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Women and physical activity related issues

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Abstract

There is an international consensus that participation in physical activities can offer a great deal to individuals, communities and nations. 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 children's participation. This may, in turn, affect later involvement in physically active lifestyles, and the social and health benefits that may result for them. Age is the dominant biological determinant of physical activity in girls. Overall, levels of activity steadily decline from about 6 years of age until adolescence, when activity levels drop more steeply. Whether this decline ought to be understood solely in terms of biological influences is dubious, and it is, perhaps, noteworthy that the decline in sporting or physical activities among girls around 11 or 12 years occurs almost simultaneously with the period when gender ideology sharply interacts with socialisation influences. Historically, physical assertion was considered as being harmful to girls' overall development and the social understanding of 'motherhood' dictated that girls were seen as passive carers rather than as active providers. Evidence tends to suggest that many of these values are still supported and it is the early experiences of girls which often provide the foundation for future participation. Women's participation in sport has a long history. It is a history marked by division and discrimination but also one filled with major accomplishments by female athletes and important advances for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In addition to benefits for women and girls themselves, women's increased involvement can promote positive development in sport by providing alternative norms, values, attitudes, knowledge, capabilities and experiences.

Keywords: women, sports, physical activity, empowerment, society

Introduction

WHO says, Physical inactivity is now identified as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. Physical inactivity levels are raising in many countries with major implications for the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the general health of the population worldwide. There is an international consensus that participation in physical activities can offer a great deal to individuals, communities and nations. 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 children's participation. This may, in turn, affect later involvement in physically active lifestyles, and the social and health benefits that may result for them.

In recent years, sport and physical activity as a strategy for the empowerment of girls and women has been gaining recognition worldwide. Sport and physical activity have not yet been used on a large scale as a strategy within women's movements. Women's increased involvement in sports can promote positive development in sport by providing alternative norms, values, attitudes, knowledge, capabilities and experiences. The contributions of women, particularly in leadership positions, can bring diversity and alternative approaches and expand the talent base in areas such as management, coaching and sport journalism. The participation of women and girls in sport challenges gender stereo types and discrimination, and can therefore be a vehicle to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In particular, women in sport leadership can shape attitudes towards women's capabilities as leaders and decision-makers, especially in traditional male domains. Women's involvement in sport can make a significant contribution to public life and community development.

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To awaken the people, it is the woman who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family, moves, the Village moves, the nation moves.

-Jawaharlal Nehru

In recent years, sport and physical activity as a strategy for the empowerment of girls and women has been gaining recognition worldwide. Girls and women face a disproportionate number of life challenges, which reduce their ability to achieve their full potential. Involvement in sport and physical activity can, for example, build life skills, confidence and body awareness may create social networks, which result in dramatic positive life changes for participants. It is believed that participating in sports results in mental wellbeing of a person. It happens with a chain ie., one who plays develop the ability of focusing on a task and it improves self-confidence. Once self-confidence is improved, most of the negative qualities like depression, stress, anxiety are removed. It results in developing self-esteem as one can take good decision according to the situation.

Reasons for Girls to Play Sports

We all know that regular physical exercise is good for a girl's body, mind, and spirit. The Women's Sports Foundation has discovered that sports offer some extra benefits for girls in addition to having fun and getting fit.

Here are a few

1. **Girls who play sports do better in school.** Researches show that girls who play sports do better in school and are more likely to graduate than those who don't. Exercise improves learning, memory, and concentration, which can give active girls an advantage when it comes to the classroom.
2. **Girls who play sports learn teamwork and goal-setting skills.** Working with coaches, trainers, and teammates to win games and meet goals is great practice for success later in life. Being a team player can make it easier to work with others and solve problems, whether on the field or in the workplace.
3. **Sports have hidden health benefits.** Some benefits of sports are obvious — like improving fitness and maintaining a overall health.
4. **Playing sports builds self-confidence.** Girls involved in athletics feel better about themselves, both physically and socially. It helps to build confidence when the skills are improved.
5. **Exercise can cut the pressure.** Pressure is a big part of life. Playing sports can help to deal with it, since exercise is a natural mood lifter and a great way to relieve stress and fight depression.

Benefits for women and girls of increased participation in sport and physical education

Sport today clearly provides benefits for women and girls and can be a powerful tool for women's empowerment and gender equality. Sport promotes the physical and mental well-being of women and girls. Sport offers the opportunity for developing self-knowledge, self-expression, self-fulfillment and self-esteem, and for demonstrating ability and skills acquisition and personal achievement, through a process of social interaction.

Sport has been traditionally perceived as a male domain, women's and girls' participation in sport also challenges gender stereotypes, and has thus potential for reducing

discrimination and breaking down entrenched attitudes. Sport can offer an important space for renegotiation of the gender order and the evolution of constructions of masculinity and femininity to the benefit of both women and men. The skills and values learned through sport are considered to be especially important for girls, given that they have fewer opportunities than boys for social interaction outside the home and beyond family networks. In such contexts, successful sports programmes can be a potential entry point for reaching girls and young women on a variety of important issues.

In addition to benefits for women and girls themselves, women's increased involvement can promote positive development in sport - through providing alternative norms, values and attitudes, knowledge, experiences and capabilities. Women's involvement in sport can make a significant contribution to public life, community development and to building a strong and healthy nation. There are also clear benefits from women's increased participation in decision-making in sport. It diversifies the talent pool among coaches and managers, administrators, and other officials. Increased numbers of women in key positions can, as well, enhance outreach to women and girls by providing positive role models and mentors. Although women's participation in sporting activities has increased in recent years in local, national and international contexts, women are still significantly under-represented in decision-making and as leaders in sporting bodies and institutions.

Barriers to Women & Girls' participation in sport & physical Activity

A. Practical barriers

- Lack of time and childcare
- Lack of transport
- Personal safety
- Funding
- Access to facilities

B. Personal barriers

- Body image
- Clothing and equipment
- Lack of self-confidence
- Parental and adult influence

C. Social and cultural barriers

- Male-dominated culture of sport
- Attitudes about sexuality
- Attitudes about disability
- Attitudes about ethnicity
- Sexual harassment
- Female invisibility

Girls and women need encouragement and aspirational role models

Many people think that girls are not as interested in sport as boys. Women's Sports Foundation research shows that boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 9-and their parents-are equally interested in sports participation. However, by the age of 14, girls drop out of sport at a rate that is six times greater than boys. Girls and women simply do not receive the same positive reinforcement about their sports participation. Boys receive balls, gloves and sports equipment by the age of 2. They see their images on television as sportsmen, they see their photos in the sports section and know from their parents and friends that they are expected to play sports. Even though

girls are not as likely to be discouraged from playing sports as they were 10 years ago, they simply encouraged to the same extent as little boys. As a result, they enter organized sport two years later than little boys and are, therefore, less likely to have the skills necessary for early success experiences.

Recommendations

1. Girls do enjoy engaging in physical activities. Strategies should be implemented which build up this enjoyment, and allow them to participate as fully as possible.
2. Practices should be established which recognize 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.
7. Sports program should reflect local cultural needs if they are to engage and sustain girls' participation.
8. The organization of sports 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 ensures activities; settings and facilities are easily accessible and safe.

Conclusion

Women's participation in sport has a long history. It is a history marked by division and discrimination but also one filled with major accomplishments by female athletes and important advances for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In addition to benefits for women and girls themselves, women's increased involvement can promote positive development in sport by providing alternative norms, values, attitudes, knowledge, capabilities and experiences. Despite progress made, there are still significant gaps and challenges in relation to the access and participation of women and girls in sport which must be clearly identified and addressed. While both men and women can suffer from a lack of safe and appropriate sport facilities, resources, training opportunities, technical support and access to incentives and rewards, these constraints are often exacerbated for women. The attitudes of men to women and their roles in sport – including among athletes, coaches, managers and officials, broadcasters, sponsors and the general

public - is also a major constraint and proper solutions must be found through various research works.

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