



## PARTICIPATION OF GIRLS IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AND SPORTS

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### ABSTRACT

The gender discrimination is also evident in play activities for boys and girls. Girls playing outside the courtyard of the family house are not socially accepted practice where as traditionally boys have been playing outdoor games. Even among the hobbies pursued by boys and girls there is gender discrimination .Till recently very few girls participated in sports events, but now awareness has brought about change in gender differences in sports and play. There are many factors which may effect on girls participation in games and sports .1).There is a lack of orientation of the people living in Indian society taking part in games and sports for girls has not became a common phenomenon.2).Whatever little facilities for games and sports are available to girls, they are confined to urban areas. The rural girls are deprived of taking benefit of such facility.3).The habit of participation in games and sports is not inculcated systematically in rural areas.4).There is a general superstition among the people that girls' participation in games and sports causes loss of femininity. The participating girls might look 'Tom Boys'.5). The girls in our society of rural areas have to look after the family/household jobs to be good house wives.6). The male dominating society assumes that the personality of women should be submissive, introvert, delicate, sensitive, tolerant, shy, weak and sincere.

Evidence suggests that from an early age, differences in gender-based attitudes towards and opportunities for sports and physical activities can have a significant influence on girls' participation. This may, in turn, affect later involvement in physically active lifestyles, and the social and health benefits that may result for them. Factors influencing girls' participation.

**Keywords:** Participation, Girls, Physical activity, psychological factors

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The civilization of Sparta, Athens and Rome in the history of world of have stressed on physical fitness or physical training as an important objective of the educational programme. There were equal rights to girls to participate in training program as boys had. Examination of artifacts from primitive societies and cultures indicate that mankind has almost always participated in game or play of some sort. Those artifacts do not, however allow us to determine to what extent women participated. Bloch (1968) states, " Ancient Greece can truly be considered the birthplace of competitive sports as we know them." We also know from Harris (1964) excellent study that, in the sixth century B.C, girls participated in running race and that women of Sparta wrestled .Even this participation was limited to the time of a women's life prior to marriage.

The Modern Olympics were founded in 1896. No doubt other forces were in part responsible for the fact that women /girls didn't appear as contestants in the first modern Olympic Games in 1896.Indeed, six women competed in the 1900 Olympics. By 1932, 715 participants were women. Contemporarily, representation of girls and women as Olympic contestants has improved in 1996 Olympics as Atlanta the women participants were 3780, which was near about thirty five percent of all participants.

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It has been suggested that there is a genetic predisposition towards being more or less physically activeliv. However, any such predisposition is mediated by a host of factors,i.e. Personal Factors -Biological (Heredity, Age, Obesity and Fitness level); Psychological (Motivation, Perceived Barriers, Perceived Competence and Attitudes) Social Factors ( Peer group, Family, Culture & Role Model) and Environmental Factors (Access, Type of activity, School & Independent mobility)

## 2. BENEFITS OF SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

### 2.1 Physical Health

The physical health benefits of regular physical activity are well-established. Regular participation in such activities is associated with a longer and better quality of life, reduced risks of a variety of diseases and many psychological and emotional benefits. There is also a large body of literature showing that inactivity is one of the most significant causes of death, disability and reduced quality of life in the developed world. Physical activity may influence the physical health of girls in two ways. First, it can affect the causes of disease during childhood and youth. Evidence suggests a positive relationship between physical activity and a host of factors affecting girls' physical health, including diabetes, blood pressure and the ability to use fat for energy. Second, physical activity could reduce the risk of chronic diseases in later life. A number of 'adult' conditions, such as cancer, diabetes and coronary heart disease, have their origins in childhood, and can be aided, in part, by regular physical activity in the early years. Also, regular activity beginning in childhood helps to improve bone health, thus preventing osteoporosis, which predominantly affects females. Obesity deserves special mention. There seems to be a general trend towards increased childhood obesity in a large number of countries, and this increase seems to be particularly prevalent in girls from highly urbanised areas, some ethnic minorities and the disabled. Obesity in childhood is known to have significant impact on both physical and mental health, including hyperlipidemia, hypertension and abnormal glucose tolerance. Physical activity can be an important feature of a weight control programme for girls, increasing calorific expenditure and promoting fat reduction. Indeed, recent systematic reviews on both the prevention and treatment of childhood obesity recommend strategies for increasing physical activity.

**2.2.Mental Health-**In recent years, there has been evidence of disturbingly high rates of mental ill-health among adolescents and even younger children, ranging from low-self-esteem, anxiety and depression to eating disorders, substance abuse and suicide. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to anxiety and depressive disorders: by 15 years, girls are twice as likely as boys to have experienced a major depressive episode; girls are also significantly more likely than boys to have seriously considered suicide.

Research suggests two ways in which physical activities can contribute to mental health in girls.

Firstly, there is fairly consistent evidence that regular activity can have a positive effect upon girls' psychological well-being; indeed, some studies indicate that girls may respond more strongly than boys in terms of short-term benefits.

Secondly, research has indicated that physical activity can contribute to the reduction of problematic levels of anxiety and depression. Evidence is beginning to be gathered for exercise as a treatment for clinical depression, with studies finding that physical activity is as effective a treatment as anti-depressants, and psychotherapy. Similarly, a variety of nonclinical studies have found that higher levels of activity were related to lower rates of depression. A position

statement of the International Society of Sport Psychology drew out numerous mental health benefits of physical activity from the research literature, including reduced state anxiety, neuroticism and anxiety, mild to moderate depression, and various kinds of stress.

**2.3 Educational and Intellectual Development-**A range of evidence suggests that for many girls, sports and physical activities are positive features of their academic aspirations and achievement. The classic study of the relationship between physical activity and school performance was carried out in France in the early 1950s, in Vanves. Researchers reduced 'academic' curriculum time by 26%, replacing it with physical activities, yet academic results did not worsen, there were fewer discipline problems, greater attentiveness and less absenteeism. More recent studies have found improvements for many children in academic performance when time for physical activity is increased in their school day. A report of three longitudinal studies emphasises that 'academic performance is maintained or even enhanced by an increase in a student's level of habitual physical activity, despite a reduction in curriculum or free time for the study of academic material'. There is considerable evidence of a positive relationship between girls' participation in sports and pro-educational values, although, at present, it is difficult to distinguish between correlation and causation. Studies from the United States report a host of encouraging findings including: girls who participate in sports are more likely to achieve academic success than those who do not play sports; female high school athletes expressed a greater interest in graduating from both high school and college; female athletes from ethnic minority groups reported better school grades and greater involvement in extra-curricular activities than non-athletes, and in some cases are considerably less likely to drop-out from school. Other studies have suggested that sports participation can help undermine traditional gender stereotyping in terms of academic aptitude, by demonstrating an association between girls' engagement in sports and improved performance in science and mathematics.

#### **2.4 Reproductive Health**

Adolescent pregnancy and sexual ill-health are major social problems across the globe. Although there is a shortage of research in this area, early studies conducted in the US have found that adolescent girls who participate in sports tend to become sexually active later in life, have fewer partners, and, when sexually active, make greater use of contraception than non-sporting girls. Projects are currently underway in the developing world that use sports participation as a strategy for empowering girls to avoid high risk sexual behaviour.

### **3. SOCIAL INCLUSION**

Combating social exclusion, or 'the multiple and changing factors resulting in people being excluded from the normal exchanges, practices and rights of modern society', has become a focus of attention for governments and nongovernment organisations in recent years. Some writers have argued that sports not only reflect but can also contribute to girls' social exclusion in sports and wider society. Certainly, the dominance of sports as culturally valued physical activities, and the close identification of sports with masculinity, means that other, non masculine

groups can become pushed to the margins. However, positive sports experiences do seem to have the potential to, at least, contribute to the process of inclusion by: bringing individuals from a variety of social and economic background together in a shared interest in activities that are inherently valuable; offering a sense of belonging, to a team, a club or a programme; providing opportunities for the development of valued capabilities and competencies; and increasing 'community capital', by developing social networks, community cohesion and civic pride.

Studies of women's experiences of sports participation have suggested that they can contribute to a more generalized feeling of empowerment. In many settings, adolescents may be encouraged to view their bodies as sexual and reproductive resources for men, rather than sources of strength for themselves. Physical activities may help them develop a sense of ownership of their bodies and access the types of activity experiences traditionally enjoyed by boys. This may be because participation augments girls' self-esteem, or because being an athlete carries with it a strong public identity. Some female athletes report having a stronger sense of identity and self-direction – what Talbot calls 'being herself through sport'. Whatever the reasons, increasing the numbers of girls' participating in sports and physical activities does seem to open up routes through which they can acquire new community affiliations and begin to operate more openly and equally in community life. In doing so, girls' participation can challenge and change social norms about their roles and capabilities.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The benefits of participation in physical activities are great, and the potential costs of inactivity can be severe. Many girls around the world are not currently able to take advantage of the benefits of regular sports and physical activities due to inequitable access and opportunities. Therefore, a central challenge facing governments, schools, sports groups and communities is to develop forms of physical activity that are sensitive to girls' needs and interests. But rather than focusing on 'girl-friendly' sports, we should be looking for ways to make sports and other physical activities more 'child-friendly' and 'youth-friendly'.

Our reading of the research suggests a number of strategies that promote such 'child-friendly' practices, facilitate regular physical activity, and are supportive of positive sporting experiences.

1. Girls do enjoy engaging in physical activities. Strategies should be implemented which build upon this enjoyment, and allow them to participate as fully as possible, in forms that offer them satisfaction and opportunities for achievement.
2. Practices should be established which recognise the importance of fun, health and social interaction in sports participation.
3. School physical education is a foundation of life-long physical activity. Fundamental movement skills need to be developed from an early age, for all children, with the emphasis on the individual body, rather than sporting outcomes.
4. Some girls regularly engage in sports and physical activities, as an integral part of their lifestyle. Any strategies concerned with raising participation among young people need to

- remember that neither girls nor boys are ‘the problem’; rather, the difficulty lies with the ways in which physical activities are constructed and presented.
5. It is important to examine and highlight the practices inherent within sports which might deter children from participating. Sports provision may need to be adapted to encourage and accommodate all young people.
  6. It is necessary to listen to voices from outside mainstream sports, for example, dance, mixed ability, noncompetitive and co-operative activities.
  7. Sports programme should reflect local cultural needs if they are to engage and sustain girls participation.
  8. The organisation of sports groups and programmes should be include women in key roles, such as coaching and mentors, and role models drawn from within local communities and schools. These should reflect differences in perspectives and interests, and develop close links with schools and communities, to ensure continuity of engagement in sports and physical activities throughout life.
  9. More research is needed to explore sports and physical activities in the lives of young people, and this needs to reflect the diversity of experiences around the world, acknowledging both developed and developing countries.
  10. The more opportunities that are available for girls to be physically active, the more they are active. Strategies need to be put in place that ensure activities, settings and facilities are easily accessible and safe.

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