

Social Situations Affecting the Sporting Experiences of Working Class Women in Nigeria: A Challenge to Sport for All

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Abstract

This study explores the social situations affecting sport experiences of working class women with a view to determining their impediments to the principles of sport for all. A population of 164 working class women of Federal College of Education, Obudu, Cross River State in Nigeria was used for the study. A questionnaire designed by the researcher was used for data collection. The mean, standard deviation and t-test of difference were used for data analysis. Results show that certain social situations prevailed on the women to exercise their right to participate in sport. It is suggested that more attention should be focused on strategies to achieve the principles of sport for all.

Introduction

The sport for all movement started in the mid-1970s in Europe. As a concept adopted as a long term objective by the Council of Europe, it aims at encouraging the population at large to become more active and proclaims the message that sports are not for the talented few (Fu, 1998). According to Fu, almost twenty years later, participation in sports and recreation are justified on the assumption that they serve as mediums for developing desirable attitudes and behaviour essential for one's own wellbeing. Sports for all was an attempt to extricate sport from domination by the privileged few and to declare it an entitlement for everybody in a more egalitarian society. This means that sport for all implies equal opportunities for participation for both males and females, irrespective of age, political affiliation, race or religion. While this is important as an ideal, it has proved difficult to achieve in reality, particularly in relation to women.

In contrast to the expectation of sport for all, women experience role conflict and this is reflected in the attitude of the general public regarding female athletic participation in Nigeria. Women's participation in sport in Nigeria has for a long time been relatively low compared with men due to differential treatment based on socialised gender roles and expectations. Consequently, the traditional images of gender in Nigeria have often worked against women's participation in sport. This perhaps, extensively reduces already existing opportunities available for women to be involved in sports. Sohi and Ikhioya (1990) cited in Ikhioya (1999) reported that women in Nigerian universities were not active sport participants. According to them these women did not regard sport as conducive to their physical wellbeing. Ikhioya (1999) citing Ikhioya (1986) and Amuchie (1978) further showed that in most communities in Nigeria, especially rural ones, cultural beliefs and attitudes had strong influences on low participation of women in sports. Besides, organisation of sporting activities in most communities are usually focused on combative sports, such as boxing, wrestling, archery and shooting. These sports are mainly participated in by men and tend to discriminate against women.

Ikulayo (1998) observed that most developing countries, including Nigeria, have not experienced rapid changes in women's active participation in sports

compared to their more developed counterparts. This is due to a number of cultural factors, such as religion, in the Nigerian case. For example, most women in Northern Nigeria are Muslims. The Islamic religion and its social expectations for public behaviour influences the choice of women in this part of the country to participate actively in sport. Muslim women are typically more passive than their male counterparts. Their preoccupation is in the home with their children and husband. In the views of Bauzon (1997) these 'traditional' values influence Muslim women's participation in sport and physical activity. Recreational sport participation for women in Nigeria, more generally, lags behind due to demands of domestic responsibilities coupled with religious factors.

It is generally known that in comparison to men, women have significantly lower levels of participation in sport. Many young women drop out of sport during the teenage years (Tracey, Nicole & Jo, 1999). Greendorfer (1983) remarked that there is a necessary connection between gender role stereotyping and sport socialisation in most cultures of the world. She argues that this comes from the explicit differential treatment and discriminatory socialisation practices that result in structural discrimination that are not questioned or challenged. Coakley (1990), amongst others, has noted that patterns of opportunities and patterns of constraints are also shaped by the socialisation experiences of women. Women have not received the same kind of encouragement as their male counterparts to be socially independent and physically active in play activities, though at least in Western countries, women in the past two decades have increased their participation rates and range of sporting activities dramatically.

The overall pattern of protectiveness and constraint restricts women's involvement in sport. Cross cultural studies involving Asian cultures reveals that priority is allocated to academic development and not physical achievement. Thus Carrol (1993) revealed that ethnic minority women in Britain accepted domestic and family duties and responsibilities as part of their lives in ways that males do not and in ways that are different from British-born women. In the view of Hardman (1997), social environment is important in exposure to sporting experiences. Sporting experiences in this context are knowledge or sport skills that come from practice. Lack of participation in sport can affect the sporting experiences of women, thereby making women's involvement in sport elusive. A sporting environment that is accessible to a living and active community can play an active role throughout life.

Yan and Thomas (1995) reporting on the findings of Barrett and Bailey (1988) and Sage (1988) established that cultural expectations shape children's physical activity patterns and the gender differences in their motor performance. Fagot (1978) indicated that, parents' reactions and expectations toward their children create the messages or concepts of children's sex role stereotypes in physical activity. This notion can affect sport experiences of women. The sport participation of women may also be limited when they are asked to shoulder adult responsibilities at home. For example, Dobie (1987) cited in Coakley (1990) pointed out that babysitting duties keep many women from coming out for sporting activities. Dobie suggests developing group childcare so that women are able to baby-sit and play sports. Another inhibiting social factor affecting women's sport experiences is the unlikelihood to be able to negotiate the time and resources needed to maintain sporting participation. Nigerian society still experiences significant gender inequality in sports, despite recent international class performances by women spinters and football players in national teams. This inequality can visibly affect the opportunities for women to participate in sport, thereby limiting their sport experiences.

Teacher education is the primary focus of Federal College of Education in Obudu. This institution is a non-degree awarding institution. Hence, the institution prepares students for the award of Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE). The workforce consists of both men and women. In recent times there have been massive changes and an increasing search for equal opportunities for women within the realm of sport. Hums, Barr and Doll-Tepper (1998) stated that women are part of the changes and growth in sport as they participate in ever-increasing numbers. The steady success and progress in women's sport is a global phenomenon,

In spite of the transformations in women's sport, specific changes are yet to be noticed in the sport involvement and experiences of women at the Federal College of Education in Obudu, in particular, and Nigeria, in general. In fact, there is a miserable apathy in sports and this is shown in the lack-lustre attitude of most women toward active sport participation. This worrisome situation has kindled this researcher's interest in examining the social situations affecting the sporting experiences of women with a view to determining its impediment to the overall achievement of the objectives of sport for all.

Research questions

1. How does a shortage of free time affect women's sport experiences?
2. What is the effect of a lack of childcare resources on women's sport experiences?
3. To what extent do available sports programmes related to women's interest and needs determine their sport experiences?
4. What is the impact of expectations of caring for family needs on women's sport experiences?

Hypotheses

1. There are no significant differences between married and single women's mean scores on lack of resources for childcare and their effects on women's sport experiences.
2. Women in the academic and non-academic unit will not differ significantly in their mean responses to the lack of related sport programmes.

Population

The population of this study consisted of all the working class women in the Federal College of Education, Obudu in the Cross River State of Nigeria. The list of women was supplied by the establishment unit of the College that gave the overall number of women employees as 164. Out of the 164 women working in the College, 23 belonged to non-academic staff, twenty were academic staff while 121 were junior staff. For convenience, the population was typed into academic and non-academic staff, There was no sampling because the entire population was used in the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for the study was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. A pool of 27 items constituted the draft instrument. The questionnaire had two sections. Section A dealt with the personal data of the subjects while section B had a modified Likert four point scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree). This section equally contained sub-scales on shortage of free time, lack of resources for childcare, the scarcity of sports programs relating to

women's interests and needs and expectation of caring for family needs, The questionnaire was validated for its face and content validity by experts in sociology of sport and measurement and evaluation in education. A reliability coefficient was determined through test re-test.

Data Collection Technique

The instrument was self administered with the help of unit heads. The total number of the questionnaires administered were 164 with 163 being returned indicating over a 99 per cent return rate.

Data Analysis Technique

The mean and standard deviation were used for analysing the research questions, The criterion mean for considering the opinion of the subjects positive was 2.5 or above while any mean with less than 2.5 was regarded as negative. The standard deviation of each item showed how the opinions of the subjects deviated from the mean. The hypotheses were tested with t-test of difference at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Subjects

<i>Variables</i>			
<i>Marital Status</i>	Married	89	55%
	Single	73	45%
<i>Number of Children</i>	1-3	90	70%
	4-5	31	24%
	6-10	8	6%
<i>Age</i>	20-25	71	45%
	26-30	46	29%
	31-35	27	17%
	36-40	9	6%
	41-45	3	2%
	46-50	2	1%
<i>Academic Qualification</i>	Primary School Certificate	13	8%
	O Level Certificate	61	39%
	Ordinary National Diploma	9	5%
	Nigeria Certificate in Education	58	36%
	Higher National Diploma	3	1%
	Degree	18	11%
<i>Nature of Job</i>	Academic Staff	26	16%
	Non-Academic Staff	138	84%

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of the Responses Showing Shortage of Free Time Affecting Women's Sporting Experiences

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
1	Women lack the time needed to participate in sport	2.96	0.91	AGREE
2	Time constraints on women with families affect their exposure to sport situations	3.07	0.89	DISAGREE
3	Women in family situations have less time to negotiate and maintain sport participation	3.12	0.77	AGREE
4	A married woman should settle down and become a homemaker	3.05	0.86	AGREE
5	When a married woman with children decides to join a soccer team that schedules practices late in the afternoon, she may encounter resistance from the husband	3.08	0.86	AGREE
6	On the other hand, married men with children do not often face the same resistance	3.07	0.86	AGREE

Table 2 above showed that the respondents were in agreement with the items on short of free time affecting women's sport experiences, The mean of all the items either fall within or above the criterion mentioned.

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations of the responses showing the effect of lack of resources for child care on women's sport experiences

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
7	Women learn to conform to expectations based on their presumed dependence	3.07	0.84	AGREE
3	Due to lack of adequate resources, women are often asked to baby-sit with little or no time to participate in sport	3.04	0.85	AGREE
3	Babysitting duties keep many women from coming out for sport participation	3.05	0.85	AGREE
10	Group childcare practices involving both men and women are not likely to have many sport opportunities	3.06	0.85	AGREE
11	Without the resources to secure babysitters, women are not likely to have many sport opportunities	3.05	0.85	AGREE
12	Many women learn to see themselves strictly in terms of their abilities to nurture others and maintain supportive connections especially within the family	3.04	0.85	AGREE

The mean of the items in this table show that subjects' views were the same. The criterion mean is 2.5 or above.

Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations of Responses showing extent of available sports programmes related to women's interest and needs that determine sporting participation

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
13	Meeting the challenges of women's sport has not been given a high priority in the lives of women	3.03	0.86	AGREE
14	Women's sports are not covered as often or in the same detail as men's sports	3.02	0.86	AGREE
15	Women may not receive the same kind of encouragement as men from coaches when it comes to involvement in sport programmes	3.01	0.86	AGREE
16	The traditional ideal of female preserving youthful beauty should be emphasised more than sport participation.	2.99	0.89	AGREE
17	Sport can help women overcome the feeling that their bodies are objects for sexual pleasure of men	2.98	0.89	AGREE
18	If women are not visible throughout the structure of sport programmes participation in sports is considered inappropriate	2.97	0.89	AGREE
19	In many cases women's programmes are non-existent and when they do exist	2.97	0.89	AGREE
20	Equality of opportunity for women at all levels of sport are lacking	2.97	0.89	AGREE
21	Women do not receive an equal sports program	2.87	0.89	AGREE

Subjects' opinion on the items in this table were consistent since the mean of all of the items fell above the criterion mean.

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviations of the responses showing the impact of expectation of caring for family needs on women's sport experiences

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
22	Women's sport destiny is controlled by men due to expectations on care of family needs	2.98	0.89	AGREE
23	Women should get locked into care taking and nurturing roles	2.96	0.890.89	AGREE
24	Women should limit sport participation to maintaining a steady relationship with family members	2.98	0.770.89	AGREE
25	Women are socialised to please others	2.96	0.860.89	AGREE
26	Women are created by God not to be a physically hard person but to take care of domestic needs	2.96	0.860.90	AGREE
27	Women's bodies should be preserved as an object of consumption	2.53	0.861.00	AGREE

Expectation on care of family needs determines women's sport experiences, The views of the subjects were in agreement on the items in this table.

Table 6: Results of t-test for the comparison between mean scores of married and single women on lack of resources for child care affecting their lack of sport experiences

Items	XM	SD	XS	SD	
7	2.65	0.97	2.85	0.89	-1.538*
8	2.68	0.93	2.85	0.90	-0.594*
9	2.76	0.92	2.87	0.90	-0.859*
10	2.81	0.92	2.90	0.89	-0.703*
11	2.84	0.91	2.90	0.90	-0.468'
12	2.85	0.90	2.90	0.90	-0.074'

Note: Table Value= +/- 1.960

* = not significant at 0.05 level of significance

XM = mean of women who are married

XS = mean of women who are single

Table 7: Results of t-test for the comparison between mean responses of women in the academic and non-academic units on lack of related sport programmes meeting women's needs influencing their sporting experiences

Items	XWA	SD	XWNA	SD	t-value
13	2.90	0.90	2.91	0.89	-0.079*
14	2.91	0.89	2.91	0.89	0*
15	2.91	0.89	2.90	0.90	0.086*
16	2.90	0.90	2.86	0.91	0.077*
17	2.89	0.90	2.88	0.92	0.077*
18	2.89	0.90	2.87	0.93	0.153*
19	2.89	0.89	2.89	0.93	0*
20	2.90	0.89	2.88	0.93	0.153*
21	2.91	0.89	2.95	0.90	-0.314*

Note: Table Value = +/- 1.960

* = Not significant at 0.05 level of significance

XWA = Mean of women in academic unit

XWNA= Mean of women in non academic unit

Findings

1. A lack of free time affects women's sport experiences. These time constraints are as a result of women's involvement in family duties and responsibilities.
2. Women's sport experiences are affected by lack of resources for childcare. Besides, many women see themselves strictly in terms of nurturing and maintaining supportive roles within the family.
3. There is limited consideration given to women's sport in the sport programme of the college. This is manifested in the undue emphasis on men's sports.
4. Performing domestic duties is accepted by women as a hindrance to their active involvement in sports.
5. The results of the t-test analysis showed that the null hypothesis of no significant differences were accepted. The obtained t-values as shown in the tables were less than the table value of +/- 1.960. This is indicative of no significant differences in the mean scores of the groups.

Discussion

Women have faced barriers that have discouraged their progress in the level of participation in sport. Coakley (1990) and many others have demonstrated that throughout history men have controlled sport, used it for their own purposes and shaped it to fit their abilities. Consequently, fewer numbers of women have participated in sporting activities than men. This situation raises sociological issues that require the attention of sociologists of sport. In the opinion of the respondents, as is evidenced in Table 2, women lack the time needed to participate in sport. Most women respondents suggested that women should settle down and become a home maker. On the other hand, the women were of the opinion that married men with children do not often face the same resistance to participate because of their non-involvement in domestic chores. This may likely suggest that if women were less committed to, or forced into, performing domestic responsibilities, they would have more time for sporting activities.

The views of women on other items used to answer the research questions were equally concurrent. The claims here were substantiated by Ikulayo (1998) who stated that most societies in the late twentieth century still believed a woman's place was in the kitchen, in care of children and in managing domestic chores. According to Coakley (1990) the resistance to women participating in sport is certain, especially when they have to serve as chef, chauffeur and tutor. Time off for good behaviour is not a principle that applies to married women with children. As Acosta (1993) suggested, the philosophy concerning female children is that they should be at home to help with the day-to-day chores and care of younger siblings. When women are at home, they may not have adequate space or time in which they can fully participate in sport. There is the tendency for women to feel a sense of guilt for staying away for a long period, knowing that their presence is needed to relieve the pressure of home responsibilities ascribed to them.

Table 3 provides an overview of the patterns of responses on the effect of lack of resources for childcare on women's sport experiences. The mean of the items showed that the subjects were of the opinion that the socioeconomic position of the woman can influence her involvement in active sport participation. Their responses on group child care practices involving both men and women, however, is an indication that if this situation was reversed then women may be interested in participating in sports. Incidentally, in a related study carried out by Ikulayo (1998)

there is dissimilarity to the revelation that there was a high percentage of agreement on socio-economic factors being instrumental to female participation in sports even though the study utilised female athletes who participated during the ninth West African University Games held in Nigeria.

Positively directed influences of resources for childcare were noted by Coakley (1990) who remarked that the constraints of home making and child rearing are felt mostly by women in middle and lower income families. Without the resources to pay for babysitters, for people to help around the house and for the expenses associated with sporting participation, these women are not likely to have many opportunities. Consequently, the majority of the women respondents are junior staff whose income fell within the minimum wage for civil servants in Nigeria. The resultant effect of this socio-economic position on women, especially when combined with their child rearing function, is crucial in understanding how limited are sporting opportunities for most Nigerian women. This case study does not challenge the position of women generally in other societies, but points to the increased problem faced by Nigerian women who still face greater obstacles than many of their European or North American counterparts. When compared with women in Western societies who are poor, the situation does have parallels, however. According to Deem (1986) women from middle and lower income families in England often lack the network of relationships out of which sporting interests and activities emerge, Expectations to participate in sports may be high from women in the upper income group, by contrast. Unfortunately, women from the higher income group in the area of study have not shown enough interest to participate in sport in spite of their high socio-economic status. One would have expected the women to use their resources for childcare so that their involvement in sport will increase. This finding is at variance with the views of Unkel (1981) in Coakley (1990) who demonstrated that woman from upper income families have resources to pay for child care, house cleaners, carry out dinners and sports participation. They often use resources to participate in sporting activities by themselves or with other family members,

Sports programmes related to women's interests and needs are not available. This finding is consistent with the report in Table 4. Considering the above, Ikhioya (1999) observed that most communities in Nigeria constructing playgrounds, sport halls and sport activities have males as their focus. He further remarked that community reinforces values of society. Although the family and school are agents of socialisation, they in turn are influenced by activities of the community. This is further supported by Lydon (1993) who noted that decisions earmarked to improve a specific boys' sport are frequently implemented with complete disregard for the impact they will have on the girls' programme. The outcome of the result in Table 5 showed that the women's expectations that they must take care of family needs exerts undue influence on their opportunity for sporting experiences. The null hypotheses of no significant differences was accepted. This finding is supported by the research questions.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Women in sport has been a subject of controversy in many cultures of the world. This study aimed to understand problems faced by Nigerian women who wish to participate in sport in the hopes of creating a better understanding of the obstacles women face. There are powerful social factors limiting the ability of women to

participate in sport, particularly for poorer women. An increased understanding of the social, economic and cultural barriers women face will enable us to fight more coherently for increased sporting opportunities to be made available for women. In order to achieve women's more full participation in sports, socio-cultural elements that stand against the doctrine of sport for all should be exterminated.

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