

# An Elaborative View about the Physical, Social and Cultural Barriers Faced by the Females in Sports

Saqib Khan<sup>1</sup> Irfanullah Khan<sup>2</sup> Farhatullah Khan<sup>1</sup> Hamid Rauf<sup>1</sup>  
Tufail Nawaz<sup>1</sup> Nafid Khan<sup>1</sup> Syed Zia-ul-Islam<sup>3</sup>

1.Department of Business Administration, Gomal University, Dera Ismail khan, Pakistan

2.Department of Public Administration, Gomal University, Dera Ismail khan, Pakistan

3.Department of Sports Sciences and Physical Education, Gomal University, Dera Ismail

## Abstract

Many efforts have been made to encourage physical education, coupled with the benefits of physical activity and the risks of physical inactivity, but a substantial portion of young adults are not physically active and remain sedentary. This situation raises several questions; Why this trend? What are the factors that prevent people to engage in physical activity? Is it possible to change the attitude of inactive individuals toward physical activity, and if so, how? To examine whether there is any differences in perceived barriers to physical activity among male and female students. The current study also investigate the relationship between perceived barriers, self-efficacy and physical activity. To see the mediation effect of self-efficacy in the relationship between perceived barriers and participation in physical activity. The study attempts to examine the barriers to perform physical activity among the female students.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the male dominated societies, the socio-cultural barriers against the female activities have become a prominent issue in the modern world. The females are being cornered in every social activity let-a-side the sports. Already, due to present wave of terrorism the sports stadium and grounds at the both local and national level are lying vacant. Moreover, the cultural barriers also restrict the females to participate in the sports. "The regular physical activity remains an important behavior for promoting health. But, unfortunately, research indicated that physical activity rates decline consistently during the adolescent years" (Leslie, Sparling & Owen, 2001). Examination of perceived physical activity barriers was considered important to contribute to physical inactivity. "The present study was conducted to explore the perceived barriers to physical activity among female students and it looks at the mediation effects of self-efficacy in the relation between perceived barriers and physical activity". Research has also clearly suggested a positive association between exercise and psychological health and well-being. This appears especially true for improvements in mood and the ability to cope with stress (Macintyre, 2004). In addition, exercise has been shown to improve many psychiatric problems such as depression, anxiety and stress disorders.

The social justice does not allow the gender discrimination at any level. Still, in the developing countries, the females are not allowed by their family members and the society as a whole to come out from their homes for any healthy activity. "The gender based physical activities and physical education because access and regular participation is a fundamental human right. It is a fundamental human right because regular participation in physical activity is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle". Programs that prepare female students for lifelong physical activity must be formally organized, well designed and professionally led (Trudeau & Shepherd, 2005). "Quality, school physical education programs provide young people with opportunities to develop the values, knowledge and skills they need to lead physically active lives, build self-esteem and to promote and facilitate physical activity in the lives of others".

## 2. PHYSICAL BARRIERS TOWARDS SPORTS

The divine has gifted the females with immense power and endurance. In sports, they can perform much better as compared to males in the fields of swimming, running, jumping etc. "With exercise and activity habits commencing early in life and the development of healthy lifestyle behaviors among children and adolescents translating into reduced health risks in adulthood" (Van Daalen, 2005), quality education at an early ages is paramount. Hence, schools have been identified as key health settings and are being called upon to give greater attention to their physical education and physical activity programs. "Today, despite Participation in sports activities is available and relatively cheap; however, few people would like to pay to physical activity and exercise". Although from the theoretical point, almost everyone knows that sporting activities can enhance physical health and also is an entertainment, but unfortunately from the practical point view, a few are interested in regular exercises.

Regarding the participation of the female in the sports, the picture is very bleak right from the school level. The

educational institutions, in this regard, can play the role of sports centers and nurseries for the future athletes and players. Physical activity, fitness and relaxation have many benefits for the human body. Trudeau & Shepherd (2005) identified physical activity can be very effective in improving the human respiratory system, while strengthening the heart muscle and increasing its volume is the benefits of physical activity. "People with physical activity and those who exercise regularly are able to adopt an active lifestyle, have an attractive appearance and changes in mood and experience confidence". Allender (2006) believed that physical activity can be described as an activity that involves stimulus throughout the body that results human skeleton muscles contraction and increases energy levels. Flintoff & Scraton, (2006) believed that, student perceptions and positive attitude towards physical activity is one the important elements in evaluating the success of a physical education curriculum. They believed develop and strengthen students' attitudes toward sports is the instructors and coaches key task.

Presently, the promotion of physical exercise has become one of the government's main objectives with respect to public health. "This is due to the fact that, among the goals to be achieved by the government, is the prevention of the illnesses caused by sedentarism, as well as the boost of a healthy and suitable lifestyle and is linked to the health and quality of life of the person" (Gidlow, 2006). This concept has gained increasing importance in the last decade. "This can be proved by the epidemiological researches, consensus agreements and reports elaborated for Health Authorities in Europe, Canada, England, The United States and Latin America" (World Health Organization, 2007). They all clearly pointed out the existing relations between physical activity, everyday life sport and health not only on an individual level but also on a public one.

### **2.1 Socio-cultural Barriers**

In the under developed societies, the females are confined to only domestic affairs. In the wake of cultural restrictions they cannot spare themselves for any outdoor activity like sports. The overall social environment gives them no space to make themselves prominent in the outdoor games. They are barred due to religious fanaticism which has marked the whole society especially the female community. With reference to the specific social and cultural practices, beliefs and traditions within a community or society and how they cause impact on self-perceptions and the perceptions of others (Nixon, 2007). "Of particular significance in this area are discourses of sport and physical activity dominated by exclusive notions of elitism and masculinity. A lack of positive and attainable role models is a related issue for most groups examined".

### **2.2 Practical Barriers and Knowledge Barriers**

"Refer to the physical, medical and economic obstacles to activity that individuals encounter in their daily lives. Issues such as cost, safety, access, time pressures and health issues were significant for each group (although different groups were impacted in different ways)". "Include the correlation between higher educational achievement and higher levels of physical activity. Knowledge gaps also appear to be linked with socio-cultural factors, self-perceptions and the perceptions of others". Evidence suggests that individuals in specific groups (particularly people from ethnic minority communities and older people) might not be fully aware of all the benefits of physical activity (Sit, Kerr & Wong, 2008). "There is also evidence to suggest that some service providers might not be fully equipped to provide for and understand the needs of specific groups".

## **3. POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

"Assumed the multiple barriers to participation and the manner in which these intersect between and within social groupings, policy interventions and/or promotional activities are likely to be more successful if they adopt a multivariate approach rather than a 'one size fits all' approach". Policy interventions might be beneficial if they seek to challenge the notion of sports and physical activity as elite, masculine, young and white pursuits. "The dominance of these myths may exclude women, people with disabilities, older people and members of ethnic minority and communities (Cerin, 2008)". "Promotional and marketing materials might benefit from providing positive, attainable role models for all of the groups considered. It is evident that most groups face practical barriers to participation". Policy interventions may wish to consider the wider community, neighborhoods and infrastructure and examine how these can be redesigned to facilitate and encourage activity.

### **3.1 Barriers for girls**

At this age, girls (and boys) are greatly influenced by their families and schools. "Therefore, barriers to their participation in sport and active recreation may be due to their home and school environment. *Barriers at home:* Time constraints (work and family commitments); Lack of knowledge of available opportunities; and membership fees, travel and equipment can be expensive, especially for single income families. *Barriers at school:* Peer pressure; The diversity of activities offered (for example offered traditional sports which can be thought of as more relevant for males); and overcrowding of the curriculum, physical activity can often be

viewed as the lowest priority”.

### **3.2 Perceived Barriers**

Many reasons have been given for not performing tasks or behavior, and many difficulties in performing these tasks and activities have been reported. “Perceived barriers are certain events, pressures, and situations that are perceived to impede one’s ability to perform certain behavior”. The barriers in this study consist of two categories: “perceived internal barriers” and “perceived external barriers”. Perceived internal barriers include “lack of energy”, “lack of motivation”, and “lack of self-confidence”. Perceived external barriers include “lack of resource”, “lack of support”, and “lack of time” (Trudeau & Shepherd, 2005). “Example statements of perceived internal barriers are ‘I have been thinking about exercise is difficult and too tiring’, ‘I have been thinking about other recreational activities with my friends are more entertaining than exercise’, and ‘I have been worried about my looks when I exercise’. While examples of statements of perceived external barriers are ‘my family or friends do not encourage me to exercise’, ‘I have no leisure time for exercise because of my busy lesson schedule’ and ‘there is no fitness center that I could get to’ (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006)”. Perceived barriers to physical activity in this study were measured using exercise barriers scale. The scale has been used in previous studies among young adults.

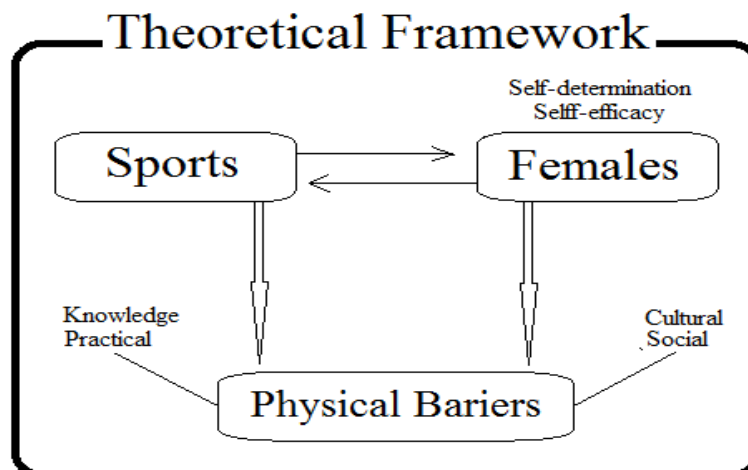
### **3.3 Self-Efficacy and Self-determination**

Self-efficacy is defined as people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. “Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave, through cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes. It is one’s perception of his or her ability to accomplish certain behaviors or achieve certain outcome”. Self-determination theory is about students perceiving what they want rather than have to do (Gidlow, 2006). It recognizes students’ basic needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness in physical activity that lead to a desirable motivation and sense of accomplishment. “Positive feedback is fundamental to competence. Beliefs in competence strongly influence choices. Autonomy includes feelings of freedom from pressure and opportunities to choose among several options. There are examples of students’ perceived competence being high but intrinsic motivation being low because autonomy was low”. Students thrive when they believe they are in an autonomy supportive environment (Nixon, 2007). Relatedness refers to feelings of loving and caring for others. Students who perceived their teacher to be compassionate are also more likely to experience higher levels of intrinsic motivation.

### **3.4 Girls in physical education**

Physical activity is defined as “any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles and resulting in an increase in energy expenditure”. “Physical activity in this research is classified into leisure time physical activity. The intensity might be strenuous, moderate and mild physical activity performed three or more sessions per week for 20 minutes.” Examples of strenuous intensity of physical activity include running, jogging, football, basketball, and long distance bicycling. We need to understand more about age-related declines in self-efficacy for physical activity, particularly in girls by the end of primary school (Cerin, 2008). “In general, teachers wouldn’t argue that discomfort with physicality is more likely to increase with age in girls than boys. Within the limitations of trend analyses, fewer adolescent girls than boys have positive experiences in physical education” (Jenkinson & Benson, 2009). Everyone would stand around and watch, and if you missed everyone laughed I dropped gym because I was afraid of looking dumb and feeling worse about myself.

Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework



#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

For girls who are able to attend school, physical education is thus of central importance. Because of its emphasis on developmentally appropriate and carefully sequenced physical activities, physical education makes a unique contribution to their education in ways that ad hoc physical activity, manual work and informal leisure participation cannot (Trudeau & Shepherd, 2005). "Widespread, regular, beneficial and sustainable participation by girls in physical education is only possible, however, when programs are well designed, appropriate to specific groups of girls, led by trained and competent teachers, and are well resourced" (Flintoff, 2006). First while girls and women as a group experience inequality in relation to boys and men, not all females experience inequality to the same degree. "This crucial insight suggests that strategies for change need to be targeted at specific groups of girls and women and significant others such as fathers, husbands and sons, taking into account their particular circumstances" (Nixon, 2007). Failure to recognize this key point may explain why so many initiatives in the past have been ineffective in bringing about real and sustainable change.

How sport, physical activity and appropriate levels of both are defined may have an impact upon participation or an individual's perception of their own participation level. "The following paper focuses on barriers to participation as they affect specific socio-cultural and socio-economic groups, specifically: women; people with disabilities; people from areas of social disadvantage; older people; people from black and ethnic minority communities" (Sit et al., 2008). In considering desirable levels of participation the paper refers to the World Health Organization recommendation of at least '30 minutes of daily moderate intensity activity'. Barriers are considered under the following broad headings: Socio-cultural Barriers; Practical Barriers; and Knowledge Barriers (Jenkinson & Benson, 2009). "In examining these barriers and how they impact specific groups it is important to recognize that: The life experiences of individuals will vary between and amongst the groups examined; Specific groups should not be considered as unified entities, they are by contrast heterogeneous groupings of individuals with individual motivations and needs; and it is likely a degree of overlap will exist amongst each group, further complicating matters – for example there is a tendency for more vigorous activity women among higher socio-economic positions and more incidences of sedentary lifestyles among women from lower socio-economic positions".

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Feelings of success and failure are fundamental to the continuum of impact that physical education can have on students' lives. Similarly, competency is not optimal when the one same test is the only means of evaluating responses in physical education. Competency may best be nurtured in an environment with an emphasis on self-improvement and minimal comparisons with others. Winning should not be the only outcome from competition. Alternatives to winning can include; keeping the main emphasis on the learning environment such as understanding more about personal contributions, skill development, satisfaction and or self-improvement. Competition in school sport and physical education should always provide an outstanding opportunity to educate female students about personal and collective successes, independent of outcomes. The physical activity practiced on a regular basis is associated with a great amount of physical, psychological and physiological benefits and plays an exceptional role in preventing a variety of illnesses. Leading a sedentary lifestyle, on the contrary, is closely connected with the pathologies mentioned above and can become a serious health problem both in childhood and in adolescence and particularly among the female students.

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