



EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS SCIENCES/ACTIVITY

FAROOZ AHMAD PUNZOO,

Research Scholar, Department of Physical Education JJT University,
Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India.

ABSTRACT

Experts agree that sport and physical activity involvement can potentially offer a wide range of life benefits for girls and women. Sport and physical activity have not yet been used on a large scale as a strategy within women's movements. There are, however, already very positive stories to tell from both our programme partners and those programs in network. Based on the experience of these partners we have learned more about how participation in sport and physical activity can empower individual girls and women. The involvement of sport and physical activity can build life skills, confidence etc. In my opinion, empowerment is a process by which people gain power over their lives that is empowerment enables women to do things for themselves in their own interests rather than at the command of others for their benefit. Thus empowerment also involves the ability to resist pressures to conform to gender-stereotyped notions concerning presentation and behavior. It also enables women to be more socially assertive. As such becoming empowered enables to become what they do with their lives. Sports are an integral part of the culture of almost every nation. However its use to promote gender equity and empower girls and women is often overlooked because sport is not universally perceived as a suitable or desirable pursuit for girls and women. The International Day of Action for women's Health, which celebrates the work of women's health advocates around the world to improve their communities and the lives of women and girls. "For girls especially, the idea of safe and supportive environment is crucial, given the burden and imitations placed on them by parents and social institutions that intensify as girl approach adulthood."

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Health, Gender Equity etc.

INTRODUCTION

Regular and enjoyable physical activity benefits everyone. It can improve physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being and for the students and young people everywhere. It should be a part of daily life. Society influences the choices of young people make physical activity, first as it affects all their other choices we all share responsibility for providing good opportunities for physical activity.

Schools, in particular, play a critical role in fostering young people's physical activity, in teaching the skills and attitudes needed to participate, and in providing a safe venue for the activity to take place. An effective school programme will include time for daily play and structured and unstructured physical activities provide recreation and sport, and other quality physical education for all.

In recent years sport and physical activity as a strategy for the empowerment of girls and women has been gaining recognition worldwide. Women Win is the first International Organization with a sole focus of providing support for innovative sport and physical activity programme for empowerment and creating a social movement around sport for the advancement of women's rights.



Sport and physical activity have not yet been used on a large scale as a strategy within women's movements. There are, however, already very positive stories to tell from both our programme partners and those programmes in network. Based on the experience of these partners we have learned more about how participation in sport and physical activity can empower individual girls and women. The involvement of sport and physical activity can build life skills, confidence and body awareness and may create social networks, which results in dramatic positive life changes for participants. We have also seen that involvement in sport and physical activity can positively change existing gender norms and help girls and women move into public places. Moreover, sport and physical activity programmes provide opportunities to bring communities together and help to realize development objectives relating to such issues as conflict management, reproductive health and gender-based violence.

Empowering girls and women through sport and physical activity is an important assessment and research publication, which focuses on the effect of sport and physical activity programmes on the on the lives of girls and women around the world and how these programmes are developed.

Girls and women face a disproportionate number of life challenges, which reduce their ability to achieve full-potential. Recent studies show that despite formal guarantees of equality, the overall rate of progress for women participants, those from the poorest and most marginalized regions of the world has been slow. Women and girls continue to encounter inequalities and deprivations in their daily lives, which prevent them from contributing towards both the creation of more equitable societies and sustainable development within their communities and beyond. "The State of the World's Children 2007", a report by the United Nations Children's fund (UNICEF) asserts that:

"Gender discrimination is pervasive. While the degrees and forms of inequality may vary women and girls are deprived of equal access to resources, opportunities and political power in every region of the world. The oppression of girls and women can include the preference for sons over daughters, limited personal and professional choices for girls and women, the denial of basic human rights and outright gender-based violence."

Reaching in the period of adolescence is key to confronting these critical issues. Gender-based discrimination, as well as different degrees and forms of inequalities increase for girls during adolescence. As articulated in a report on adolescent girls in the developing world publishing by the Population Council, these girls face new restrictions reserved for women while their male counterparts enjoy new privileges reserved for them, including autonomy, mobility and power. Girls on the other hand are often systematically deprived of the same gains.

Experts agree that sport and physical activity involvement can potentially offer a wide range of life benefits for girls and women. The International Platform on Sport and Development, a platform dedicated to the thematic field of sport and development and initiated after the first International Conference on Sport and Development in 2003, underscores or recommended the



role of sport in promoting gender equity. The platform cites a number of benefits for physically active girls and women. According to the current platform, sport involvement can play a significant role in promoting the physical and mental wellbeing of girls and women fostering opportunities for this leadership and life achievement, initiating social inclusion and social integration of girls and women, and challenging gender norms.

WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT

In my opinion, empowerment is a process by which people gain power over their lives that is empowerment enables women to do things for themselves in their own interests rather than at the command of others for their benefit. Thus empowerment also involves the ability to resist pressures to conform to gender-stereotyped notions concerning presentation and behavior. It also enables women to be more socially assertive. As such becoming empowered enables to become what they do with their lives. David Whitson sees the confident sense of self that comes from being skilled in the use of one's body as a form of empowerment. The religious or spiritual societies, the World Bank, feminist action group, health and gender researchers' government United Nations and developmental agencies have all put empowerment on their agenda. The result is multiple meaning and interpretations associated with a variety of strategies. A central element in empowerment is power which is concerned to authority, domination and or exploitation.

The empowerment of women through sport and physical activity has been hit by the fact that sports women being undergoing several physical suffering of various magnitudes. Various opportunities for women's leadership and capacity building can be achieved through increasing their participation in sport activities. Evidence from developing countries indicates that some sport and physical activity programmes provides opportunities to women and girls to develop leadership and life skills. In this connection the Great English Writer, Marry Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) addresses in his famous prose, "*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*" advocacy of women's equality and critiques of conventional femininity attained significance. According to her:

- *Women can't be forced to be "domestic"*
- *Women are allowed an minimal education while her counterpart (men) are encouraged variety; this variety encourages men to explore ; this exploration results in extra-marital affairs; in relation, will resort to infidelity as well; all of which takes them both farther from "virtue"*
- *Equitable laws (for husband and wife) have created a more sanctimonious marriage pack that allows men and women to choose their own partners (instead of if being dictated by family and politics)*
- *If husband and wife are on equal levels to each other , then the wife will be a better mother to her children .She will teach her children the "virtue" she has acquired and*



provide an example of a righteous marriage for them-one where she and her husband are friends

- *Wollstonecraft refuses to treat women like children and appeals to women's "reason" to acquire strength of both in their intellect (education) and their physical bodies (exercise)*

IMPORTANCE OF SPORTS FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Spots are an integral part of the culture of almost every nation. However its use to promote gender equity and empower girls and women is often overlooked because sport is not universally perceived as a suitable or desirable pursuit for girls and women. Existing social constructs of masculinity and feminist or socially accepted ways of expressing what it means to be a man or women in a particular socio-cultural content play a key role in determining access, levels of participation and benefits from sports.

It is true, in all countries that girls and women are less likely than boys and men to participate in sport and sport continue to be dominated by males. It is a mistake, however to assume that this is because girls and women do not wish to participate in sports and physical activities. Poverty ,heavy domestic demands , safety concerns , lack of accessible transpiration , inadequate sport and recreation facilities , and few opportunities for physical education and skills development frequently abstains women's participations in physical activity and sport . Being physically active, leaving home accompanied, or being seen by men outside their family are also additional barriers preventing girls and women from becoming involved in sport and physical activity.

At the same time many International frameworks support women's participation in sport with some national laws requiring equal access and opportunities for females. A small but growing body of evidence has also begun to establish sport as a viable tool for addressing gender equity on a broader scale. Research on sport, gender, and development indicate that sport can benefit girls and women by:

- Enhancing health and well-being
- Fostering self-esteem and empowerment
- Facilitating social inclusion and integration
- Challenging gender norms, and
- Providing opportunities for leadership and achievement

Girls and women can become more physically active, benefiting their physical and mental health including the reduced risk they will suffer from chronic diseases, depression and anxiety and engaging in health risk behaviors. Sports can also be a powerful health information and education platform, connecting girls and women with the information skills and strategies they need to reduce health risks in their lives, particularly in their sexual reproductive health. Sports and physical activity can help to increase self-esteem by giving girls and women opportunities to



learn new advance skills, engage in positive relationships, acquire achievements, engage in volunteer services and receive public recognition.

Sport and physical activity can help to reduce the social isolation and exclusion that many girls and women experience particularly those that cannot be attend school and live in poverty. Sport programmes can also provide girls and women with safe places together, help them to build social networks, offer social support and connect them to health, education and employment information services and opportunities that can help to address their marginalization in society.

The country's poor performance on women's empowerment and gender inequality is also reflected in the gender development index. That is India is ranked 132 out of 148 countries on Gender Development Index as per the 2013 Global Human Development Report. Women in India are not encouraged to participate sport and physical activity. The conditions for Indian women in to take-up sports are subpar especially at an International level. The resources to make successful Indian women's teams are readily available, but just need to be utilized. In this content, the Sports Council of India still advocated several policies in favor of sports and environment friendly activities with gender equality. The Council also pays great attention to establish new policies for women empowerment.

WOMEN AND HEALTH EDUCATION

As there is huge difference between thinking about health and worrying about health, so there is a difference between simply knowing about health and following the principles that facilitate maintenance of good health. Health is man's most valuable possession and it is sensible for him to look after his possessions. Good health comes naturally to those of us. It is not a thing that has to be sought after by continually taking medicines and pills. It is only when man has something with him that he needs things to put it right.

Balanced diet and regular physical activity can help to maintain the girls and women healthy. Various research studies showed that regular physical activity may reduces the onset of osteopenia in women. According to the United Nations Population Information Network, the empowerment of and autonomy of women, and improvement in their political, economics and health status are recognized by the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) as highly important ends in themselves. In addition, they are seen as essential for the achievement of sustainable development. The central role of women play in regard to population and development has been strongly, emphasized in all preparation for ICPD. Empowerment of women was discussed during five regional population meeting, three sessions of the ICPD preparatory committee and a number of expert group meeting and round tables.

Education is one of the most important tools of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. The fundamental right to the highest attainable standard of health, including physical, mental and social well-being has been recognized in many global, regional and national declaration and charters.



The International Day of Action for women's Health, which celebrates the work of women's health advocates around the world to improve their communities and the lives of women and girls. The International community is being called upon to ensure a holistic and inclusive approach to women and girls' health as the global health community moves beyond 2015, the target date set for achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. This is very personal and important issue for me since being exposed to the problem. I have dedicated my life to protecting women from HIV, as a field practitioner working in the hospitals of the Democratic Republic (DR) of the Congo, as an advocate at the national and international level fighting to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa and across the globe and as a researcher focused on the unmet medical needs of the developing world.

SAFE SPACES

Sport and physical activity programmes provide girls and women with the opportunity to convene in public spaces around a common interest. In this way girls and women are given the chance to assert their independence outside their homes, to build strong social networks and to increase the likelihood of their participation as active citizens with their communities and beyond. Restricting girls from moving beyond the home or area around the home has traditionally functioned as an important safety component. In order to ensure that girls and women enjoy the positive benefits offered by sport and physical activity involvement, participants and their families must feel comfortable and secure to attend regular sport and physical activity practice outside the home area. Addressing safety concerns should be an important priority of all sport and physical activity programmes that seek to empower girls and women.

In a population council publication, that addresses the importance of access to safe spaces for girls, Martha Brady and Arjmand Banu Khan stress that:

“For girls especially, the idea of safe and supportive environment is crucial, given the burden and imitations placed on them by parents and social institutions that intensify as girl approach adulthood.”

Safety in this regard means physical safety, meaning that sports and physical activity programmes prioritize the requirement that girls and women are protected from bodily harm in the form of violence, including sexual abuse and preventable sport injuries. This also includes emotional safety, meaning that girls and women feel comfortable and secure in their sport and physical activity, for example, to feel that they can communicate and express themselves. Women need good reliable security for involving in sports. Several sporting events do not provide security for women players or athletes. The women players countenance problems with regarding to boarding, lodging mess, longue etc. The provision for bathrooms sanitation and rest rooms are almost absenting certain sporting events. Girls in India are brought up in increasingly confined, restrictive, enclosed and domestic atmosphere as girls reach adolescence. They are



almost barred from taking part in any physical activity. They are restricted to take part in those games and activities which requires them to stay away from home. This preventive tendency makes girls become more homely and confidence level freezes to scale up.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Women empowerment through sporting involvement can be feasible consideration with the following steps:

1. Encouraging sports scholarships in schools for girls
2. Ensuring the active participation of various sports organization, clubs authorities in women sporting activities
3. Enhancing the quality infrastructure for physical education and women sports
4. Ensuring public – private participation in physical education programmes
5. Establishing separate women universities for sports and physical education
6. Development of corporate sector involved in women sporting activities
7. Comprehensive women sports policy framing
8. Adequate Budget allocation for women sporting events
9. Media coverage policy about women sporting activities
10. Scholarship, rewards , honors cash rewards etc. for women

“In fact that country and that Nation which doesn't respect women will never become great now and nor will ever in future and in pursuit of making women empower let's work together giving them (women) their much deserved status”

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The gender equity and equality to great extent depend on the mental strength of the people. In this conclusion apart from derived physical and mental well-being enjoyed by physically active girls and women, a well designed sport and physical activity can provide a good platform to enable positive life changes. The involvement of the women in sport will reduce their tension and develop more confidence that will regularly raise their confidence. This situation needs a good background from the state itself. The preventing cultural and social barriers stand as an obstacle in their development scenario. That situation should change. Then the women with their spirit in sports can be regenerated.

The safety in sports for women is still an issue which is being tackled with great innovative inputs. If women empowerment needs to take good shape, women should be brought out from their confined restrictive atmosphere and sports can prove an important imperative in empowering women. Government spends lot of money on women empowerment and gender equity programmes.

Sport has substantial to empower women both economically and socially. Women are not aware of the values of the sport to their health; hence they are not motivated to venture into sporting at individual level, family level into community level, as result of lack of education. Hegemonic



masculinity, lack of education, poverty, lack of media coverage has emerged as the outstanding barriers to women participation in sport both in towns and rural areas. Poverty in women communities has made women inactive in sport.

RECOMMENDATION

- For women to be involved in sport activities there should need for training, establishing separate clubs and advance funding, a responsibility for government.
- Women communities should be encouraged about the economic and social values they gain from sport participation.
- Ministry of Women, gender and empowerment should put a policy that compels a government structures to involve women out of school to do sport and physical activities in their communities.
- Women communities should be encouraged by local and national media to cover every field of sport.
- Sport related programmes should be organized so as to motivate them and expose their talents.

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