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Social Integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women in Switzerland through Sport and Physical Activity

Betelihem Brehanu Alemu[1], Siegfried Nagel[1]

[1]University of Bern, Institute of Sport Science, Bremgartenstrasse 145, 3012 Bern, Switzerland

betelihem.alemu@ispw.unibe.ch

Abstract

Global immigration (forced and unforced) has become both one of the most complex challenge and biggest opportunities in today's world. This phenomenon has intensified the bargaining between the existing and emerging culture. In an effort to build social harmony between immigrants and the hosting society, sport may foster integration under certain circumstances. However, existing studies lack sensitivity to the difference in the sports experiences of women from diverse migrant populations. Therefore, this study investigates the extent and ways in which informal sports participation assist in the social integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean women in Swiss society, as well as identifying barriers that hinder their participation. Ager and Stranger (2004) indicator of integration framework is used to examine social connection in an informal sports setting. Thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016) of data from semi-structured interviews and focus groups (n=12, 18-51 years old) was used to explain the interplay between participation and integration. The data show that social contact in a sports context has helped to establish social network and support within the migrant communities. It also serves as a channel of information, place of unity, and helps in maintaining cultural identity. However, informal sports settings are rather weak and limited in establishing a social connection between Ethiopian and Eritrean women and their host community. Gender, cultural expectation, and the high cost of participation are the most common barriers hindering sustainable participation. Racism and discrimination on and off the field of sport continues to intensify existing social boundaries.

Keywords: Immigration; Sport; Social Integration; Women; Switzerland

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