

Do Women Cricketers have different Psychosocial Issues as Compared to Male Cricketers?

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Women's sports include amateur and professional competitions in virtually all sports. Female participation in sports has risen dramatically in the 20th century, especially in the last quarter, reflecting changes in modern societies that emphasized gender parity. The level of participation and performance varies greatly by country and by sport. Some of women's sports have broad acceptance throughout the world, going by the women representation in Olympics. Women's sports like tennis, gymnastics, weight-lifting, hockey, swimming, etc. are popular games and keenly watched on television too.

Earlier Women Cricket was less heard of but now it has become a global game. There are an increasing number of bilateral competitions and at present the women's game is represented in the same National and International Organizations as men's cricket is. This association between sports and masculinity is long standing and traditionally females were discouraged from it. Thus, the emergence of sport as a male preserve has meant that females who enter the sporting arena were often resisted or constrained. Conventionally and culturally bound biases existed against women engaging in cricket, since cricket represented an expression of masculine values.

As one observes sport and physical activity, whether as an athlete, coach, trainer, team physician or spectator, it is quite obvious that participants from various athletic groups including cricket differ in a number of respects. It has been contended that there is a possibility that some discrete set of personality factors exists which cause some people to select and participate in a particular kind of sport. Some of the distinct characteristics of sportspersons as empirical studies have shown may be summarized as sociability, dominance, extraversion, positive self-concept, mental toughness, emotional stability, straight forwardness, achievement motivation, aggression and conventionality.

Just as sports, health differences between genders are both subtle and direct and research to date regarding this has been limited. The research literature reveals the differences between women and male cricketers in relation to physiology and body type. While observers of sport seem to be equally confident that such differences have psychological correlates, there is actually little agreement as to the psychological ways in which these women and male cricketers differ from each other. It has been observed that women are mostly involved in both aerobic and nonaerobic activities, which are not necessarily competitive sports but still require physical stamina, strength and discipline like running, hiking, martial arts, etc. Review of available literature on the female sports women including women cricketers and their personality, suggest that they possess traits much like those of both the normative male and the male athletes, i.e. being more assertive, achievement-oriented, dominant, self-sufficient, independent, aggressive and intelligent. Specifically, the female body-builders have been observed to be more extraverted, more vigorous, less anxious, less neurotic, less depressed, less angry, and less confused. Trends also suggest that mood patterns of sports women reveal less tension, depression and anger. The cathartic and therapeutic value of the play leads to sublimation of aggression. It has also been found that women also tend to get the same gratification out of athletic activity as men do.

Men and women do have social differences that can be better understood with the theory postulated by Connell (2002, 1987).^{1,2} According to him, the four main structures in contemporary gender relations are: power relations, production relations, emotional relations and symbolic relations. Despite numerous studies about the experiences of female footballers psychosocially little is known about women's cricket. During early child rearing practices,

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the society imposes internalized gender-based and stereotyped beliefs and values about the (in)appropriateness of female participation in sports especially cricket.

In schools, the girl's experiences of cricket are influenced by views on traditional gender roles and gender appropriate sport. A general lack of provision for girl's cricket resulted in the fact that the majority of the girls were not able to play and practice cricket. Coaches within the school and practice sessions continue to provide and develop boys cricket further reiterating the point that cricket is a sport for males. Misconceptions and the undervaluing of women's sport skills and knowledge (including an unequal assumption of competence, e.g. where a male cricketer is assumed to be more competent than a female cricketer; negative stereotypes that women are less competent.

Psychosocial factors affect women and girls of all ages, influencing their health and well-being, participation, athletic development, performance and leadership in sport/physical activity. The four main psychosocial factors that influence women's participation in cricket are intrapersonal, interpersonal, environmental, and policy-related. Intrapersonal factors include self-perceptions of sports competence, gender differences in decision-making skills, motivation, goal setting and body image. Interpersonal factors would include social support from family members and peers (the 'cool factor'), positive feedback from family members, peers, teachers, etc. nature of interpersonal relationships, group atmosphere, social influence exerted by teachers, leaders and coaches during activities and identification processes (e.g. during classes, practices, games, assessments, etc.). Environmental factors include social climates (both positive and negative), issues pertaining to safety and security, presence of stress/anxiety provoking conditions (e.g. social physique anxiety/body on display, selection procedures and assessments, stress related to trying to overcome participation barriers, moral reasoning and attitudes towards fair play, extent to which a family, educational, physical activity or sport environment is linked to gender, vulnerability, security or safety, links between physical activity and sexuality (e.g. suggestive uniforms, training apparel, culturally stereotyped media coverage of active and athletic women that emphasize femininity and heterosexuality, including sexually suggestive poses in sport settings). Policy related includes inappropriate or low quality programming, instructor, coach and teacher training, physical education curricula, portrayal of unrealistic and unhealthy body images in promotional or marketing materials and the media, mixed messages about the importance of physical activity and sport (e.g. to look 'fit' for appearance-focused reasons rather than for overall health and well-being, lack of diversity in images), resource allocation (financial, facility and human resources), policies that are cognizant of the complexities of women's and girls' lives, which include societal/cultural stereotypes, family demands, role conflicts or role imbalances (whether as a participant, athlete, coach or volunteer). These psychosocial factors can either contribute to or hinder the involvement of women and girls in sport/physical activity. Participation can be facilitated or discouraged through the direct and indirect decisions and actions taken by parents and family members, coaches, educators, officials, leaders and peers.

It can be concluded that psychosocial factors contribute to an environment that supports the development of physically literate, active, healthy women and girls. Separating the links between femininity and participation in sport and physical activity will create a supportive environment for optimal participation and performance in cricket, which is critically important to achieve sustained participation and commitment of women. However, a large gap persists in knowledge and practice relating to the psychosocial factors that influence women. It is time to create optimal conditions and systems that support women and girls to be active at all stages of participation and competition in cricket.

Culture and media play an important role in the popularity of women as sport persons. It is perhaps not surprising that given the image of cricket as a male preserve, the females identified more strongly with men's than women's cricket. This is evident with the fact that majority of the girls watched and followed men's cricket but had little knowledge about the women's game. One of the reasons for this was likely to be due to the lack of media coverage of the women's game. The impact of this on women cricketers was that they judged themselves, using a 'masculine criterion' of what cricket 'should be like'. As women did not think that they were able to match this criterion they do insist that women's cricket was different, relying more on technical skill than the men's cricket. This seems to indicate that women made up for their lack of strength by being more technically able than men. The intensity of training and competition for sports women and importance of performance and level of achievements are now nearly equal as that of males.

It is clear from the above discussion that women's cricket now, has developed since earlier days. Sports administrators and coaches do give emphasis on the psychosocial development of women sports persons while giving training and preparing for future. Changes in balances of power between some males and some females are evident, both within sport and in wider relations between the sexes. In terms of the promotion of women's cricket, females

have more opportunities to play cricket. In cricket, in line with broader examples of functional democratization, power inequalities between males and females have decreased but they have not equalized. Research in this area demonstrates that women's cricket emerged as the consequence of variety of moral, historical, financial and organizational processes. Overall, sports women, although less aggressive tend to be better at developing skills, negotiating play and course patterns, and tend to have more finesse than men.

REFERENCES

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2. Connell R. *Gender and Power in Society*. Cambridge: Polity; 1987.