

Are Non-Sports Women Empowered through Sports? The Context of Dhaka City

Khurshed Alam

Bangladesh Institute of Social Research (BISR), Bangladeshi

Sarmin Akther*

Bangladesh Institute of Social Research (BISR), Bangladeshi

Abstract

This paper deals with non-sports women's empowerment through women's sports in Bangladesh. The study was carried out in two phases, quantitative and qualitative. Under the quantitative phase, 120 non-sports and 80 sportswomen were interviewed through a semi-structured questionnaire. The qualitative phase of the study involved 18 respondents who volunteered to participate in in-depth interviews. The findings reveal the limitations imposed on the women in Bangladesh while participating in competitive sports. Non-sports women follow what might be called the *denial perspective* and the *demand perspective* which lead to low participation by women in sports. Second, contradicting other research findings, the study found that women from lower-income groups take part more in sports in Bangladesh. Third, women primarily participate in those kinds of sports in which male players of the country are performing well. Finally, women's sports have only a limited impact on the empowerment of non-sports women who are outside of those sports.

Key words

women's empowerment, women in sports, sanctioned inequality, denial perspective, demand perspective

Introduction

Nazmul Karim (1922–82), founding father of Bangladesh sociology, used to mention to his students that the types of sports Bangladeshi people play are those which do not require any cash. Perhaps that is why Kabaddi is the national sport

* Corresponding author

of Bangladesh. However, this sport was played and practiced only by men for a long time, until women began to take part in 2005 (Hoque, 2016). The state of football, basketball, archery, cricket, gymnastics, wrestling, handball, and many other sports are not different from Kabaddi. Women's participation in sports was for a long time mainly limited to their school and college premises.

Around the world, the conventional view is that women are not “naturally” suited to sports (Whiteside & Hardin, 2010), which often kept women invisible in this arena. Although it is evident from the numerous terracotta figures that have survived from antiquity that different forms of games were popular among the women from the Indian subcontinent, it was not institutionalized. The figures depict polo being played by aristocratic Chinese women while various sorts of ball games were also quite popular. Games resembling modern badminton were played by Asian women in the first century CE. In the Victorian era, many upper-middle-class women played golf, tennis, and field hockey, while boxing and wrestling were played by some women from the lower classes (Rowe, Thompson, Maguire, & Guttman, 2021).

However, as pointed out by Nair and Karthika (2018), it was in the late 1800s when women were allowed to participate in organized sports for the first time. Games not requiring a large amount of physical activity, like golf, croquet, and archery, began to become popular among women. The invention of the bicycle at the end of the nineteenth century revolutionized the participation of women in physical activities as their participation in sports was quite uncommon before this (Huggins & Randell, 2008). As a result, switching on television for sports programs or looking at sports books or magazines ended up with the story of male players (Hargreaves, 2002) where women became a fan of them.

These achievements of women have re-shaped existing gender roles and women are now regarded as more fit to participate in sports. They are becoming empowered physically, economically, and socially through enhancing their strength, income, and interaction. Studies on sports (Blinde, Taub, & Han, 1993; Bradshaw, 2002; Nair & Karthika, 2018) also show that sport and women's empowerment is intertwined. It differs from other sectors as it has some visible impacts on society and thereby contributes to increasing the confidence of other women who are not involved in this kind of activity.

In Bangladesh, women's sports have found a direction with the contribution of Lutfunnessa Haque Bakul, (Shamsuddin, 2015) popularly known as Bakul *Apa* (a Bengali term used to refer to elder sister), who won two gold medals in the 80-meter hurdles in the 1956 and 1958 National Olympic Games. To involve

more women in sports, she established Bangladesh Mohila Krira Sangha (BMKS) and the Bangladesh Women Sports Federation (Islam, 2012). In recognition of her efforts, she was awarded the National Sports Award in 1978 (Shamsuddin, 2015). However, despite such achievements and recognition, women's sport remained a debated issue in Bangladesh for a long time until more success stories were created by women in sports like football, cricket, and handball.

Meanwhile, considerable research has been pursued into women's empowerment through sport in different countries of the world, but there has been hardly any such research in Bangladesh, nor has the extent to which the empowerment of sportswomen influences other Bangladeshi women been studied. This study, therefore, is an attempt to assess the role of women's sports in the empowerment of non-sports women in Bangladesh, especially in Dhaka City.

Literature Review

Defining Women's Empowerment

Empowerment has been defined by many scholars (Gutierrez, 1990; Rappaport, 1984) as a process in which individuals from an underprivileged social group achieve control over their lives by developing their skills. Women's empowerment is described by Kabeer (2005) and Mosedale (2005) as the process by which women expand and reconstruct what they can be, do, and accomplish in a situation which they were denied previously.

Following Rahman (2013), Kabeer (2005), and Mosedale (2005), four indicators of women's empowerment were set for the present study: to be what they wanted to be, to do what they wanted to do, the ability to make a decision, and economic independence.

The process of women's empowerment usually takes place in various settings, such as formal education, feminist organizations, clubs, and religious and voluntary organizations (Rappaport, 1985; Stromquist, 1988). Their involvement with these types of organizations increases the women's role, thereby leading to empowerment.

Women's Empowerment through Sports

Sport may represent one arena in which women can gain valued qualities and abilities at the personal level (Cantor & Bernay, 1992). Two characteristics of sport

particularly suggest its empowering capability: first, the focus of sport on physicality and the body which can enhance women's understanding of their bodily potential (Lenskyj, 1986), and second, as the sport takes place in a competitive environment, women participants can develop skills that not only lead to success in sports (e.g., persistence, competitiveness) but can also be applied to a variety of life situations (Cantor & Bernay, 1992).

Hargreaves (2002) argued that sport provides a space in which women can renegotiate concepts of femininity and masculinity, challenge stereotypes that label women as weak and inferior, and demonstrate to their communities what they are capable of achieving. Other scholars like Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson (2000) identified that sports have the capability to break down the traditional gender norms and stereotypes, thereby increasing women's empowerment through sports. On a similar note, Blinde et al. (1993), Kane (1998), and Nelson (1994) argued that women would be able to come in contact with each other through the social network created by sports. As such, promoting girls' and women's involvement in sports is an important tool in gender equality and women's empowerment.

Bangladesh is no exception to this trend and sportswomen are becoming public figures: cricketer Jahanara Alam, footballer Sabina Khatun, sprinter Shirin Akter, weightlifter Mabia Akhter, table tennis player Zobera Rahman Linu, and archer Shyamoli Roy to name just a few. The limited studies conducted on women's sport in Bangladesh have found that sports have a long-term impact at both individual and community level (NUK, 2016; Shefali, 2014), and have empowered women by allowing them to challenge the discriminatory social norms and exhibit their sporting capabilities, thus creating an enabling environment for gender equality (Shefali, 2014). Their success stories have created a demand among women to take up sports as a profession in recent years (Karim, 2012).

Bangladeshi Sportswomen

In Bangladesh, women's participation in sports has started to rise significantly, particularly in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Today, the success stories of women's sports are highlighted on the front pages of the newspapers, such as the victories in the Women's Asia Cup T20I and SAFF U-15 Football Championship (Hoque, 2018a). The fact that Bangladesh's ICC (International Cricket Council) Global Women's Twenty20 International team is ranked ninth in the world (Hoque, 2018a) has also encouraged more women to get engaged in cricket. Football started gaining popularity among women in Bangladesh in 2011

when government-funded primary school tournaments took place in schools all over the country. Today, over one million women in Bangladesh play soccer as a result of this tournament (Hoque, 2018b).

The Bangladesh Women's Hockey team also gained popularity very recently after clinching sixth place in the Asia Hockey Cup in 2018 (Ullah, 2018). In swimming, Mahfuza Khatun Shila won two gold medals in the 12th South Asia Games held in 2016, while her gold medal made Mabia Akther Simanta the first female Bangladeshi gold medalist in weightlifting (Uddin, 2017). The achievements of the women's archery team have been highlighted by their getting to the semi-final of the 2017 Asian Archery Championship (Ullah, 2018), while women shooters won gold in the 2010 South Asian Games and silver in the 2016 Asian Airgun Championships ("Shooting team leaves", 2017).

Though women's participation in basketball is limited in Bangladesh compared to cricket and football, the women's basketball team has participated in various international events since the formation of the national women's basketball team in 2009, including the first South Asian Women's Basketball Championship in 2016 ("Gaining ground for women's basketball", 2018). Indeed, increased participation of women in sports from among non-sports women is a clear indication of their being inspired by women's sports which only a few decades ago were completely absent.

Researchers in this area admit that sports empower women who take part in them. However, the extent to which women's sports contribute to the empowerment of women who are not engaged in sports has not yet been studied with special reference to Bangladesh. The present study is intended to investigate whether non-sports women consider sports as an instrument of empowerment after observing the success of sportswomen. It mainly intends to answer three basic questions: a) do sportswomen have any impact on the empowerment of non-sports women? b) do non-sports women value sports as a means of empowerment? and c) how does society value women's sport?

Methodology

Research Method

For the present study, primary data were collected in two phases. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected from both sports and non-sports women on their socioeconomic status and the nature of their engagement in sports using a

semi-structured questionnaire. The second phase of the study was qualitative, where in-depth interviews were conducted with the respondents using a checklist. Dhaka City corporation area was purposively selected for this study due to time and resource constraints. Books, journal articles, newspapers, and other published documents were also reviewed through the internet for secondary data collection.

First Phase

Sample Selection. For quantitative data collection, two groups of women were chosen as respondents—sportswomen (group A) and non-sports women (group B). “Sportswomen” were those actively and professionally associated with physical sports (cricket, football, swimming, hockey, archery, etc.) and competing at national or international level. Women who did not match these criteria were termed “non-sports women.”

For group A, sportswomen were selected from 10 different sports in which they were primarily engaged and all were members of their respective national sports federations. In parallel to this, the immediate impact of sports is expected to be higher on the empowerment of women who are involved in pursuing education. For this reason, students aged from 15 to 24 were selected for group B following the definition of “youth” by UNICEF (2018) which covers college level. A total of 200 female respondents were interviewed in this phase.

To ensure representative participation, a Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) sampling technique was applied to determine the sample size of group A. Using the PPS method, the sample size was determined as 80 from 10 sports, namely: cricket ($n=23$), football ($n=12$), shooting ($n=12$), archery ($n=10$), swimming ($n=6$), handball ($n=6$), athletics ($n=5$), hockey ($n=4$), gymnastics ($n=1$), and tennis ($n=1$). After that, a Simple Random Sampling (SRS) method was used to select the respondents from each sport’s group.

For group B, the sample was determined by using a multi-stage cluster sampling method. At the first stage, two city corporations of Dhaka City (North and South) were taken as two clusters. Each of these clusters was divided into five zones. From the list of the colleges in these ten zones, one from each zone was selected through purposive sampling. In the case of two selected colleges, management did not allow researchers to conduct a survey and they were replaced by two other colleges from those zones. As a result, 120 students were interviewed with 12 students selected conveniently from each college.

Data Collection Technique. Two different semi-structured questionnaires were administered for face-to-face interviews with the sports and non-sports women. The questionnaires were developed by the researchers based on the review of the literature and in conformity with the study objectives. The questions included in the questionnaires were related to the respondent's demographic details and engagement in sports.

Data Analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 24.0) was used to process and analyze the collected data for descriptive statistics.

Second Phase

Sample Selection. In the second phase, qualitative samples were collected from the respondents who volunteered to participate in the in-depth interviews. A sample size of the 18 most notable and popular sportswomen of Bangladesh were chosen for this phase. In the case of non-sports women, qualitative data were collected through the semi-structured questionnaire used in the quantitative phase.

Data Collection Technique. A standard checklist was developed by the researchers for conducting the in-depth interviews. The interviews focused on the respondent's attitude to women's sport, including family attitudes toward women's sports, social attitudes toward women's sports, childhood and present engagement in sports, support from family and society to take part in sports, the gender difference in sports, and challenges faced by them while taking part in sports. Each face-to-face interview lasted around 60 minutes.

Data Interpretation. During the interview, field notes were taken to record potential themes which were transcribed later. Each interview was read repeatedly and the important information was initially coded. After that, some emerging themes were identified from the codes. Information related to the study objectives was highlighted and the themes with the same meanings were categorized into several themes which were analyzed thematically (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Verbatim statements relevant to the themes were extracted from the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Since data were collected from sportswomen and non-sports women, three female graduate investigators along with a female researcher were fully involved in data collection. Each individual respondent's verbal consent was obtained after the objectives of the study had been explained. In the case of sportswomen permis-

sion was sometimes required from a coach as both coaches and federations often impose restrictions on discussing anything about life and conditions with outsiders. Researchers did not offer any gift or remuneration to the respondents for their time as they voluntarily participated in this study.

Care was taken to arrange appointments with the sportswomen in their off time so as not to affect their income or practice. To ensure a familiar and welcoming atmosphere, interviews with the sportswomen were conducted at their training facilities and those with the female students on college premises. Parental consent was obtained in the case of respondents under 18 years of age and these interviews were conducted in the presence of a parent or parents. Respondents were told they could skip any question with which they were not comfortable. Finally, the respondents were assured that strict confidentiality would be maintained regarding personal information disclosed to the investigators or researchers.

Findings

After analyzing the questionnaires and in-depth interviews, the findings of the study were divided into six themes: demographic profile, economic status, family encouragement, women's empowerment, denial, and demand.

Findings of the Quantitative Phase

Demographic Profile

In the present study, an attempt has been made to cover similar age groups so that a comparative picture can be drawn. Students were selected from Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level, though many sportswomen had not achieved that level as some of them were from underprivileged groups. The mean age of the non-sports women was 17.43 and for the sportswomen it was 19.45. No sportswoman was aged less than 16 years.

The overwhelming majority of the sports (88.8%) and non-sports women (97.5%) were Muslim which mirrors the national picture. By education, 82.5% of the non-sports women and 37.5% of the sportswomen were at HSC level at the time of data collection. In terms of marital status, 92.5% of non-sports women and 95% of sportswomen were unmarried. More than half of the sportswomen (56.3%) lived with their friends or in hostels as their parents were living outside Dhaka. The non-availability of coaches in many districts and the presence of better

practice facilities lead them to move away from their families. The scenario was the opposite for the non-sports women, 90.8% of whom were living with parents. The primary occupation of the main wage earner for both the non-sports women and sportswomen's families was business.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Non-sports women		Sportswomen	
Variable	Percentage	Variable	Percentage
Age (in years)		Age (in years)	
Less than 18	67.9	Less than 18	25.8
18-25	32.1	18-25	56.7
25+	--	25+	17.5
Total	100.0	Total	100.0
Religion		Religion	
Islam	97.5	Islam	88.8
Hindu	1.7	Hindu	7.5
Christian	--	Christian	2.5
Buddhist	.8	Buddhist	1.3
Total	100.0	Total	100.0
Education		Education	
SSC*	5.0	SSC*	28.7
HSC**	82.5	HSC**	37.5
Graduation	12.5	Graduation	33.8
Total	100.0	Total	100.0
Marital status		Marital status	
Unmarried	92.5	Unmarried	95.0
Married	7.5	Married	5.0
Total	100.0	Total	100.0
Living with		Living with	
Father-Mother	90.8	Father-Mother	42.4
Husband	5.0	Husband	1.3
Hostel/Friends	4.2	Hostel/Friends	56.3
Total	100.0	Total	100.0
Occupation of household head		Occupation of household head	
Farmer	0.8	Farmer	10.7
Business	59.1	Business	43.8
Job	39.3	Job	37.5
Migrant	0.8	Migrant	8.0
Total	100.0	Total	100.0

Note. *SSC = Secondary School Certificate; **HSC = Higher Secondary School Certificate

Table 2
Respondent's Economic Status

Non-sports women		Sportswomen	
Variable	Percentage	Variable	Percentage
Family income (BDT)		Family income (BDT)	
Below 5000	---	Below 5000	1.3
5001-10000	4.2	5001-10000	18.8
10001-20000	21.7	10001-20000	38.8
Above 20001	77.5	Above 20001	41.3
Total	100.0	Total	100.0

Economic Status

The economic status of the non-sports women and sportswomen has an impact on their engagement in sports. Table 2 shows that 58.9% of the sportswomen were in the income group below BDT 20,000 (USD\$ 236.85) which is less than the average monthly income per household in urban areas of Bangladesh, BDT 22,600 (USD\$ 267.64) (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2018). It shows that most of the sportswomen were not rich in terms of economic background, indicating that women from lower-income groups tend to take part in sports to a higher degree. Their families do not have sufficient financial resources to support their education. Taking that into account, they opted for sports where their food and lodgings were often supported by the club and they could also earn fees from their sporting activities.

Family Encouragement

The study found that the engagement of family members in sports elevates the possibility of a woman being engaged in sports later. In total, 68.8% of the sports-women reported that they had family members engaged in sports which seemed to be instrumental to getting financial and other support from their family, while only 13.3% of the non-sports women mentioned that they had family members engaged in sports, which would be likely to create less impetus among them to get so engaged.

Similarly, 81.3% of the sportswomen received encouragement from their families to get engaged in sports while only 3% of the non-sports women received such encouragement.

Table 3
Encouragement from Family

Non-sports women		Sportswomen	
Variable	Percentage	Variable	Percentage
Family members engaged in sports		Family members engaged in sports	
Yes	13.3	Yes	68.8
No	86.7	No	31.3
Total	100.0	Total	100.0
Family encouraged in sports		Family encouraged in sports	
Yes	3.3	Yes	81.3
No	96.6	No	9.9
Somewhat	0.0	Somewhat	8.8
Total	100.0	Total	100.0

Findings of the Qualitative Phase

Women's Empowerment

The results of the study indicate that every social group interprets empowerment according to their own specific reality. Little more than one-third of the non-sports women opined that women's empowerment is the ability to decide while more than half of the sportswomen mentioned that women's empowerment means to do the things that they wanted to do. Non-sports women who are not always able to make decisions in their family and about personal matters mentioned the ability to make decisions as women's empowerment. In a different interpretation, sportswomen who had wanted to be involved in sports since childhood by denying social barriers stated that empowerment means to do what they wanted to do.

The indicators for women's empowerment were higher among the sportswomen than the non-sports women. More than half of the sportswomen secured an empowered position within their family by spending their income on the family. Though they were few overall, a certain proportion of sportswomen (8.8%) met their own needs and 5% of them looked after their family with their income from sports. No such economic empowerment was found among the non-sports women as only 1.6% worked as private tutors and their earnings were negligible. Similarly, less than half of the non-sports women stated that they had the ability to make decisions on their own while almost all the sportswomen could do so. One

of the non-sports women said:

My parents take all the major decisions for me, where to go, what to do, and how to do. I cannot do anything without their consent.

The practice of traveling alone as a part of women's empowerment was also noticed less among the non-sports women (50.4%) than the sportswomen (86.3%). As stated by one of the non-sports women:

I never traveled alone out of my district. My family could not even imagine this.

Denial

The study also found that a significant portion of non-sports women expressed their interest in playing as a result of watching women's sports, though they were not willing to pursue sports as a profession. To act in line with the recognized social norms, values, and behaviors, they established a kind of self-denial among them which prevents them from getting engaged in sports, which can be labeled as "denial perspective."

A lack of preference was observed among the non-sports women in terms of participating in sports which means they do not really consider sports as a means of empowerment. None of the non-sports women mentioned "being a sports-woman" as a childhood aim. Likewise, at present none of them wanted to be sportswomen either. Moreover, unwillingness was the major reason (40.6%) for not participating in sports. Only 10% of the non-sports women stated that they would have engaged in sports had they been allowed to take part. In addition, only one-fourth of the non-sports women believed that they were deprived of independence because of their disengagement in sports.

Additionally, the different forms of resistance (social and family denial) that have been imposed upon women and girls who attempt to engage in sports act as a discouragement to non-sports women to take part. 'What is women's sport? Why do women need to play?' are the kinds of comments faced by non-sports women who wanted to play in childhood. As stated by one of the non-sports women:

The entire basketball team for women in our school was canceled because girls would have to wear shorts to play.

Another non-sports woman mentioned:

I loved to play cricket in childhood, but my mother always told me that no one would marry a girl who plays outside. For this reason, I discontinued sports.

Demand

The lack of demand for sports among the non-sports women was the outcome of limited earning opportunities from women's sports. In Bangladesh, indeed, throughout the world, a huge remuneration gap exists between male and female players. Sportswomen in Bangladesh, other than those on a national team, do not receive any regular remuneration though the majority of them need financial support. As mentioned by a sportswoman:

Income is a major factor in sports careers. If it was paid well, they would get permission to continue sports after marriage. Most of the women left their sports careers after marriage as it is not well-paid.

Another sportswoman stated:

Almost all the women players need monetary support as they are from poor families. For many families, sport is a way of earning, not entertainment.

Even the national team itself does not receive regular remuneration despite having dire need of it. As usual, a wide gap also exists between the match fees earned by men and women players in Bangladesh. In the case of domestic sports, while male cricketers earn around BDT 50,000 (USD\$ 592.08) per match, women cricketers earn only BDT 600 (USD\$ 7.0) per match or 1.2% of what the men are paid. The salary paid to each member of the national women cricket team, BDT 30,000 (USD\$ 355.25), is only a mere 7.5% of the 400,000 (USD\$ 4736.66) the men are paid (Karim, 2018).

The findings of the study also indicate that due to the absence of star sports-women before this generation, non-sports women are not inspired to get engaged in sports. During the study, all the sportswomen mentioned that they were initially inspired by their father or another male sports family member rather than any female member. Later they were inspired by watching the sports involving Bangladesh's star players. Furthermore, today there are Bangladeshi sportsmen who are known around the globe and are admired by all sections of Bangladeshi society, but this is not yet the case for sportswomen. One of the sportswomen stated:

In childhood, I used to play with my father who was a football player. We read the sports news in the newspaper together. He encouraged me to participate in the school sports events. He is the main inspiration behind my success.

As mentioned by one cricket player:

I used to play cricket with my elder cousins in childhood. Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was their favorite player. We watched the World Cup and other matches together. From them, I came to know about other sports icons of the world and started to follow them. Now Shakib Al Hasan is my idol.

All the above-mentioned issues are significant and interact in deciding whether a woman will follow a career as a sportswoman or not. Accordingly, non-sports women are not considering sports as a means of empowerment, and therefore are not yet willing to see sports as a potential profession.

Discussion

Existing gender roles in Bangladesh society also do not encourage women to choose sports as their profession. Bangladesh, as a traditional Muslim society, has gender roles defined by religious and cultural norms as perceived and practiced here. The reason behind this, as pointed out by Kabeer (1988), is that the version of Islam practiced in this region is different from its divine and theocratic version. The country's cultural boundary with the eastern part of India institutionalized Islam differently here. Encompassing the practices of these two dominant religions, a constrictive code of behavior has been introduced for the women of this region. Therefore, from the very beginning of her life, a girl child in Bangladesh plays with dolls or crockery where a boy child plays with the bat, ball, or cars. Participating in physical exercise or sports is regarded as a male rather than female phenomenon. Huggins and Randell (2008) observed that in South Asian countries like Bangladesh, the village elders forbid women and girls to wear shorts while playing, unlike men. This cultural practice draws a clear line between "male sports" and "female sports" which leads men and women to think differently about sports. The work of Giuliano, Popp, and Knight (2000) found that the same trend was also prevailing in the United States.

Bourdieu identified it as a cultural reproduction, which is a social process of reproducing culture across generations, particularly through the socializing influence of key institutions such as schools that are used to pass along particular cultural ideas that support the privileged position of the dominant class. It is part of a larger social reproduction process through which the cultural, ecological, and structural characteristics of entire societies are reproduced in such a manner that invariably includes a certain amount of social change (Bourdieu, 1977).

In rural areas, it is also difficult to convince parents to allow their daughters to get involved in sports even when they are interested in doing so. Here, the case of Mofiz Uddin, the coach of Kalsindur Government Primary School, is an example. He initiated a program, contrary to local values, to coach girls in his school who were interested in football, free of charge. The girls won the Bangamata Gold Cup (a girls' football competition at the national level) three times and produced many women football players who played on the national team. Despite these successes, Mofiz Uddin has been named by local people as “mad master” and “a marriage-destroyer” (“Kalsindur Paved the Way”, 2016) as parents consider their daughters “born to marry” (Guller, 2018).

Indeed, the results of this study contain some findings which invalidate those of previous studies on sportswomen. Like previous studies, this study also found that sports empower women who are participating in it, though empowerment does not hold the same meaning for non-sports women as it does for sportswomen. It is the social position of a woman which continuously shapes their meaning of empowerment. The study by Porter (2013) in Fiji, Sri Lanka, and Timor-Leste also revealed that women's concepts of empowerment differ culturally.

However, the research findings of the present study show that women from lower-income groups tend to take part in sports to a higher degree, which is somewhat contrary to the findings of Pierre Bourdieu (1978). For Bourdieu, participation in sports primarily depends on economic capital as modern sports has a variety of requirements, such as various types of equipment, instruments, special clothing, trainers, and instructors. He further added that the ability to meet these economic costs confirms participation in sports. Additionally, it depends on the amount of spare time; for example, sports that demand less time are mostly practiced by the lower middle classes. Bourdieu also mentioned that people treat their bodies differently according to their economic and cultural capital; working-class males prefer physical-strength-oriented sports but working-class women do not spend much effort, money, or time on cultivating their bodies. Moreover, the work of Dollman and Lewis (2010), Kahma (2012), Hasbrook (1986), and Wilson (2002) also revealed that women's high social status resulted in higher sports participation. However, the present study found that women from lower-income groups tend to adopt sport as a profession more frequently than do their higher-income group counterparts.

The social demand for women's sports was also limited in Bangladesh. Women's sports are not yet on the priority list of common people who are likely to be the spectators seeking entertainment. In a women's cricket match, for example,

the number of spectators rarely exceeds 300 while the number goes up to 20,000 for a men's match (Zuwairiyah, 2018). Simply, money follows the eyes. The difference in the number of spectators in the matches results in a remuneration gap between men and women players. The study by Flake, Dufur, and Moore (2012) shows that this kind of remuneration gap also exists in the most popular women's sport, tennis, and though the prize money received by men and women is equal in Grand Slam Tournaments, women's prize money is considerably lower in other tournaments. Gacka (2017) also noticed the same practice within the Australian Football League (AFL).

Moreover, due to the limited number of spectators, the number of matches and tournaments played by sportswomen is also limited. Sponsors are not very interested in investing in women's teams as it is not a sector guaranteed to earn any mileage. However, remuneration levels are not always decided by either sponsors or the number of spectators. Kahn (1991) argues that, even when the same revenue is derived from women's matches as men's, the prize money women winners receive is lower than that received by their male counterparts.

Additionally, the limited media coverage of women's sports is not increasing fast enough to create a demand for sports among either non-sports women or society as a whole. The study by Dasgupta (2019) on Indian women showed that women's exposure to mass media works as a determinant of female empowerment, which in turn leads to the improvement of their status. But media coverage, such as television advertisements, billboards, and posters, continues to be limited in the case of women's sports throughout the world while men's sports are widely promoted (Duncan & Messner, 1998; Tuggle, 1997). This can be explained from the "demand perspective" where there is almost no demand for women's sports. In this case, the lack of demand can relate to two different conditions: where there is no demand from within the individual herself for involvement in women's sports, and where the society in which she lives exhibits so such demand.

The study also found that, in Bangladesh, women participate mainly in cricket and football, the sports in which males have earned fortune and fame. Hence, women are increasingly participating in those kinds of sports in which the male players of the country are already showing their excellence. A review of some other countries also shows the same trend. It does not mean that women are impersonators, but rather that they follow the most popular and therefore, rewarding routes by which they also can also earn fame and, thereby, economic rewards.

Conclusions

Until recently women in Bangladesh have had limited participation in sports but an ascending trend is clear. A plurality of causes, such as social disapproval, denial, and low demand exist, leading to women's low participation rate in sports in Bangladesh. Although there is no legal prohibition, society has not given adequate support to women's sports. One analogy would be that if society were a football pitch, the women are like the goalkeeper, effectively restricted to the D-Box area. While they are theoretically allowed to take part in the sport just like the other players, they are in fact restricted to just one area, unlike their more privileged counterparts. In fact, the goalkeeper remains responsible for protecting the goal as women protect the home. Though women do not lack the physical capacity to move and work in society, their mobility is governed by the codes and norms of society. As a result, they enjoy only limited freedom to engage in these activities and thereof, participation in the public sphere has been described here as 'women in D-box'.

In Bangladesh, women's sports have limited impact on the empowerment of non-sports women even though some sportswomen have become superstars at national and international levels. Society places limited value on women's sports, creating limited demand and therefore limiting the growth of this sector.

References

- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. (2018). *Household income and expenditure survey 2016*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.
- Blinde, M. E., Taub, E. D., & Han, L. (1993). Sport participation and women's personal empowerment: Experiences of the college athletes. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 17(1), 47–60.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and Ideology in Education* (pp. 487–510). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1978). Sport and social-class. *Social Science Information*, 17(6), 819–840.
- Bradshaw, A. (2002). Empowerment and sport feminism: A critical analysis. *International Sports Studies*, 24(1), 5–31.
- Cantor, D. W., & Bernay, T. (1992). *Women in power: The secrets of leadership*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2014). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dasgupta, S. (2019). Impact of exposure to mass media on female empowerment: Evidence from India. *International Journal of Development Issues*, 18(2), 243–258.
- Dollman, J., & Lewis, N. R. (2010). The impact of socioeconomic position on sport participation among South Australian youth. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 13(3), 318–322.
- Duncan, C. A., & Messner, A. M. (1998). The media image of sports and gender. In L. Wenner (Ed.), *Media sport* (pp. 166–176). London, UK: Routledge.
- Flake, R. C., Dufur, J. M., & Moore, L. E. (2012). Advantage men: The sex pay gap in professional tennis. *International Review for the Sociology of Sports*, 48(3), 366–376.
- Gacka, H. (2017). Levelling the playing field: Discrimination against women in sport in Australia. *Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity*, 5, 189–219.
- Gaining ground for women's basketball (2018). *The Daily Star*. Retrieved December 28, 2021, from <https://www.thedailystar.net/star-youth/news/gaining-ground-womens-basketball-1663789>
- Giuliano, T. A., Popp, K. E., & Knight, J. L. (2000). Footballs versus Barbies: Childhood play activities as predictors of sport participation by women. *Sex Roles*, 42(3), 159–181.
- Guller, A. S. (2018). *Born to marry*. New Delhi, India: Blue Rose Publishers.
- Gutierrez, L. M. (1990). Working with women of color: An empowerment perspective. *Social Work*, 35(2), 149–153.
- Hargreaves, J. (2002). *Sporting females: Critical issues in the history and sociology of women's sports*. London, UK: Routledge.

- Hasbrook, A. C. (1986). The sport participation–social class relationship: Some recent youth sport participation data. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 3(2), 154–159.
- Hoque, S. (2016, December 15). A tale of kabaddi, Bangladesh's national sport. *Dhaka Tribune*. Retrieved August 12, 2020, from <https://www.dhakatribune.com/sport/other-sports/2016/12/15/tale-kabaddi-bangladeshs-national-sport/>
- Hoque, S. (2018a, January 4). Rise of the Bangladesh girls. *Dhaka Tribune*. Retrieved December 27, 2021, from <https://www.dhakatribune.com/sport/football/2018/01/04/238019>
- Hoque, S. (2018b, June 27). Bend it like Bangladesh: The girls with goals (2018). *Business Times*. Retrieved December 27, 2021, from <http://ibtd.net/bend-like-bangladesh-girls-goals/>
- Huggins, A., & Randell, S. (2008, June). *The contribution of sports to gender equality and women's empowerment*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Gender Equity on Sports for Social Change, Kigali, Rwanda. Retrieved July 27, 2020, from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.517.2234&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Islam, T. (2012, September 27). Get Sporty. *New Age*. Retrieved August 12, 2020, from <http://newagebd.com/supliment.php?sid=130&id=952>
- Kabeer, N. (1988). Subordination and struggle: Women in Bangladesh. *New Left Review*, 168(1), 95–121.
- Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal. *Gender & Development*, 13(1), 13–24.
- Kahma, N. (2012). Sport and social class: The case of Finland. *International Review of Sociology of Sports*, 47(1), 113–130.
- Kahn, L. M. (1991). Discrimination in professional sports: A survey of the literature. *ILR Review*, 44(3), 395–418.
- Kalsindur paved the way (2016, April 30). *The Daily Star*. Retrieved August 19, 2020, from <https://www.thedailystar.net/sports/football/kalsindur-paved-the-way-1216663>
- Kane, M. J. (1998). Fictional denials of female empowerment: A feminist analysis of young adult sports fiction. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 15(3), 231–263.
- Karim, N. (2012). Women's sports in Bangladesh—An encouraging year. *The Daily Star Forum*, 6(3). Retrieved August 12, 2020, from <https://archive.thedailystar.net/forum/2012/March/women.htm>
- Karim, N. (2018, March 15). Not yet a country for sportswomen. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved August 11, 2020, from <https://www.thedailystar.net/star-weekend/not-yet-country-sportswomen-1545328>
- Lenskyj, H. (1986). *Out of bounds: Women, sport and sexuality*. Toronto, ON: Women's Press.
- Mosedale, S. (2005). Assessing women's empowerment: Towards a conceptual framework.

- Journal of International Development*, 17(2), 243-257.
- Nair, R. A. & Karthika, C. (2018). Gender unevenness in the sports pages of newspapers: A case study based on Indian womens cricket team. *International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics*, 118(18), 1459-1475.
- Nelson, M. B. (1994). *The stronger women get, the more men love football*. New York, NY: Avon Books.
- NUK (Nari Uddug Kendra). (2016). *Sports for Women Empowerment*. Retrieved March 28, 2020 from https://nuk-bd.org/women_sports.php.
- Pohl, S. L., Borrie, W. T., & Patterson, M. E. (2000). Women, wilderness, and everyday life: A documentation of the connection between wilderness recreation and women's everyday lives. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 32, 415-435.
- Porter, E. (2013). Rethinking women's empowerment. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 8(1), 1-14.
- Rahman, M. (2013). Women's empowerment: Concept and beyond. *Global Journal of Human Social Science Sociology & Culture*, 13(6), 9-13.
- Rappaport, J. (1984). Studies in empowerment: Introduction to the issue. *Prevention in Human Services*, 3(2/3), 1-7.
- Rappaport, J. (1985). The power of empowerment language. *Social Policy*, 16(2), 15-21.
- Rowe, D. C., Thompson, W. N., Maguire, J. A., & Guttman, A. (2021). Sports. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved January 1, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/sports/sports>
- Shamsuddin, A. S. (2015). Claiming public space: Women's sports in Bangladesh. In H. Hoodfar (Ed.), *Women's sport as politics in Muslim contexts* (pp. 184-209). London, UK: Women Living Under Muslim Laws.
- Shefali, M. K. (2014). *National sports life of Bangladeshi women from gender perspective*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Nari Uddug Kendra.
- Shooting team leaves for Japan today (2017, December 5). *New Age*. Retrieved December 28, 2021, from <http://www.newagebd.net/article/29755/shooting-team-leaves-for-japan-today>
- Stromquist, N. P. (1988). Women's education in development: From welfare to empowerment. *Convergence*, 21(4), 5-17.
- Tuggle, C. A. (1997). Differences in television sports reporting of men's and women's athletics: ESPN sports center and CNN sports tonight. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 41(1), 14-24.
- Uddin, M. (2017, January 1). Achievement in different events. *The Daily Observer*. Retrieved December 28, 2021, from <https://observerbd.com/details.php?id=51065>
- Ullah, A. M. (2018, January 1). Women's teams outshine men footballers. *The Independent*.

Retrieved December 28, 2021, from <https://m.theindependentbd.com/printversion/details/130622>.

UNICEF (2018). *Adolescent and youth engagement strategic framework*. Retrieved August 9, 2020, from <http://www.unicefinemergencies.com/downloads/eresource/docs/Adolescents/63792683.pdf>

Whiteside, E., & Hardin, M. (2010). Public relations and sports: Work force demographics in the intersection of two gendered industries. *Journal of Sports Media*, 5(1), 21–52.

Wilson, T. C. (2002). The paradox of social class and sports involvement: The roles of cultural and economic capital. *International Review for the Sociology of Sports*, 37(1), 5–16.

Zuwairiyah, R. (2018, June 27). Women's sports deserve more respect and attention. *The Financial Express*. Retrieved July 19, 2020, from <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/education/womens-sports-deserve-more-respect-and-attention>.

Biographical Note: **Khurshed Alam** is a former university teacher of MBSTU and currently Chairman of Bangladesh Institute of Social Research (BISR) Trust. He was involved in preparation of a few national policies and national development strategies including Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP-II) for Bangladesh. He attempted to develop some theories and concepts and also developed several new ideas and models such as poverty reduction through enabling factors; Canal Maintenance Group (CMG) involving landless people; IGA mapping for poverty reduction; and institution for landless poor. He has 32 peer-reviewed journal articles, 8 books and 4 book chapters as publication to his credit.

Email: khurshedbisr@gmail.com

Biographical Note: **Sarmin Akther** is a research officer at Social and Gender Division of Bangladesh Institute of Social Research (BISR) Trust. Her areas of research interest include: gender, women empowerment, gender dimension of health care and female criminality. She has authored several research reports and book chapters.

Email: akther.sarmin101@gmail.com