

SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF MUSLIM
WOMEN IN SINGAPORE AND KUALA LUMPUR

BY

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation
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International Islamic University Malaysia

NOVEMBER 2019

ABSTRACT

This study examines the sports participation and activity patterns of adult Muslim women in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. A profile of the participants, aged 20 years and above, was established, from the sample of 191 respondents who completed a questionnaire as part of the survey. The study also looks at the major causes of non-participation in sports and exercise. Information like the use of facilities in and around the residential areas, income, educational and occupations status of participants were derived. Further information like the types of sports that participants engaged in, the amount of money spent by participants on a weekly basis for the sporting activity and their attitude and feelings towards physical activity were included. Results revealed that age, gender, socio-economic status, education and early exposure to sports and exercise do influence adult participation. Sports and exercise attracted those who are economically well off and the educated individuals. The study found that an increase in age resulted in a decrease in physical education. Friends and colleagues had a great influence over respondents' participation in sports. Health and fitness were found to be the motivational factors that led many to be physically active. Lack of time, work commitment and being lazy are the major reasons given for the lack of participation in sports and physical activity.

مُلخَصُ البَحْثِ

يتناول البحث مشاركة المرأة المسلمة (الفئة البالغة) في النشاطات الرياضية في كل من سنغافورة وكوالالمبور، ويهدف إلى بيان أسباب العزوف عن ممارسة التمارين الرياضية، فقد أنشئ ملف تعريفى للمشاركات ممن أعمارهنَّ ٢٠ سنة فأكثر، ثم جُمعت المعلومات من ١٩١ مشاركة باستخدام استبانة تضمَّنت معلومات عن: مدى استعمال المرافق الرياضية في المناطق السكنية وما حولها، ومقدار الدخل، والمستوى التعليمي، والحالة المهنية للمشاركات، ومعلومات إضافية عن: أنواع الرياضات التي مارستها المشاركات من قبل، ومقدار الأموال التي ينفقنها أسبوعيًّا على النشاطات الرياضية، ومواقفهنَّ ومشاعرهنَّ تجاهها، وقد أظهرت النتائج أن للعمر، والجنس، والمستوى الاجتماعي والاقتصادي والتعليمي، والممارسات الرياضية المبكرة منذ الصغر؛ تأثيرات على مقدار احترافهنَّ في الكبر، وأن النشاطات الرياضية تجذب ميسورات الحال والمتعلمات، وأنه كلما تقدَّم الشخص في العمر قلَّ اهتمامه بالنشاطات الرياضية، كما أن للأصدقاء والزملاء دورًا مهمًّا في التأثير على المشاركات في ممارسة الرياضة، وأيضًا بيَّنت النتائج أن الصحة واللياقة كانتا من العوامل التحفيزية التي أدت بكثير إلى أن يحترفن الرياضة، أما ضيق الوقت والتزامات العمل والكسل فكانت من الأسباب الرئيسة للعزوف عن النشاطات الرياضية بأنواعها.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic World Issues).

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Ahmad F. Yousif
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic World Issues).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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**MUSLIM WOMEN, SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: A
STUDY OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE CITIES OF
SINGAPORE AND KUALA LUMPUR**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Three wonderful women deserved to be mentioned on this page. I am indebted to Amarat Kaur Sraa and Mary Liew, who have been supportive in my pursuits here. I'm fortunate to have my mother, Fatemah Abdullah Basharahil, a woman who has guided and inspired me to acquire knowledge – worldly and religiously. These women are the epitome of what women's success are all about.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Ahmad F. Yousif, Prof. Dr. Abdullah Ahsan and Prof. Dr. S.Ajmal Al-Aidrus for the advice and guidance on this research project.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Research has indicated that regular physical activity is effective in reducing diseases and disability risk. Studies have shown the positive relationship between physical activity and psychological wellbeing (Brown, 1992; McAuley, 1994). It is without a doubt that today's women are busy with careers and as such, may not have spent enough time on physical activity (Jones, 1998; King, 2002; Fry, 2003). Eyler et al. (1998)¹ concluded that the lack of time due to care giving responsibilities, health concerns and lack of motivation are the major barriers to being an active woman. Some studies have indicated that women do not participate regularly as their male counterparts, thus the interest to look into the environmental issues and activity patterns of women (King, 2002; Eyler, 2002). There have been research, which dealt with personal factors like cognitive, demographic, behavioural and emotional issues that have influenced people's decision to become physically active (King, 2002). According to King (2002), such factors are not able to account for the levels of inactivity in a country. As such, there is a need to explore and study the environmental and policy influences on physical activity among the ethnic groups. There is a lack of research done in the cities of Singapore and Kuala Lumpur on Asian women for sports participation among the Muslim women (King, 2002). This research would give the opportunity to embark on more important

1 The research on Muslim women in relation to the physical activity levels as supported by Jennifer Hargreave. In *Sports for All Women. Sporting Females. Critical issues in the history and sociology of women's sports*. Routledge, New York (1994).

2 Jennifer Hargreaves. *The Muslim female heroic. Heroines of Sport. The politics of difference and identity*. Routledge, New York (2000).

issues in relation to Muslim² women's participation in physical activity. The research undertaken concerns the Muslim women's participation in recreational sports in the cities of Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. A comparative study would provide a better understanding of the issues that affect the physical activity patterns of women from the different ethnic groups in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, concentrating on the Muslim women as its focus group. This study would also relate to the *Sunnah* on sports participation and recreation for women from the Islamic perspective. This is a follow-up from the previous research done by the researcher at Loughborough (1995), whereby it was found that the lowest rate of participation was from the Muslim female group. This research would deal with the attitude, perception, reasons, barriers and recommendations for increased sports participation among the Muslim women. Chapter 2 would be designated to the review of literature, followed by the chapters on findings, discussion and conclusion.

1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Based on a study by the Mayo Clinic (2013), the benefits of health, physical activity and regular exercise³ are as follows:

1. **Weight control:**

One can maintain and prevent excess weight increase through physical activity through the burning of calories. More calories are burnt with a higher level of intensity. A simple activity would be to take the stairs instead of the lift or do the household chores.

³ The definition of physical activity is relevant to the research as to ascertain the level of activity by Mayo Clinic in www.MayoClinic.com as in p 3,4, 5, 6 & 7 (accessed on 30th December 2013).

2. Exercise can fight against diseases and health conditions:

It was stated that being physically active can help increase the high-density lipoprotein (HDL), the "good" cholesterol. It can also reduce the unhealthy triglycerides. Doing exercises allows the blood to flow smoothly, thus lowering the risk of getting cardiovascular diseases. Such activities done regularly has been known to prevent and control a wide range of health problems and concerns, such as depression, metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, stroke, some types of cancer, falls and arthritis.

3. Mood Improvement:

An exercise session at the gym or a brisk 30-minute walk helps as it stimulates various brain chemicals that may leave individuals with a sense of happiness and being relaxed. They feel and look better, which can boost their confidence and self-esteem.

4. Boosting energy:

Studies have shown that regular physical activity improves endurance and muscle strength. The physical activity and exercise will deliver oxygen and nutrients to the body tissues, assisting the cardiovascular system to work more efficiently. This would result in the individual's lung and heart to work more better, allowing the person to do the daily chores and activities with more energy.

5. Helps one to sleep better:

Regular physical activity can help participants to fall asleep faster and deepen the sleep. Just a cautious advice from the Mayo clinic is that one should not exercise too close to bedtime as participants may feel energetic and have difficulty in falling asleep.

6. Putting the spark into one's sex life:

Looking good and feeling energetic due to regular physical activity can leave one to have a positive effect on the sex life. It may increase the arousal levels of men and women. Men are less likely to encounter erectile dysfunction as compared to those who don't do physical activity or exercise.

7. The fun element in exercise:

One can spend time to unwind, be engaged with others and enjoy the outdoors. Such activities can connect participants with friends and family in a more social and fun setting. Participants will reap the benefits of feeling better, attain health and be jovial and happy among friends and family. It is ideal to exercise for at least 30 minutes daily for such.

1.3 RESEARCH-BASED EVIDENCE (Mayo Clinic)⁴

Exercise is associated with good health as one aged. A study by Dr. Qi Sun and co-authors from the Harvard School of Public Health, stated that among the 13,535 nurses in the 1986 research, it was found that those with higher levels of activity in midlife tend to be active by 10 years or more, even at age 70. The study noted that the level of physical activity increased the likelihood of them being healthy, irrespective of their body weight, despite them being lean and active and having “the highest odds of successful survival.”

Based on Mayo Clinic's review of 52 studies of exercise and colon cancer, the researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis stated that those who were most active were 21% less likely to develop the disease than those who

⁴ The findings would ascertain the importance and values of physical activity through the studies made by the Mayo clinic in the USA as in www.MayoClinic.com. (Accessed on 30th December 2013)

were least active. This is so as physical activity helps in the movement of waste more efficiently through the bowel. This lowers the risk of having bowel cancer by 16%. This is because exercise helps to reduce tissue exposure to insulin-like growth factor, a known cancer promoter. As such exercise might protect postmenopausal women against cancers of the endometrium, pancreas, colon, esophagus and breast. It also helps them keep their weight down.

On the issue of osteoporosis and fragility, weak bones and muscles increase the risk of falls and fractures. This would create an inability to perform the tasks of daily activities. It was stated that weight-bearing aerobic activities like weight training and brisk walking would increase muscle strength. Such can reverse and limit bone loss. The study by German researchers⁵ of women, who are 65 and older, to an 18-month exercise regimen or a wellness program, found that exercise had significantly increased their bone density. It also lessens their risk of falls. Even at age over 100, weight training improves the quality and size of the muscles. This is helpful as it increases their abilities to function independently⁶.

On the study for cardiovascular disease, it has been established that aerobic exercise has been an invaluable protector of the heart and blood vessels. It helps to lower blood pressure, increase the heart's ability to work hard and raises blood levels of HDL-cholesterol, which acts as a cleansing agent in arteries. This would mean that active individuals of whatever ages they may be, would have lower levels of strokes and heart attacks. A 2002 study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* by Dr. JoAnn

⁵ Wolfgang Kemmler, PhD; Simon von Stengel, PhD; Klaus Engelke, PhD; Lothar Häberle, PhD; Willi A. Kalender, PhD, MD. *Exercise Effects on Bone Mineral Density, Falls, Coronary Risk Factors, and Health Care Costs in Older Women. The Randomized Controlled Senior Fitness and Prevention (SEFIP) Study.* (<http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=774236>. Accessed on 5th September 2014)

⁶ *ibid*

E. Manson and colleagues, comprised of 73,743 healthy women (ages 50 to 79), who had clocked for 30 minutes daily by walking briskly or had done vigorous exercise weekly. It showed a great reduction of their risks of heart attacks and other cardiovascular events. In another study, it was found that women who had walked at least one hour a day, were 40% less likely to suffer a stroke than of women who had walked less than an hour weekly.

In the case for diabetes, moderate activity lowers such risks of developing diabetes in normal weight women. In a study of 68,907 healthy female nurses, it was found that those who were sedentary had twice the risk of developing diabetes. On the other hand, those who were both sedentary and obese had 16 times the risk. This is compared with the active and normal-weight women. In another study of 3,234 randomly selected pre-diabetic men and women, a modest physical activity (of at least 150 minutes a week) was found to be more effective than the metformin drug that's used to prevent full-blown diabetes⁷.

In the case of dementia, as the population ages, regular physical activity has the ability to prevent or delay the loss of cognitive functions. A study of 3,485 healthy men and women aged 55 and above, who are physically active three or more times a week, were found to be least likely to become cognitively impaired⁸.

An Australian study published in September 2008 in The Journal of the American Medical Association, where 170 volunteers had reported memory problems. They were assigned to a six-month program of physical activity or health education. In

⁷ www.MayoClinic.com. (Accessed on 30th December 2013)

⁸ Thorleif Etgen, MD; Dirk Sander, MD; Ulrich Huntgeburth, MD; Holger Poppert, MD; Hans Förstl, MD; Horst Bickel, PhD. *Physical Activity and Incident Cognitive Impairment in Elderly Persons* in The INVADE Study (<http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=774229>. Accessed on 5th September 2014.

a year and a half, they showed “a modest improvement in cognition.”⁹ Multiple studies have confirmed the benefits of exercise in helping older people maintain useful short-term memory. This enables them to multi-task, schedule and plan their tasks. They can also store and use information effectively (cited from the Mayo Clinic).

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To understand the issues on the physical activity patterns among Muslim women from the different racial and economic backgrounds.
- To sought information on the environmental, social and cultural constraints that Muslim women see as affecting their involvement in physical activity.
- To give a better perspective to ascertain if issues were similar in both cities of Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.
- To consider the attitude, perception, reasons, barriers and recommendations for increased sports participation among the Muslim women.
- To gather the information through a questionnaire from a small sample of Muslim women in the cities of Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

1.5 SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE QUR’AN AND SUNNAH

In the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah (Hadith)*, direct references to horse riding, shooting, swimming, hunting, fencing, running, and wrestling were found. It indicates the Muslims' need for training and discipline in order to stay healthy and be well-prepared

⁹ Nicola T. Lautenschlager, MD; Kay L. Cox, PhD; Leon Flicker, MBBS, PhD; Jonathan K. Foster, DPhil; Frank M. van Bockxmeer, PhD; Jianguo Xiao, MD, PhD; Kathryn R. Greenop, PhD; Osvaldo P. Almeida, MD, PhD. *Effect of Physical Activity on Cognitive Function in Older Adults at Risk for Alzheimer Disease. A Randomized Trial* in JAMA. 2008;300(9):1027-1037. doi:10.1001/jama.300.9.1027.

for military purposes (Anahar, Becker, & Messing, 1992). We have read of women who had fought wars and engaged in activities to maintain levels of physical and martial fitness (Daiman, 1995). In the *Hadith*, Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) wife, Khadijah (RA), aged 55, had climbed mountains to serve food when the Prophet (SAW) had isolated himself on religious grounds (Daiman, 1995). Islam, regardless of gender, is concerned with the development and maintenance of the spiritual and physical strength (De Knop, Theeboom, Wittock, & De Martelaer, 1996). Through sports and physical activity, it helps keep the body healthy, which attributed to the Prophet's (SAW) health (Sfeir, 1985). On the other hand, the non-Muslims might misinterpret the *Qur'an* on the theme of sport, play and pastime. An example was given by Martin and Masson (2004), which was taken from *Surah 5:57*: "Choose not for friends such of those...as make a jest and sport of your religion" (p.6). Martin and Mason (2004) has used words like "play and sport" in the English translation of the *Qur'an*, which had minimally clarified the Islamic views. Abdalati (1986) and Al-Qaradawi (1984) had stated that Islam has not rejected the people from sports and physical activities, as long as they are religiously conscious and abiding. Martin and Mason (2004) illustrates further of the positive Islamic perspectives on sport, as found in the *Hadith*.

From the above, we could denote that the aims of sport was for the holy war (Hendricks, 1998; Kahan, 2003; Kamiyole, 1986). This has made the Muslims to teach their children skills on how to shoot arrows, run, jump fences and ride horses (Kamiyole, 1986). In the *Qur'an* (Q8: 60), the verse "And prepare for them whatever you are able to of force and of cavalry to testify therewith the enemy of Allah ..." indicates the need to be healthy and fit for war, showing the need to acquire sports skill for such purposes. The females and males were required to maintain health and physical fitness.

According to Walseth & Fasting (2003), Islam allows Muslims to do sports for recreation. This is further enhanced with the story told by Aisha (RA), the wife of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), where she had raced in a running event with the Prophet. This *Sunnah* indicates the importance of physical activity and sport in everyday life. The need to stay strong and fit is also important for his Companions to follow suit (Al-Qaradawi, 1984).

1.6 IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The information from this research can expand the existing programmes to improve physical activity among the women here. The results of the findings can be shared with health educationists and experts, as well as make recommendations to policy makers so as to help design programmes and make environmental changes to increase physical activity among the population. It would also give a greater insight on the physical activity patterns of Muslim women and the barriers to physical activity. The relevant authorities included the Singapore Sports Council, Mendaki (Singapore), MUIS (Singapore), Malaysian Sports Council, Health Promotion Board (Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) and the Muslim Women's Associations in Singapore and Malaysia.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

This study employed the questionnaire method to collect relevant information from Muslim women in the cities of Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and Singapore. A small group of Malay / Muslim women (100 in number) from each city in five aged groups (20 -30, 31- 40, 41-50, 51-60 and 61 & above) were the target participants for this study. The survey questions were in English though the researcher verbally translated it to the

Malay language to the participants who may not have a good command of the English language.

1.8 REASONS FOR USING QUESTIONNAIRE AS THE TOOL FOR DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaire was used in this research after consultation with the researcher's supervisor in April 2013 so that the responses would reflect the information sought. The initial draft of the questionnaire was done in May 2013. The primary reason for the use of the questionnaire rests on the need for information that cannot be reasonably obtained in other ways (Clarke & Clarke, 1984) as it was used for obtaining information quickly from persons concerning factual matters. This survey method is also inexpensive as the only financial costs were for the photocopying for distribution to the Muslim women in both cities. Time was also an important factor and the questionnaire would allow the researcher to gather as much information within 8 – 10 minutes (time taken to answer the questionnaire).

1.9 PURPOSE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The survey attempted to gather data concerning present status, practices and opinions. The purpose of the survey was to obtain responses and reactions from a number of individuals who could not be interviewed personally within a short period of time and without considerable expense. The questionnaire was designed and aimed at investigating the following:

- age of the sports participants and non-sports participants in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur
- activity levels; in terms of duration and frequency per week

- reasons for participation and non-participation
- major influences to participate or interest in sports and exercise
- major causes of non-participation in sports and exercise
- use of facilities in and around the residential areas
- income, educational and occupations status of participants
- types of sports participants engaged in
- money spent by participants, on a weekly basis for the sporting activity
- attitude / feelings towards physical activity.

1.10 THE SURVEY PROCEDURE

The completed questionnaire was piloted in June 2013. It was distributed to 6 students at ISTAC (5 locals and 1 foreigner) and 4 Singaporeans who each lived in Singapore, Germany, Australia and America respectively. This aims to gather feedback on the feasibility of the use of the survey and reflect upon the criticism given. Changes were made from the pilot study, phrases were re-worded and some questions removed. Further consultation was made with the Supervisor on the questionnaire. Changes were again made, with certain wordings and questions removed or worded accordingly based on feedback received. Finally, the questionnaire was distributed to the targeted group from July 2013 onwards.

The researcher had approached individuals at various venues in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. 110 questionnaires were distributed to Muslim women in Kuala Lumpur with the returns of 100, thus there was a return of 91%. As for Singapore, 100 questionnaires were distributed with returns of 91 (91%). In Singapore, the researcher had enlisted the help of three family members to administer the distribution of the questionnaires. The places where participants responded were at a secondary school in