

## **Sport participation motives of Kenyan female university athletes**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the participation motives of female university athletes at a university sport championship. It was hypothesized that the participation motives would not differ significantly based on the athletes' age, sport participation experience and year of study. Data were collected through participation motivation questionnaire (PMQ) from 132 female athletes participating in university sport championship. Results indicated that the primary motives for participation were to improve skills, physical fitness and team spirit. The motives did not differ ( $p > 0.05$ ) based on age, sport participation experience and year of study. It is concluded that female athletes participate in sports due to intrinsic reasons and therefore coaches and administrators need to structure training bearing in mind the participants' motives. Future studies should be conducted from a developmental perspective to test the notion that socio-cultural environments e.g., a coach's gender, athletes' sexual orientation, student athletes' residence and as well as the influence of friends/family, could affect participation of female athletes in university sport.

**Keywords:** Sport participation, motives, female athletes, university sport championship.

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### **Introduction**

Motivation in sport refers to those psychological processes that trigger the arousal, direction and persistence of behavior (Nevid, 2012). These include personality factors, social variables or cognitions that come into play for people to enter into competition or attain excellence in sports. Motivation greatly influences an individual's performance in situations where one is physically capable of performing a task but is uncertain about his/her capabilities, which in many cases is a problem that discourages people from participating in a chosen sport.

The reasons for participating and dropping out of both recreation and competitive sport have received extensive attention over the past few years (Cheung, Chan & Levy, 2012). However, consensus on the motives for participation in sport has remained elusive. Motives for participation in physical activity and sports have been studied by various researchers (Biddle, Wang, Chatzisarantis & Spray, 2003; Allender, Cowburn & Foster, 2006; Biddle & Mutrie, 2008; Barnett, Van Beurden, Morgan, Brooks & Beard, 2008; Fraser-Thomas, Cote & Deakin, 2008; Kondric, Sindik, Furjan-Mandic & Schiefler, 2013; Benar & Loghmani, 2014). These studies have revealed that the general reasons underlying participation in sports and physical activities include fun; physical fitness; skill development; achievement and status; being on a team; enjoyment from team atmosphere; friendship; energy release, and situational motivations. Specifically, the experience of sport appears to be attractive to students for the following reasons: fun; enjoyment; improving skills; learning; being with friends; success; winning and health (Mouratidis, Vansteenkiste, Lens & Sideridis, 2008; Murcia, Coll, Martin-Albo & Gimeno, 2010; Waldron & Dieser, 2010).

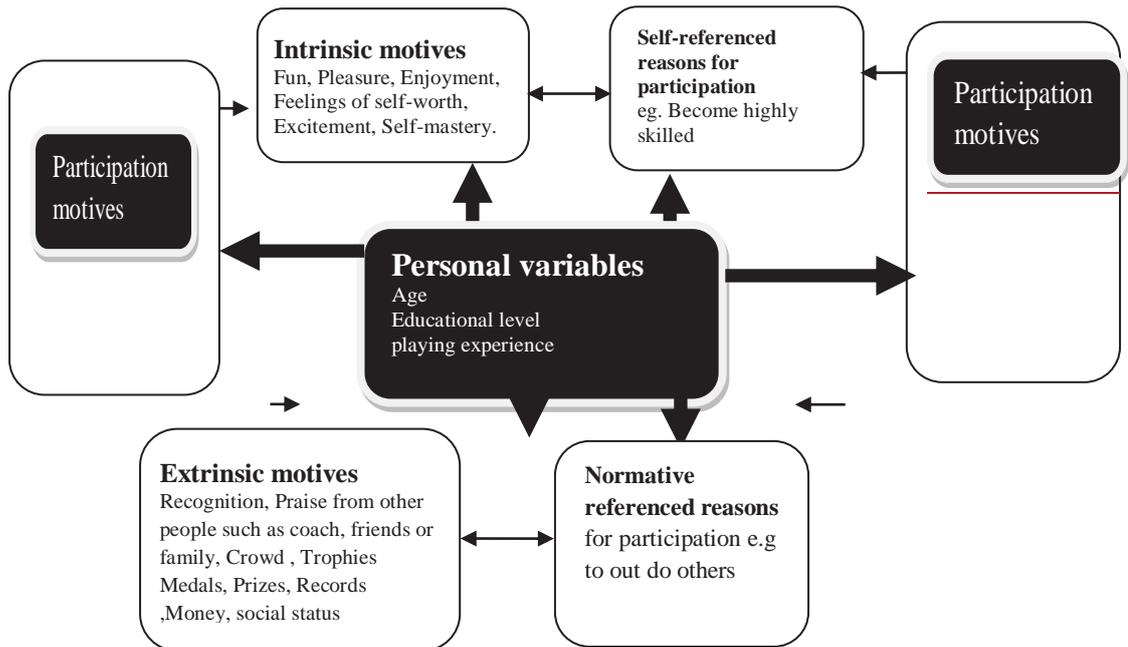
### *Theoretical Framework*

Motivation consists of many different and connected theoretical models that make it impossible to subsume the construct under a single model (Bosnar & Balent, 2009). In an attempt to justify sport participation motives of Kenyan female university athletes, the self-determination theory (SDT) (Zaharidis, Tsorbatzoudis & Alexandris, 2006), which is a contemporary framework that is increasingly used to understand motivation in the sports and physical education domains, was applied (Figure 1).

The SDT posits that there exist different types of motivation depending on the level of self-determination. SDT defines intrinsic and varied extrinsic sources of motivation and a description of the respective roles of intrinsic and types of extrinsic motivation in cognitive, social development and individual differences. This model suggests that athletes have various motives for taking up the sport categorized as either intrinsic or extrinsic. Personal variables such as age, educational level and sport participation experience are believed to influence the sport participation motives of athletes thereby determining whether the latter will either be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated.

Studies have also undertaken gender comparisons in sport participation motives. For instance, Monazami, Hedayatikatooli, Neshati and Beiki (2012) compared the motivation of male and female competitive teams and individual athletes in Iran and found that female athletes have higher levels of intrinsic motivation compared to male athletes. Similarly, Chantal, Guay, Dobрева-Martinova and Vallerand (2001) reported that Bulgarian female athletes were intrinsically

motivated to participate in sport at elite level. On their part, Meyer and Bevan-Dye (2014) found that generation Y female students were more motivated to engage in physical activities based on health pressure, ill-health avoidance, positive health, weight management and appearance.



**Figure 1:** Self Determination theory and Achievement Goal Orientation Model

Gitonga, Bailasha and Toriola (2011) reported that elite African women volleyball players continued participation in volleyball due to success and desire to excel. Rintaugu and Ngetich (2012) in a survey on participation motives of university sports science students revealed no significant gender differences in motives for participation in diverse physical activities. The students perceived their physical health status as fair and their main motives for participation were weight management, enjoyment and revitalization. The least motivators for both males and females were stress management and competition. Rintaugu, Kamande, Litaba, Toriola and Amusa’s (2014) study indicated that in contrast to parental social economic status, gender did not influence the athletes’ reasons and motives for continued participation in sport. Similarly, Kondric *et al.*, (2013) results revealed that the motives among sport science students consisted of six factors of sport action with friends, popularity, fitness and health, social status, sport events and relaxation through sports.

These findings triggered the present study which was aimed at examining sport participation motives among Kenyan female university athletes. The focus on

sportswomen is apt as participation in formal/structured sports at higher educational institutions is a relatively challenging task for female athletes. It is apparent that universities have invested in sports infrastructure to promote students' participation but few students, especially females take part in sports. This view is buttressed by epidemiological evidence which indicates that the level of physical activity declines from high school to college and activity patterns in college populations are generally insufficient to improve health and fitness (Brady, 2004; Kilpatrick, Herbert & Bartholomew, 2005; Pate, Dowda, O'Neil & Ward, 2007). This situation is worrying bearing in mind that most university students are engaged in health risk behaviors like substance abuse, illicit and unsafe sex, unhealthy eating habits and low participation in physical activities. Furthermore, there are specific challenges that are pertinent to women sports persons, which include homophobia and/or sexual behavior or orientation usually viewed as "taboo".

It could also be interesting to establish the sport participation motives of females in male dominated sports, especially association football or soccer. It should be appreciated that globally football has been almost wholly male dominated sport for a long time, especially in Africa. Azzaratzis and Solmon (2009) point out that, girls are more pressured to participate in feminine "appropriate" physical activities based on traditional gender stereotypes and hegemony usually perpetrated by men. A secondary aim of the study was to examine differences in sport participation motivation based on year of study and past sport experiences. It has been shown that participation in college sports is almost wholly a foundation of earlier success in a high school sport. Previous research has shown that participation motives may be influenced by age; perceived ability; sport type, and sport level. Kilpatrick *et al.* (2005) investigation on the motives for participants versus exercisers among college students indicated that participants were more likely to report intrinsic motives whereas motivation for exercisers was more extrinsic and focused on appearance, weight and stress management.

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

The study sample consisted of 132 female university athletes who volunteered to participate in the study. They were aged between 18-27 years (Mean: 21.23 ± 2.08 years), and competed in the following sports: association football (or soccer), netball, hockey, volleyball, basketball, swimming, athletics, martial arts, tennis, table tennis, badminton, chess and scrabble.

### *Procedures*

Data were collected during the 2013 Kenya Universities Sports Association (KUSA) Women Championship. Participants were asked to fill the questionnaires during their off field time before or after matches. Permission to

collect data during the championship was sought from KUSA. Further, permission was sought from the various team managers through a written request. The objectives and procedures of the study including a model of the data collection instrument were explained to both the managers and players who gave informed consent. Additionally, the voluntary nature of their participation, the absolute confidentiality of answers given as well as the data produced by the study and the fact that there were no right or wrong answers, were assured. As such, respondents were not required to write their names on the questionnaires to maintain anonymity. They were also asked to respond with the highest degree of sincerity and honesty. All the above ethical considerations were captured in an explanatory letter appearing on the first page of the questionnaire. Using simple random sampling 160 questionnaires were issued to participants in different above-mentioned sport codes in the championship. Out of the 160 questionnaires distributed only 132 were successfully filled, returned and analyzed.

#### *Measures*

Participation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ) was used to collect data from the participants. The PMQ is a 30-item scale which consists of the following six subscales of achievement/status, team atmosphere, fitness, energy release, skill development, and friendship and fun (Zahariadis & Biddle, 2000). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 "strongly disagree" to 1 "strongly agree". Given that all participants in the study took part in university sports, they were all suitable for inclusion in a survey based on the assumption that all actually participated in sport. Adequate reliability and validity of PMQ have been reported elsewhere (Castillo, Tomas, Balaguer, Fonseca, Dias & Duda, 2010).

#### *Data analysis*

The data were processed with the IBM SPSS Statistics (21.0) software. The basic descriptive parameters including means and standard deviations were computed. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and subsequent Tukey post-hoc analysis was used to test for differences among participants' years of study and past sport experiences and motivation for each item in the questionnaire.

### **Results**

In total, the students were aged 18-27 years. With regard to year of study, 59(46.82%) were second year students followed by 38 (30.15%) who were in the third year. There were 17(13.49%), fourth year students, whilst those in the first year were 12(9.5 %). In relation to their past sport participation experience, 59 (45.05%) had over 5 years of experience; followed by 26 (19.84%); 18 (3.74%), and 14 (10.68%) who had two, three and four years of sport participation experience, respectively.

The sport participation motives of the female university athletes are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Rank order on individual motives for participation in female university athletes

Top ranked motives for participation	Mean	SD	Least ranked motives for participation	Mean	SD
1. Improve skills	4.68	.61	1. Get rid of energy	2.65	1.12
2. Physical fitness	4.63	.64	2. Status or recognition	3.01	1.47
3. Team spirit	4.57	.65	3. Popularity	3.02	1.43
4. Learn new skills	4.51	.71	4. Get out of the house	3.20	1.36
5. Teamwork	4.50	.72	5. My parents or close friends want me to play	3.21	4.74

Table 1 shows that the most important reasons for sport participation were: to improve skills; gain physical fitness; develop team spirit and learning new skills, while the least reasons were to get rid of energy; for status or recognition; for popularity, and getting out of home.

To determine the effect of years of study on sport participation motives, participants were classified into five groups. ANOVA conducted to determine whether participation motives were discrepant for groups with different years of study and past sport participation experiences yielded no significant differences. There was no statistically significant difference between year groups in all the sport participation motives of skill development; achievement/status; team atmosphere; fitness; energy release, and affiliation/friendship/fun. However, the motive for gaining fitness was statistically different between years of experience in sport participation ( $F_{4, 127} = 2.59, p = .040$ ) (Table 2). Post-hoc analysis on fitness motives revealed that the mean difference was significant on fitness motives between athletes with 3 and 4 years of experience.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the sport participation motives of female university athletes in Kenya. It was also of interest to the study to ascertain whether the athletes' sport participation is influenced by the selected factors of year of study, past sport participation experience and/or age? The findings indicated that the majority of university athletes were aged between 18 to 27 years and that they had participated in sports prior to joining university sports teams. Finding also showed that upon entering universities, few first year students took up sports activities immediately after registration, but sports participation rates improved as they proceeded into the second year of study.

Drop out cases are reported by the third year of study and sport participation rate tended to decline when the students got into the last years of study. Njororai (2010) contends that the first year in the university is characterized by issues of

settling down and experiencing freedom from parents. The lower number of first years could also be attributed to the fact that majority of them delay before they affiliate with the university teams.

**Table 2:** Summary of ANOVA on participation motives of female university players based on their years of experience

PMQ subscales		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Fitness	Between Groups	3.51	4	.87	2.59	.04
	Within Groups	43.09	127	.33		
	Total	46.61	131			
Friends/fun	Between Groups	.63	4	.15	.28	.88
	Within Groups	69.25	127	.54		
	Total	69.88	131			
Achievement1	Between Groups	.41	4	.10	.15	.96
	Within Groups	85.55	127	.67		
	Total	85.96	131			
Energy	Between Groups	3.83	4	.95	1.64	.16
	Within Groups	74.07	127	.58		
	Total	77.91	131			
Skill	Between Groups	1.05	4	.26	1.19	.31
	Within Groups	28.20	127	.22		
	Total	29.25	131			
Team	Between Groups	.23	4	.05	.17	.95
	Within Groups	43.16	127	.34		
	Total	43.40	131			

Results also showed that the motives for sport participation were fitness; skill development; team atmosphere; making friends; achievement, and energy release. These findings are consistent with those of Rintaugu and Nteere (2011) which indicated that among female athletes' participation motives were aesthetic qualities; cognitive benefits; skill development; health and physical fitness; and tension /stress management.

Studies have also indicated that women are more motivated to participate in sport due to intrinsic motives rather than extrinsic motives (Gitonga *et al.*, 2011). This is consistent with the sport participation motives of athletes in the present study with respect to improving skills: physical fitness and health. More importantly, the present study was based on SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Williams & Gill, 1995), with basic premise that humans inherently possess self-determination since it facilitates the adoption of behaviours and activities that provide for its fulfillment. Furthermore, Kilpatrick *et al.*, (2005) suggest that college women

have greater concerns for their body weight than do men. The highest rated motives for sport participation in the study were competition; affiliation; enjoyment and challenge whereas the highest rated health and appearance-related motives were exercise behaviors.

The participation motives of the female university athletes did not significantly differ based on year of study and age but varied based on past sport participation experience. Athletes with more years of sport participation experience valued fitness more than those with less years of experience. It is postulated that those with longer years of sport participation experience may not engage in sports solely due to fitness as the latter is rather too basic to drive sustainable participation in sports. Also, fitness can be achieved through other physical activities like dancing and aerobics. Probably, this explains why the exception of generation Y females with intrinsically-oriented positive health motive, tend to be mostly motivated to engage in physical activity for extrinsic reasons (Meyer & Bevan-Dye, 2014).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this study, it appears that females' involvement in sport is beneficial to them not only at the time of involvement but also after participation has ceased. This, therefore, implies that there is a need for personnel involved in sport promotion for female university athletes, such as sport officers, coaches, especially those of different gender, to be sensitive and aware of their unique role if they are to properly engender intrinsic and self-determined forms of motivation, such as fitness; team atmosphere, and skill in female athletes. This perspective is buttressed by Cunningham, Miner and McDonald (2013) in their paper entitled: "Being different and suffering the consequences: The influence of head coach-player racial dissimilarity on experienced incivility."

The development of sensitivity and awareness when dealing with female athletes might involve interventions at group and individual levels. At the group level, coaches need to create an environment that is conducive for mastery of skills. This can be done by emphasizing personal improvement; choice, and learning. At the individual level, interactions with young people in sport need to allow for personal choice and the coach is encouraged to show empathy with female athletes, particularly those having difficulties in the physical activity domain. These strategies should increase self-determination in university female athletes and hence create the feeling that 'I want to' participate rather than 'I ought to' participate (Zaharidis *et al.*, 2006). This notion is aptly summarized by Cunningham *et al.* (2013) who reported that incivility is often negatively associated with female players' commitment to the team.

Further, sport administrators and coaches, especially male coaches need to be sensitive to socio-cultural issues such as gender differences and/or preferences of their female athletes; their sexual orientation and/or choices, and play a conscious role to eradicate homophobia and unfair stigmatization of female athletes. It is believed that the latter could positively improve and reinforce intrinsic motivation if variables such as team atmosphere and team spirit are to be improved and if sustainable sport participation by female athletes is to be achieved. In addition, the findings of this study suggest the need for further research at other levels of sport participation such as clubs and at primary and secondary schools as well.

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