

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS, ITS PROBLEMS AND SOLUTION

Alor, Roseline Chinyere

Department of Physical and Health Education, Ebonyi State College of Education, Ikwo Nigeria.

Phone Number: 07036541063

Abstract

As history could record, it is evident that women participation in sports has elicited a whole lot of controversies. Going by the Western world development, these oppositions, and misconceptions are getting behind them while Third-World countries including Nigeria are still battling with these misconception and discrimination emanating from culture, religion, illiteracy and poverty. This paper looked into some of the forces and factors delaying the improvement of Nigerian women in sports participation. It also examined the performance of females in sports, showing how they are overcoming some of the problems. Suggestions were also made that women in the legislative arm should sponsor the making of favourable laws that will encourage women participation in sports as it will affect sports administration, better remuneration, attract sponsorship and the investment in women sports among other things.

Introduction

World all over, dated over 300 years, women participation in sporting activities has suffered gender the fight is still on till today. No clear record can show that the war is over, be it in the developed and undeveloped societies. The involvement of women participation in sports have been denied by a lot of misconceptions, prejudices and even myth (Anyanwu, 1990). Women's duties following history has been that of childbearing, home keeping and toil, while exhibition of physical prowess was considered the domain of men. It may not be out of place to say that it is in this century that women have been able to hold their heads high in physical competition and sports. Some decade ago even among the civilized societies had prejudicial societal patterns of culture, ethics and morals

stating that women were not only physically incapable but women participation in such activities was sinful and degrading (Klafs and Lyon. 1998), Sports as defined by Imoukhuede (2007) is any physical or mental activity that is capable of exerting the human mind and body toward improved output. In this paper therefore, sports is viewed as all organized physical or mental activities with rules and regulation carried out indoors or outdoor, whether at amateur or professional level requiring physical or mental exertion. In view of what sport means, one begin to wonder why women sports participation has been limited by the often unsporting standards set by social institutions, which defines social reality. The question is if the cultural limitation of women participation in sports is scientifically based? Or if the legal system does outline what women should do? In spite of all these, some women have pursued their interest in sports and participated, breaking records and cultural laws. Nevertheless, women participation has been limited by the often unsporting standards set by social institutions (Duquin, 2001).

This paper is then focused on those obstacles that limited women sport's participation, and suggestions for improving women sports participation.

Factors Working Against Women Participation in Sports

1. Socio-Cultural Factor: Some parents having wrong conception of sports, still forbid their wards (girls) from participating in sports, Edwards (2000) defined sports as physical activities that have recorded history and tradition, which emphasizes exertion within some prescribed rules and regulations The question is who take part in sports? It may be individuals, groups, who could be men or women to achieve the set objectives or goals? The chief characteristics of sports is rivalry, to defeat the opponent in order to achieve the desired goal including honour, recognition, money or trophy, etc.

How do participants emerge in sports? He or she has to undergo long periods of training with great expenditure of energy in order to be physically and emotionally prepared for the competition. Most importantly, he/she has to have adequate knowledge of the skill, rules, tactics and strategies of the game.

Going by the saying that a winner never quits and a quitter never wins, a participant cannot quit from the field of play as he may wish no matter how tired or injured he may be. Such being the case, an activity that will challenge the woman participant to harder training will be employed, so as to make her a trained athlete. From the above definition of sports and the ways of becoming a good participant in sports, one wonders why the societies try to exempt women from taking part in sports, due to some obnoxious cultural practices.

An outstanding societal belief from history has been that women are inferior to men and for that reason the women have been denied access to equal opportunities in almost all social institutions of which sports is included. (Lopiano, 2002; the Berge, 2000). To the disadvantage of women, research shows that simply being a woman influences social status, life chances and life styles. The differences exist in varying degrees across different societies and within institutions.

In most cultures, male roles have been given more prominence and value than female ones and this has led to the social problem of dominant-subordinate relationship between genders.

Theberge (2000) opined that sports as a gender cultural form bears significant relationship to gender segregation and inequality in other realms of social life. Sports has therefore been taken as a male preserve and the dominance in sports is evidenced by the lower rate of sports participation by women in different countries.

In Nigerian context, women are excluded from active sports based on structural constraints and have had fewer opportunities to participate in sports. It is also a known fact that women's achievement has been hampered in sports as it has been in other non-domestic endeavours and is seen as female entrance into a culturally male activity.

Men have in some events been threatened by the achievement of a woman. This is as a result that sports has traditionally been associated with such masculine sex roles as domination, competitiveness, aggressiveness, and ruggedness. In that line a female athlete is considered a threat to the male and male ego. Other women tend to degrade the female athlete, feeling that such an individual is a threat to femininity simply because the female athlete has stepped outside her assigned sex role (Kalakain and Goldman, 1998). X-raying from the above, it is evident that psychological and sociological pressures which discourage women full participation in physical activities were as a result of contrived and learned human value systems. Considering this period of enlightenment, irrelevant tradition and vestiges of the past seen have given way. Despite all these obstacles our present society has accepted women's role in sports as natural and healthy development.

2. Misconceptions about Female Physiological Make-Up:

Misconception in the ordinary or layman understanding is when one gives wrong intention, or without full understanding of something and decides to

wrongly attach interpretation as to the actual meaning of that word or issue. Anti-women participation in sports apart from sex- role duties and other socio-psychological forces have contended in the past and present that sports competition is physically detrimental to (women). This opinion cut across sex lines as both use this to support their dislike towards athlete women. As this unbelief to women participation in sports brought so many objections to athletics, including a popular idea that women athletes would develop a masculine musculature, although they could not present any conducted research result to support their position. There is no evidence to suggest that women are masculinized, or made less feminine by such participation. (Kalakian and Goldman, 1998).

In line with the negativists misconception, is that female athletes and players cannot bear children. Some believe that apple, beauty and femininity may be or will be adversely affected by participating in vigorous activity (Ugwueze, 2006).

On her study on development of masculine features and fertility among female athletes, Katherine (2003), noted that there is nowhere in the world that research has supported this misconception of the public that female athletes look more like men and thus they can not bear children. It is important to note that participation in sports do not cause women to be barren.

In his work Harris (2001), stated that no evidence that strenuous physical activity has any deleterious effect upon menstruation, fertility or childbirth, rather the healthy female may have fewer problems with all normal functions if she participates in vigorous physical activity (like sports).

3. Religious Beliefs on Women Participation in Sports: In some parts of the world, religious beliefs have been known to be anti-sports. Early Christians never allowed physical education to be part of their school curriculum. Some believed that recreational and spiritual teaching are not compatible.

In Nigeria today, some Christians and Muslims groups frown at women putting on sports wears that shows the contours of the body. The influence of such doctrine which the girl child imbibes is carried over to adult life and sees participation in sporting activities as immoral and sinful.

Kamiyote (2007), noted that throughout the Islamic school system, physical education is excluded from the school curriculum because it exposes the thighs and legs which is forbidden by the religion. Also, Muslim women are restricted in

purdah and this affect sports participation by women adversely. The implication of these is that women who practice these beliefs are restricted by religion from participating in sports. In the interim Christian groups are accepting women sports more than their Muslim counterpart; most disturbing is the 'introduction of Sharia Laws making it impossible for girls to take part in sports in some parts of Nigeria.

4. Lack of Marketing and Sponsorship of Nigerian Women Athlete/Sports:

Some categories of sports organization include professional, age group, school sports etc, are ignorant as to the importance of sports participation and this perception affects and is most responsible to the cause of poor attitude towards women participation and sponsorship.

Sports in the present day society are a multi-billion naira business. In Nigeria, sports have not been fully managed as a business and as a profitable venture. Instead sports have been dependent on government for survival.

Obajimi (2004) stated that sports is now a major part of world business community that offers various players and officials with specific services and opportunity for profit, but lack of adequate funds and sponsorship is a factor that has drawn women participation back. In Nigeria's case you can hardly see any sponsorship of any women competition. Unlike the men, any Super Eagles match, one or more companies will pay for advertisement and hardly will you hear or see Super Falcons match being sponsored by any group, its unfortunate.

5. Education of the Girl Child: In Nigeria as a whole, it is not hidden that in most families the education of women is seen as a waste of fund, not only that, precisely in Igbo land, fathers feel much more reluctant to train girls child with the belief that after training her and wasting money she will go to another man, who will reap the benefits. We can imagine this line of thought. Amuchie (2005) described education as a permanent change in behavior. Therefore, by this when a girl child is educated you are not only educating her rather you are educating her children and the society. It is expected that if more girls are educated we will have more women opportunities participating in sports, as schools are bedrock for discovery of athletes.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

The social cultural factor working against women participation should be tackled through a well-planned enlightened programme to educate parents that they stand to benefit from girls in sports without any adverse consequences.

The misconceptions about female physiological makeup and effect of sports on them has no scientific back up as beauty is not dependent on muscle rather on the mind of the opposite sex who wishes to admire.

Education of all girl child will in no small way help in the exposure of the girl into taking interest in sports and thereby reap the benefit of sports participation.

Conclusions

The conclusions simply are direct, because from the work done, women and the entire society stand to benefit fully from women participation in sports as no recorded or practical disadvantage is seen or proven scientifically in a woman taking part in sports and general physical activities. The researcher encourages everybody, groups, government to propagate the message of accepting women into sports participation and give them the moral, financial and material support.

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