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Sport Experiences and Social Integration of Women in/from Developing Countries

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Aim

Sport and physical activity (PA) are a fundamental part of people and culture around the world. Participation in sport and PA can enhance women's physical, emotional and mental well-being. Sports also serves as a remarkable platform for social benefits in terms of promoting social relationships, networks, and civic participation (Spajj 2012, Elling, de Knop & Knoppers 2001). Studies have shown that involvement in sport and PA is particularly relevant in binding women to the society, creating a sense of belonging and loyalty (Walseth, 2006; Sawrikar & Muir, 2010).

Despite the multidimensional social benefits of participating in sport, women and young girls with migrant backgrounds have a lower rate of participation in organized sports settings (e.g Walseth, 2006; Sawrikar & Muir, 2010). In the ongoing effort to integrate migrant women to the general society using sport as a platform, it is crucial to gain better understanding of the interplay between participation and social integration through their sport experiences. Thus, the aim of the research is to explore the role of sport and PA in social integration of Ethiopian women from migrant backgrounds in Switzerland, by analyzing their living experiences. This research intends to identify the different types of conditions that promote, as well as hinder, their sport and PA in this target population.

Theoretical Background

"The indicator of Integration Framework", developed by Ager and Stranger (2004), will be used to examine the role of sport as a 'means and maker' of social connection. This framework shows how the social integration process develops in a sporting context in three dimensions. The first dimension "**social bond**", points out the social connection/ties between "like persons" who share similar experiences and values through their ethnicity, religion, and or country of origins. These social relationships are established within communities, which in return could create a sense of identity within. Unlike the first dimension, "**social bridges**" indicates to the social connection between different groups who come from a different ethnicity, religion, and or country of origin. It is the relationships between communities that demonstrate social mixing in which one could expand his/her day to day social circle. On the other hand, "**social links**" refers to the social ties between people in dissimilar social situations, through shared access to access to services and resources from formal institutions (Ager and Strang 2004, p.5).

Research Design, methodology and data analysis

A case/study design will be used, incorporating semi-structured interviews and focus groups to accentuate the voice, experiences, and meaning attached to their social integration experience, both in and through sport (Creswell 2013). Most importantly, the research will explore the role of informal sport and sport settings in the social integration of women with migrant background. In order to do so, the researcher plans to recruit participants through visits to informal sport spaces/settings (i.e. neighborhood sports), community organizations and migrant offices, and also the utilization of social media platforms (e.g. facebook, 'whats up', 'Meetup').

Initial results are projected to support the benefit of involvement in sport in easing the difficulties (i.e language, social support and etc.) women migrant experience in integrating into Swiss society. However, it is also possible that their involvement might spark conflict and social isolation as a result of the conflicting socio-cultural differences, discrimination and different factors serves as barrier to their sport participation.

Conclusion

The research hopes to challenge the existing homogenization of women in sports sociology research, addressing the lack of sensitivity to the differences in the experiences within the diverse migrant women population. Focusing on the voice of the specific target groups allows for a greater and more detailed understanding of current barriers to participation, and also what is needed to further promote social integration of women in sport and society as a whole. Through looking through the lens of informal sport and sport settings, hopes to complement the existing research on organized sport clubs and programs in the social integration of women with migrant background.

References

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