

## Socio-cultural predictors of female participation in sports in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

**Background:** Women have faced barriers that have discouraged their progress in the level of participation in sport across all the countries and Nigeria is not an exception. This study examined the socio-cultural factors influencing women participation in sports Ikwo local governments, Ebonyi state.

**Methods:** The descriptive survey design was used. The population of the study comprised 200 female athletes in Ikwo local governments which covered twenty (20) wards. They was no need for sampling hence the entire population was used for the study. A self-structured questionnaire was employed in collecting data from the respondents. Data collected were analyze descriptively using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations.

**Results:** The result of the mean and standard deviations of Social factors ( $\bar{x} = 2.71 \pm SD=0.56$ ), and cultural factors ( $\bar{x} = 2.85 \pm SD=0.53$ ), indicated that both social and cultural factors predicts/prevent female participation in sports in Ikwo local government area, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The result of the null-hypotheses tested shows that there was a significant difference in the class level ( $F = 4.306$ ;  $P = 0.003 < 0.05$ ) and marital status ( $F = 3.976$ ;  $P = 0.021 < 0.05$ ) of the respondents. However, age of the respondents did not differ ( $F = 0.330$ ;  $P = 0.719 > 0.05$ ) on the socio-cultural predictors of female participation in sports.

**Conclusion:** The Government, physical and health educators and other relevant stakeholders should organize community based education or enlightenment campaign in various communities in the area and Nigeria in general on the importance of sports participation among women.

**Keywords:** Sports; Socio-Cultural; Predictors; Female Participation; Ebonyi State

### 1. Introduction

Sport is an integral part of physical education which involves training of the mind and body through physical activities. It involves all form of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels. Hence, the maintenance of physically active leisure-oriented lifestyles has become increasingly important in developed societies (Van Deventer, 2021). Involvement in sport and other sport related activities is significant as it leads to

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competence in the physical world of sport and can also extend to the real life situation (Grahm and Stigsdotter, 2003). Consequently, it offers important opportunities to enhance health and wellbeing as well as cultivate cultural diversity and promote social inclusion (Taylor and Doherty, 2022). Sport is a way of life, and a means to achieving and maintaining healthy living (Li 2021). Granger (2017); Pawlowski, Downward and Rasciute (2011); and Bull (2020) noted that sports participation is an effective way of improving mental wellbeing.

In contrast to the expectation of sport participation for all, women experience role conflict and this is reflected in the attitude of the general public regarding female athletic participation. Adler (2008) in his study explained that, today as in the past most female members of the society have fewer opportunities in life compared to their male counterparts as they are expected to run a home and bring up children. Women have less free time in their choice of leisure activities and they are more restricted than males. Women's participation in sport in Nigeria has for a long time been relatively low compared with men due to differential treatment based on socio-cultural roles and expectations (Ogidan, Onifade, Ologele, 2013). Consequently, the traditional images of gender in Nigeria have often worked against women's participation in sport (Ogidan, Onifade, Ologele, 2013).

In many Nigerian communities, traditional perceptions of females as inferior to males continue to prevail as many people invoke the preservation of Africa culture to justify the subordination of female. As a result, males usually dominate females in the political, religious, economic, academic and domestic spheres (Ashrafy, 2018). Female participation in sport has come a long way. Female's participation entails the provision of equal opportunity to female to take part in sports activity. It implies quantitative and qualitative participation of females in sports. Efforts have been and are being made in getting more females to participate in sports. However, a lot more effort is still required to generate greater female participation in the world of sport (LeUnes& Nation, 2018). Women and girls have traditionally been, and continue to be underrepresented as both sport participants (Borgers, Vanreusel, Lefebvre and Scheerder, 2018; Strandbu, Bakken, and Sletten, 2019; Shull, Dowda, Saunders, McIver, and Pate, 2020) and in non-playing roles.

Previous researchers have observed that females are poorly represented in sports as players, coaches, advisers and as team administrators. In Nigeria, males and boys participate in organized community based sport at nearly twice the rate of females and girls (Eime, Melanie, Harvey, Westerbeek, 2020). Analysis of participation in 10 major sports [Nigeria volleyball, basketball, handball, football (soccer), gymnastics, hockey, badminton, long jump, swimming, and tennis] with a combined number of 844,992 participants aged 4–100 years showed that the participation rate for females and girls was 10% compared to 17% for males and boys. A study of youth sport in Oshodu (Lagos) also reported that participation in sports clubs was significantly lower for girls compared to boys aged 16–18 years (Strandbu, Bakken and Sletten, 2019). The overall participation rate for males and boys was higher (17.1%) than for females and girls (9.8%). The participation rates across the lifespan by sex. Males and boys had higher participation rates than females and girls across all ages. The highest difference in the absolute participation rate was for ages 10–14 (74.0% males and boys, 53.1% females and girls). However, for several age groups within the early to middle age (20–39 years), the male's participation rate was over double that of females.

The under-representation of females in sports remains an issue of national concern. According to Adeyanju (2009), observation of who is actively involved in sports in Nigeria generally indicated that males constitute the greatest number either as players, coaches and administrators. This is an indication that though there had been transformations in female's sports in Nigeria, great changes are yet to be observed. In essence females' participation in sports in Nigeria is not yet adequate. Babatunde, (2021) and Okonkwo, (2017), have reported that culture and tradition is significant predictors of female participation in sports in Nigeria. It is against this background that this pertinent question is raised. What are the socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports in Ebonyi State. Based on the reviewed literature and to the best knowledge of the present researchers, no study of this nature has been conducted in Ebonyi state. Thus, there is need to investigate the socio-cultural factors predicting sports female participation in Ebonyi state and to the society at large to ensure gender equality in sports. The objective of the Study was to:

- Investigate the cultural predictors of female participation in sports in Ikwo local government area of Ebonyi State.
- Determine the social predictors of female participation in sports in ikwo local government area of Ebonyi State.

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## 2. Material and methods

### 2.1. Research Design

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The design enabled the researcher to gather data without any manipulation of variables in determining the socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports. The

population of this study comprised 200 female athletes in Ikwo local governments which covered twenty (20) wards. They involved all the female students in different academic levels (Ebonyi State Sports Council, 2022). There was no sampling technique used. Thus, all the 200 female athletes from different academic levels in different secondary schools were used since they were of manageable size.

## 2.2. Instrument for Data Collection

The study made use of a self-structured questionnaire titled: Female Participation in Sports (FPIS), which served as the instrument for data collection. It was made of two parts. The first part consists of demographic information of the respondents. The second part of the instrument consist of a 42 item questions which sought information on the socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports in Ikwo local government using the 4-point likert scale, the participants were supposed to indicate their options by putting a tick (✓) in the appropriate spaces provided. The instrument was given face and content validata by two lectures from the department of Physical and Health Education and 1 lecturer from measurement and evaluation programme. To establish reliability of the instrument, a total of 20copies of the questionnaire was administered to 20 students that are not athletes. Then, using the date collected, a Cronbach's-alpha was used to test the reliability. The reliability was obtained using total of 42 items. It shows correlation between the two sets of scores yielded coefficient of 0.928 and 0.939 respectively. The reliability coefficient was considered appropriate as judged by a standard of 0.8 (Coolican, 2009).

## 2.3. Method of Data Collection

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the respondents after proper explanations on the aim and focus of the study. The respondents were asked to carefully make responses after which the researcher collected the responded instruments on the spot. Out of the (200) administered, only one hundred and forty nine (149) were retrieved and used for data analysis.

## 2.4. Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyze descriptively using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations. Descriptive statistics were performed to give full picture of the data and was organized and presented in tables and bar charts. The response options for socio-cultural factors predicting sports participation, which is weighed as “Strongly Agree SA” (4 points), “Agree A” (3 points), ‘Disagree D’ (2 points) and “Strongly Disagree SD” (1 Point), was analyzed using mean and standard deviation since the data were interval data. The limit of numbers was used to interpret the data. This implies that the ranges (lower and upper limits) were created for the interpretation of mean scores as follows: 3.50-4.00 = SA, 2.50-3.49 = A, 2.00-2.49 = D and 1.00-1.99 = SD. The item and cluster mean scores were interpreted on this basis. The criterion mean was derived by adding, four, three, two and one and dividing by four. Hence, a criterion means of 2.50 was used in taking decision for socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in ports. Any item mean that is equal to or greater than the criterion mean was considered as predicting female participation in ports in Ebonyi state.

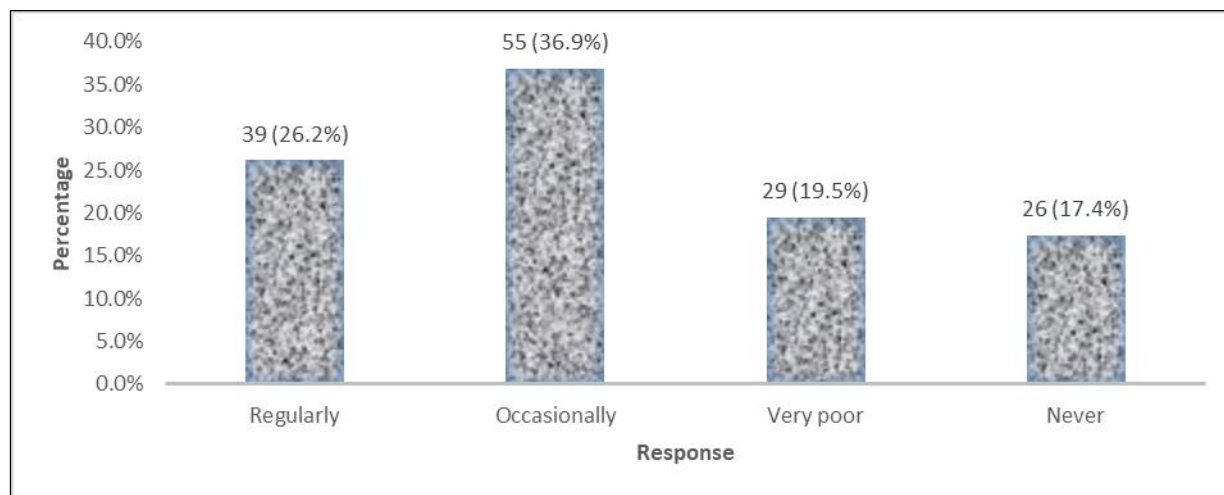
## 3. Results

**Table 1** Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (N = 149)

Sociodemographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-21year	72	48.3
22 - 24years	54	36.2
25 & above	23	15.4
Academic level		
100	25	16.8
200	31	20.8
300	37	24.8
400	50	33.6
500	6	4.0

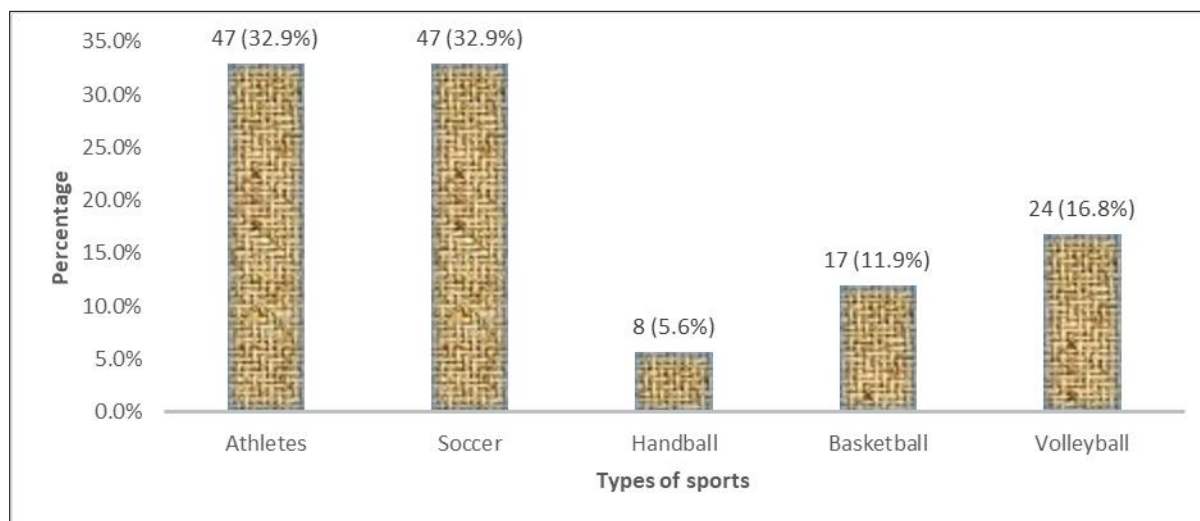
Marital Status		
Single	105	70.5
Married	25	16.8
Others (Cohabiting, separated, and divorced)	19	12.8

The socio-demographic characteristics of the primary school pupils were presented in table 1. Result shows that the majority of the students 72 (48.3%) aged between 18 – 21years, and 54 (36.2%) aged between 22 – 24years. Greater proportion 50 (33.6%) of the students were in 400level, and 37 (24.8%) were in 300 level. Greater number 105 (70.5%) were single, and 25 (16.8%) were married, while 19 (12.8%) were in other marital status such as cohabiting, separated, and divorced.



**Figure 1** Bar chart showing women participation in sports among the participants (N = 149)

As shown in figure 1, on the frequency of women participation in sports, the majority 55 (36.9%) were occasionally, 39 (26.2%) were regularly, and 26 (17.4%) of females never participates in sports. More so, figure 2 shows that 47 (32.9%) each participate in athletes, and soccer. Others 24 (16.8%) participate in volleyball, 17 (11.9%) participate in basketball, and 8 (5.6%) were into handball.



**Figure 2** Bar chart showing sports participated by students among the participants (N = 149)

**Table 2** Cultural factors predicting female participation in sports (N = 149)

Cultural factors	Mean±Std
Some cultures considers as taboo for female participation in sports	2.95±1.02
Cultural practice forbidding females not to expose themselves beyond the knee and elbow affects their participation in sport	3.01±0.90
Some cultural laws discourage females participation in sports	3.07±0.99
Customs and traditions of feminine role discourages females from participating in sports	2.88±0.88
Unequal exposure of the female child into sports discourages their participation in sports	3.09±0.86
Cultural beliefs have a great impact on the involvement of females in sports	2.91±0.83
Female participation in sports is denied by cultural traditions	2.76±0.98
Cultural beliefs makes females think not to attain the levels of their male counterparts in sports participation	2.69±1.01
Females that participate in sports are not well cultured	2.34±1.13
Overall Mean	2.85±0.53

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree. Note: Mean  $\geq$  2.5 is used as rejection.

Data in Table 2 shows overall mean scores and standard deviations ( $\bar{x} = 2.85 \pm SD=0.53$ ) of cultural factors predicting female participation in sports. This indicated that cultural factors predicts female participation in sports in Ikwo local government area. Thus, the Overall Mean  $\bar{x} = 2.85$  is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. The Table further indicated that all the items on cultural factors were greater or equal to the criterion mean of 2.50, except three item mean which were less than the criterion mean of 2.50 as indicated in the Table 2.

**Table 3** Social factors predicting female participation in sports (N = 149)

Social factors	Mean±Std
Not rewarding outstanding performance of female athletes discourage females from <u>participating</u> in sports	3.06±1.02
Societal assumptions of female's inherent weakness affects females participation in sports	2.89±0.80
Societal belief that females cant lead, affects females participation in sports	2.77±1.00
Being highly orientated to societal condemnation of sports attire affects females participation in sports	2.72±0.88
Societal condemnations of females to subordinate status affects their participation in sports	2.66±1.02
Female who participate in sports should expect harassment from the males	2.37±1.12
Females are believed to be too weak for sports	2.49±1.06
Overall Mean	2.71±0.56

Data in Table 3 shows overall mean scores and standard deviations ( $\bar{x} = 2.71 \pm SD=0.56$ ) of Social predictors of female participation in sports. This indicated that social factors predicts female participation in sports in Ikwo local government area. Thus, the Overall Mean  $\bar{x} = 2.71$  is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. The table further indicated that all the questions on social factors except two item mean such as "Female who participate in sports should expect harassment from the males" (mean score = 2.37), and "Females are believed to be too weak for sports" (mean score = 2.49), predicts female participation in sports.

### 3.1. Test of Hypotheses

3.1.1. *H01: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports by age.*

**Table 4** T-test Result of socio-cultural predictors of female participation in sports by age.

Age Group	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	F	P-Value
18-21year	72	2.86	0.39	0.330	0.719
22 - 24years	54	2.81	0.36		
25 & above	23	2.82	0.26		
Total	149	2.83	0.36		

The result from table 4 shows that there is no significant difference on the weighted mean response of socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports by age group in Ikwo ( $F = 0.330$ ;  $P = 0.719 > 0.05$ ) hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.

3.1.2. *H02: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports by class of the students.*

**Table 5** T-test Result of socio-cultural predictors of female participation in sports by class of the students.

Class	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	F	P-Value
100	25	2.86	0.30	4.306	0.003
200	31	2.91	0.39		
300	37	2.97	0.41		
400	50	2.68	0.29		
500	6	2.77	0.16		
Total	149	2.83	0.36		

The result from table 5 shows that there is a significant difference on the weighted mean response of socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports by class of the students ( $F = 4.306$ ;  $P = 0.003 < 0.05$ ) hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

### 3.2. Test of Hypotheses H03: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports by class of the students.

**Table 6** T-test Result of socio-cultural predictors of female participation in sports by marital status of the students.

Marital status	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	F	P-Value
Single	105	2.78	0.33	3.976	0.021
Married	25	2.95	0.42		
Others (Cohabiting, separated, and divorced)	19	2.98	0.41		
Total	149	2.83	0.36		

The result from table 6 shows that there is a significant difference on the weighted mean response of socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports by marital status of the respondents ( $F = 3.976$ ;  $P = 0.021 < 0.05$ ) hence, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

#### 4. Discussion

This study investigated socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports in Ebonyi state. The findings of the study indicated that socio-cultural factors predicts female participation in sports in Ikwo local government area of Ebonyi State. The outcome of the study is quite encouraging as it presents crucial information that could be instrumental in designing new programmes or strengthening the existing ones in regarding maintaining and observing the rights of women and equality between males and females and gender discrimination especially in sporting activities (Chaput, Willumsen, Bull, F. *et al.* 2020). The present study was in consonance with the study conducted by Ogidan, Onifade, Ologele, (2013), who reported that socio- cultural factors influences females' participation in sports.

Further, the findings from cultural factors such as societal assumptions of female's inherent weakness and not rewarding outstanding performance of female athletes among others predicts female participation in sports. The findings is similar to the study by Adeyanju (2011) who pointed out that, physiological myths is strong, in which many people still believe that physical exercise by women has a detrimental effect on their reproductive organs and women lose their femininity through active participation in sports. It is also a pointer to the assertion by Ikhioya (1999) who reported that, in most communities in Nigeria, particularly in the rural areas, cultural beliefs and attitudes had strong influences on low participation of women in sports. The present study is also in consonance with the study by Babatunde, (2021) and Okonkwor, (2017), who revealed that culture and tradition is significant predictors of female participation in sports in Nigeria.

Further, the present study also indicated that social factors predicts female participation in sports in Ikwo local government area. This findings supported the study by Adeyanju (2011) who observed that, social factors which exert pressure on women through the immediate family, community, religion, media, peer groups and other sources of socialization to reinforce expected behaviour and teaching of gender roles. This result is in agreement with the view of Ajadi, (2019), who pointed out that in some part of the country women are forbidden from exposing themselves beyond the knees and elbow and such women find it difficult to participate in sporting activities especially those sporting activities that requires wearing of shorts skirts and sleeveless vest. In addition, Gary (2010) and (Ajadi, 2019) in their separate studies identified clothing as a determinant of negative attitude towards sports in the society as most people especially female athletes don't want to conform to sportswear due to the fact that their bodies will be exposed during training (Ajadi, 2019).

The result of the hypotheses tested shows that there was significant difference in the mean responses of class level and marital status of the respondents regarding the socio-cultural factors predicting female participation in sports. However, age of the respondents did not differ. The finding of the present study opposed the study who reported that women who participated in sport were younger, thus, the rates of sport participation is declined with age (Pharr, Lough, and Terencio 2020). The current study is in line with the studies who reported significant differences in all sociodemographic variables tested among female participants in sports such as age, marital status, race/ethnicity and level of education (Tanaka, and Seals, 2008; Pharr, Lough, and Terencio 2020).

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#### 5. Conclusion

Sports participation is a means of bringing people of different culture and creeds together, it serves as avenue for uniting people of different genders, ages, and religious affiliations, among others. However, the present study have found that some socio-cultural factors prevent female from participation in sports in Ikwo local government area of Ebonyi State. Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations as follows:

That the Parents and other family members should educate and support their female child and sibling to participate actively in sporting activity.

Government should provide enabling environment and fund for females sports, initiate the setting up of structures that would be able to reach out to the women that are in the rural areas and outskirts of the cities.

Government, physical and health educators and other relevant stakeholders should organize community based education or enlightenment in various communities in the area of the study and Nigeria in general on the importance of sports participation among women.

Government should create room for rewards and incentives for female's participants in various sporting activities to improve the interests and zeal for participation.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Acknowledgments*

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### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

The authors declare that there are no competing or potential conflicts of interest.

### *Statement of informed consent*

Written informed consent was obtained from all subjects before the study

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