

# Female Students Opinion about Women's Participation in Sports

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## Abstract

A research study was conducted to know about the participation of Muslim girls and women in sports and philosophy of Islam in this regard. The population of this study was all female students of Government Girls Degree Colleges of District Dera Ismail Khan. Total 100 respondents selected from within the population through convenient or available sampling technique. For the purpose of collection of data a structured questionnaire on three point Likert scale, ranging from disagree (DA= 1 point) to agree (3 points), was prepared and handed over to 100 respondents with the help of female lecturers in physical education of concerned colleges. The main objective of the study was to know about the participation of Muslim girls and women in sports and philosophy of Islam in this regard. The result of the study indicated that Muslim women like sports and she wants to participate in sports for overall development but their ethnicity, culture, physical and spiritual challenges, parents, family members, and society members discourage them to participate in sports. The result of the study further confirmed that Islam encourages the women to participate in sports for good health, fitness and healthy life style after observing the Islamic dress code.

**Keywords:** Islam, Sports, Muslim women, participation

## **Introduction**

Sports play a vital role in physical, mental, emotional, social and psychological development of its participants without any discrimination of gender. Male and female are equal but still women are facing numerous problems of inequality throughout the world especially in Islamic countries and developing countries of the world. In some countries they are not allowed to participate in some kind of sports while in some Islamic countries women are not allowed to participate in any kind of sports. Although participation of women and girls in all kind of sports and their right to play is a global issue but it is generally conceive that women and girls in Islamic countries are facing countless problems in this regard.

There has been a misconception that sports are prohibited in Islam and Muslim societies do not allow sports participation, particularly to the women folk. The on ground reality is different. Sports participation is not only allowed but encouraged as well in Muslim societies for both gender; however in certain circumstances some sports are disallowed specially for women and girls. It is evident that the early Muslims took part in many sports and a concept of healthy sports festivals and competitions prevailed in Muslim Societies. Some of the games popular among the Muslims included races and running events, horse and camel riding and racing, swimming, archery, fencing, wrestling, weight lifting, high jumping, and stone tossing. Benefits of sports for the maintenance of health and fitness and overall wellbeing of the participants is also agreed by the Muslims and the Holy Quran declares that do not forbid good things which Allah made lawful, and do not transgress that Allah has not transgressed. (Al-Maida: 87).

Sports and recreation are not banned for females in Islam and the allowance of female participation in sports is evident by the occurrence of Muslim Women's Games (ICWG, 2005). In the Olympic Games at Atlanta Iranian women took part in canoe/kayak and shooting (Murray, 2002). In 2012 Olympic Games at London Muslim girls took part in different events including Pakistani girls. To maintain the dignity and honor of female, and to control immoralities and indecency, female are supposed to adhere to proper attire (Sheikh Faysal Mawlawi). Dr. Jamal Ad-Din Atiyyah, a member of the Islamic Fiqah (jurisprudence) Academy affiliated to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), states that “ There is no harm in watching sporting matches, however watching such matches will not benefit us; the benefit will be for the one who practices sports”. The social gains of sports perceived today by the present day sports are matching to the attributes of a Muslim youth and society. Islam demands and expects a high moral life and a sound character from its believers and similar is the focus of today's sports as according to Parker & Stiehl (2004) “positive character traits” can very effectively be learned through ardent participation in sports, recreation and related physical activities.

Participation of Muslim women in sports depends upon many factors such as country of origin, religious orientation, gender norms, culture, parents, family, relatives and society member support. These are the factors which shape different attitude and beliefs on physical activities, sports and athletics. Some Muslim women participate in sports without any hurdle, while some

other Muslim women face numerous problems, hurdles and challenges for sports participation. It depends from country to country. In some Muslim countries Muslim women face various problems and hurdles for participation in sports due to religious and cultural reasons, mixed gender sports, dress codes, attitude towards sports and limited resources (Dagkas et al, 2010). There is another problem that some countries consider sports as male activity. We can give the example of Senegal in this regard where participation in sports is socially and culturally prohibited for Muslim women because they believe that sports and athletics are by definition masculine (Hewett, 2010).

Islam not only encourages the sports as source of recreation and enjoyment but also recommends for good health, fitness and healthy life style. The Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H) advised Muslims of that time to participate in many forms of sports such as running, horseback riding, swimming and archery, which even today are considered of the best form of exercise. The holy prophet (P.B.U.H) himself would engage in running, archery, horse-riding, racing, wrestling and swimming (Hikmat Beiruty, 2004). It has been reported in several Ahadeeth, sayings of the Prophet that the Prophet raced with his wives and participated in swimming (Reported by Ahmad and Abu Daoud). The Hazrat Aisha, wife of Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H), said that once Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was on a journey with her. Our Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) had a race with her and she (Hazrat Aisha) won the race. After some time when I (Hazrat Aisha) gained some weight our Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H) again raced with her (Hazrat Aisha) and he (Hazrat Muhammad P.B.U.H) won the race. Then he said, 'This cancels that,' referring to the previous occasion." (Reported by Ahmad and Abu Daoud). Muslim Khalifah Ali bin Abi Talib said: "Refresh your minds from time to time, for a tired mind becomes blind." Muslim ingenious Abu Darda commented: "I entertain my heart with something trivial in order to make it stronger in the service of the Truth" (Hikmat Beiruty, 2004).

The participation of Muslim women in sports and physical activities has been topic of debate since long. Some say that female participation in sports is prohibited in Islam. Other says that under the philosophy of Islam women have equal rights in Islamic society and their participation in sports is not prohibited in Islam. A continuing debate about participation of Muslim women in sports and physical activities has occurred since long. Moreover it is said that Muslim women are constrained by their parents, relatives and society members from participating in sports and physical activities. It is also said that cultural and ethnic factors, spiritual and physical challenges constrained Muslim women to participate in sports. How accurate are those statement need further research. In this context the researchers conducted present research study to examine the perspective of Muslim women toward the involvement in sports and physical activities.

## **Methodology Of The Study**

### **Population of the study**

The population of this particular study consisted of all the female students of Government Girls Degree Colleges of District Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan.

### **Sampling Technique**

Convenient or available sampling technique was applied.

### **Sample Size**

A Sample of 100 female was selected from the population.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

To examine the participation of Muslim girls and women in sports and physical activities a structured questionnaire with 14 statements on three point likert scale, ranging from "Disagree" to "Agree" was developed for collection of data.

### **Mode of Data Collection**

The researcher delivers the questionnaire to the respondents with the help of female Lecturers Physical Education of concerned colleges and gets back, duly filled by them.

### **Analysis of Data**

The collected data were arranged, organized, and after due coding, it was processed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version-12). Percentage was used for analysis of data. Percentage of disagree, not sure and agree of each item was calculated and the conclusion was drawn on the basis of the calculated percentage. The result of percentage of each item has been given in table-1 below.

**Table Showing Statements And Scores Of The Respondents**

S.NO	STATEMENTS	DISAGREE	NOT SURE	AGREE
1.	Do you like sports?	12 %	-----	88 %
2.	Do you like to participate in sports.	18 %	-----	82 %
3.	You want to participate in sports for your overall development i.e. physical, mental, social, emotional and psychological development.	6 %	-----	94 %
4.	Islam encourages the women to participate in sports for good health and fitness.	35 %	-----	65 %
5.	Islam allows Muslim women to take part in sports after observing dress code.	30 %	-----	70 %
6.	Participation of Muslim women in sports is seen as a challenge to the boundaries of their ethnic identities.	9 %	-----	91 %
7.	Muslim culture prohibited the women to participate in sports.	9 %	-----	91 %
8.	Cultural and ethnic factors determine your participation in sports.	9 %	-----	91 %
9.	Spiritual and physical challenges constrain Muslim women to participate in sports.	10 %	-----	90 %
10.	Sport is not seen as respectable activity for women in Islamic countries.	12 %	-----	88 %
11.	Muslim women are constrained by their parents from participating in sports.	14 %	-----	86 %
12.	Muslim women are constrained by their family and relative from participating in sports.	14 %	-----	86 %
13.	Muslim women are constrained by society from participating in sports.	15 %	-----	85 %
14.	Islam allows the women to participate in sports after observing Islamic dress code.	-----	-----	100 %

### Results And Discussion

According to analyzed data 88 % female respondents like sports while 82 % like to participate in sports. Major portion of sampled population (94 %) consider sports a positive activity that develop its participants physically, mentally, socially, emotionally and psychologically while 65 % female respondents were agreed with the statement that Islam encourages the women to

participate in sports for good health and fitness. It was the view point of 70 % female respondents that Islam allows Muslim women to take part in sports after observing dress code while 91 % said that participation of Muslim women in sports is seen as a challenge to the boundaries of their ethnic identities. It was the opinion of the 91 % female respondents that Muslim culture prohibited the women to participate in sports while 91 % said that Cultural and ethnic factors determine their participation in sports. Majority of the female respondents said that spiritual and physical challenges constrained Muslim women to participate in sports while 88 % said that sport is not seen as respectable activity for women in Islamic countries. Muslim women are constrained by their parents from participating in sports was the view point of 86 % female respondents, 86 % said that Muslim women are constrained by their family and relative from participating in sports, while 85 % said that Muslim women are constrained by society from participating in sports. All the respondents (100 %) were agreed with the statement that Islam allows the women to participate in sports after observing Islamic dress code.

The above mentioned results have shown that females attitude towards sports is positive and they not only like sports but they also like to participate in sports for their overall development i.e. physical, mental, social, emotional and psychological development but their ethnic and cultural factors as well as spiritual and physical challenges forbid them to participate in sports. The results of the study confirmed that Islam encourage the women to participate in sports to develop and maintain good health and fitness but their parents, family members, relatives and society members discourage them to participate in sports. The result of the study also confirmed that sport is not seen as respectable activity for women in Islamic countries and Islam allows Muslim women to take part in sports after observing Islamic dress code. The literature on gender and sports also confirm that Muslim women are facing numerous constraints as compared to men regarding their participation in sports both in Muslim and western countries ( Henderson and Bialeschki 1993; Shaw, 1994). Several scholars say that teaching of Islam advocate and favour sports activities for physical development of both genders (Mahfoud, 2011). Some scholars dislike the ways in which Muslim girls and women take part in sports, so they strongly criticize their participation in sports (Di-Capua 2006).

Islam promotes good health and fitness for both genders and encourages both genders to participate in sports and physical activity to maintain healthy lifestyles, however in certain circumstances some sports are disallowed specially for women and girls. Still there is misconception about participation of Muslim girls and women in sports and in some Muslim countries specially in Arabic countries Muslim women and girls are not allowed to take part in all form of sports and physical activities (Walseth, 2003). Muslim women and girls can participate in some forms of sports after observing some conditions, procedure and dress code. Dress code includes covering the hair, arms, legs and breast (Yuka, 2002). The problem arises when international sports federations disallow the Muslim women to observe Islamic dress code. The Federation International Football Association (FIFA) imposed ban on Islamic head scarf in 2007. The FIFA, football's governing body, announced his policy on April 2010 that "a player's equipment must not have any political, religious or personal statements" (Stephen, 2010). This policy of FIFA affected those Muslim women who observe Islamic dress code during

sports competitions. Due to this policy of FIFA Iranian female soccer team did not participate in opening ceremony of youth Olympic held in Singapore in 2010.

We may categorize the Muslim countries in to three categories. First category comprised of those Muslim countries who do not believe on Islamic dress code for participation of women in sports. Therefore such countries women do not follow the Islamic dress code during sports competition and follow international dress code for different form of sports. These women belong to those countries who accepted the international dress code for different categories of games. We can give the example of Turkey in this regard. Suat Aşeni and Halet Çambel of Turkey are the first Muslim women in all over the world who attended the Olympic Games for the first time. They both represented the Turkey in Berlin Olympics in 1936 in fencing.

The second category comprised of those Muslim countries that are modest but at the same time observe Islamic dress code for women during sports competitions. We can give the example of Pakistan in this regard. The third category comprised of those Muslim countries that do not allow their women to participate in sports due to religious obligations, traditions, beliefs, rules and regulations of their own country. Saudi Arabia, Brunei and Qatar are the Muslim countries who did not allowed their women to participate in international games including Olympic Games until 2012. For the first time in the Olympic history Saudi Arabia, Brunei and Qatar women athletes participated in London Olympics 2012. Wojdan Shaherkani and Sara Attar from Saudi Arabia, Noor Hussain Al-Malki and Bahiya al-Hamad from Qatar, and Maziah Mahusin from Brunei participated in London Olympics 2012. More than 3000 Muslim women athlete participated in London Olympics 2012 including Tahmina Kohistani from Afghanistan, Shinoona Salah al-Habsi from Oman, Fatima Sulaiman Dahman from Yemen, Zahra Nemati from Iran, and Rabia Ishaq from Pakistan.

Islamic Federation of Women's Sports also organizes Women's Islamic Games. It is an international event of multisport. These games were stated in 1993. Muslim women from all nationalities are allowed to take part in games. The Islamic Women's Games has been held in 1993, 1997, 2001 and 2005 in Tehran. In these games Muslim women observe Islamic dress code and compete with headgear and protective clothing. In first Women's Islamic Games 407 female Muslim athletes participated in 7 sports events, in 2<sup>nd</sup> games 748 female athletes participated in 12 sports events, in 3<sup>rd</sup> games 795 female athletes participated in 15 sports events, and in 4<sup>th</sup> games 1316 female Muslim athletes participated in 18 sports events.

Muslim girls and women are well aware of the benefits and importance of sports and their interest in sports is increasing day by day. Therefore their participation in sports and physical activities is increasing gradually in Islamic countries including Pakistan. But it is needed that Muslim girls and women should be facilitated to participate in sports and modest sportswear according to Islamic dress code should be introduced so that Muslim girls and women took part in sports without any hesitation. Cutrao (2009) said that definitely there is a need for modest sportswear, even beyond Muslim communities. Murray (2008) said advancement in sportswear will help to boost the participation of Muslim girls and women in sports. Therefore full body

wears clothes that covered all the body, long trousers that covered all the legs and headscarf should be introduced in international sports for Muslim girls and women.

## **Conclusion**

It is concluded that Muslim women not only like sports but they want to participate in sports practically for their overall development. Islam encourage the women to participate in sports, after observing Islamic dress code, to promote good health and fitness and to maintain healthy life style but their ethnicity, culture, spiritual and physical challenges constrain them to participate in sports. Moreover sports is not seen as a respectable activity for women in Muslim countries and parents, family members, relative and society members discourage the women to participate in sports and physical activities.

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