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## Barriers and motivators to sports participation for children in Muslim communities in Ghana

**Nathanael Adu and Emmanuel Aboagye**

### Abstract

Barriers and motives to participate in sports have been examined among marginalised groups in numerous pieces of literature. However, barriers and motives for sports participation among children in Muslim communities are least researched within the childhood and sports literature. The purpose of this study was to examine the primary evidence on barriers and motivators to voluntary sports participation that are faced by children in Muslim communities and to then consider how those barriers might best be addressed and how-to nature their motives in sports participation. A purposively sampled Muslim youths aged (9-15) years were selected to contribute to the discourse by the use of a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and T-tests were used to identify the barriers and the motives and to find the differences based on gender. The results revealed that personal barriers were the most potent barrier with family barriers, cultural barriers, social barriers and psychological barriers all impact participation in sports. In terms of motives, positive attitudes and positive influences were identified as motivators for the youths. Notwithstanding, boys were found to perceive more barriers but were more motivated to participate in sports than girls. It is recommended that families and other stakeholders should assist to remove barriers to improve participation among children in Muslim societies in developing countries.

**Keywords:** motives, barriers, sports participation, Muslim communities, gender

### Introduction

The success of every nation rally around the youths who should not only be furnished with some level of knowledge and skills but also need to acquire a considerable amount of physical fitness. Recent researches have examined the importance of voluntary participation in physical activities which includes several health benefits and management of sports organisations (Edwards, 2015) [16]. Sports are also effective in acquiring and increasing knowledge and resources, developing local skills, increasing social solidarity, facilitating structures and mechanisms for community discourse, building leadership qualities and encouraging mass participation (Edwards, 2015) [16]. Other scholarly works have identified the physical, health, psychological and mental benefits of participating in sports among children (Khan *et al.*, 2012; Findlay & Coplan, 2008) [18, 26]. Besides, children benefit from participation in sports with regards to mental, physical and school performance (Kirk, 2005; Felfe, Lechner & Steinmayr, 2016) [17, 27]. Despite the numerous studies on the importance of sports to children, there exists a gap in the literature on barriers and motivators to sports participation among children in deprived communities in developing countries (Ghana).

Barriers to participate in sports have been examined among marginalised groups in numerous pieces of literature (Buckworth & Dishman, 2007; Jaarsma *et al.*, 2014; Maxwell *et al.*, 2013) [7, 24, 25, 33]. In their study, Buckworth and Dishman (2007) [7] identified that lack of time, lack of motivation, and difficulty in having access to sports facilities are among the common barriers to sports participation associated with people with disabilities. Jaarsma *et al.*, (2014) [24, 25] were of the view that costs, lack of peers, and visual impairment inhibits sports participation among people with visual disabilities and recommended that sports participation should be centred on benefits such as fun, health and social contacts. Other barriers reported by people with disabilities include transportation, low energy levels, access to information, qualified instructors and familiarisation with the use of sports facilities (Bragaru *et al.*, 2011; Jaarsma *et al.*, 2013; Kehn & Krool, 2009) [6, 24, 25]. However, motives for sports participation mentioned by people with and without disabilities are health benefits, motivation, enjoyment and social

characteristics (Buckworth & Dishman, 2007; Kehn & Krool, 2009) [7]. Jaarsma *et al.*, (2013) [24, 25] further maintained that to ensure physical fitness among people with disabilities, motivational drivers such as health and competition and the relevance of winning should be emphasised. The relevance of motivational factors and barriers to sports participation assist to devise strategies that are likely to promote participation in sports programmes among a given population.

It has also been established widely that some people are denied access to participate in sporting activities because of gender or religious affiliations (Agergaard, 2016; Dagkas *et al.*, 2011; Laar *et al.*, 2019) [2, 13, 31]. Religion has been found to influence the culture of any society. As far as impediments arising through religion and culture in sporting activities are concerned, it is on record that Islam has more demur to the way sport is organised than other religions (Laar *et al.*, 2019) [31]. The beliefs of Islam are specific about the clothing that must be worn by women when they may be seen by men and avoidance of association of sexes (Coakley & Pike, 2014) [10]. While the extant literature on barriers and motivators to physical activities has focused on Muslim communities in the developed world, little attention has been given to the challenges encountered by Muslim children in developing countries. It is, therefore, important to examine barriers and motives to participation in physical activity among Muslim children in developing countries. In this study, the purpose is to investigate motives and barriers to sports participation among Muslim children aged (9-15) years in a developing country (Ghana).

### Literature review

Literature available from the 1990s has exposed areas of challenges between cultural practices of Islam and physical education in schools in the western world (Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993; Benn and Pfister, 2013; De Knop *et al.*, 1996) [5, 8]. Despite the benefits of physical activity to the individual, situational factors that consider the participating environment is debatable, for example, the dress code and gender arrangements (Dagkas & Benn, 2006) [11, 12]. Samara *et al.*, (2015) [39] concluded that lack of physical facilities and motivation poses a threat to female participation in physical activities among young Saudi students but not the anticipated lack of knowledge and restrictions from families and societies. Does this mean that Muslim communities are not provided with facilities that promote physical activities? This particular issue is relevant because participants have identified barriers and motivators of physical activity different in their home countries and their current place of abode (Barnes & Almasy, 2005; Mohamed *et al.*, 2014) [4, 34]. Regarding this, it is relevant to examine barriers and motivators among people in different geographical locations to propose appropriate interventions that can accommodate the needs of the residents. In the present research, the emphasis is on people living in deprived communities in a developing country who can have challenges with access to sports facilities.

Another key area that impacts the way sports are organised and seeks to reduce participation especially among women is religion (Peiser, 2000) [37]. Klein (2007) [28] asserted that many Muslims perceived sports to be prohibited for women and girls. In their study, Dagkas and Benn (2006) [11, 12] concur that sporting activities for both sexes, religious and cultural barriers, dress code for playing, inadequate resources and the general perception of local people towards women's sport were some other identified barriers to women participation in

sporting activities. Di-Capua (2005) [15] applauds that the fusing of sexes and unavailability of Islamic dress codes for sport accounts for the reasons Muslim academicians dislike and condemn the way Muslim females participate in such activities. Maxwell *et al.*, (2013) [33] supported this assertion when they maintained that there is a range of practices that improve social inclusion among Muslim females' participation in physical activities such as flexible dress codes and the availability of Islamic sportswear; detaching females from males at training and the availability of female coaches and referees among others. In the Christian perspective, Fitzgibbons (2015) [19] contends that Catholicism criticised excessive participation in sports as it can result in a loss in family relations. Participation in sporting activities damages married life among Catholics and impedes the family's time and joint activities (Fitzgibbons 2015) [19]. Therefore, an individual's religious beliefs or cultural background can affect the decision to participate regularly in sporting activities. For instance, in a game like rugby, drinking is considered a common culture and therefore, non-drinkers may see it as weird to join (Moran 2014) [36]. In our study, the participants are children in Muslim communities dominated by the Islamic religion and can, therefore, encounter similar barriers.

Religion can influence people's participation in certain sporting activities even at the international level. Some sporting activities (athletics) dress codes expose most of the body which contradicts the religious belief. This accounted for the reason why only three women from Muslim countries took part in events at the 2012 Olympics (Hanley, 2013) [22]. Islam has a lot of effects on participation in sporting activities. In Pakistan for example, many religious academicians discourage female engagement in sporting activities at public places and when they involve a mixture of sexes. Iqbal and Rajput (2008) [23] considered it a shameful and immoral act if females compete publicly with males in any sporting activity. Notwithstanding, Islam does not condemn such activities, as long as women are in proper attire and there is no intermingling of the sexes. A supporting study was by Agergaard (2016) [2] who provided a counter-narrative by focusing on Muslim girls who practice their religion and sports. In recommendation to the challenges, Dagkas *et al.*, (2011) [11, 12] opined that flexibility of approach, collaborative decisions and situation-demand policies were most desirable for supporting the involvement of Muslim girls in physical education and school sport.

Other studies have identified some barriers to children's physical activity. Glazebrook *et al.*, (2009) [20] examined asthma as a barrier to children's physical activity and concluded that asthma was the predictor of barriers to physical activity participation in children followed by younger age. The implication from the study was those children suffering from asthma are likely to become obese as a result of physical inactivity. Shields *et al.*, (2011) [40] in a systematic review of perceived barriers and facilitators among children with disabilities confirmed that inadequate knowledge and skills, activities preferred by the child, fear, parental influence, negative perception to a disability, inadequate facilities, challenges with transport, inadequate staff and cost involved in participation poses as barriers to participation. On the other hand, health benefits, practising skills, interaction with friends, support from the family, accessibility to facilities, the closeness of location, better avenues, the skill level of the staff and access to information were the reported facilitators. Chiu *et al.*, (2015) carried out a similar topic among young Malaysians using a cross-sectional

survey and confirmed that physical fitness, stress reduction, health improvement, proper use of leisure time and becoming active individuals were the motives for sports participation. In contrast, lack of time, lack of interest, weather conditions, health challenges and lack of facilities were identified as barriers in the study. These studies have highlighted motives and barriers that sports stakeholders should be aware of to devise appropriate strategies to improve participation in physical activities.

In Ghana, barriers and motivators to sports participation among the youths in communities are least researched. The Muslim communities are perceived to have similar beliefs with the outside world because Islam as a religion has universal doctrines. However, geographical location and other factors such as the weather, available facilities and cost of living can affect sports participation in a given population (Barnes & Almasy, 2005; Mohamed *et al.*, 2014) [4, 34]. This brings the question of the type of barriers Muslim youths in Ghana encounter and the corresponding motivators to sports participation. Considering this, the current study intends to examine barriers and motives for sports participation among children (9-15) in Muslim communities and to then consider how those barriers might best be addressed and how-to nature their motives in sports participation.

The study will be drawn from self-determination theory (Gagne & Deci, 2005). This theory posits that individual possess psychological needs for autonomy (psychological freedom), competence (enhancement of one's abilities and skill) and connectedness (meaningful connections with others) and once they are achieved, individuals feel motivated (Gunasekare, 2016) [21]. Self-determination theory (SDT) has proved that the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motives in controlling behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2005), identification (e.g., Consciously valuing a goal) and intrinsic motivations (e.g., succeeding at challenges, experiencing enjoyment) determines physical activity participation (Bauman *et al.*, 2012). There is evidence of studies on this topic in different parts of the world (Buckworth & Dishman, 2007; Jaarsma *et al.*, 2014; Maxwell *et al.*, 2013) [7, 24, 25, 33], however, little is done in the Ghanaian perspectives.

In line with this, the purpose of the current study is to identify barriers to voluntary sports participation that are faced by children in Muslim communities and examine the motivators that can assist to increase participation using the Ghanaian sample. The following are the research questions:

1. What are the barriers to sports participation among Muslim children aged 9-15 years?
2. What type of motivators can assist to overcome those barriers to sports participation among children in Ghanaian Muslim communities?
3. How can gender influence sports participation among children in Ghanaian Muslim communities?

The findings from this study will assist stakeholders to identify and remove barriers that affect Muslim youth from participation in physical activities and recognise their motivation for involvement. This can assist to design programmes that can encourage and sustain their interest in sporting activities.

## Methods

### Samples

The sample for the study was made up of young Ghanaian Muslim children between the ages of 9-15 years. A total of 572 children were selected to participate in the study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select only Muslim

children in schools because of their perceived rich experience in the study. To promote diversity in the sample, the participants were recruited in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and class/level.

### Instrument

A survey questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection. The questionnaire to measure barriers to sports participation was adapted from Mohammedi and Jarani's (2017) work that tested similar variables among university members. The reliability of the items in the questionnaire reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.904. The stem for the items reads; "rate how you are likely to encounter the following barriers when participating in physical activity by selecting from a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to (5) strongly agree" The items on motives were adopted from Rasinaho *et al.*, (2007) [38] questionnaire used to measure motives to participate in physical activity among older adults. The items were modified to make them relevant for young people in Muslim communities in Ghana and to make them age-specific (9-15) years. The factors that were adopted include; disease management, health maintenance, positive experiences related to exercise, positive attitudes to and knowledge about the benefits of exercise, good pastime, social contacts and suitable environment, self-expression and self-confidence. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: the first section requested information on demographic profile and included items on age, gender, ethnicity, class or level and type of sport interested in participating. The next section examined barriers to participate in physical activity among the youths while the last section was on motivators.

### Data collection procedure

A letter detailing information about the study was sent to a total of five Muslim schools in a district in the Ashanti Region. An onsite survey was conducted at both primary and junior high levels of the selected schools with the help of trained enumerators. The training of the enumerators lasted for a day in one of the selected schools. The purpose of the study was well explained to the participants who were all teachers. Informed consent was generated and send to parents of the participants to sign before the data collection exercise. Before the questionnaire were administered, the participants filled an informed consent form and only those who agreed participated in the study. The questionnaire was administered during the last periods in most of the schools and lasted for a total of 45 minutes. In some of the schools, the trained enumerators administered the questionnaire among the students. The questionnaire was read and explained to each of the participants before they pick their choices. The data collection exercise took place from the beginning of February to the end of July 2021.

### Data analysis

IBM Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences version 26 was used for the data analyses. The demographic information of the participants was analysed descriptively using percentages and frequency counts. Cronbach alpha was applied to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the items. The means and standard deviations were measured to determine the most potent barriers and motivators to Muslims' children participation in physical activities.

### Findings

Demographic information of the participants can be found in table 1.

**Table 1:** Demographic background of the participants.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	180	31.5%
Female	392	68.5%
Total	572	100%
Hometown location		
North	270	47.2%
Middle	204	35.7%
South	97	17.0%
Missing	1	0.2%
Total	572	100%
Age		
9-10 years	151	26.4%
11-12 years	163	28.5%
13-14 years	145	25.3%
15 years	113	19.8%
Total	572	100%
Level		
Lower Primary	57	10.0%
Upper Primary	116	20.3%
Junior High	399	69.8%
Total	572	100%

Based on the results of the Cronbach Alpha, the internal reliability of the 54 items was 0.93. However, due to low Cronbach Alphas, social contacts = 0.44, suitable environment = 0.52, self-expression, 0.43 and disease

management = 0.60 were rejected for further analysis. The means, standard deviations and alphas of all items and factors are displayed below (table 2).

**Table 2:** Mean, Standard deviation and Cronbach alpha.

Factors	Items	M	S.D.	$\alpha$
Personal barriers	Having unpleasant experience and the lack of sufficient skills in sport	3.8	1.1	0.79
	Lack of knowledge of the benefits of exercise and fitness programme	3.9	1.2	
	Tense, hard and boring of sporting activities	3.8	1.2	
	Physical weakness	3.9	1.1	
	To be busy and not having enough time to exercise	3.8	1.2	
Family barriers	Family negative attitude towards sport activities	3.7	1.2	0.76
	Existence many responsibilities and obligations of the family	4.0	0.9	
	Family lack of consensus about proposed hours of sports activities	3.8	1.2	
	Lack of family agreed to participate in sports trips or competitions	3.9	1.1	
	Lack of mobility and physical inactivity family members	3.8	1.1	
Cultural barriers	Lack of consistent sports coverage with religious observance	3.8	1.1	0.70
	Lack of considering the development of sports culture in the workplace	3.8	1.2	
	Fears of damage to religious beliefs	3.8	1.2	
	The restriction to wear sports clothes from living place to sport place	4.0	1.0	
	Failure to inform the public about the benefits of exercise	3.7	1.2	
	Physical activity by corporate media	4.0	1.0	
Social barriers	Negative attitude of colleagues towards exercise	3.8	1.2	0.77
	Lack of access to skilled trainers	3.7	1.2	
	Lack of participation of friends and classmates in sports activities	3.7	1.3	
	Discouraging the exercise by the school administration	3.7	1.3	
	Lack of familiarity with diversity health promotion	3.7	1.2	
Psycho barriers	Negative impression and shyness	3.7	1.3	0.66
	Fear of being judged by others when participating in physical activities	3.8	1.2	
	Having unpleasant feeling when sweating	3.7	1.2	
	Lack of motivation to exercise	3.7	1.2	
	Having the unfavourable feeling to sport spaces	3.7	1.2	
Disease manage	Exercise reduces my pain	3.9	1.0	0.60
	Exercise help with disease management	3.7	1.2	
	Health care personnel advise me to exercise	3.9	1.1	
Positive exp.	Exercise increases my energy	4.1	1.0	0.71
	Exercise feels nice	4.0	1.0	
	Exercise is fun	4.0	1.0	
	Physical effort is enjoyable	3.9	1.0	
	Exercise is uplifting	3.7	1.2	
	Exercise is a good pastime	4.1	1.0	
Positive attitudes	Exercise keeps me good physical condition	4.1	1.0	0.71
	Exercise prevents me from getting lazy	4.1	1.0	
	Exercise relaxes me	4.0	1.0	

	Exercise keeps me young and delay ageing	4.1	1.0	
	Exercise helps me think clearly	4.1	1.0	
Social contacts	I meet friends when exercising	4.0	1.0	0.43
	Exercise helps me get to know new people	4.0	1.0	
Suitable env.	It is nice to exercise in good weather	4.1	1.0	0.52
	My neighbourhood is suitable for exercising	4.0	1.0	
	There are good exercise facilities near my home	4.0	1.0	
Self exp.	Exercise is affordable	4.0	1.0	0.43
	I can express myself with exercise	4.0	1.0	
	Exercise gives me self confidence	4.1	1.0	
	I enjoy nature when exercising outdoors	4.1	1.0	

From the table, and based on descriptive statistics, it could be observed that children from Muslim communities' rate all the barriers above 3.0 out of 5.0. This indicates that all the factors are potential barriers to participate in physical activities.

**Table 3:** The most important barriers to sports participation among Muslims children.

Factor	Mean	Standard deviation
Personal barriers	3.82	0.86
Family barriers	3.83	0.81
Cultural barriers	3.82	0.72
Social barriers	3.73	0.91
Psycho barriers	3.72	0.80
Grand mean		3.78

From the table, the most potent barrier to voluntary sport participation was family barriers ( $M = 3.83$ ;  $S.D. = 0.81$ ) followed by personal and cultural barriers. Again, all the barriers tested reported higher means of more than 3.50 out of a possible 5.0.

**Table 4:** The most important motivation to spots participation among Muslim children.

Factor	Mean	Standard deviation
Positive experience	3.96	0.80
Positive attitude	4.11	0.64
Grand mean	4.03	

**Table 6:** Motivational factors according to gender.

Positive experiences	Mean	Standard deviation	t	Degree of freedom	
Male	4.1	0.5			
Female	3.9	1.0	5.954	417.969	0.000
Positive attitude					
Male	4.2	0.5			
Female	4.1	1.0	2.216	446.387	0.000

This study further revealed that Muslim girls are less motivated to participate in sporting activities than Muslim boys.

## Discussion

While there are extant works on voluntary participation in sports in different parts of the world, little literature exists in the Ghanaian context. Responses from Muslim youths aged (9-15) from five schools selected in Ghana were enough to fill this gap in the literature. Similar to the findings from earlier studies (Buckworth & Dishman, 2007; Jaarsma *et al.*, 2014; Maxwell *et al.*, 2013) [7, 24, 25, 33] the current research has unveiled that family barriers, cultural barriers, personal barriers, social barriers and psychological barriers deter Muslim children from voluntary participation in sporting activities in a different setting-Ghanaian community. Again, Muslim boys perceived more barriers and were found to be more motivated to participate in sports than girls.

The above table revealed that Muslim youths in Ghana have a positive attitude as a more potent motivator to voluntary participation in physical activity despite the other factors reporting a mean higher than 3.50.

**Table 5:** Barriers based on gender.

Family barrier	Mean	Standard deviation	t	Degree of freedom	p
Male	4.1	0.4	8.266	566.109	0.000
Female	3.7	1.0			
Personal barrier					
Male	4.3	0.4	11.962	565.327	0.000
Female	3.6	1.0			
Cultural barriers					
Male	4.2	0.4	10.887	552.65	0.000
Female	3.6	1.0			
Social barriers					
Male	4.1	1.0	8.733	442.052	0.000
Female	3.5	1.0			
Psychological barrier					
Male	4.0	1.0	5.33	386.304	0.000
Female	3.6	1.0			

From the above findings, it is obvious that males have higher means and standard deviations for barriers to participate in sporting activities than females.

The topmost barrier to voluntary sport participation among Muslim youths in Ghana to voluntary sport participation was family barriers. This factor was mentioned as the most perceived barrier to participation by Arzu *et al.* (2006) [3] who asserted that the most important barriers to physical activity in Turkish university students were family and social environment. The researchers posited that family prioritised education ahead of academics. Again, parents expressed fear that participates in physical activities can aggravate the asthmatic conditions of their wards (Kornblit *et al.* 2017). However, this study was limited to children suffering from asthma and not the general population. Family activities were among the four barriers considered most important among high school students (Allison *et al.*, 1999) [1]. This study is supporting family barriers as a challenge to sport participation among Muslim youths in Ghana.

Cultural barriers which include religion as an important factor to voluntary sport participation among youths in Muslim

communities have been identified in several works of literature (Agergaard, 2016; Dagkas *et al.*, 2011; Hanley, 2013; Iqbal and Rajput, 2008; Laar *et al.*, 2019) [2, 13, 22, 23, 31]. Findings from this study portray that religion impacts sport participation among Muslim youths in Ghana. Surprisingly, other studies identified that religion and culture are not barriers to voluntary participation in sports (Tekin, 2010) [41].

An important finding of this study is that Muslim boys have more barriers than girls but are more motivated to participate in sports. This could be that boys are more likely to participate in sports that is why there have more barriers than girls. Again, by being willing to participate in more sporting activities, they are likely to be more motivated. The household chores performed by girls in developing countries could make them more engaged thereby, hampering their participation in sports enabling them to experience fewer barriers. Once the girls do hardly participate in sports, they are less motivated to participate in sports. However, it is on record that the majority of females experience many barriers to sports participation when they move to different levels (Laar *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, this study should have examined if the level of the participants could determine types of barriers and motivation to voluntary sports participation.

A prominent area that this study did not address is whether facilities are barriers to sports participation. For a developing country, this could have assisted to make recommendations to stakeholders to improve sports infrastructure in the country at the community level. In Ghana, one of the challenges to sport participation is that the government and other stakeholders pay little attention to develop the sport at the community level. It is recently, that the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) as part of its corporate social responsibility roles in building stadia at the community level to promote sport among the youths.

### Limitations and Strengths

Due to inadequate resources and funding, the sample size is limited. A single district selected for a whole study from one region did not give a clear picture of barriers and motivations to voluntary sport participation in Ghana. Again, some of the barriers selected for the study excluded key barriers such as facilities and equipment. The study should have been rigid if participants were allowed to mention state the barriers and motives for voluntary sports participation in a qualitative approach before using the responses to develop a questionnaire in a hybrid method. Despite these shortfalls, this study is the first to examine barriers and motives to sport participation among young Muslims in Ghana. Again, this study compared barriers and motives in terms of gender for Muslim youths in developing countries.

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