

Gender and Sports in Nepal: A case Study of Teenage Girls Involvement

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During our one month of fieldwork in 3 districts: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur, we visited 11 schools/ high schools to collect data. We are grateful to all our participants and interviewees who gave their time and effort to participate in our research work. We are also thankful to all the schools: Mount Sinai, Mount SEB, Swapna Vatika School and College, Madan Bhandari Memorial School, Blue Bird Secondary School and College, Sri Sanjaya Sai Vidya Mandir, Gandaki, Jana uddhar and Dayanand Anglo Vedic college where we got our targeted participants (girls student and respected authority). We appreciate everyone who helped us throughout the research work. Without all of your support, this project would not have been successful.

Abstract

Nepal being a male-dominated society is still facing discrimination between men and women in various sectors. This discrimination starts right from the family level to the national level. From a male member overpowering a female member in a family to unequal distribution of opportunities in national level, discrimination is easily visible in most of the areas. Currently, involvement of women in sports is one of the major topics of discussion. Women in Nepal involve in sports comparatively lesser than men due to various reasons like male-dominated media, lack of proper encouragement, menstruation, etc.

Our projects' purpose was to find out the interest and involvement of teenage girls of Nepal in indoor and outdoor sports. Moreover, it was to motivate and encourage women to take part in sports. This was a cross-sectional study, random sampling test done with teenage girls. The total number of participants were 176 and from 11 different schools/ high schools. Questionnaires prepared were given to the participants for giving their opinions.

Out of the total participants, only 62.3% said their parents or teachers encourage them to participate in sports and around 50% gave positive response about the scope of sports in Nepal. More than 50% said it is not good to play sports during the time of menstruation.

Introduction

Nepal is a male-dominated society located in South Asia. “Male-dominated society” itself says a lot about the social structure and status of women in Nepal. Although many women have now started voicing their opinions and are also heard of to some extent, the tradition of man overpowering women still persists and is still quite deeply rooted in almost every area in Nepal. Discrimination starts right from the family level to the national level. In most of the families in Nepal, the eldest male member of the family is considered to be the head of the family and are the decision makers. Similarly, we can also see discrimination among men and women in employment opportunities, involvement in different social programs, involvement in sports, etc.

Currently, involvement of women in sports is one of the major topics of discussion in Nepal. As Nepal is a male dominated society, it is pretty much obvious that involvement of women in sports is very less as compared to that of men. One of the main and obvious reasons behind it, is the fact that there is unequal distribution of opportunities to a girl and a boy child of the same family from a very young age. Due to this tradition, many girl child do not even get an opportunity to establish an interest towards sports. Although some women have recently started taking part in several sports, their participation is being overlooked due to various reasons. Generally people prefer watching men’s matches over women’s matches because they feel that women’s matches are less energetic, and hence less interesting. In an article posted in *The Himalayan Times*, many readers have presented their opinions about involvement of Nepali women in sports and the reason behind their participation being overlooked. While some of them think lingering pseudoscientific claims about inferiority of women’s bodies and male- dominated media as a reason behind women’s participation being overlooked, others feel that giving less priority for advertisement of women’s sports also leads to their participation being overlooked. Other than that, female members of families not being able to identify their family member’s talent in sports due to various socio- economic reasons has also been hindering the participation of women in sports.

Another reason for little involvement of women in sports is menstruation, which is considered as a taboo in Nepal. Even in today’s date, women mostly from rural areas of Nepal are isolated from the family and kept into dark sheds or huts during their menstruation. As menstruation is considered as a taboo, women are not provided proper knowledge about it and hence, the lack of proper knowledge has been causing anxiety to participate in sports ever since. Furthermore, even if some of the girls participate in sports, they stop doing that once their menstruation starts.

Hypothesis: School going teenage girls get comparatively less opportunities than boys to involve in sports, and also stop being involved in it after their first menarche takes place.

Literature Review

Recently, sports are considered as an important factor for developing the social, mental and physical well-being of teenage girls. Their involvement on sports can impact their health, school and social life. A recent study by the Women's Sports Foundation called as "Teen sports in America: Why Participation Matters" found that "Those who play sports not only do better in school but also are more likely to have high self-esteem, stronger relationship and improved physical health" (Frankel). Many studies have shown that those who play sports have 10 percent higher self-esteem than those who do not play sports. Moreover, sports also benefit them in improving their academic performance by developing positive attitude towards the school work. But the irony is, very less number of girls participate in sports. In comparison to boys, girls are found to be less active in sports. According to the survey by *Monitoring the Future's nationwide* from grade 8 to 12, overall 61 % girls participated in sports compared to 75% of boys (Frankel). Also a national study of US children and adolescents found that "girls were more likely to drop out of sports than boys, with 8 percent from third to fifth graders and 16 percent from ninth to twelfth graders especially in sports such as football, volleyball, basketball, gymnastics and soccer" (Frankel). This shows that many teenage girls leave sports after a certain period of time. There are various factors that influence them to stop playing sports such as lack of fund, support and opportunities. When teachers were asked about their main reason for not involving in sports, many responded saying that it was probably due to lack of resources and confidence among the girls. Another main reason was "dominating behaviour of boys during PE and sport and perceived lack of confidence and skills" (Okely et. al). Moreover, the stereotypes beliefs that sports are only for boys is also another reason for less participation of girls in sports. Therefore, many teenage girls run the risk of being considered as "unfeminine" if they play sports and they often lack support from their friends and families to play sports (Alexander). In many cases, girls lack the proper access and opportunities to play sports than boys. The existing gender stereotypes regarding the notion of sports only for boys and fewer access to opportunities are discouraging the teenage girls to play sports. Therefore, this research is necessary to understand the problem teenage girls are facing for sports so that proper plans and policies can be taken to encourage them in participation of sports.

Objectives

Our projects' purpose is to find out the interest and involvement of teenage girls of Nepal in indoor and outdoor sports such as chess, badminton, football, volleyball, table tennis, basketball etc. In addition to that, we will look at the factors that are preventing them to be involved in sports, if they are not involved. In this project, it is our hypothesis that school going girl children at the age of around 13 stop playing games due to the society's thinking as well as this is the time when their menstruation begins. Hence, to motivate and encourage women to take part in sports, we would like to put forward this project. Our key question is: how much interest do the teenage girls show in sports and if they are not involved what are their major barriers?

Methodology

The first step was submitting the research project proposal form in which several things needed to be specified such as timeline of the study, type of study, area of study, sample size and number of study population. The timeline of the study was anticipated to start on July 22nd, 2018 and end on 31st January, 2019 (Presentations, Report writing, Data Analysis). The study was mostly based on cross-sectional study. Schools and high schools of three districts of Nepal namely Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur were mainly covered. The sample selection was done by the method of random sampling. The study population was teenage girls studying from grade 8- grade 12. We covered almost 2 schools everyday as the distance to the schools were quite far. Also, we had to manage the time with the schools beforehand so that students would not miss important classes. In total, we visited 9 schools and 2 high schools from where we were able to collect opinions of around 176 students. The questionnaire prepared was semi-structured and there were no statistical questions. We first went to respective schools and chose 4 students each from 8th, 9th, 10th grade and also chose 4 students from grade 11 and 12 (if the schools had higher secondary classes).

The students were brought in a room where they were provided with questionnaire. The research investigators explained what the students had to do and if any confusion, were told to ask questions. After they finished filling up the questionnaire, we held a small focus-group discussion among the students and us. We asked them several questions regarding the sports activities in their school, about how actively they participated or not and if any other factors were refraining them from participating in sports. After that, we took interview from either the principal of the school or the extra-curricular activity in-charge. We asked the interviewees about the involvement of girls in sports in their schools, whether or not they participated in international games and encouragement for their participation.

Findings

Fig. 1 shows that 62.3% of the total participants responded saying that their parents and teachers encourage them to participate in sports. While 34.9 % participants responded saying sometimes whereas very few of about 2.9% said that their parents and teachers never encourage them to participate in sports.

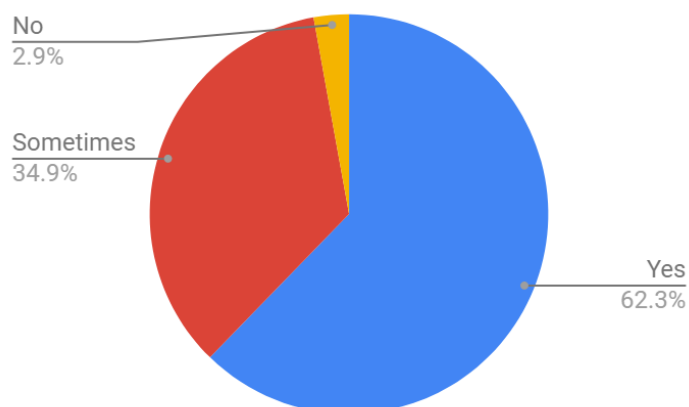


Fig 1: Count of Parents /Teachers Encouragement

In fig 2, when we asked students about the possibility of future scope for sports in Nepal, 54.9% responded saying that there is a scope for women sports whereas 34.9% participants thought that there might be future scope for women in the field of sports. Among them, 10.3% said that there is no scope for women sports in Nepal.

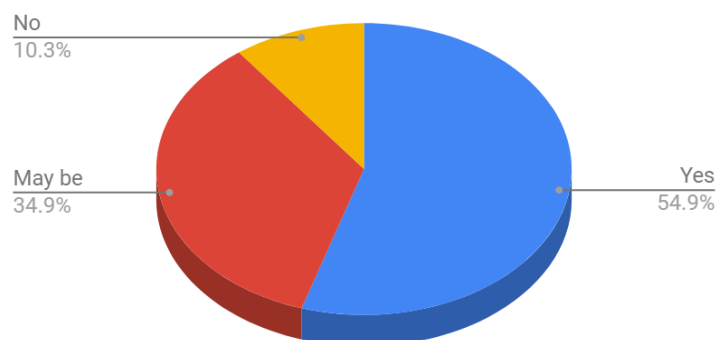


Fig 2: Scope for women sports in Nepal

In fig 3, we asked students whether they will take sports as their career or not in future where only 35.4% said that they will take sports as career in near future. While 55.4% students responded they might take sports as career whereas 9.1% were sure that they won't be taking any sports as career in future.

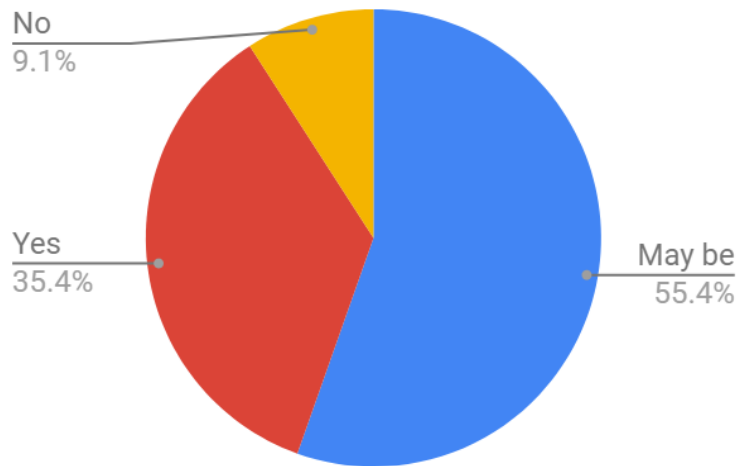


Fig 3: Response on career as sports

Fig. 4 shows that 37.7% students said that it is fine to play sports during the time of menstruation. While there were 52.6% students who believed on opposite, not fine to be involved in sports at the time of periods. Around 9.7% participants does not responded on the question since they had not got their period yet.

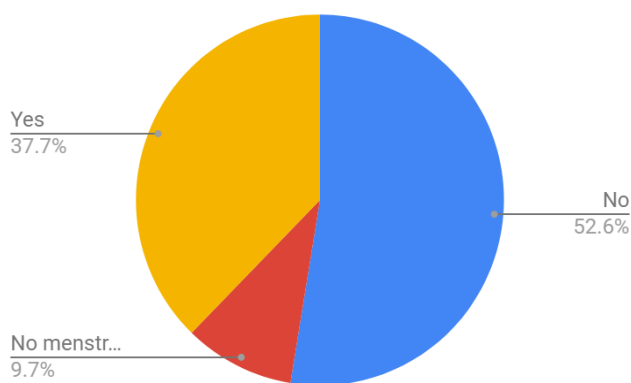


Fig 4: Is playing sports during menstruation fine?

Discussion

From the results above, we can clearly see that there is very little involvement of teenage girls in sports. We tried to find out their perspectives about it from the questionnaire that we had designed and the in-depth interviews were taken with teachers along with some of the students. We found out different factors that are hindering the women's participation in sports. First thing we noticed was that some schools did not have facility of sports at all and those which had the facility of sports, did not have a separate coach to train students. In addition to that, we also found out that sports was only prioritized for boys and girls did not have a group for playing any kind of sports. Some of the schools had extra time separated for sports during weekends and only boys were allowed to play. Discrimination in providing resource to play sports for girls and boys of the same school has caused teenage girls to lose their enthusiasm towards sports.

Another thing was the trend of parents prioritizing studies over extra-curricular activities including sports. As we all know, most of the parents in South Asia are very skeptical about their children showing interest in other sectors except studies and that is exactly what we are seeing in Nepal as well. When asked to students whether or not do their parents support them to play sports, most of the students said they do support but only during their free time after they have completed all their academic works. This can be considered as a pseudo permission by parents to their children which confuse them even more. Sports can not be taken just as a time-pass, although that is what most of the parents in Nepal think. Hence, lack of encouragement from parents to actively participate in sports is another reason for less involvement of teenage girls in sports.

After interviewing the participants (teenage girls) and listening to their views towards whether or not sports should be played during menstruation gave us a surprise. Most of them said that due to heavy bleeding and cramps, it is not appropriate to play sports. Also, they said that they would have heavy bleeding which is a very wrong concept in their minds. We tried our best to aware the girls that playing sports during menstruation is fine as well.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, through this research we were able to find out that teenage girls were not really involved in sports due to various reasons. One main reason was the unavailability of facility of sports. Also, we found out that there were boys team but there was no girls team formed in most schools and even if they did have one, there were not enough sports equipments. Other reason was due to the focus on studies which was forced by parents as said by the participants and the interviewees (principal/ extra- curricular coordinator). The third reason was menstruation. The girls had a negative notion that playing sports during menstruation was not good for their body.

We encouraged them to play outdoor games as it not only keeps us physically fit but it helps us stay mentally fit. We hope that the girls also get involved in sports and there is a proper space provided by the schools for girls to learn, grow and participate in national and international games.

Limitations

Due to the lack of knowledge on proper research methods and data analysis, the questionnaire prepared and the sample size estimated were not accurate. Since the questionnaire was not so well planned, data analysis is difficult to do as most data collected are descriptive. Also, due to the lack of time and budget, more schools could not be covered as expected.

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