

## Level of Sport Participation for Women in Iran and Leisure Constraints

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to carry out an empirical study of constraint factors in recreational sporting activities. More specifically it tests the model of constraints (intra-personal, interpersonal, and structural), as proposed by Crawford *et al.* (1991), and its relationship with actual participation levels in specific recreational sports activities in Iran.

Although there is a growing body of study in the USA, Canada, and United Kingdom into gender differences in leisure opportunities and behavior, little is known about leisure activities in Iran. The main purpose of this study is about the factors prohibiting female student at Khorasgan Azad Islamic University to participate in recreation sporting activities. This paper presents the findings of an exploratory investigation into factors influencing the recreational sporting activities.

The data was collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire among three hundreds (300) female students who were participated in recreational sporting activities (102 individuals once or more per week, 129 individuals once or more per month, and 69 individuals once per year or more). Leisure constraints factors used in this study named as lack of time, lack of money, lack of facilities, transportation, social relations, lack of interest, unawareness, lack of skill and ability, and health and fitness problems.

The findings showed that significant differences was found among constraint factors such as lack of time, lack of money, transportation, lack of interest, unawareness, lack of skill and ability, and health and fitness problems. These findings have theoretical and practical implications, which are discussed.

**Key words:** Participation, Constraints, Sporting Activities, Women.

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## **Introduction**

The lifestyles of women continue to change as they enter the workforce, yet the social expectations of women's roles have been slow to make the transition. Women are still expected to keep family and home as their priority. This emphasis on the home sphere would seem to provide a "common world" for women with leisure as an important component (Bialeschki and Henderson, 1986). Recently, more women have entered the workforce in Iran, the lifestyles of women have gone through changes, for example sixty percent (60%) of the universities' students are female in Iran. However women are still expected to carry out home-centered 'women's work' in addition to out side job roles.

In recent years researchers have improved the theoretical and measurement questions related to leisure constraints. According to Jackson (1990), "recent leisure constraints research reflects a substantially higher level of conceptual and theoretical sophistication than was the case in early investigations" (p.129). Leisure investigators have recognized that studies must be grounded in theory if our understanding of the phenomenon is to continue to advance.

Although considerable progress has been achieved by leisure researchers in their study of discontinuance of recreation activities, very little is known about why some individuals continue to participate in selected recreation activities while others discontinue their participation (Backman, 1991). Buchanan (1985) hypothesized that consistent participation in selected recreation activities is

related to the notion of commitment and that an individual's commitment to a recreation activity may influence some individuals to participate consistently while others discontinue it.

Inequality of access to recreation opportunities between different sectors of the community is of major concern to public sector leisure providers (Glyptis, 1985). The 1980s and early 1990s have been years of considerable achievement in boosting levels of participation, yet Sport for All, Countryside for All, Arts for All, Entertainment for All, and Holidays for All remain aspirations rather than attainments. Participation data, including the General Household Survey (Office of Population Censuses and Survey, 1976, 1979) and surveys based on countryside recreation (Countryside Commission, 1984/5) provide a statistical backcloth which consistently reveals women, the elderly, school leavers, the unemployed, low-income groups and the disabled as low participant groups. The issues concerning women and leisure are succinctly stated by Talbot (1979) and are the subjects of several current and recently completed research projects (including Octon, 1979; Deem, 1982; Dixey and Talbot, 1982). To date, most studies focus on 'demand' constraints, particularly the personal and social barriers inhibiting women's participation.

The aim of this paper is to carry out an empirical study of constraint factors in recreational sporting activities. More specifically it tests the model of constraints (intra-personal, interpersonal, and structural), as proposed by Crawford *et al.* (1991),



and its relationship with actual participation levels in specific recreational sports activities in Iran.

### **Relationship between Constraints and Sport Participation**

Most women who have responsibilities as homemakers/mothers and in paid employment appear to have little time for leisure (Henderson, 1991). They work a “second shift” and have a dual career (Shank, 1986). They also may experience a leisure gap both in terms of the availability of leisure and the conflict between leisure and the other demands in their lives. Rojek has stated that “at every stage in the life cycle, the leisure time and space of females is obstructed by constraints that do not intrude so insistently upon the leisure preserves of men” (1985, p. 18). Many women do not find the opportunities for leisure or are not satisfied with the opportunities that are available to them. In addition, for women as for men, the simple provision of more opportunity is usually not enough to eliminate constraints (Goodale & Witt, 1989). These facts and suppositions provide the basis for a number of questions to be explored about the meaning of leisure and constraints to leisure. Although the relationship between constraints and participation is emphasized in the literature, few empirical studies have been conducted in this area. Boothby, Tungatt and Townsend (1981), Godbey (1985), and McGuire (1984) have suggested that a significant practical contribution could be made by an empirical study of leisure constraints. A few attempts have been made to identify the link between perceived barriers and

participation. These investigations challenged the assumption that constraints always prevent participation and provided evidence that the assumption of a link between perceived constraints and participation may be problematic. There has been some focus on the nature of leisure constraints. Jackson et al. (1993), for instance identified lack of money, lack of facilities, lack of time and a transportation problem, as structural constraints, which were found to be most important constraints. The absence of constraints was seen to imply higher levels of participation. Nevertheless, other types of constraints (intra-personal and interpersonal) may be related to participation. Participation in actual recreation activity might well be related to the absolute importance of specific constraints’ variables. Social theory and sociological studies have noted that social structures such as gender, age, lifestyle, occupational, status, income, and education affect people’s decision-making and options in their life.

There is some evidence to show that there is a direct and negative relationship between the level of participation in leisure activities and the reporting of constraints in the literature (Shaw, Bonen and McCabe, 1991). However, Kay and Jackson (1991) have suggested that reported constraints are likely to come not only from non-participation but also from participants. In addition, the authors expected that high levels of constraints were related to frequent participants, because participation exposes individuals to constraints. For example “lack of facilities” as a constraint may affect individuals,



either by reduction or non-participation in a specific activity, which may lead to an increase in participation in another one. Jackson et al. (1993) attempted to identify in detail the leisure decision-making process. The main suggestion was that negotiation of leisure constraints took place. Often, the literature has emphasized the conception of constraints as insurmountable barriers to leisure participation, but Jackson et al. (1993) suggested that negotiation resulted very often in modified participation rather than non-participation. They also suggested that motivation is one of the most important factors in the decision-making process, and the outcome of the negotiation process is dependent on the interaction and relationship between the strength of motivation and constraints' participation.

### **Method**

**Subjects:** The samples were selected randomly from a large university in Esfahan (Khorsgan Azad) in Iran, located in the east of main land. The samples consisted of three hundreds (300) female undergraduates which means they are educated people, and the age ranged between 18 to 26 years so that they are therefore included in the young adulthood category. The data was collected and analyzed by SPSS/10. A principal component analysis was performed. Only those components with eigenvalue greater than 1.0 were retained and

rotated with a Varimax Rotation (Orthogonal Factor Analysis).

**Instrument:** A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the samples the reliability of questionnaires was 84. The questionnaires were distributed on weekdays, during the daytime in the faculties and departments of the university by the respective secretaries. Data were collected during the second academic term of 1999-2000 in Iran.

**Procedures:** Annual frequency (rarely, sometimes, often, and very often) participation (Stockdale et al., 1996), and frequency (more than four times, one to four times, and non-participation (Kelly, 1980). Also the Likert scale (very important, quite important, somewhat important, and not important) participation (Jackson, 1987; Jackson & Henderson, 1995).

### **Findings**

**Factor Analysis:** An exploratory factor analysis was performed, using SPSS (version 9.1, for windows) FACTOR program in order that the underlying dimensions of the concept be determined. A principal component analysis was performed. Only those components with eigenvalue greater than 1.0 were retained and rotated with a Varimax Rotation (Orthogonal Factor Analysis). All thirty four (34) items were satisfactory (at least .35 Devellis, 1991) (see Table 1).



**Table 1** Principal Component Analysis of Constraints on Participation in Sporting Activities

Items	Time	Interest	Finance	Transport	Facility	Social	Awareness	Skill Ability	Health Fitness
Time: work/studies	.84								
Time: family commitments	.84								
Time: social commitments	.84								
Time: because of timetable	.84								
Not interested		.84							
Not enjoyed in the past		.83							
Not interrupt routine		.84							
Not interest available activity		.83							
Cannot afford			.84						
Cost of transportation			.84						
Cost of equipment			.84						
Admission fee			.83						
No opportunity near my home				.84					
No car				.83					
Transportation takes much time				.83					
Facilities inadequate					.83				
Facilities crowded					.83				
Facilities poorly kept					.83				
Nobody to participate with						.84			
Friends do not have time						.84			
Friends do not like participating						.84			
Social situation (opportunity) limit						.84			
Not known where to participate							.83		
Not known what is available							.83		
Not known where I can learn it							.83		
Not skilled enough								.83	
No one to teach me								.83	
Generally poor ability								.83	
Shy because of lack of ability								.84	
Not fit									.83
Health problems									.84
It makes me feel tired									.83
Too tired for recreation									.84
Afraid of getting hurt									.84
Eigenvalue	7.4	3.8	2.0	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.1
% of Variance explained	21.7	11.2	5.8	4.8	4.3	4.0	3.9	3.4	3.2
Cumulative % of Variance explained	24.7	32.9	38.7	43.5	47.9	51.9	55.8	59.2	62.4

**Reliability of the whole scale and the sub-scales**

Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated for the whole scale and sub-scale, so that the internal-consistency reliability of each scale be assessed. As it can be seen in Table 2, the Cronbach alpha coefficient ranged between .61 to .85 and

subsequently all the scale proved to have acceptable internal consistency reliability (Devellis, 1991). Moreover, the internal consistency reliability of the whole scale was found to be .84, which is also satisfactory.

**Table 2** Reliability Analysis

SUB-SCALES	Cronbach's alpha	Number of Items
Lack of Time	0.68	Four
Lack of Interest	0.73	Four
Lack of Money	0.62	Four
Transportation	0.79	Three
Lack of Facilities	0.61	Three
Social(lack of partner)	0.85	Four
Unawareness	0.77	Three
Lack of Skill/Ability	0.61	Four
Health/Fitness	0.84	Five
Whole Scale	0.84	Thirty Four

**Frequency of Sport Participation**

Table 3 indicates the percentage of participants at

each level of frequency for the samples who participate in recreational sporting activities.

**Table 3** Number and Percentage of Participation in Week, Month, and Year

Level of frequency of participation	Frequency	Percentage
Once a Week	102	34%
Once a Month	129	43%
Once a Year	69	23%
Total	300	100%



### The Relationship between Constraints and Participation Level

The mean scores of the three participation groups (rare, moderate, and frequent participations) in the constraints factors were calculated and the significance of the differences were evaluated using a one-way ANOVA.

For the samples, the results are presented in Table 4 and Figure 1. Comparisons between the three groups' scores in the whole scale and in the sub-scales revealed significant differences. In terms of the whole scale, the scores significantly ( $F=8.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ) decreased with the frequency of participation in sport. The rare participants had the highest mean score ( $m=3.01$ ), followed by the moderate ( $m=2.73$ )

and frequent ( $m=2.64$ ) participants. In terms of the constraint dimensions, significant differences were found in seven of them, namely, lack of time, lack of interest, lack of money, transportation, unawareness, skill/ability, and health/fitness. Scores in three dimensions did not decrease with the frequency of participation in sport first, lack of interest (rare,  $m=1.95$ ) (moderate,  $m=2.10$ ) and (frequent,  $m=1.84$ ), lack of money (rare,  $m=1.75$ ) (moderate,  $m=1.79$ ) and (frequent,  $m=1.33$ ), and skill/ability (rare,  $m=1.68$ ), (moderate,  $m=1.81$ ), and (frequent,  $m=1.42$ ). The lowest mean scores were revealed in frequent participation health/fitness ( $m=1.23$ ) and the highest mean scores were revealed in rare participation lack of facilities ( $m=3.01$ ).

**Table 4** One-way ANOVA of Constraint Factors (Mean Scores) by Participant

Factors	Once a Week		Once a Month		Once a Year		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Lack of Time	1.96	.684	1.97	.523	2.30	.865	6.72	.001
Lack of Interest	1.33	.402	1.79	.803	1.75	.655	15.85	.000
Lack of Money	1.84	.639	2.10	.806	1.95	.887	3.22	.040
Transportation	2.00	.926	2.30	.844	2.39	.777	5.31	.005
Lack of Facilities	2.64	1.06	2.73	1.00	3.01	.865	2.93	.055
Social (lack of partner)	2.30	.746	2.51	.767	2.56	.817	2.87	.057
Unawareness	1.70	.820	2.17	.971	2.43	.931	14.51	.000
Skill/Ability	1.42	.616	1.81	.822	1.68	.467	9.35	.000
Health/Fitness	1.23	.322	1.50	.575	1.69	.664	16.45	.000



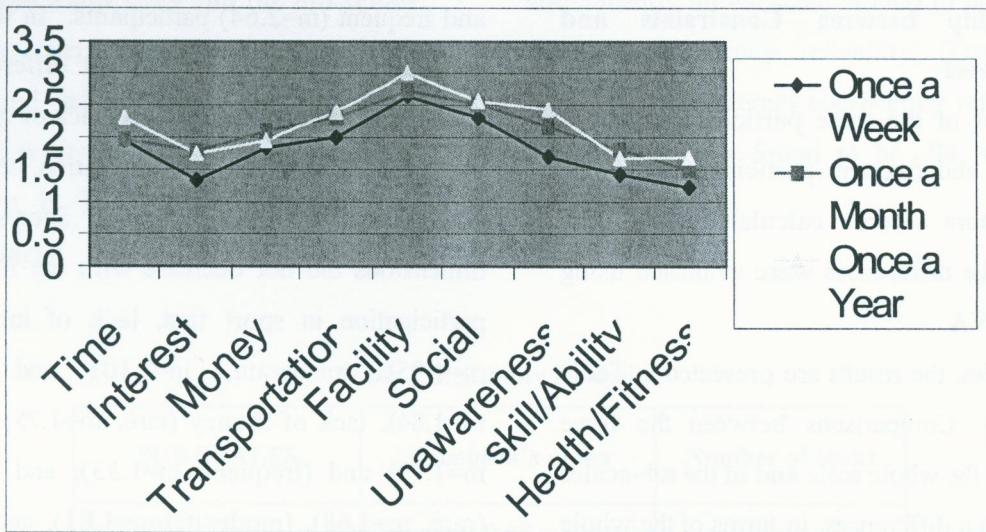


Figure 1 Perception of Constraints Dimension by Level of Participation

### Discussion

Comparison between the constraint factors identified by the current study with those found by studies in other countries, is not an easy task, considering the characteristics of each study. The factors named “time”, “facilities”, “money”, and “social (“lack of partner” were conceptually the most clear and can be easily compared with those found by previous studies, in which samples of general population were used (e.g. Jackson, 1993). “Individual/psychological” factor included a wide range of internal constraints, some of which were categorized in different factors by previous studies (e.g. health or body related problems, Henderson et al, 1988). Finally, “lack of interest” as a constraint to recreational sport participation has been excluded by a number of previous studies, which aimed to investigate just intervening constraints, while the factor named “knowledge of opportunities” has been mixed with

the factor “lack of partner”, under the “social isolation (Jackson, 1993).

Level of participation in activities has been shown to be related to various indicators of well-being, such as life satisfaction Kelly, Steinkamp and Kelly (1987); Ragheb and Griffith, (1982); Riddick and Daniel (1984) or the Cantril Ladder format (“worst possible life” to “best possible life”) Palmore (1979). Support for this idea has not been consistent, however. For example, Lemon, Bengston and Peterson (1972) found that among a group of measures that operationalised activity, only informal activities with friends were associated with life satisfaction. Culter (1976), and Hoyt, Kaiser, Peters and Babchuk (1980) are among several studies that failed to demonstrate any relationship between formal activities and well-being. A need was thus seen to determine whether some types of well-being are differentially related to activity participation.



It has been suggested (Shaw et al, 1991; Kay & Jackson, 1991) that reported constraints might not act as barriers to leisure participation and that there is no association between intervening constraints and levels of participation. The results of the present study provided support for these arguments and indicated that constraints also affect participants and their frequency of sport participation.

The perception of constraints are discussed below:

Frequency of participation (rarely, moderate, and frequent) by nine constraints factors were statistically analysed by ANOVA in order to examine whether the frequency of participation in sport decreases perception constraints.

For the samples, comparison between the three groups' scores in the whole scale and in the subscales revealed significant differences. In terms of the whole scale, the scores significantly ( $F=12.78$ ,  $p<.001$ ) decreased with increased frequency of participation in sport. The rare participation had the highest mean score ( $m=3.01$ ), followed by the moderate ( $m=2.73$ ) and frequent ( $m=2.64$ ) participants.

It seems that because of the difficulties in precisely measuring the frequency of participation in sport, the survey of the relationship between frequency of participation in sport and perception of constraints is a complex issue. For example, according to Carroll and Alexandris (1997), constraints, such as accessibility/ financial and facilities/ services were not shown to be negatively related to the frequency of participation in sport,

although they could be expected to be so, as stated by (Coalter, 1993).

This might be due to the methodological limitations of the study. Comparative between the results of different studies should always be made very carefully, as methodological issues should be considered, although in the present study frequency of participation was measured ordinally and for the year before the investigation, it was the same as in the study of Carroll and Alexandris (1997). More detailed measures of the frequency of participation, like mean hours per week, could help towards a further explanation of these issues. However, the relationship between perception of constraints and the frequency of sport participation needs further empirical investigation, in which more detailed measurement of the frequency of participation should be employed.

It is worth examining these figures from a health perspective. It has been suggested, for example in Howley and Franks (1992) and Wankel and Berger (1990) that in order to gain cardio-respiratory fitness benefits through participation in sports and exercise an optimum frequency of three to four times per week is required. Hence, those who participate at least once a month and less than once a month do not gain significant health benefits by their participation in sport. The issue of the proportion of the participants who gain health benefits by their participation in sport, in terms of the frequency, duration and intensity are necessary in order to clarify these issues. However, the frequency of participation in sport was measured as a



dichotomous variables (frequent versus infrequent participation). This does not provide an accurate measurement of the frequency of participation, and consequently the results might have been affected by this methodological limitation.

The identification of the constraints on participation in recreational sport was made the main objective of the present study, since, according to Jackson (1988) and McGuire and O'Leary (1992), the identification of the constraints experienced by individuals can contribute more effective planning, management and delivery of sports related services.

The methodological limitations of the investigation, for example the inaccurate measurement of the frequency of participation in sport, might have influenced the results regarding the relationship between the frequency of participation in sport and the perception of constraints. This issue needs further examination.

It is difficult to compare this study with previous studies because of the methodological differences. To some extent, these differences are inevitable, as they relate to the operation of different samples and participation in different sport and recreation activities, and the stages of progress of the theoretical base in different investigations.

The study of the relationship between the frequency of participation in sporting activities and the perception of constraints was shown to be a complex issue. This is because of the difficulties inherent in accurately measuring the frequency of participation in sport. The fact that the relationship between frequency of participation in sport and

constraints was shown to be not significant, might be due to the limitations of the research design (e.g., ordinal measurement of frequency). In order to obtain more detailed and accurate measurements of participation in sport, in which the relationship between these two variables might be adequately investigated, further empirical research is needed.

In order to encourage people to participate physical activities in Iran, those constraints were shown in this study should have reduced or eliminated.

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