Barriers in Physical Activity Participation among Muslim Women

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Abstract

A research study was conducted to investigate barriers in physical activity participation among Muslim women and the differences between barriers and demographic factors (age group and hijab). The sample consisted of 455 Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) female Muslim students from four different UiTM campuses in Selangor. For data collection the instrument used in this study were Exercise Benefit and Barriers Scale (EBBS). These questionnaires consist of two sections: perceived benefit and perceived barriers, but for these studies the researcher only used perceived barriers. There are four domains (exercise milieu, time constraint, family discouragement and physical exertion) in perceived barriers and a total of 14 items. Score range for this section was 14 to 56, where lower score represented lower perception of barriers and vice versa. Each of the 14 barrier items were scored on a 4-response Likert format (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = disagree; and, 4 = strongly disagree). The result of this study indicated that exercise milieu (m = 13.10) was rated significantly higher than time constraint (m = 6.77), physical exertion (m = 6.75) and family discouragement (m = 3.24). With reference to the objective, the greatest perceived barrier to exercise was exercise milieu followed by time expenditure, physical exertion, and family discouragement. Therefore, the needs to understand the key areas of barriers in physical activity participation is crucial as a result to find an essential step and programs to overcome any perceived difficulty as well by providing suitable facilities to Muslim women when participating or during a time in any physical activity.

Keywords: Barrier, physical activity, participation, Muslim women
Background

Most Muslim girls in Islamic society are structured, and go through their lives by following the religious beliefs and values of the religion of Islam. These values are fundamental to their identity, and thus, their participation in sports and other activities are determined based on the factors their religion, culture and ethnicity (Yasmeen & Soniha, 2011). According to Muhammad Akhbar Zahidi, Syed Kamaruzaman, & Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor (2012), young Muslim women face many issues at school during physical education and sport activities because of the restrictions that are placed on them by their culture, gender, religion and ethnicity. In contrast to men, who can freely participate in physical activities, any of these factors can be a reason that women do not participate in physical activities.

Numerous studies in the existing body of related literature state that Muslim women have lower rates of participation in sport compared to others (Equal, 2008). There are many perceptions regarding Muslim women being involved in sports. In fact, Islamic principles promote good health and fitness for both men and women (Maesam Abdul Razak, Mohd Sofian Omar Fauzee & Rozita Abd Latif, 2010). However, there are guidelines that need to be followed in how to participate in different physical activities, as well as the appropriate clothes to wear.

Due to misconceptions about Islamic culture, and lack of awareness of matters concerning religion, many Muslim girls have been prohibited to participate in any physical activity because of their fear of discrimination and negative attitudes toward them by society and religious leaders (Yasmeen & Soniha, 2011). According to Ali Muhyy Ed-Deen Al-Qara Daaghi stated that: “Cannot be denied that Islam has never prevented women involve themselves in the sport. However, there are several conditions that must be taken into account.”

Other sport scientists have mentioned that both men and women emphasize that health and fitness are important to them. Islamic culture refers to the lived experience of being a Muslim. It needs to be stated that Muslim females are not a homogeneous group, and that there are differences in how they choose to resolve religious demands. For
example, some choose to adopt the 'hijab', or head scarf, and Islamic dress (Muhammad Akhbar Zahidi et al., 2012).

Islam had mention that sport such as swimming, archery and horse-riding will encourages both men and women to involves in physical activity in order to maintain the healthy lifestyles (Syed Agil Syed Omar,(2011). Islam had encourages its followers to stay healthy and strong.

“Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of won, to strike terror into (the heart of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies, and other besides, whom you may not know, but whom Allah do know. Whatever you shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and you shall not be treated unjustly.”
[Al- Anfal 8:60]

Many people are fully aware of the benefits of regular physical activities, but because of the constraints related to Islamic rules, it is difficult to take part in physical activities. Islam and physical activities share common concerns about the issues of controlling the diet and maintain a healthy body (Muhammad Akhbar Zahidi et al., 2012). The participation of Muslim women in physical activities depends on many factors, including origin, religious orientation, gender norms, culture, parents, family, relatives and support from society members. These are the factors that shape different attitudes and beliefs toward physical activities.

Objectives/Research Questions

i. To determine the barriers towards physical activity participation among Muslim women.

ii. To determine the differences in barriers towards physical activity participation among Muslim women based on: age group and between hijab and non-hijab.
Research Methodology

Instrument

- The barrier component comprised 14 barrier items categorized into four subscales: exercise milieu; time expenditure; physical exertion; and family discouragement, with high internal consistency (0.87).
- Score range for this section will be 14 to 56, where lower score represented lower perception of barriers and vice versa. Each of the 14 barrier items were scored on a 4-response Likert format (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = disagree; and, 4 = strongly disagree).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived barriers to exercise</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercise milieu</td>
<td>6 items (3,4,5,6,10,14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td>3 items (1,9,12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical exertion</td>
<td>3 items (2,7,13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family discouragement</td>
<td>2 items (8,11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

Reliability and Validity

Table 2 shows the reliability of the research instrument after analyzed using Cronbach Alpha analysis and table 3 showed the result if an item is discarded, any other items will not increase the alpha coefficient. Thus no items will be discarded after pilot study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha based on standardized items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.868</td>
<td>.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N of items 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</th>
<th>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</th>
<th>Corrected Item-Total Correlation</th>
<th>Squared Multiple Correlation</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>41.00</td>
<td>33.017</td>
<td>.536</td>
<td>.570</td>
<td>.858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>41.20</td>
<td>32.468</td>
<td>.511</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>40.97</td>
<td>33.558</td>
<td>.516</td>
<td>.433</td>
<td>.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>40.90</td>
<td>32.024</td>
<td>.567</td>
<td>.592</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>40.65</td>
<td>32.333</td>
<td>.586</td>
<td>.584</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>41.07</td>
<td>32.233</td>
<td>.592</td>
<td>.566</td>
<td>.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>41.23</td>
<td>32.589</td>
<td>.503</td>
<td>.650</td>
<td>.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>40.80</td>
<td>33.383</td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td>.868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>40.93</td>
<td>33.318</td>
<td>.403</td>
<td>.382</td>
<td>.865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>40.50</td>
<td>31.847</td>
<td>.706</td>
<td>.629</td>
<td>.850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>40.58</td>
<td>33.535</td>
<td>.421</td>
<td>.479</td>
<td>.864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.08</td>
<td>32.790</td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>.367</td>
<td>.861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>40.72</td>
<td>31.698</td>
<td>.611</td>
<td>.597</td>
<td>.854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>41.02</td>
<td>31.745</td>
<td>.578</td>
<td>.445</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3:** items- total statistics

**Sample size**

- The sample consisted of 455 UiTM students from four different campuses in Selangor who voluntarily participated in this study. The sample only drew Muslim female students that study at these campuses.

- Population of UiTM Muslim female student in Selangor is around 30 000 and based on Krejcie & Morgan (1970) the sample size will be 379 subjects and 20% will be added as dropout from the sample after collecting the data.
Findings

Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time constraint</th>
<th>Physical exertion</th>
<th>Exercise milieu</th>
<th>Family discouragement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>13.10</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. deviation</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of Barriers

Table 1 showed the descriptive statistics of barriers towards physical participation among Muslim women. The mean score for exercise milieu (13.10), time constraints (6.77), physical exertion (6.75) and family discouragement (3.24). Standard deviation for exercise milieu (3.65), time constraints (2.19), physical exertion (2.02) and family discouragement (1.14).

With reference to the objective, the greatest perceived barrier to exercise was exercise milieu followed by time expenditure, physical exertion, and family discouragement. Exercise milieu was rated significantly higher than all other barriers. There were no further significant differences between physical exertion, time expenditure or family discouragement.

Question 2

i. Age group

The descriptive table provides some very useful descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation and 95% confidence intervals for the dependent variable (barriers) for each separate age group (19-22, 23-26 and 27-30). From the table it shows age group 23-26 (30.70) had higher means score followed by age group 27-30 (30.64) and 19-22 (28.75).

Below are the table that shows the output of the ANOVA analysis and whether the results have a statistically significant difference between age group means. The table shows that the significance level is 0.022 ($\rho = .022$), which is below 0.05 and therefore,
there is a statistically significant difference in the mean of barriers in physical activity between difference group ages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>F-test (sig)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-22</td>
<td>28.7398</td>
<td>7.13451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-26</td>
<td>30.7016</td>
<td>7.54686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-30</td>
<td>30.6364</td>
<td>10.23985</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5: ANOVA (age group)**

Based on the results above, there was a statistically significant difference between age groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F (2, 452) = 3.865, \rho = .022$). The results revealed that age group 23-26 ($m = 30.7398$) had higher score in barriers slightly higher from age group 27-30 ($m = 30.6364$) compared to age group 19-22 ($m = 28.7398$) that had lowest score in barriers.

**ii. Hijab and non-hijab**

The descriptive data showed the mean, standard deviation and 95% confidence intervals for the dependent variable (barriers) for each separate groups (hijab and non-hijab), as well as when all the groups are combined (total). From the table it shows that students who wear hijab (30.3063) had higher means score followed by students who not wear hijab (26.8833).

Below are the table that shows the output of the ANOVA analysis and whether the results have a statistically significant difference between these group means. The table shows that the significance level is 0.001 ($\rho = .001$), which is below 0.05 and therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in the mean of barriers in physical activity between students who wear hijab and students who's not wearing hijab.
Based on the results above, there was a statistically significant difference between these two groups as determined by one-way ANOVA \((F(1, 453) = 11.12, \rho = .001)\). The results revealed that hijab group (m = 30.3063) had higher score in barriers slightly higher from non-hijab group (m = 26.8833) that had lowest score in barriers.

### Discussions

#### Question 1

This is the first study on perceived barriers to physical activity participation involving representative sample of UiTM students of different campuses. The results showed that the exercise milieu (facilities and transportation, self-esteem, money) were the most referred as a barriers by students. This finding were supported with King et al. (1992) suggestion that young adult females find it difficult to exercise due to limited access to facilities. According to Taylor & Toohey (1995), many Muslim women indicated that they would like to participate in physical activities but could not do so because of the limited number of existing facilities and programs that met their religious requirement. Family discouragements are the least barriers to physical activity. This finding might be expected because most of the sample is single. However, our findings might be specific to university students who are usually confident and had different social context than others.

Most of the previous studies reported that time expenditure are the greater barriers to physical activity participation among university students. It’s stated that most of the student
cannot commit because of the tightness schedule and other commitments that their need to
attend to than participated in physical activity (Lovell, Ansari & Parker, 2010). Some other
common barriers to physical activity is include lack of facilities, bad weather, safety, lack of
exercise partner, fatigue or lack of energy, poor health, and self-consciousness about
appearance (Daniela Dressler Dambros, Luis Felipe Dias Lopes & Daniela Lopes dos
Santos, 2011).

Question 2

i. Age and barriers toward physical activity participation

The results of analyses of mean scores showed that there are differences
between age groups ranking of barriers toward physical activity participation. Most of
research on female development had focused on adolescent girls that previously not
received many attentions on studies. According to Petersen (1988), he stated that there
will decreasing in psychological development for girls during adolescence stage
(Robbins, 2010). These groups also will begin to lose their optimism and resiliency.
Those who reach age between 18-22 will have physical and biological changes with are
reach high point in vigor and physical fitness. For age group 22-30, their will experience
increase in body fat and less physical activity participation. Biologic factors are strongly
associated with level of physical activity, even though it is not clear these factors
actually “cause” physical activity to vary. Age is a potent predictor, and the level of
physical activity is known to decrease throughout the entire age span, beginning at least
with entry into school. During the school years, the activity level declines about 50%
(Sallis, 1993), and the decline continues until the typical elderly person is almost
entirely sedentary (USDHHS, 1996)

ii. Hijab and barriers toward physical activity participation

The Islamic concept of hijab is used to indicate the practice of head covering as well
covering the arms and legs as the practice of modesty. Not all women who are Muslim
wear the hijab or Islamic dress nowadays. Muslim women today made their own
choices weather to wear the hijab and cover their body because of the diverse in social
context, economic and political situations (Haifa Jawad, 2011). In this study showed that
students who wear hijab had higher barriers score between students who are not
wearing it. The rule of covering the head as a decisive influence on physical activity participation although women are able to take part in many activities if they wear loose-fitting clothes and a headscarf.

**Recommendations**

Based on current study, researcher has gain a lot of knowledge, experiences and information. The researcher has come out with some suggestion and recommendation as follows:

- The concentric circles around the Muslim women represent the Muslim community in Uitm. At present, there is little evidence suggesting that physical activity has been promoted to Muslim women for its health benefits. As discussed above, the problem lays both with the Muslim subculture regarding women ability to exercise within religious framework and the lack of awareness about Muslim women need in wider community. Education within the Muslim community about the Islamic need to maintain good health is necessary to bring about an attitudinal change regarding exercise.

- Health professionals who can encourage women to exercise more such as general practitioners and need to be educated about the specific religious norms within which Muslim women can exercise.

- Partnership between government organization and universities and other institutions, as well as Muslim sport group that will help integrate Muslim women physical activity participation into the mainstream activity guidelines.

- Improve policy and practice separate-sex on physical activity times’ where there is a demand, and publicize with the help of university to attract more members of the public and students.

- Priorities the recruitment, training and retention of female health trainer, and more creative ways of using current expertise.
References

Al- Quran Al-Karim


