



AN INVESTIGATION OF MISCONCEPTION OF FEMALES' PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS COMPETITIONS IN A TRADITIONALIST SOCIETY OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study has been undertaken to explore the misconceptions of female participation in sports competitions that normally exist in various traditionalist segments of Muslim society in Pakistan. The experiences revealed there has been a great influence of religion and effectual impact of socio-cultural conditions prevalent in various sections of the people living in rural and urban areas of the country. Most of the conservative religious scholars discouraged women's participation in sports and physical activities in open playfields, though not popular among most of the female population, and declining athletes of both genders to compete in mixed gatherings, with reasonable consideration that both sexes may not mix up actually to disgrace their nobility and self-respect. The study articulated most of the prevalent misconceptions were based on false beliefs that conveyed a negative message in encouraging women's sports competitions in the country; female contenders acquainted with the benefits of physical activities for sound health and in reshaping their bodies in fine shape that enhanced their perception for sports competitions, persuade moderate government officials related to sports organizations to realize productive measures to raise maximum number of female participation in sports at national and international competitions.



METHOD

SAMPLE

In this study, 50 respondents each from provincial capital cities: Karachi (Sindh), Lahore (Punjab), Peshawar (NWFP), Quetta (Baluchistan) and Islamabad (federal capital) were randomly selected from the students of popular public universities and various organizations functioning in these cities under investigation wherein teaching departments offer diploma, bachelor and master degree programs in Physical Education & Sports Science discipline. Attitude Towards Sports Participation Questionnaire (ATSPQ) and Personal Adjective Questionnaire (PAQ) were administered randomly to selected respondents from each provincial city and federal capital under study to collect and assess the views of their region on girls participation in competitive sports, exploring female participants limitations in traditionalist societal environment.

INTRODUCTION

The female participation in sports at national and international competitions is often talked about among moderate religious scholars advocating limited guidelines for female participants engaged in sports competitions on the issues of wearing tight and short dresses not adequately covering the bodies, and mixing up with male counterparts during competition as intimacy might develop to endanger the honor of the family and self respect in the social order. Keeping in view the prevalent religious and socio-cultural restraints, parents especially of remote area are often reluctant to encourage their daughters to involve them in sports competitions.



During PhD research studies, it was interesting and hard to believe that many of the uneducated parents of rural area, which is comprised of 70% of the total population of Pakistan, were influenced with the weak and false beliefs, such as girls wearing red ribbons in primary schools, which is considered to be a sign of danger and misfortune. Consequently, those illiterate parents with flimsy beliefs avoid enrolling their daughters to study in schools. Further, during discussion it was informed that they hesitate to admit their grown up girls for intermediate education as college dress is white, which is displeasing as it is normally worn by widows and avoid keeping them away from societal concern regarding matter on involvement of school going children in participating sports and healthful physical activities, most of the elderly female parents replied that fathers have limited them to allow their daughters to play competitive games only up to primary level within schools boundary. The girls who were lucky enough to get the opportunity to be admitted in girl's high schools, were playing competitive games only with the support of their teachers, and their good performance enforced the school authorities to convince their parents to take part in sports competitions and other healthful activities as name and fame of the school was involved; but such examples are very few in this context. In addition to it, other crucial but disturbing beliefs that are largely spread in most of the remote area of rural population not only in Pakistan but also in rural areas of European Countries that competitive sports in which female competitor has to display intensive physical exercises for target performance may be injurious to their reproductive system and tear hymen, and its protection is understood to be a sign of virginity, and eventually competitive sports, which require intensive physical exercises, may lose their feminist physique as female are too tender to become athletes; though most of the studies undertaken by



physical educationists and medical doctors have discarded this philosophy as these were largely inaccurate and based on whims. (Robert. A. Mechikoff -1987)

With passage of time and acquiring awareness of healthy life style, moderate functionaries of the governments and parents provide support in discouraging such weak and false beliefs prevalent in the majority of conservative rural community, cheering and helping uneducated and naïve portion of the masses in shifting their impression on fake beliefs through inter-exchange of the views of athletes and parents; arranging seminars and discussions in the schools on the advantages of participating in sports competitions and engaging in physical activities; providing incentives in the form of award of tuition waivers, scholarships and cash prizes that promote moral-cum- financial support to enhance mental level of those illiterate traditionalist parents living in remote rural areas where one can hardly see girls in schools and colleges.

WOMEN'S SEGREGATION

In Islamic countries, women's lives and roles are influenced, to great extent, by the teachings of the Quran and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). However, these texts are translated and understood in various ways, and their interpretations are often controversial and have difference of opinion relating to participation of girls in sports competitions. It is largely true in contemporary Muslim cultures where reactions to the challenges of modernity range from fundamentalism to open-mindedness. For example, current women's movements striving for equal status that promote exercise of reasoning have led to differences in understanding the religious obligations in the context of modern life.



In recent times, deliberations and heated debates on the clash of cultures between east and west often focus on the role of women in family and society. Muslim feminists claim that neither the Quran nor sayings of Prophet Muhammad (Hadith) give an opinion for women's exclusion from public life. Accordingly they can participate in every field of life with some limitations so that they may not lose their dignity and decency in the social set up of the society.

Not only Pakistan but almost all Muslim nations world over, to great extent, are comprised of tradition bound society, and dominance of men in all spheres of the social order is attributed to a combination of understanding of Islam and prevalent customs and traditions. However, in the context of modernization challenge and globalization process, women's bodies and roles have been wrongly politicized, and their subordination is well-established in the collective identities of many Muslim societies where the idea of gender is based on the assumption of different nature and trait of the sexes. The creation of woman as a weaker sex and concern on their bodies embrace significant influence on sports and physical activities, which encourage more Muslim females to take up sports activities regularly. The organization of international sports events by Iran and Pakistan may be a reasonable example and further improvement in this context; desire optimistically to make it acceptable also to western nations.

Having personal experience and considering prevalent environmental conditions, this paper was prepared attempting to focus on Islamic and societal perspectives on women's bodies as it sparks a colossal impact on the opportunities and obstacles that women deal with the participation in sports competitions of national and international stature. The refined western cultures of many



Euro-American states as well as Islamic nations, and also as observed in everyday life that civilized societies who respect family norms have focused on the need for men and women to be shielded from sexual temptation during social and sports congregations. (Haque. A. 1982)

Pakistan being the Islamic country normally allow their girls as well as women to wear T-Shirt or long-Shirt / Jersey and lower of track suit or Trouser (Shalwar) during local contests, Inter-Universities, National and International competitions as a requirement of proper dress for female athletes. In Islam, sexuality is looked upon as a threat and a sin, and resolutely defined its proper place only inside marriage. Sexuality is forbidden and set aside through teachings and internalization of norms, and effective compact work is taken to overcome this problem efficiently by a segregation of both sexes, either with the help of some limitations of not mixing with males. Some families normally advise their girls to stay at home and look after the house and family relationships. The concept of virginity is normally required of Muslim girls, and guiding principles are enforced to guarantee that it may not be lost, fearing that hymen of adolescent may be spoiled due to intensive physical exercises. The main objective of introducing such societal moral obligations and rules is to keep girls under control to prevent objectionable contact with males to maintain their grace and reputation in the neighborhood and society.

Almost in all cultures, the chastity of women is considered as a matter of honor, which is believed to be the root of family's character, and head of the family or its male members are required to defend family against aggression and to guarantee chastity of their female family members. The moral integrity for women with regard to their bodies in



Islamic wisdom means as the most important conviction that women have to observe covering the head and curvature of the body in public, which may develop attractions towards sexuality, and covering of the body is understood to be a line of defense in this direction; and all Muslim scholars agree that wearing of clothes in sports competitions should be decent, respectable and not sexually exciting.

WOMEN SPORT AND SOCIETY

The studies reveal that the civic social order has not denied female population to take part in sports competitions, whereas Muslim scholars emphasize on health and fitness that are equally important for both male and female population, stressing to maintain it by regular physical activity as no such limitation is advocated by Islam.

The experiences of physical activities in traditionalistic Muslim cultures who participate in women's international sports competitions, including strength training is not focused on improving the records, but the influence of advanced techniques, it has effectively altered the training methods. Girls / Women of Muslim World have also been captivated by the fascination of Olympic Games and various international sports competitions. The Muslim nations participating in girls' sports desire that whenever sport competition is carried out, Islamic teachings must be followed. That means, the body of the female participant must be reasonably covered during sports competitions and practice as far as possible, be organized for men and women separately.

Today, women of Pakistan and other Islamic states resolutely consider that participation in international sports



competitions has achieved enormous popularity, and the enthusiasm surrounding sports competition has had great impact on the society. Pakistani girls / women have normally two possible ways of practicing and competing in games and sports: it may be within boundary walls of the girl's schools, colleges and universities; and where private facilities of playing sports is available to which common men may have no access, or in public playing areas where they have to wear appropriate clothing; women can take part in Cricket, Hockey and Soccer / Foot ball and almost all games, including participating in Skiing and Hiking events as numerous girls / women show their merit by making way to the top wearing coats and headscarves and safety helmets. Many of the parents expressed their willingness to allow their daughter to participate in sports activities, provided adequate facilities are available to them. For such events, families often also propose refresher courses to be carried out for families and participant girls to work out on women Health, Sports and recreational activities arranged at schools, colleges, universities and at district level organizations to educate the parents as well as students to create healthy sporting environment, and introducing Physical Education as a compulsory subject in educational institutions.

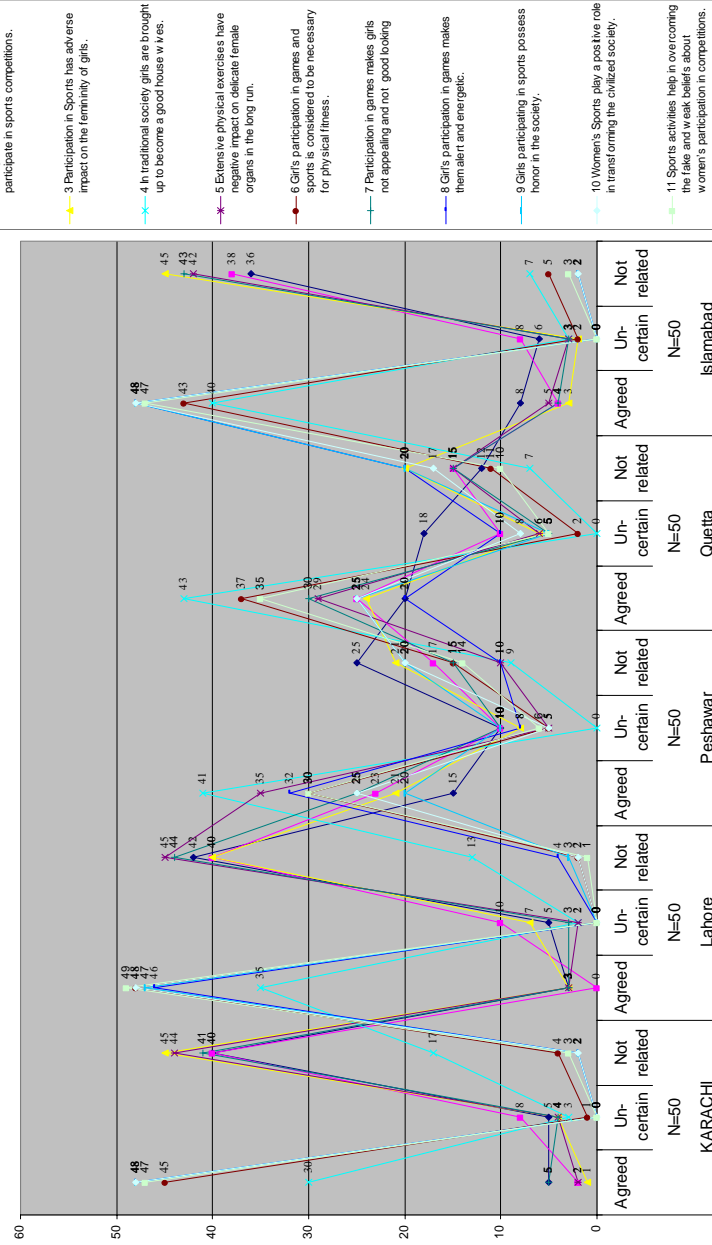
The Attitude Towards Sports Participation Questionnaire (ATSPQ) was administered to each participant selected from capital cities of the provinces of Pakistan to assess their attitude towards female sports competitions as mentioned in the following graph:



AN INVESTIGATION OF MISCONCEPTION



Attitude Towards Sports Participation Questionnaire (ATSPQ)





On the basis of the results obtained from the questionnaire and interviews with the selected 50 respondents each belonging to major cities of Pakistan clearly exposed that sport plays a vital role in overcoming negative cultural values about women's / girls' participation in sports competitions and majority of the respondents revealed that sport participants of Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad cities have almost discarded the perception that sports competition is physically harmful for females, whereas the respondents from Peshawar and Quetta expressed conservative opinion. On religious limitation issue Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad clearly not agreed with this view, but the respondents of Peshawar (NWFP) and Quetta (Baluchistan) expressed favorable opinion. On query that sports has adverse impact on the femininity of girls, the respondents from Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, fully disagreed with this issue, whereas fifty percent respondents belonging to Peshawar and Quetta, gave preferential opinion to this phenomenon and on question that girls are brought up to become good house wives in traditional society, almost all respondents consented the same opinion. On issue about the negative impact of extensive physical exercises on delicate female organs, Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad participants responded negatively, whereas respondents of Peshawar and Quetta expressed highly approved. On the issue of physical fitness of girls participants through sports, Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad expressed positively whereas the respondents of Quetta and Peshawar, more than 30% agreed with. On question that participation in games and sports for girls is not appealing, Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, approx. 70% participants disagreed, whereas in Peshawar and Quetta almost 30% agreed on the questions of becoming energetic, possess honor in the society, play a positive role in transforming the civilized society and the perception that



sports help in overcoming the fake and weak beliefs about women participation in competition, Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad respondents showed with the same positive opinion whereas Peshawar and Quetta participants also expressed positive approach on this questionnaire.

Further, the adjective check list consist of thirty adjectives among 300 adjectives often used as descriptors of persons (Gough & Heilbrun, 1980) was also administered, which was used as a personality assessment instrument with persons checking those adjectives, and considered to be self descriptive, given to 50 respondents of each city and found that the sport participants are more affectionate, smart, and socially strong in tackling the affairs of the society and possess comparatively better societal understanding, predicting, communicating and controlling individual as well as collective behavior of man and woman of the society as compared to non-sport participants. The study clearly showed that sport participants have comparatively better capacity to cope up with the pressure of competition, crowd and its behavior, importance of winning, influence of parents, coach, and friends and observe the societal attitude deeply with confidence and determined to work actively to promote socio-cultural environmental conditions in modernizing the Pakistani society to compete globally.



Adjective Check list (ACL)
50% or More Endorsements of the Respondents

Sr.	Adjective	Karachi	Lahore	Peshawar	Quetta	Islamabad
		N=50	N=50	N=50	N=50	N=50
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Adaptable	85	90	60	70	98
2	Affectionate	70	93	55	60	96
3	Ambitious	82	93	70	75	93
4	Attractive	65	73	55	50	88
5	Autocratic	95	70	75	80	75
6	Active	95	46	55	40	63
7	Attention-seeker	89	90	70	80	88
8	Cautious	70	86	60	82	85
9	Civilized	80	86	55	45	88
10	Cool	65	83	35	40	96
11	Co-operative	79	93	45	58	100
12	Demanding	76	56	70	70	58
13	Determined	80	78	57	65	98
14	Energetic	75	90	75	70	85
15	Enthusiastic	83	86	60	50	85
16	Foresighted	75	56	45	35	91
17	Forgiving	65	95	35	45	98
18	Friendly	73	91	40	57	95
19	Generous	81	78	55	60	90
20	Helpful	62	93	50	45	95
21	Responsible	71	93	60	65	91
22	Smart	80	78	45	35	96
23	Sportive	82	90	50	45	90
24	Self confident	89	96	55	40	90
25	Self controlled	92	91	55	35	96
26	Sincere	61	95	50	45	93
27	Stable	79	78	60	40	98
28	Straight forward	65	93	62	45	90
29	Strong	67	50	75	60	90
30	Un-excitable	69	51	35	45	75



CONCLUSION

Thus, sports girl and woman belonging to any class, status and community have desire and will to engage themselves in healthy sporting activities and desire parental-societal encouragement and incentive to make themselves responsible citizens of the civilized democratic society, and play active role in nation building process.

The study and reports have verified to great extent that physiological problem expressed were mainly on whims and lack of adequate information about women's health care. The women of 21st century are participating more in sports and engaging themselves in various physical activities for maintaining the helpful physiological responses to bring laurels for themselves and for the country and lead to happy domestic married life.

As far as physical injuries are concerned the female physique is well protected and serious sports traumatic injuries to uterus or ovaries are extremely rare; and as regard to musculo skeletal injuries in female athletes the fact is that the same kind of injuries occur in females as in male, sex specific injuries are a rarity, but females are a little more susceptible to a few musculo skeletal injuries such as knee injury and bunion (a deformity of the big toe that causes it to angle outwards, 10-15%). Exercise can promote physical as well as psychological stability in women of all ages and make them more physically fit, agile, active and confident than non-athletes. (Lyle. J. Micheli, p. 300)



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