

# THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS ON FEMALE LOW PARTICIPATION IN COLLEGIATE SPORTS IN EBONYI STATE.

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## **Abstract**

Sports participation in higher institutions has become a requirement which is backed by policy Sports Development Policy, (SDP, 1989). Competitive, sports for women is also gradually increasing. The success of any sports policy depends on the level of participation of those it is meant for among other things. Omoruan (1996), lamenting female low participation in sports stated that various reasons account for the apologetic stand of females in sporting activities that have become man's world. He stated further that as a result of societal negative attitude, our universities and colleges have not lived up to the expectations either in producing female athletes or competent professionals. This paper therefore investigated the socio-cultural determinants of female low participation in collegiate sports in Ebonyi State. Conclusions and recommendations within the scope of the study were accordingly made.

## **Introduction**

The area of physical education and sports like many others is saddled with traditions, taboos, and myths. In medicine or engineering for instance, such traditionally originated myths often disappear under close scrutiny of scientific analysis. In education as in any other social discipline, the primary area of interest, human behaviour does not lend itself easily to scientific analysis. According to Mshelia (1998), these fields are more conducive to the birth and growth of unchallenged ideas which after years of fermentations, suddenly appear as truths or principles.

The emergence of women in sports is largely a twentieth century phenomenon. Infact, women made their first appearance in the Olympics in the 1900 (Bucher & Krotee, 2002). Even when the Olympics were revived, women were not allowed to participate. The males have offered varied rationalizations for subordinating women and much of it has rested upon the dubious assumptions of women's inherent weakness.

The notion that women have been conditioned to be what they are is deeply rooted in the prejudicial social pattern of different cultures. Women through the ages have always been viewed to be made of milk and honey. Consequently, in keeping with this metaphor, a feminine picture of a woman was conjured up which seems to militate against females doing anything too physical. Adeyanju and Shuaibu (1992) observed that in Nigeria the female faces greater stress than her male counterparts because she is working against the expected traditional feminine role when she commits herself to serious athletic competitions. In fact in some parts of the country, women are forbidden to expose themselves beyond the knee and elbow. Such women find it difficult to take part in sports which would require them to wear shorts, skirts and sleeveless vests. The case of Sokoto State legislation is 1983 and Sharia legislation of 2000 in some parts of the North comes to mind.

Faluyi (1989), opined that the influence of cultural tradition on women can not be underestimated when analyzing the factors affecting women participation in sports. Most Nigerian sports women retire automatically from active sports when they get married in preparation for marital duties. When they start having children, they forget they ever took part in sports. Studies have shown that physically, becoming a mother is not any more detrimental to sports than becoming a father (Kaplan, 1979; Klarfs & Arnheim, 1981). So many women in developed countries have become impressive athletes that doctors call pregnancy a nine months conditioning programme (Kraus & Curtis, 2006).

In Nigeria, our women are trying to emulate their female counterparts in developed countries as few women no longer withdraw from competitive sports. Bold as these steps may seem, Kabido and Dashe (1982) opined that the liberation of Nigerian women in sports is still greatly handicapped by the fact that men dictate the behaviour of women. A woman's identity according to Mshelia (1998), from historical times has been tied to that of her husband, family and significant others hence for a woman to be involved and continue active participation in sports, she must be located in a social

environment highly supportive of her activities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Ebonyi State is endowed with four institutions of higher learning, two Federal and two State owned. With this availability of a viable breeding ground for seasoned female athletes, one wonders why the state cannot “manufacture” her crop of female athletes from her institutions.

The purpose of this study was to find out the influence of cultural and social considerations on female low participation in collegiate sports.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses guided the study and were tested accordingly:

**Hypothesis 1:** Marital status will not be a significant determinant of female low participation in collegiate sports in Ebonyi State.

**Hypothesis 2:** Cultural influence will not be a significant determinant of female low participation in collegiate sports in Ebonyi State.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The design of the study was the descriptive survey research. The utilization of the design was hinged on the fact that it is suitable for gathering data from a relatively large number of cases at a particular time.

#### **Population**

The population for the study comprises all the female students of the four higher institutions in Ebonyi State.

#### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample was made up of a total of six hundred students. After stratifying the various faculties/schools in the institutions, the simple random sampling technique was utilized to select one hundred and fifty (150) samples from each of the institutions.

#### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument was the researcher-designed Likert type questionnaire with four points rating scales of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The instrument has a reliability index of 0.99 and was self administered in the various institutions.

#### **Data Analyses and Discussion.**

The analysis of the data was done with the chi-square inferential statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

#### **Hypothesis 1**

Marital status will not be a significant determinant of female low participation in Collegiate Sports in Ebonyi State.

**Table 1: Response on Marital Status and Sports Participation**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Df	Critical value	Calculated value
Strongly Agree	129	21.5	3	7.82	53.38
Agree	224	37			
Disagree	142	24			
Strongly Disagree	105	17.5			
Total	600	100			

$X^2 = 53.38$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $P < 0.05$ , Table value = 7.82

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Data in Table 1 shows that the critical or table value of  $X^2$  at 0.05 alpha level is 7.82 while the calculated value is 53.38. Since the calculated value is greater than the critical value, the null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This means that marital status is significant in female participation in sports.

**Hypothesis 2**

Cultural influence will not be a significant determinant of female low participation in collegiate sports in Ebonyi State.

**Table 2: Response on Cultural influence and Sports Participation**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Df	Critical value	Calculated value
Strongly Agree	126	22	3	7.82	80.01
Agree	182	30			
Disagree	218	36			
Strongly Disagree	74	12			
Total	600	100			

$X^2 = 80.01$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $P < 0.05$ , Table value = 7.82

In table 2, the  $X^2$  computed shows that the critical or table value is 7.82 while the calculated value is 80.01 at 0.05 alpha level at 3 degree of freedom. In view of the fact that the calculated value is greater than the critical value, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that cultural influence is significant in female sports participation.

**Discussion**

A look at the data in the tables shows that the frequencies of response in Table 1 reveals that three hundred and fifty-three (353) respondents which represents 58.5% of the sample agreed with the statement. Two hundred and forty-seven (247) respondents which represent 41.5% of the sample disagreed with the statement. Demographic data shows that four hundred and forty (440) respondents were within the 21-25 age bracket, and five hundred and fifty –seven (557) are single. This means that majority of those who accepted the statement that marital status or marriage cannot prevent them from taking part in sports are not even married.

Based on the findings above, the hypothesis that marital status will not be a significant determinant of female low participation in collegiate sports was rejected. This means that the influence of the husband, family and significant others in determining to what extent a woman can participate in sports cannot be over-emphasized. This finding is in agreement with the conclusion of Mshelia (1998) that for a woman to be involved and continue active participation in sports, she must be located in a social environment highly supportive of her activities.

Responses as indicated in table 2 show that three hundred and eight respondents which represent 52% of the sample agreed with the statement that they will not take part in sports if their culture disapproves of it. Two hundred and ninety-two (292) respondents which represent 48% of the sample disagreed with the statement. From the responses of the respondents, it is evident that 52% of the sample will abstain from sports participation because of cultural disapproval. This shows that cultural influence on female participation in sports is a significant negative factor.

On the basis of this finding, the hypothesis that cultural influence will not be a significant determinant of female low participation in collegiate sports in Ebonyi State was rejected. This influence stems from the fact that our society is such that attaches much premium on taboos and superstitions, which greatly dictate the behaviour of people particularly women as opined by Faluyi (1989).

The finding is also in agreement with those of Adedeji (1991), Adeyanju and Shuaibu (1992), and Mshelia (1998), that socio-cultural patterns of men determining the role of women and placing limitations on them especially in Ebonyi State has militated against their effective participation in collegiate sports.

### **Findings**

On the basis of the data in tables 1 and 2, the study found that:

1. the influence of husband, family members and significant others is a significant determinant of female low participation in collegiate sports in Ebonyi State.
2. cultural influence is a significant determinant of female low participation in collegiate sports also in Ebonyi State.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In view of the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn, social factors as well as cultural influence are significant determinants of female low participation in collegiate sports in Ebonyi State. This is because the society has created many myths and folktales which reinforce the rejection of sports for most women.

In order to reverse this ugly trend, there is need for an aggressive campaign in the form of orientation to enable female students exploit the physical, social and cognitive benefits of sports participation. Sports participation should be made a requirement for graduation. The implementation of lecture-free day for sports must be enforced to enable female students derive maximum benefits from the sports development policy.

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