondent 18 stated: *“Yeah, nimeshinda. Nimeshinda mara mingi sana. Nimeshinda Olympics, nimeshinda World Championship, All-African Games.* “Yeah, I have won. I have won many times. I won the Olympics, I won the World Championship, All-African Games” (Excerpt Range: 5188-5303). Similarly, Respondent 20 pointed out: *“Yes. Paralympic nime win several times. For example, you can see niko na gold medal tatu.* “Yes. Paralympic, I have won several times. For example, you can see I have three gold medals” (Excerpt Range: 7822-7909). In the same way, respondent 15 (Excerpt Range: 3888-3927) mentioned winning almost six times, and Respondent 4 said, *“Eeh nime wai shinda”* (Excerpt Range: 10960-10979).

Likewise, to the above respondents, Respondent 11, Excerpt Range: 10555-10675, observed winning almost all competitions for many years, participated especially in Kenya, stating that there is no strong competition. But the respondent argued that there are always no fans to cheer Para Athletes during competitions, saying, *“Only by myself, like you, when there are no fans, you don't feel like ume win. Ata tunaweza enda uwanja tuko na trials ya Paralympics lakini nisisi pekee yetu, ni empty”* “Only by myself, like you, when there are no fans you don't feel

like you have won. Maybe we can go to the stadium, we have trials of Paralympics, but we are the only ones, it is empty” (Excerpt Range: 10795-10966). This might explain the way the Para Athletes recounted how they celebrate after winning competitions. For example, Respondent 20 remembered: *Nilikua na style ambayo nimefanya tangu nikue primary. Mimi nilikua nikimaliza race huwa ninaweka hii mikono ya left, kwasababu hii haiwezi kuinuka juu alafu ninaenda kuinama nikimshukuru Mungu sana. Whenever you see me nikimaliza race, nikichukua ninafanya hivyo. Na nikimaliza position two hapo nimeweka mikono juu kushukuru, yule aliyejuu.* I had a style that I've had since primary school. I was finishing the race as I put my left hand up, because I could not lift it up, and I went to bow and thank God so much. Whenever you see me finish the race as a winner, I do that. And when I finished position two, there I laid my hands up to thank the highest God (Excerpt Range: 8020-8364).

The style of celebration used by the above respondent is similar to that of Respondent 15, who, compared to others' styles, *“Huwa nasikia mzuri lakini sasa, si ati ninataka nijionyeshe sana. Sina style. Ata mimi huinua mkono mara mingi”* “I feel good, but I do not want to show myself too much. I have no style. I have raised my hand many times” (Excerpt Range: 4013-4127). Some Paralympic athletes are associated with the celebratory experience of winning major competitions. Respondent 4 recalled, *“najua sasa kwa zile zingine huwa napeperusha pendera juu. Lakini ile ya olympics sasa, nilistukia tu nimefanya vile nimekueleza nilianza kupiga magoti na kuomba. Alafu zile zingine huwa nashika tu bendera na kuzunguka.* “You know now that in some cases I fly the flag up. But at the Olympics now, I just happened to do what I told you and started to kneel and pray. The other ones just hold the flag and move around” (Excerpt Range: 11498-11719). While other respondents mentioned specific styles, Respondent 18 recounted that the celebration varies, like when there is a crowd. The Respondent narrated: *Always kila mtu aki shinda ama aki pata kitu mzuri, huwa anafurahia. That is part of the celebration. Kuna njia mingi ya ku celebrate. It is not consistent, uki win kuna ile obviously, kuna ile normal yenye uki cross the line una raise your hand then una celebrate waving to the crowd. Alafu nashukuru Mungu.* Whenever everyone wins or gets something good, they are happy. That is part of the celebration. There are many ways to celebrate. It is not consistent if you win, there is, rather than normal, when you cross the line, you have to raise your hand, then you celebrate, waving to the crowd. Then I thank God (Excerpt Range: 5443-5745).

Regarding competitors, some acknowledged facing tough competition, while others emphasized external factors affecting their performance. For example, Respondent 12 commented: *“Ni kali. Hakuna mchezo.* "It's tough. No laxity" (Excerpt Range: 3391-3415). Similarly, Respondent 4 noted: *“Kitu yenye naweza comment nawao walikua shape. Sitaki ni seme walikua namna gani, wao walikua shape. Na ata namini nilikua nimefikia mahali kwa mazoezi yangu. Lakini sikukua shape”* “Something I can comment on about them; they were in good shape. I don't want to say how good in shape they were, but they were in good shape. And at least I was also in shape consistent with my training. But I was not in good shape” (Excerpt Range: 11811-11990). Respondent 9 revealed not being in good shape, *“Sija fanya mazoezi vizuri lakini hawa wali kuwa sawa”* “I didn't practice well, but they were okay” (Excerpt Range: 2482-2532). Respondent 12 comments (Excerpt Range: 8719-9959) were different since the competition was among different Para Athletics competition classes, not normally combined in one race. So, Para Athletes with different abilities were competing together. The respondent recounted how the pace was higher than due to those of better abilities than the others in the race. So, they had to struggle to catch up harder with those of higher abilities in the race.

While some athletes expressed that their competitors were not tough, issues of support and motivation were highlighted as critical factors in their performance. Respondent 1 claimed, “The competitors in the last event are not tough, the only thing is the support and motivation. But competition is not tough” (Excerpt Range: 4013-4133). Other respondents complained of corruption, as Respondent 5 said, “2016. Ilikuwa sawa. Kwasababu ili kuwa inatakikana watu wawili kwa kila class waendeng'ambo. Na kwa ingine hakuna mtu. Kama 5000 ilienda mmoja tu. 10,000 ilienda mmoja. Ni time na unajua corruption iko. Na Corruption...” “It was ok. Because it required two people per class to go overseas. And for another, no one. As for 5000 meters, only one went. 10000 one went. Time is considered, and you know corruption exists. And Corruption ...” (Excerpt Range: 5473-5694). Respondent 15 questioned the evaluation criteria by narrating: *Hiyo competition ilikua mzuri, tulicheza vizuri, ingawaje ilikua na somehow maneneo za upendeleo lakini tulifurai sababu tuli participate, na mwisho, dakika ya mwisho washindi wali patikana na waka weza kuenda. Mapendeleo si unajua tu kawaida ma officiators, mtu saa zingine ana officiate na officiate vibaya. Hizo ni mapendeleo ambazo ziko. Wengi ni wa hapa tu inchini. Wamesomea lakini, sasa wanakuanga na upendeleo somehow, lakini tumewa zoea. Ni kitu ya kawaida. Nafikiri ile kitu inaweza fanya mapendeleo itoke, ni ma officiators wa toke. Wale wame kuwa wamezoea hawa. Ma officiators wengine watoke wengine waingie. Nafikiri wenye wataingia watakuja na akili mpya. Wale, tangu mimi ni ingie kwa para ni hao tu wamekua waki officiating. Hakuna wengine wapya. Sasa hiyo ninaona kidogo, inaua competition.* That competition was good; we played well, although there was a lot of favoritism. But we were glad we made it, and in the end, in the last minute, the winners were found, and they were able to go. Favoritism, you know, usually, officiators, someone sometimes officiates and officiates badly. Those are the favors that exist. Most are local. They have studied, but they have a favoritism somehow, but we are used to it. It's something normal. I think the thing that might make favoritism come out is the officiators to come out. Those who have become accustomed to these. Some officiators come out, and some get in. I think new entrants will come with a new mind. Those guys, since I joined the para, are just those who have been officiating. There are no new ones. I see, it kills competition (Excerpt Range: 4221-5039).

When evaluating their competitive form in the most recent competition, respondents rated their performance with varying degrees of success. As shown in Figure 7, 61% rated their performance as fair, while 39% rated it as good. Respondent 8 stated: *Good. Nilikuwa sawa. Nilikuwa fair, unajua kwanza tulikuwa good tukiwa hapa, lakini sababu za problem ya hapa na pale za hapa Kenya; viza kupotea, nini... preparation ndio ika tu sumbua akili. Hiyo tu. Visa ata karibu turudi nyumbani. World Championship tulifika uko kama watu wamekimbia. Watu wengine hawa ku kimbia. Visa yetu ili chelewa, so hakuna vile uta fly bila visa. So kitambo tupate visa ya kuenda, races ilikua imeanza. Fair, ilikua tu fair. But mimi mwenyewe nilikuwa shape. Nilikuwa shape, but because of these problems, ndio ikanifanya siku perform good.* I was ok. I was good, you know, at first, we were good here, but because of the local problems here in Kenya, we did not have visas, what ... preparation was what disturbed. That's it. Visas, we were about to return home. World Championship, we arrived there as people ran. Some people did not run. Our visa was delayed, so there is no way you can fly without a visa. So, once we had a visa to go, races had begun. Fair, it was just a fair. But I was in shape. I was in shape, but because of these problems, it made not perform (Excerpt Range: 6102-6656).

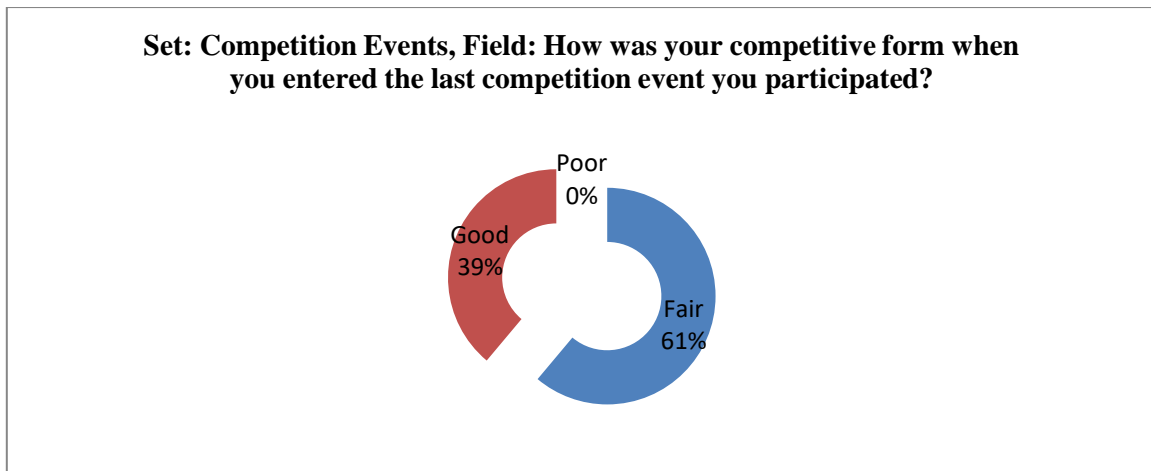


Figure 7: Respondents' Competition Form in the Last Competition Event Participated

As discussed above, on the competitive form of the Para Athletes, the respondents rated their performance differently, as shown in Figure 8 below. The majority (9) of the respondents said average, then 4 respondents said excellent and above average each, while only one said below average. Strikingly, many respondents attributed their performance ratings to external circumstances rather than their abilities. This sentiment was echoed by Respondent 14, who said: *“Mimi nafikiri ilikuwa excellent lakini siwezi sema. Nadhani nilifanya more than expected. Time ilinifurahisha, ranking ilinifuraisha, nimeridhika sana. Hata sijawahi ridhika hivyo. But still much to be done.* “I think it was excellent, but I can't say. I think I did more than expected. Time pleased me, ranking pleased me, I am very satisfied. I've never been that satisfied. But still much to be done” (Excerpt Range: 12392-12597). On the contrary, Respondent 15 claimed going through difficulties before the competition event, saying, *“Above average; sababu ya zile vitu ambazo nili pitia kabla ata niende hiyo mashindano na mambo mengi”* “Above average; because of the things that I went through before I went to that competition and so many things” (Excerpt Range: 5359-5465). Similarly, Respondent 8 gave reasons for the rating, stating, *“Haikuwa excellent. Ilikuwa average. Problem yenye ilipatikana pale juu, kama singe pata ile problem ya kukosa visa, ningenda excellent yote. Na, I wish ingekuwa grand prix. Yote ingekuwa good mpaka nika break record. Lakini hii ni mzuri, word championship juu niya dunia yote.* “It wasn't excellent. It was average. The problem was found above; if I had not had the visa problem, I would have done excellently. And I wish it were a grand prix. All would be good until I broke record. But this is good because the world championship is for the whole world” (Excerpt Range: 7200-7474).

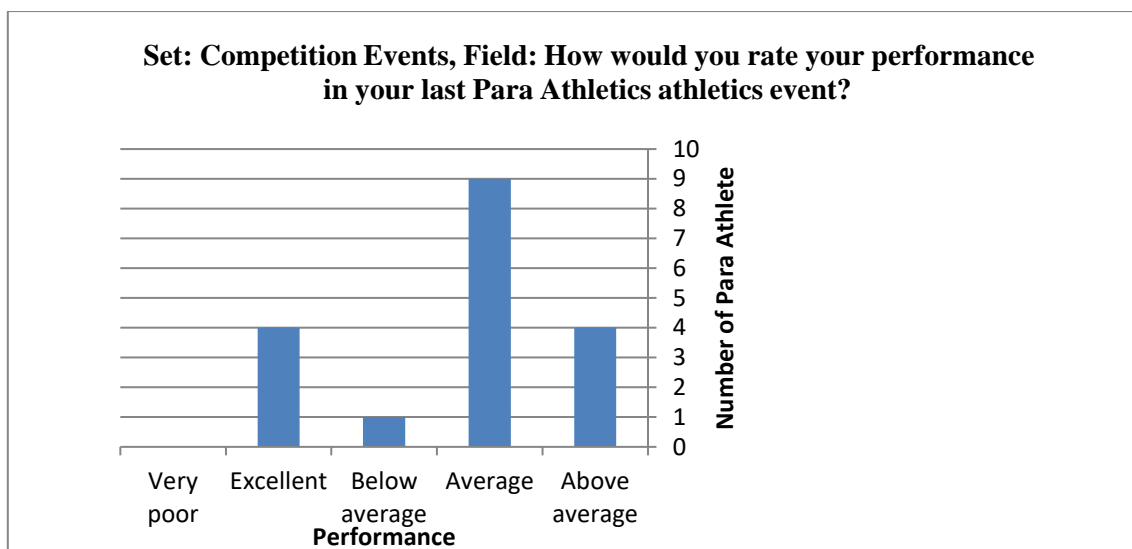


Figure 8: Respondents' Performance Rating in the Last Para Athletics Competition Event

In terms of the experience the Para Athletes had by going and participating in various Para Athletics competition events, diverse views were expressed as illustrated in Figure 9 below. 6 Para Athletes said they were satisfied with the experience, and 9 said they were neutral. On the other hand, 3 respondents said they were dissatisfied. Respondent 20 (Excerpt Range: 20000-22076) experienced distinct differences between international and local competition events. According to the respondent, the experience was dissatisfying with the local competition events, while satisfying when it came to international competition events. Furthermore, the respondent revealed that a competition event where a Para Athlete competes in a personal capacity, like in a Grand Prix, was more pleasing than one in a national team.

Similarly, respondent 14 exposed the poor conditions that the Para Athletes go through, especially during local competitions. The respondent revealed: *Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Internationally kwa wakati mwingi huwa tunaridhika lakini hapa sometimes haturidhiki because vile tunaenda Eldoret, at the back of your mind unajua unaenda kukimbilia kwa...especially kama mtu ni T11 day 2 unaweza elewa. T11 kwa competition anataka tartan. Anataka tartan ili anyoroshe vizuri. Alafu, all of a sudden tuna pelekwa ile uwanja ya 64. Ile uwanja iko challenge yake kwa T11. That is a great challenge. Na una expectiwa kuweka time, unaweza weka time usiende Nairobi. Ukikatwa hapo ata olympic hakuna. Inaku affects directly. Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Internationally, most of the time we are satisfied, but here sometimes we are not satisfied because the way we go to Eldoret, at the back of your mind, you know you're going to run on ... especially if someone is T11 day 2, you can understand. T11 for the competition wants tartan, and needs the tartan to stretch well. Then suddenly, we are sent to the 64 Stadium. That field has its challenges for T11. That is a great challenge. And if you are expected to attain a certain time, you can run a certain time and fail to go to Nairobi. If you do not proceed, there are no Olympics. It affects you directly (Excerpt Range: 13837-14411).*

Others said that participation at competitive events at the national level was better than at the regional level, as Respondent 13 narrated: *Ni mzuri kwasababu inategemea na endurance, shape na your speed vile sasa uko. Iyo ndio inakupea...sasa nasema nationals ndio mzuri. Kama last year ilikuwa mzuri kwa sababu tulikuwa under Safaricom. Nationals ilikuwa mzuri lakini, hii ya nini haikuwa mzuri, ya provisional kwa sababu walikuwa wanasema hawajapata*

sponsor. Lakini tukawa ivyo tuka shiriki. Regionals sio mzuri sana. Lakini nationals last year ndio ilikuwa imekuwa mzuri. Kwasababu walitupea morale kama Safaricom walikuwa na sisi. Ata wakatupea morale wakatupaTshirt. Wali tusponsor; kama sijui Japan itakuwa na Olympics...2020 wata sponsor wenye watahinda gold...ni uqualify championship nauende Japan. Watakufanyia kila kitu. It's good because it depends on your endurance, shape, and speed as you are now. That's what gets you ... now I say nationals are good. Like last year, it was good because we were under Safaricom. The Nationals were good, but this one was not good, the provincial, because they said they didn't get a sponsor. But then we participated. Regionals are not good. But last year, nationals were good. Because they gave us the morale as Safaricom was with us. They even gave us morale and gave us T-shirts. They promised to sponsor us if I don't know Japan hosts the Olympics...2020, they will sponsor those who will win gold ... if you qualify in the championship and go to Japan. They will do everything for you (Excerpt Range: 12474-13149). Some expressed great satisfaction with the opportunities provided by involvement in Para Athletics. For example, respondent 10, Excerpt Range: 4861-4990, was happy to visit new places.

Other respondents, after a long period of participation and going through several actual occurrences in Para Athletics, were optimistic that circumstances tend to improve with time. Respondent 14 acknowledges vast experience gained from participating in many competition events. Besides, Respondent 8 professed: *Sababu nili kuambia hapo awali ya kwamba nilijiunga na hii familia ya paralympic 2006 up to now, I think it is 13 years. 13 years old katikaku participate. So hiyo ni kuonyesha ya kwamba, I have a lot of experience in it. Kwa vile nilipo kua nimeanza hapo 2006 mpaka hapo 2012 inaonyesha ya kwamba kila uchao unapata kujua kitu. So, 13 years unaweza kusema a lot of experience ambayo nilipata hapo ni mingi sana. Ni ile experience ilikuwa ina nipatia marks kukuja juu kwa sababu nilikuwa na perform mzuri, hiyo mwaka kesho naona nimekuja nimevunja hiyo. Hiyo mwaka kesho nimeweka another new record, kumaanisha ya experience na kuwork hard ndio inafanya kusaidia mpaka performance inakuwa very excellent. So nataka tu niambie wale wakimbiaji au wale new athletes, wenye wanajiunga, leo sio kama kesho na kesho sio kama kesho kutwa. So vile iko tu ni kujitahidi, naku have a target, ambapo at the end of the day you will achieve it.* Because I told you earlier that I joined this Paralympic family in 2006 up to now, I think it is 13 years. 13 years old in participating. So that's an indication that I have a lot of experience in it. Since I started in 2006 to 2012, it shows that every day you get to know something. So, after 13 years, you can say the experience I got there is so much. It was the experience that gave me marks to come up because I was performing well, so next year I came and broke that. So next year I set another new record, which means experience and hard work are what help until performance becomes very excellent. So, I just want to tell those athletes or the new athletes who join today, today is not like tomorrow, and tomorrow is not like the other day. So, it is all about effort and having a goal, where at the end of the day you will achieve it (Excerpt Range: 7453-8366).

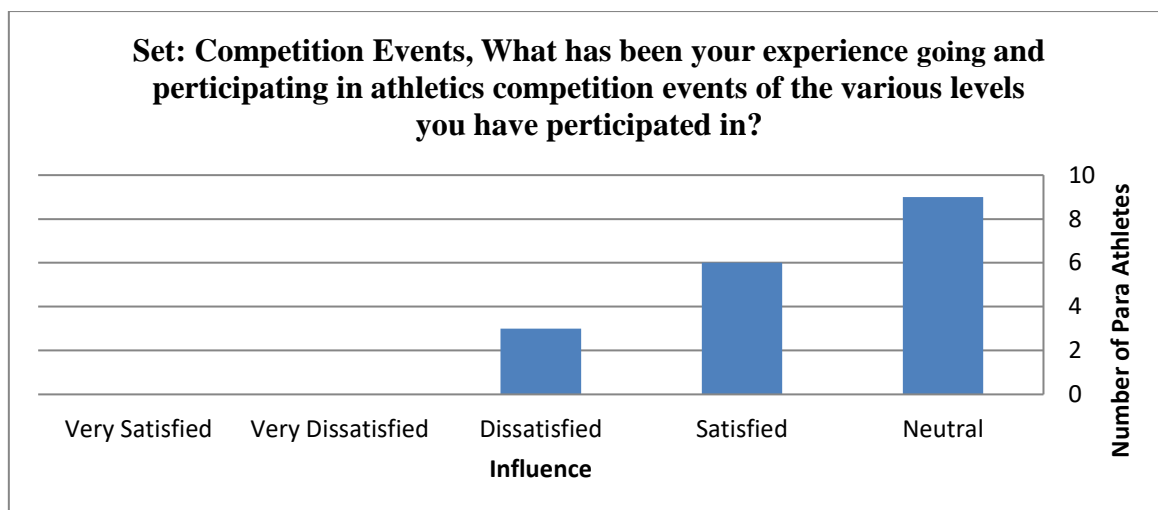


Figure 9: Respondents' Experience in Para Athletics Competitions Events at Various Levels

In brief, while many respondents expressed contentment with their experiences, there was a clear recognition of the challenges faced at local levels. Factors such as support, motivation, competition quality, and resource availability significantly influenced the athletes' overall experiences in Para Athletics.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the significant impact of competitive event structures on the performance of Kenyan para-athletes. The findings reveal a critical gap in competitive opportunities, with minimal exposure to such events. The existing parasport governance framework significantly affects the nature and availability of competitive events. To enhance para-athlete performance, a strategic overhaul of the parasport structure and leadership is imperative. This includes fostering an environment conducive to increased competitive opportunities, aligning with the performance characteristics derived from the athlete brand image model: athletic expertise, competitive style, sportsmanship, and rivalry. Recommendations include developing tailored training programs and support systems to address the unique challenges faced by para-athletes. Implementing these recommendations can create a more inclusive and competitive environment for para-athletes in Kenya and beyond. Future research should focus on optimizing competitive event accessibility and para-athlete performance, ensuring that para-athletes can achieve their full potential.

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