

SPORTS PARTICIPATION AND RURAL FEMALES: SOCIAL TABOOS AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA, SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT

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Abstract:

Previous research shows that sports participation and physical activity enhances mental, psychological and spiritual health of young females. Contrary to the fact, social customs and fixed roles in family prohibit females from sports participation in developing countries including Pakistan. Moreover, weak sports arrangements in educational institutions and low government budget add fuel to the fire. From a careful review of literature, it has been observed that there is insufficient empirical evidence on the circumstances of rural women's lack of participation in sports especially in educational institutions in Pakistan. As a result, this study focused on Government Girls' Degree Colleges of Sanghar district to understand circumstances of female sports participation. The study carefully designed mixed research methods e.g. direct observation and in-depth interviews to draw detailed empirical evidence to reveal the truth. Through thematic analysis strategy, findings show that government colleges are ill-prepared and unprofessional with limited sports arrangements and budget. Most of the parents shown apprehensions and role of media seemed dubious in female sports promotion. In last section policy implications are discussed.

Key word: Female sports participation, social customs, family role, government degree colleges, interviews and observation methods

Introduction:

Sports participation has umpteen benefits regardless of gender, color or creed. It maintains immune system, regulates blood pressure, controls diabetes, and above all it keeps people physically and mentally fit (Brooke, 2018). Healthy sports environment provides females with nu-

merous benefits (Bawoiley, 2006; Craoline, 2009). Irrespective of sports benefits, in several Asian and African societies there are taboos attached to women participation in sports (Craoline, 2009). Women sports participation especially in rural areas does not only require to have good infra-

structure, stadiums, sports scholarships and rewards but it also requires support from family, society and electronic and print media. There are number of social taboos, stereotyping, familial traditions and cultural values that come in the way of females to participate in sports (Sheikh et al., 2013). Social taboos create gender discrimination which discourage female activism in education, work and sports in urban in general and rural in particular which causes *intersectionality* (Cranshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theory explains how divisions and sections prevail within society with different value system and importance attached to females.

Literature suggests that even educated and resourceful people also fall prey to customs and prohibit their female family members from sports participation. In addition, stereotyping i.e. traditional roles of women as mother, sister and wife in family fix their responsibilities to stay at home and take care of house chores, also appear to be major cause of lack of women in sports. Moreover, weak sports organizational system, no financial bene-

fits and negative portrayal of women in sports are also considered central players. From a careful review of literature on this topic, it has been observed that there is insufficient empirical evidence available in this area. There is urgent need to investigate circumstances of lack of rural women participation in sports in educational institutions in Pakistan. As a result, this study tends to address this gap in the existing literature and undertakes study on what socioeconomic, familial and institutional hardships rural women experience in rural areas especially at Government Girls Degree Colleges of Sanghar, Sindh, Pakistan. The main objectives of this study are as under:

1. To investigate the status of women sports participation of Government Girls Degree Colleges, Sanghar.
2. To develop strategies to improve women participation in Colleges' sports in Sanghar.

Literature Review

Since this study attempts to address one of the neglected areas in research i.e. lack of women sports participation in most of the developing nations including Pakistan. Crofts (2014) reported that

women have been kept away from the boundary in most of the sports especially in cricket in developing countries because of their physical appearance. Author traced historical trajectory of women in cricket stating that women faced lot of resistance from male who were dominant in cricket and gradually women made their way in. There were arguments that there are several technical and tactical sides of men's cricket, their injury prevention and the impact of globalization and commercialization on the game. Cowburn et al. (2006) reviewed 24 qualitative studies on sports from 1990 to 2004. Study shows reasons of women's participation and non-participation in sports in the UK. Study found that women do sports with the intention to keep fitness and make their body shape attractive. Further, study shows that women understand that there is lack of organized group or network supporting them in sports and masculine behavior is also a hurdle in women's sports participation. Similarly, Nunes (2019) analyzed the evolution of women's sports participation in the Olympics. The investigation is based on a descriptive approach using offi-

cial documents, to analyze data of Olympics committee, bibliography, reports, factsheets, and map of Olympics games and other publications of different researches. The study reported that first time in Olympics games, 1896 Greece, a woman namely Melpomema Greek athlete, urged to participate in the marathon. However, she was banned by the organization. Secondly, the Olympics in 1900 Paris, France, 22 women participated in golf and tennis. The results show that women are increasing in sports day by day in every community. Women's participation going to be 50% in the next Olympics games in 2020 Tokyo, Japan. Olympics in Tokyo 2020 could not take place due to global outbreak COVID-19 and Olympics were postponed next year 2021 with same name.

Shannon (2016) enlightened factors that influence girls in the community to participate in physical activities including dance. The researcher took two semistructured interviews from 17 adolescent female dancers. Shannon (2016) found that adolescent female dancers enjoy, flexible participation and supportive envi-

ronment, if available in the dancing studio. Previous studies including Shannon (2016) highlighted reasons why girls stop or decline in sports, due to destructive aspects in sports program, such as lack of time, slow improvement in skill, difficult skill, lack of success, high pressure to perform or win, puberty problems, dislike of coach, school work, lack of fun and boredom. According to Artinger et al. (2006) randomly surveyed 349 college girls at the intramural sports program. Authors suggest that an internal sports program plays a big role, due to sports competition, the player learn many lessons from each other such adjustment, living in peace and harmony with each other. This study examined the social benefits of intramural sports participation of the undergraduate male-female student. Results show that due to intramural sports competition students of on-campus and off-campus increase their social networking, relations, and achieve institutional goals. Craoline (2009) noted that many young adolescent women rapidly dropping out from sports between the age of 12 to 15 and 16 to 19 years old. She shows various fac-

tors of individual, social and environmental dropout on young adolescent women's sports participation. They explain that it may cause of moving from primary to secondary schools, and second cause in biological changes in young adolescent women body, third reason was lack of time, enjoyment, self-efficacy, attitude, behavior, concerns about body shape and beauty are some other factors of dropping out from sports. She conducted semi-structured interviews of 35 respondents in three sectors. Hallmann et al. (2012) analyzed that sports not only provide individual fitness, fun, and well-being but it also increases external benefits such as social networking, equality, and public health.

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted in two phases, in the first phase direct observation method was applied and in the second phase in-depth interviews of 50 key informant were taken and analyzed.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of five Girls' Degree Colleges of Sanghar district which

include: (i) Government Girls Degree College Sanghar, (ii) Government Girls Degree College Shahdadpur, (iii) Government Girls Degree College Shahpur Chaker, (iv) Government Girls Degree College Tando Adam and (v) Government Girls Degree College Khipro.

Sampling and demographic details

All the colleges of district Sanghar were visited by the collaboration of Director Physical Education and Principal of concerned college. We applied convenience sampling and selected 20 Women. Ten out of 20 were active athletes in sports and 10 non-athlete and not active in sports. Ten parents were included 05 active parents in sports and 05 non-active parents in sports. Ten teachers 05 active teachers in sports and 05 non-active teachers in sports. Similarly, 10 DPEs/ Principals 05 Directors of Physical Education and 05 Principals were also part of data collection efforts. College students who were active in sports were selected as a sample of the study on the recommendation of concerned Director Physical Education who played at least at zonal level, in-

tercollegiate level, or at the inter-class level. Whereas, non-active students were selected on the recommendation of concerned teachers. Those parents who were active in sports were selected as a sample of the study on the recommendation of concerned Director Physical Education and students, whose daughter must play at least zonal level, intercollegiate level, or at inter class level. Furthermore, non-active parents in sports were selected as the sample of the study whose daughters don't participate in sports, on the recommendation of concerned Director Physical Education and also students. Teachers active in sports, were selected as sample of the study on the recommendation of concerned Director Physical Education and also whose take interest and play effective role in college sports management those teachers non-active in sports, were selected as a sample of the study whose don't take interest in sports, and select Director Physical Education and Principal of Government Girls Degree College Sanghar (see table 1 for more details).

The Data Collection Tool and procedure

Data were collected through interview method with the permission from Principals and participants. Fifty interviews were conducted from participants regarding the promotion of women sports of government girls' degree colleges of Sanghar. Participants shared their experiences and feelings regarding lack of female participation in sports and how to promote sports in women in the area of study. Interview is indeed an effective method of research to study participants directly through facial expressions,

feelings while giving feedback and body language. This is a non-statistical research method. In qualitative research, we collect data through interviews, reduce data in codes and analyze data through thematic analysis procedure. After the permission of principals of colleges, data were collected through a structured interview method. Before the interview, it was made clear to all respondents that a tape recorder will be used to record the interview for research purposes, and your identity shall not be disclosed and all demographic details shall be kept strictly confidential.

Sr. No	Variable	Sub-variable	Frequency	%
1	Gender	Male	12	24
		Female	38	76
2	Education	M Phil	1	02
		Master/MA/MSc	21	42
		Bachelor	8	16
		Intermediate	20	40
3	Status	Students	20	40
		Parents	10	20
		teachers	10	20
		Administers	10	20
4	Age of Student	16-20	14	28
		21-24	6	12
	Age of parents	25-30	0	00
		31-35	0	00
		36-40	2	4
		41-45	3	6
		45 up to	5	10
	Age of Teachers	25-30	0	00
		31-35	8	16
		36-40	0	00
		41-45	2	4
		45 up to	0	00
	Age of Adminis-trators	25-30	0	00
		31-35	0	00
		36-40	4	8
		41-45	1	2
		45 up to	5	10
5	Language	Urdu	12	24
		Sindhi	10	20
		Panjabi	20	40
		Balochi	1	2
		Pashtu	1	2
		Others	6	12
6	Categories	Women (Athletes) Active in sports	10	20
		Women (Non-Athletes) Non-Active in sports	10	20
		Parents' active in sports	5	10
		Parents' non active in sports	5	10
		Teachers active in sports	5	10
		Teachers non active in sports	5	10
		Director Physical Education of colleges	5	10
		Principles of Colleges	5	10

Analysis Procedure: Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used method of analysis in qualitative research. Thematic analysis is flexible, methods of research to describe complex issues of society and a good method of beginner and researcher who are unfamiliar with more complex types of qualitative research. In qualitative research, thematic analysis is a foundational method of analysis to define and describe the complicated issue of society, political, or cultural issues (Virginia & Victoria, 2006). Through interviews, respondents discuss their issues, problems, and give their suggestions. We use thematic analysis to tease out the results from both direct observation and in-depth interviews. The steps of thematic analysis are illustrated in table 2 which comprise on six steps. According to the guide line of Braun & Clarke (2006) in first step researchers familiarize themselves with the dataset which has already been collected and transcribed. In the second step from the dataset main words and phrases are underlined which are known as codes. In step three,

researchers are searching for themes or main variables or factor from codes. Step four guides for reviewing themes emerged from codes. Step five suggests preparing appropriate definitions and providing names of themes. In last step researcher interpret themes in findings section and also report finding from qualitative dataset (see step by step analysis process in table 2). Through thematic analysis we reduce data in themes then we explain themes through literature review.

Table-2: Step by Step Process of Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

Steps	Steps of Analysis data	Process of Analysis data/Interview
1	Familiarizing oneself with data	i. Narrative preparation. i.e. Transcribing data ii. Reading and Re-reading; noting down initial ideas
2	Generating initial codes	i. Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic manner ii. Fashion across entire data set iii. Collating data relevant to each code
3	Searching for themes	i. Collating codes into potential themes ii. Gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4	Reviewing themes	i. Checking if theme work in relation to the coded extracts ii. Checking if theme work in relation to the entire data set; iii. Reviewing data to search for additional themes; iv. Generating a thematic “map” of the analysis
5	Defining and naming themes	i. On-going analysis to refine the specific of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells ii. Generating clear definition and names for each theme
6	Producing the report	i. Selection of vivid. Compelling extract examples ii. Final analysis of selected extracts iii. Relating the analysis back to the research question. objectives and previous literature reviewed

Results and discussion

Researchers employed both data collection methods i.e. direct observation and in-depth interview simultaneously. Whilst the college sports facilities were under observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants. During direct observation a diary was maintained to note down various factors that cause hardships in women participation and same issues were taken up in the interviews as well. Factors that were observed include; physical, tangible and intangible things including behaviors of humans and materials surrounding them. Qualitative observation has been used to know facts, behavior, and views of involved persons. During observation, photos and video shots were also made for detailed analysis. The behavior of students, their parents, teacher, director physical education, and principals have been observed to know their mode/emotions regarding women's participation in sports and also to know the condition of sports material, infrastructure and equipment including playing ground.

Sports infrastructure, facilities, equipment, sportswear, en-

couraging sports environment and other basic facilities are necessary for the sportsperson. With the assistance of staff of the Government Girls Degree College, Sanghar researchers visited two sports grounds which were completely unmaintained and in worst conditions with uneven surface, grass and high bushes (please see figures 1 to 4). Other things which are compulsory for sports facilities such as seating arrangements for spectators and players, changing rooms, sports equipment, even drinking water for athletes were not available. During the observation, researchers observed two types of problems in government girls' degree colleges of Sanghar. First, corporeal and human side restriction in sports and second, unavailability of sports facilities and sports infrastructure in colleges. Other things observed include: there appeared mismanagement, lack of coordination, manpower, personnel irresponsibility, parents' cultural consideration and overload of study for students. Figure 1 and 2: Close-up of the conditions of Sports ground at Govt. Girls Degree College Sanghar.

Moreover, indoor or outdoor sports facilities were too

limited even all colleges lack playground, proper equipment and sportswear. In addition to the direct observation of these factors, researchers took in-depth interviews, transcribed and performed analysis through thematic strategy. Some of the key themes emerged from the empirical evidence are discussed below with some relevant interview quotes.

Sports Facilities

Sports facilities include sports personnel, maintained sports grounds and equipment to carry on sports activities. On the contrary, there were no game-wise grounds, sportswear (kits and shoes), sports protection equipment and first aid box. It was also noticed that the college administration did not have any plan or timetable for games, sports or physical activities. Educational institutes mostly do not have any proper sports area/space except a few educational institutes. Recently, government of Pakistan approved a sports gymnasium for Government Girls Degree College, Tando Adam. But unfortunately, later they constructed an auditorium in the place of sports gymnasium on the pretext of auditorium can be used for

multipurpose. In an interview, one of the participants (B.Sc. student, 21,) said:

"In our college, there aren't indoor and outdoor sports facilities and games classes, even we don't have drinking water, changing room and sitting facilities. So, how can we prepare ourselves without facilities for intercollegiate and regional level tournaments?"

Necessary sports facilities that develop students' interest in taking active part in sports refer to sports infrastructure, sports materials, and sports kits including ventilation, electrical, plumbing, sounding and lighting system, cleaning, security and different related sports facilities.

Sports Infrastructure

Sports infrastructure is a vital part of sports to continue physical activities. Without sports infrastructure, a player cannot take part in games. During the observation, it was found that there is very limited outdoor and indoor sports infrastructure. The available facilities seemed useless, uneven and full of bushes on the grounds of outdoor games like cricket, football hockey, and

athletics. No colleges had Gymnasium for indoor games like Throw Ball, Volleyball, Net Ball, Basketball, and Badminton. According to local weathers of district Sanghar, Gymnasium is necessary for girls because they are too sensitive as compared to boys. They always avoid playing in open areas during extreme summer or winter season. There was, also unavailability of changing room, washroom, wardrobes, lockers, setting arrangements and other facilities which are necessary for women student in colleges.

Sports scholarship

Athletes try to achieve their target and goal through hard work and continuous struggle. Players need more concentration, diet nutrition and beverages in the replacement of their efforts and physical work in sports. College, charitable institutions and local as well as national governments should give athletes scholarships as financial support to maintain their struggle and be able to afford reasonable diet nutrition and beverages on a daily bases for their betterment in sports. This type of financial supports will officially bound them

to take part in games and improve their performance with responsibility.

Reward in Sports

It was also observed that in the beginning, players participate in the game with interest and without any demand and they do not want anything from educational institutes. They play games for their intrinsic reason, for personal interest, recreation and enjoyment purpose. So, initially, they don't need any reward. They only need concentration, attention from spectators, players, teachers, and coaches and they try to perform their best. Senior students slowly lose their interest in the game. They continue games for external reasons i.e. they need extra motivation/reward to continue games. Reward systems are necessary for player's appreciation, mental satisfaction. It is prerequisite that the administration should make an authentic, fair and transparent reward system for best performance players in teams. Through extrinsic rewards, certificates, cash prize and scholarship will make players continue participation and enhance their performance in games.

Media Role in Women Sports

Media is a powerful tool to change the attitude, trend, and behavior of human beings. It was found that media is not performing a positive role in women's sports in study area. Most parents consider media broadcast of their daughters' news is unnecessary and defamation in the society. It was observed that media resource persons focus on women's physical attraction and their feminine aspects in broadcasting on mass media and social media. Due to the physical attraction of women mostly people passes weird comments which earns defamation of female sports persons and their families. As a result, most parents avoid allowing females to participate in sports. This is a huge issue for sports administrators and organizers in rural areas. Parents believe, media should have played constructive role rather creating problems. Media should create better image women sports so that parents and sports players feel safe. During an interview, one participant (male, 45, parent) expressed:

"Media should be asked to broadcast women player sports videos, pictures and news with full permission and in an ethical way. The positive aspect

of sports competition shall be inculcate to our society for very positive lesson and more and more people will allow their girls in sports".

In words of an active girl student in sports:

"Media can be an effective tool to create a good name and fame for women sports and players provided that the news and broadcasted meets our cultural norms otherwise people feel defamed".

Cultural attitude towards women sports

District Sanghar is a rural area, so women's sports participation is lower than in urban areas. Parents don't allow their daughters to participate in the game, because all games have running, jumping and severe physical movement. Parents are conservative regarding their adult daughters. They think that running and jumps are not good for their daughters and can create after marriage issues. These activities are ethically not appreciated by community, neighbors, and relatives and satirically and make jokes about such girls, their parents, and family. Exercise and physical activity are still considered as the low grade in our society. This thinking creates hurdles in the

development of women sports. The community seems unaware of benefits of women sports participation till now. People understand women are weaker than men, games are harmful for young girls.

Parent's awareness of women sports

It was observed that parents are playing a worthy role in our community for their children. Parents also seemed eager and curious for their young girls to play sports but they also shown some suspicion due to cultural factors. Parents also understand the benefits of participation in sports and physical activism. However, due to social taboos and conservative mindset of people most parents seemed cautious of social teasing and taunting hinders most parents and guardians to allow their daughters and sisters to participate in games.

In this context one of the participants (female, 38, Director Physical Education) said:

"We should focus on players' individual needs and training issues and social customs and thinking. Also, a special focus on those players be paid who are good in sports and one who believe in sports as healthy activities

and can be our role model for many other future sports people".

In an interview, one parent (male, 55) expressed:

"We rely on college administration to provide our girls a safe, secure environment to participate in sports. We must understand every member of our society is not good and positive. Some people unnecessarily associate bad things to girls who do sports and then parents may face issues with girls' marriage proposals".

Furthermore, one participant (female, 34, active teacher in sports) expressed:

"If we want to promote sports at college level, we should aware our society in general and particularly community, families, parents, teachers, and students that what are real benefits of games and sports in common life in younger age, and especially for girls".

Women sports association and organizations also express similar concern by describing that providing safe and sound playing environment to women, suitable locations, appropriate scheduling, secure changing rooms, and adequate lighting, transport and must address power relationships between coaches and athletes.

Institutional sports support

In this study it was observed that college administration and teaching faculty are working for the betterment of students: they are educating them, increasing their knowledge and strengthening them mentally. It has also been observed that sometimes administrators and staff members create hurdles for girls, financially and morally through the official and unofficial way. The student feels difficulty for participation in sports in education institutes. Due to lack of moral support lack of planning, useless supporting staff, shortage of time and other different hurdles, institutes are not motivating women sports, specifically in rural areas.

Student interest/awareness

It is observed that the majority of students under-utilize their leisure time in creative and healthy activities. Students have lots of leisure time in college and they should utilize their time in physically healthy activities. Due to the lack of government attention and unplanned structure in colleges cause demotivation.

Formal Education

In the words of one participant (male, 36, Director Physical

Education):

“Formal education is necessary, it helps students to learn step by step. Through formal education methods, we include curriculum, games, classes and specific lecturers. The player can be capable to understand easily sports’ narrow skills, techniques and tactics”.

Eaton (2018) also stressed on the importance of formal education for girls sports participation which includes curriculums, trained teachers, all types of learning facilities available in the institution. During the study one of the very important aspect revealed by one participant (female, 39, Director of Physical Education):

“The majority of college women can’t afford basic things of sports such as good diet, transport, and sportswear. Lots of girls wish to play game barefoot or play in common shoes and get injured themselves”.

Kenton (2018) recognizes that the population's ability to afford or purchase a specific sports item and good diet is very low in developing countries. In an interview, one participant (female, 57, principal) said:

“We organize sports competition

when higher authority sent us any schedule. In a harsh season or environment, students often have to push themselves harder in training and matches”.

An interviewee (female, 36, Directors Physical education) expressed similar concern:

“When we organize sports competition in college women enjoys these recreational activities and they refresh themselves”.

A female (50, parent) said:

“The administration should give cash, reward, and different types of incentives to students to support them”.

Literature suggests that sports activities regardless of gender are enjoyable. Curative and healthy activities provide individuals, excitement and pleasure in leisure time. (David & Austin, 2001) Similarly, Hatch (2019) noted that packages, pays, benefits and facilities for staff and rewards for students are increasing chances of participation. Findings discussed above suggest that there is long way to go yet regarding women sports as we need infrastructure, positive media role in women sports, curbing

gender discrimination, proper budget in women sports and change mentality of community. Pakistan needs prepare educational institutions with focus on highlighting significance of women participation in sports. The case of government colleges of Sanghar district also experiences similar hurdles that other colleges witness across the country.

Conclusion and Implications

This study attempted to investigate the socioeconomic and familial hardships females experience at college level in Sanghar district Sindh. The study revealed that there is acute shortages of furnished infrastructure, complete facilities and appreciation through intrinsic and extrinsic reward to enhance sports participation. Parents are also scared to allow their females to participate as there are more chances of injuries to play without appropriate arrangements in the colleges. College students seemed eager to participate in sports activities provided that the necessary arrangements and coaching are available in colleges. Another factor that plays significant role is the fitness and weight balance that female students give priori-

ty. Both require training and coaching which colleges are supposed to provide to the interested students. If colleges administration could play their role to arrange fitness and weight balance training that may also enhance the chances of female sports participation. Findings reveal that government colleges should arrange sports facilities such as washrooms, wardrobe, separate changing rooms, clean drinking and sports equipment. Sports administrators, sports bodies, sports-persons also need to play their role for such arrangements. In addition, rewards systems play an important role for players and officials to motivate them. Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, cash reward, awards, allowances, subsidies and different types of appreciation certificates shall also encourage both students and coaches. Media should publish women sport events and not only pictures that focus on female body position, emotional displays, facial expressions, physical appearances and odd poses of women. In the case of exploiting photos and images women get demotivated and it further creates hurdles in sports developments. During direct observation of col-

leges in the study area, it was observed that there are some corporal or human side restriction in sports and also there is unavailability of sports facilities and sports infrastructure in colleges. There are various reasons for this situation. It was observed that there was mismanagement, lack of interest of college administration and lack of coordination, sports personnel, parents' cultural consideration, and overload of study. Second, poor facilities in girls' colleges with no proper indoor or outdoor sports facilities, even the majority of colleges haven't a playground, equipment, and sportswear. There is issue of a systematic gap in sports supervision and sports training. This study concludes that unless college administration do not step in and provide a safe secure playing environment, fully functional sports facilities which include rewards in annual sports festivals students and their parents will not agree to participate. Media should promote benefits of sports participation and cover the events locally and regionally to show positive side of sports.

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