Women's Leisure and Constraints to Participation: Iranian Perspectives

Narges Arab-Moghaddam
Iranian Academic Centre for Education, Culture & Research (ACECR)
Fars Branch

Karla A. Henderson
North Carolina State University

Razieh Sheikholeslami
Shiraz University

Literature about women's leisure exists with growing information about a range of women (e.g., women of color, older women, and women with disabilities). Little is known, however, about the leisure of women in middle Eastern cultures. The purpose of this exploratory study is to describe the leisure of Iranian women. A sample of 555 women of young middle age (25-40 years) provided information about their participation in leisure activities and constraints to their involvement in leisure. Iranian women had the greatest constraints related to the lack of structure for opportunities within their communities. Specific cultural constraints based on traditional views and the social significance of leisure were important but other typical economic, social, and personal home expectations were rated as more constraining to the Iranian women's leisure.

KEYWORDS: *Culture, religion, individualism, collectivism.*

Introduction

The study of women's leisure has been visible in the leisure literature for almost 20 years. During that time, a good deal of information has been uncovered about leisure meanings and how leisure is enabled as well as constrained for women (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1996; Shaw & Henderson, 2005). Although culture and ethnicity appear to play a large role in how leisure is embodied (e.g., Floyd & Gramann, 1993; Henderson, 1998; Stodolska & Yi-Kook, 2005; Walker, Deng, & Dieser, 2005), the growing body of research available about women and leisure written in English has been devoid of cultural analyses except in a few cases (e.g., Junui, 2000; Khan, 1997; Russell & Stage, 1996; Tirone & Shaw, 1997).

Integrative reviews conducted over the past 15 years show a growing evolution of information about women's leisure. Henderson (1990) concluded in the first integrative review related to research done in the 1980's

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that frameworks for understanding women's leisure were emerging using a variety of methods with a focus on empowering women generically to find meaning in leisure. This analysis showed that women shared a common world in their inequality regarding opportunities for leisure, were focused on social relationships in leisure, had fragmented leisure time, found the preponderance of leisure in the home and through unstructured activities, and lacked a sense of entitlement to leisure. The next integrative review (Henderson, 1996) broadened the basis of understanding to address multiple "meanings" associated with leisure. Henderson suggested that emerging issues in the literature related to gender explanations, a continua of meanings associated with leisure that were sometimes contradictory for different groups of women, and a growing focus on diversity existed within the research on women's leisure. The most recent integrative review (Henderson, Hodges, & Kivel, 2002) found that researchers in primarily English speaking countries around the world were further expanding the meanings of leisure for women from different perspectives. Dialogical issues surfaced related to the inward examination of how research on women is currently being conducted as well as how this research needs to move toward an examination of ideologies that shape girls' and women's experiences as well as the meanings of gender for men.

    These integrative reviews demonstrate a body of knowledge about women's leisure, but also acknowledge the lack of examination of the cultural dimensions of leisure and especially research about women from emerging nations. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the leisure involvement and constraints of women living in Iran. In this exploratory study we examined leisure from a sample of Iranian women and described constraints that influenced the way that leisure is perceived and embodied. The results are presented followed by a cross-cultural comparison from the perspective of current literature. Although a body of literature exists from the largely Judeo-Christian influences of North America, Europe, and Australia/New Zealand, less is known about the leisure of Muslim women from Middle Eastern cultures.

Constraints Literature

    Constraints research has moved from a narrow focus on barriers to participation towards a broader conceptualization of constraints. The conceptual framework for this study related to a culturally focused look at the three categories of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints, which have become widely accepted and adopted by researchers (Jackson & Scott, 1999). The relationship between these categories of constraints has been theorized including the development of a hierarchical model (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991) and a set of propositional statements about how this model works (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993). Further, based on evidence that constraints are not necessarily impenetrable barriers, attention

has been directed toward the idea of negotiation recognizing that constraints can be mitigated to a greater or lesser degree (e.g., Henderson, Bedini, Hecht, & Shuler, 1995; Jackson & Rucks, 1995). Constraints research has been closely aligned with the North American social psychological approach to the study of leisure (Coalter, 1999) and has tended to focus on individual experiences or perceptions and less on the social structure that influences leisure (Samdahl, 2005; Shaw & Henderson, 2005).

These approaches to studying constraints have not been without criticism as evidenced particularly in the work of Samdahl (2005) and Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997). Samdahl and her colleagues suggested that the constraints model narrows the analysis to a focus on leisure activity participation and fails to address the cultural context of individuals. The pre-determined definition and categorization of constraints limits, rather than facilitates, explanations of leisure behavior.

Shaw and Henderson (2005) also described why research on women's leisure has not always fit within a constraints framework. The majority of feminist researchers have directed their attention towards the linkages between women's gendered lives and women's leisure. When a constraints framework has been adopted, however, the research has shown that women face more constraints in their leisure than do men (Jackson & Henderson, 1995) and that these constraints relate to gender-based role expectations.

The categories of structural, intrapersonal, and interpersonal constraints overlap and may not be as useful especially from a cross-cultural perspective. For example, Shaw and Henderson (2005) noted that the ethic of care and lack of sense of entitlement relate to women's family roles and their obligations to put the well-being of others first. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish between structural constraints of lack of time from intrapersonal constraints related to caring behaviors and an internalized interpersonal sense of responsibility to others.

The issue of gender and cultural appropriateness or expectations is another area apart from constraints related to most men. These constraints may be tied to specific activities. For example, Culp (1998) found that gender roles including both peer and family expectations about appropriate roles for females constrained girls who were interested in outdoor recreation. The perception of specific activities as appropriate or not is a culturally based determination that varies among ethnic groups as several researchers have shown (e.g., Khan, 1997; Manrai & Manrai, 1995; Tirone & Pedlar, 2000; Tirone & Shaw, 1997). Further, social disapproval of activities considered to be inappropriate may be a type of interpersonal constraint as is social control of women's leisure by family members (Green & Hebron, 1988). The extent to which social disapproval and social control influence women's leisure remains essentially unknown since virtually no discussion surrounds this type of constraint (Shaw & Henderson, 2005). The social context of such decisions may not be taken into account or may be given only scant attention (Shaw & Henderson). This lack of acknowledgment of how social structures

constrain people can be criticized for leading to a "blame the victim" approach. In other words, an individual woman is at fault if she is afraid to confront a hegemonic system.

Shaw and Henderson (2005) suggested strategies to make the constraints literature more useful in studying women. Exploring both individual and societal levels of constraints is important. This approach requires moving beyond examining only individual experiences toward taking account of social context as well as social structural factors. In addition, moving beyond gender to describe the multiple systems of inequality such as among racial and ethnic groups (e.g., Floyd, 1998; Stodolska & Jackson, 1998) may be useful. The cultural construction of gender and the need to take social construction into consideration is important in studying a group such as Iranian women.

Cultural Issues

More cross-cultural analyses are called for in studying leisure (Shinew & Floyd, 2005; Stodolska & Yi-Kook, 2005). Researchers such as Walker et al. (2005) argued that how an individual identifies with culture has important implications for leisure theory. Women face some similarities relative to their position in society, but ethnicity, race, religion, and class are additional characteristics to consider. Culture and socioculture refers to the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2003). Thus, fully understanding gender requires examining contexts of cultural identity as they relate to leisure. Further, the influence of globalism on women's lives has implications for leisure not only in Western cultures but also for women all over the world.

Walker at al. (2005) discussed self-construal as an intervening variable in understanding more about culture. Some cultures have an "independent" nature with the belief of unalienable rights associated with being unique, asserting oneself, expressing, inner attributes, and promoting personal goals. People from the U.S., Canada, and northern Europe are more likely to fit this category of independence. The second worldview described as "interdependent" emphasizes the value of belonging, fitting in, maintaining harmony, restraining oneself, and promoting others' goals and is more often associated with Asia, Africa, and southern Europe. Needless to say, both elements exist in all societies but some cultures may have a greater propensity to one or the other based on social mores. Other terms sometimes associated with notions of self-construal are individualism and collectivism, which are consistent with independence and interdependence, respectively.

Mannell (2005) suggested that the concept of self construal is important in cross-cultural psychology and helps in examining not only what people do, but also the how and why of behavior. He also noted that intrinsic motivation may be obvious in all cultures but the psychological processes that underlie it may be different. Although Caldwell (2005) warned against the "devilish dualism" (p. 107) suggested by dual ways of thinking (i.e., inde-

pendent and interdependent) about culture, the two notions are helpful when thinking about culture and gender relative to measuring an area such as constraints.

Culture and religion are also clearly tied to each other and with leisure. Tarakeshwar, Stanton, and Pargament (2003) stated, "Religion is inextricably woven into the cloth of cultural life" (p. 377). Religion occupies a substantial role in people's lives, has been found to be a strong predictor of important life domains, influences cross-cultural dimensions, and is shaped by culture. The relationship between religion and leisure has been noted by a handful of researchers such as Livengood and Stodolska (2004), Martin and Mason (2003), and Kay (2005) who have all addressed some of the issues linking the Islamic tradition with leisure.

Livengood and Stodolska (2004) underlined the embeddedness of leisure activities in the social, religious, and political environment of followers of Islam. Muslims look at life as being "God's will." Pathways to follow in living God's will include a complete surrender to God through declaration of faith, prayers, fasting during the month of Ramazan, alms tax, and pilgrimage to Mecca. These pillars blur the lines between religion, culture, and leisure although leisure may not always be articulated. When leisure is studied in the US, for example, religion and culture are often taken for granted. When people outside the dominant culture are studied, however, the importance of culture and religion may take on new meanings.

Studying women in the Islamic Republic of Iran obviously connects leisure in a religious and cultural context. Constraints cannot be separated from all aspects of life and are not immune to broader cultural ideologies. Examining constraints as categories may also be difficult in any culture, but especially in one where religion is directly tied to daily life. Livengood and Stodolska (2004) emphasized that in studying leisure constraints researchers should not be limited to immediate, short-term, and activity specific explanations but should look at a broader picture.

In the Islamic culture the symbols of culture, especially for women, are obvious in a number of ways. For example, the wearing of hijab by Muslim women is a sign of religious affiliation. Martin and Mason (2003) described how substantial gaps exist in the data about leisure, and conflicts appear to exist at times between the traditional beliefs and practices of Islam and the pressure for a more secular oriented modernism. In Islam the emphasis is on the improvement of body and spirit for both men and women. As is true in other religions, incongruence may exist between beliefs and daily living. Habits of some Muslim men and women may not be consistent with the teachings of Islam. In most Islamic traditions, however, the meanings of religious and non-religious activities are not separated.

Middle Eastern Women

Golley (2004) suggested that a feminist consciousness has developed in Islamic countries and is an indigenous product of Arabic political and socio-

economic dynamics. Golley noted, "Arab women's need for positive change in their lives is neither more nor less than the need of women for positive change anywhere else in the world" (p. 522). The predicament in the call for women's freedom can be challenged by men who feel women cannot be free since men are not free either. Equality might be defined different in this context as Golley noted, "Equality between the sexes can also be appropriated to mean that men should be women's superiors because they are more qualified" (p. 528). Women may be less qualified because they lack the education and the power necessary to contribute to "public" life. They may participate less in typical leisure activities and have more constraints because they do not have opportunities to work or participate in other community projects. In the US, for example, the opportunities for women to have "equal employment" resulted in the concomitant demand for leisure choices (Henderson et al., 1996).

Those individuals who oppose the emancipation of women in Middle Eastern countries may also argue that feminism is a product of a decadent Western capitalism that alienates women from their culture, religion, and family responsibilities (Golley, 2004). Instead of seeing feminism as a political response, it is seen as the cause of problems. The rise of the women's movement in the Middle East, nevertheless, has been affected by women's movements in other parts of the world both positively and negatively, but the feminist philosophy is not alien in all Arab cultures. The Western misrepresentation of Middle Eastern women may be one manifestation of how culture and religion have been misconstrued.

Kay (2005) suggested from her research on Muslim girls' responses to sport that being a young Muslim woman in Britain effected their sport participation. Equally as useful was her analysis of how sport contributed to understanding what being a young British Muslim woman was like. In other words, culture defined sports participation but participation in sport illustrated culture as well. Kay found that a key theme in examining sport was the cultural importance of family. In this family relationship, males are privileged and none of the family members are individuals but are all part of the collective. This traditional view of the family compared to British embodiments of family changed the nature of sport involvement for girls, or at least created points of divergence. Kay found that Islam did not forbid girls to participate in sport, but set certain types of conditions that needed to conform to Islam such as circumstances regarding modesty. She concluded that researching an activity such as sport was helpful in understanding broader cultural practice and the significance of family context related to Islam was relevant. Kay, as well as Martin and Mason (2003), recommended further exploration about the relationships among culture, religion, and leisure.

Some additional background and demographic information about Iran may also be useful in setting the context for our research study. Martin and Mason (2003) noted that the population of Iran is young with 60% of the population between 0-24 years, compared to 32% of the UK population in

illiteracy rate is twice as high for females as males. The average household size is 4.8 individuals. The average yearly income per capita was equivalent to $1557 (U.S.) in 1996, with 2004 data showing average per capita yearly income as $2200 (U.S.). Martin and Mason found that less than 2% of income was spent on recreation and amusement, which likely reflected the traditional emphasis on family, friends, and religious activities. Martin and Mason noted that the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 brought with it restrictions on many Western forms of leisure. They noted, however, that in Iran the most commonly found activities were reading, viewing and listening, do-it-yourself repairs and gardening, hobbies and pastimes, socializing with friends, extra care of family and friends, education in and for leisure, resting/doing nothing, leisure shopping, eating and drinking out, local entertainment, gambling, active sport and exercise, sightseeing, holidays and travel, and voluntary work. Much of the recreation occurred within a segregation of the sexes. Martin and Mason suggested that with increased affluence in countries such as Iran, interest in leisure is growing.

Methods

As noted in the literature review, feminist researchers have argued that the conceptualization of constraints needs to be grounded in people's lived experiences. Feminists (e.g., Henderson et al., 1996) as well as leisure researchers (e.g., Jackson, 2005) advocated for more studies using interpretive research to ensure that the categorization and definition of constraints are consistent with the meanings of constraints in people's lives. Although an interpretive study would have been enlightening, we felt that a quantitative survey was the best way for us to begin to explore some of the issues of women's leisure in Iran. Using the constraints model with questions tailored to the population was the initial way to uncover some of the issues that might be of importance and that could pave the way for further research.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to provide information about the leisure of Iranian women living in Shiraz, one of larger cities in southern Iran. A sample of 570 women of young middle age (25-40 years) was asked about their participation in indoor and outdoor activities and constraints to their involvement in leisure. We narrowed our analysis to this age group because we were interested in focusing on the social and family obligations of young adult women. In addition, demographics of these women were analyzed in relation to participation and nonparticipation in "typical" categories of leisure. Thus, the study was focused on describing what these Iranian women did and how they perceived constraints. The interpretation of these results based on existing literature and cultural and religious ideologies provided ideas for future research.

Instrument Development

The initial questionnaire consisted of three sections including activities, constraints and demographics comprising a total of 81 items. The major

section of the questionnaire addressed constraints to leisure. Items were bor-
rowed from other scales and frameworks that have been used to measure
constraints primarily from a gender perspective (e.g., Harrington, 1991; Hen-
derson & Bialeschki, 1993; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Jackson & Rucks,
1995; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Scott & Kim, 1998; Shaw, 1994). The
initial questions were developed to measure five dimensions of constraints
that frequently appeared in the literature. Those constraints dimensions used
in the development of the instrument included personal, social, cultural,
economic, and structural constraints.

Another section of the questionnaire included possible leisure activities.
This list was compiled by asking Iranian colleagues and friends to make lists
of activities that they undertook with friends and family. From those ideas
a list was developed that appeared to be culturally appropriate for Iranian
women. The list included activities that might be found on any activity list
including sports, outdoor activities, artistic activities, going to the cinema,
reading books and magazines, watching TV and listening to the radio, going
out for coffee or a meal, and family gatherings. Several activities had specific
meanings within the Iranian culture and included social volunteering (e.g.,
charity activities, visiting sick or elderly, and helping people in other ways),
religious activities (e.g., learning from the holy book of Islam called the
Quran, going to classes to learn about religious precepts, participating in
religious ceremonies conducted by women on holy days, or going to mosque
or other holy places), scientific activities (e.g., attending scientific societies
or clubs), vocational activities (e.g., attending computer classes, typing clas-
ses, sewing classes), cultural activities (e.g., playing music, poetry, writing),
indoor activities (e.g., playing computer games, chess, playing cards), and
watching satellite (i.e., an illegal activity whereby people attach a device to
their TV so they can access TV programs broadcasted from Europe and the
US and other countries; the common activity of watching TV includes only
the six channels made available by the government).

The final section of the questionnaire consisted of common demo-
graphic questions to describe the sample and to use in further analyzing the
constraints. The demographic items included age, occupation, education,
family income per month, personal income, marital status, number of chil-
dren, and perceived health.

A pilot study was conducted with 40 Iranian women randomly selected
in the 25-40 years age group. The procedures for sample selection and ques-
tionnaire distribution were piloted along with the actual questionnaire con-
tent. Ten items were omitted from the questionnaire after the pilot testing
analysis was conducted. One item from the activity list was discarded along
with nine items from the constraints items. If correlations between an item
and the other items in the measured area were not significant at the .01
level, the item was eliminated. These items were also compared to the Cron-
bach's alpha reliability test and deleted if the alpha statistic was low.

Cronbach's alpha for all items in the revised questionnaire was .92, which was well within the acceptable range to assure reliability. The reliability for individual statements ranged from .76 to .94.

A factor analysis was conducted for the constraints items for the final sample to determine if the initial five-factor design could be confirmed. The rotated component matrix resulted in 10 factors. These factors were confirmed for the proposed structural, economic, and social dimensions, but the cultural dimensions seemed to include both traditional views of leisure and the cultural significance of leisure. The personal constraints were further divided into personal interests, personal time and companions, personal health and safety, and personal home responsibilities. These 10 factors explained 65% of the variance (see Table 1).

Sample Selection and Data Collection

The sample was randomly selected from six municipal regions of Shiraz city. Each region consisted of several districts. From each region 2-6 districts were randomly selected depending on the population of the region of the city. Then, three to ten blocks were randomly selected from each of the districts. Finally, households were chosen from selected blocks based on whether or not the address ended in an odd number. Based on power calculations, a sample of at least 500 respondents was targeted.

The questionnaire was written in Persian, the language of Iran. Questionnaires were distributed using the "drop off/pick up" method. They were hand delivered and distributed to the households in the blocks that had been randomly selected. If a woman meeting the age criterion lived in the house, she was asked to complete the questionnaire within an hour so the distributor could return to collect it before leaving the block.

Sample Characteristics

Of the 570 individuals sampled, 15 questionnaires were unusable because the age criterion was not met or the majority of the questionnaire was not completed. Thus, complete questionnaires were obtained from 555 women for a response rate of 97%. The average age was 32 years within the range of 25-40 years. Only 18% of the women were employed with the remainder indicating either they were a homemaker, student, or unemployed. Twenty-nine percent did not have what would be considered equivalent in the U.S. to having a high school diploma. Forty-four percent had a (high school) diploma and 14% either a bachelors or masters degree. The family income was 100,000-200,000 tomans a month (i.e., $110-200 US) for 58% of the respondents. Three-quarters of the women indicated they had no personal income. The majority of the women were married (73%) with 25% describing themselves as single and less than 2% divorced or widowed. The average number of children was 1.7 with a range from 0-8 children. About a third (32%) of the women surveyed had no children and over one quarter (27%) had two children. Over 98% described themselves as healthy.

TABLE 1
Factor Loadings and Descriptive Information for Constraints to Leisure
for Iranian Women

FACTOR/Item	Mean[1]	SD	Factor Loading
COMMUNITY STRUCTURE	4.12	1.19	
Unsuitable equipment	4.24	1.49	.811
Unequal facilities	4.23	1.46	.818
No national support	4.21	1.48	.826
Lack of government priority	4.18	1.52	.775
No assessment of women's needs	4.17	1.51	.803
Lack of govt. awareness of leisure	4.13	1.55	.697
Lack of government responsibility	4.13	1.52	.883
Poor attitude by government	4.05	1.41	.875
Lack of supervision	3.99	1.46	.805
Scarce equipment	3.98	1.47	.512
No standard places to participate	3.86	1.48	.511
PERSONAL HOME EXPECTATIONS	3.97	1.50	
Too much housework	4.12	1.51	.809
Familial responsibilities	3.84	1.84	.855
ECONOMIC	3.87	1.12	
Pricing	4.55	1.52	.684
Scarcity of places	4.05	1.50	.311
Lack of personal income	3.85	1.68	.661
Lack of private transportation	3.75	1.75	.692
Lack of money	3.64	1.70	.728
Lack of easy public transportation	3.31	1.61	.377
SOCIAL SECURITY	3.78	1.16	
Fear of violence	4.01	1.57	.702
Lack of safety	3.98	1.60	.595
Overcrowding	3.87	1.56	.727
Hygiene and cleanliness issues	3.74	1.59	.681
Opportunities not close to home	3.63	1.54	.560
Behavior of others in public	3.41	1.84	.498
CULTURE-LEISURE SIGNIFICANCE	3.68	1.15	
Low quality of opportunities	3.85	1.39	.582
Leisure not important	3.68	1.70	.468
Lack of information	3.65	1.54	.462
Lack of trained people	3.59	1.55	.584
PERSONAL TIME & COMPANIONS	3.31	1.28	
Lack of time	3.58	1.58	.560
Lack of companions	3.04	1.62	.762
CULTURE-TRADITIONS	3.25	1.32	
Restrictions for women in public	3.43	1.74	.666
Permission needed to participate	3.42	1.80	.758
Integration of sexes not allowed	3.19	1.70	.471
Leisure only for men	2.99	1.73	.744

TABLE 1
(*Continued*)

FACTOR/Item	Mean[1]	SD	Factor Loading
PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES	2.99	1.43	
Too many responsibilities	3.56	1.62	.611
Work commitments	2.56	1.81	.804
PERSONAL INTEREST & SKILLS	2.91	1.08	
Not wishing to participate alone	3.03	1.63	.657
Lack of skills	2.98	1.72	.477
Not accustomed to leisure	2.84	1.44	.391
Lack of interest in group activities	2.79	1.62	.784
PERSONAL HEALTH & SAFETY	2.50	1.17	
Feelings of guilt	3.36	1.94	.310
Fear of public participation	2.29	1.59	.672
Poor health	2.23	1.58	.723
Poor health of family member	2.19	1.57	.702

[1] 1 = never, 2 = a little, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = most of the time, 6 = all the time

Findings

The leisure activities of the women were measured using a 6-point scale ranging from "never" to "very often." The most common leisure activities undertaken were watching TV and listening to the radio, family gatherings, reading books and magazines, outdoor activities, and religious activities. Less than 7% said they participated in sports often. Table 2 provides a summary of the means, standard deviations, and the percentage of women who never participated as well as the percentage that participated often in the common Iranian activities.

The constraints items within each of the factors were summed and divided by the number of items to obtain a mean score. The major constraint to leisure for these Iranian women was lack of structure as it related to opportunities for leisure within the community (See Table 1). This constraints dimension was followed by personal-home expectations, economic, and social security constraints. The least constraining factors were personal interest and skills along with personal health and safety. The two factors related to cultural constraints, traditional views and social significance of leisure, were in the middle of the list and reflected a medium level of constraint compared to the others.

Examining some of the demographic aspects of these Iranian women in relation to the activities and constraints provided some additional interest. An analysis of variance run between the three age categories (i.e., 25-30, 31-35, 36-40 years) and the ten constraints factors showed only two items where statistically significant differences existed among the three groups. Women

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics for Activity Participation of Iranian Women (N = 555)

Activity	Mean[a]	SD	Percent Never	Percent Often/ Very Often
TV, Radio	4.61	1.30	3	58
Family Gathering	4.29	1.32	3	45
Reading	3.96	1.50	7	39
Outdoor	3.51	1.53	14	25
Religious	3.35	1.57	18	22
Vocational	2.92	1.71	33	22
Indoor	2.75	1.66	34	17
Social	2.72	1.54	31	14
Going out (eating, coffee)	2.64	1.49	32	11
Cinema	2.62	1.53	34	13
Sport	2.60	1.33	27	7
Watching satellite	2.21	1.78	61	16
Cultural	2.16	1.56	55	11
Scientific	1.99	1.43	58	8
Artistic	1.90	1.48	66	10

[a]0 = Never, 1 = Very Little, 2 = Some, 3 = Average, 4 = Often, 5 = Very Often

who were 36-40 years perceived their constraints higher regarding household expectations ($df = 2,526$, $F = 18.73$, $p = .000$) and personal health and safety ($df = 2,482$, $F = 6.293$, $p = .002$).

Education (i.e., less than high school, high school, college) level showed some differences among the constraints for Iranian women. Women who had less than a high school diploma had more household expectation constraints ($df = 2,509$, $F = 37.83$, $p = .000$) and more personal health and safety constraints ($df = 2, 467$, $F = 17.49$, $p = .000$) than women who had more education. Iranian women with at least some college education perceived more constraints relative to community structure ($df = 2, 428$, $F = 4.50$, $p = .012$) and work ($df = 2, 508$, $F = 11.27$, $p = .000$).

Because of the small number of divorced and widowed women, they were grouped into the category called single. T-tests were conducted to examine differences in constraints between married and single Iranian women. Single women perceived more constraints than married women related to community structure ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.13$, $t = -2.80$, $p = .005$), personal money and transportation ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.13$, $t = -2.15$, $p = .030$), and work ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.5$, $t = 4.276$, $p = .000$). Married women perceived more constraints related to household expectations ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.23$, $t = 14.666$, $p = .000$) and personal health and safety ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.18$, $t = 4.40$, $p = .000$).

The Iranian women were asked if they had personal income, which became a dichotomous variable of yes or no. More constraints existed for

women who had no income related to culture traditions ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.28$, $t = -2.54$, $p = .011$), household expectations ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.46$, $t = -3.16$, $p = .002$), and personal health and safety ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.16$, $t = -2.24$, $p = .000$). Work was a greater constraint for women who had personal income ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.39$, $t = 6.52$, $p = .000$).

Having children was divided into three categories: no children, 1-2 children, and 3 or more children. Differences were found in that women having no children had more constraints related to community structure ($df = 2,384$, $F = 3.52$, $p = .031$) and work ($df = 2,456$, $F = 9.43$, $p = .000$). Women with three or more children had greater constraints related to household expectations ($df = 2,455$, $F = 145.13$, $p = .000$) and personal health and safety ($df = 2,456$, $F = 17.85$, $p = .000$).

These comparisons among the Iranian women gave some sense of the ways that demographic factors contributed to the constraints categories. Work responsibilities and obligations were more constraining for single women without children who had personal income and some college education as might be expected. Household expectations and personal health and safety constraints were greater for women aged 36-40 years who were married with three or more children and who had no personal income and less than a high school education.

Discussion

These data provided an exploration of the leisure activities and constraints to leisure that Iranian women encounter. A conceptual framework of constraints as interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural was a starting point, but our data suggested that definitions of structural constraints are far ranging as previously suggested by Shaw and Henderson (2005) and Samdahl (2005). The data collected served two purposes in providing a baseline for describing Iranian women's leisure and a foundation for future research about the relationships among leisure, gender, culture, and religion in the context of leisure constraints research.

The results showed that home based activities including TV and radio, family gatherings, and reading were the most common activities undertaken by this random sample of Iranian women. The least participation occurred with cultural, scientific (i.e., profession based), and artistic opportunities. The results of our study are somewhat consistent with the work of Martin and Mason (2003) who found that the most popular activities done in Iran for both men and women were reading, viewing and listening, and do-it-yourself repairs and gardening. Considering that only 2% of the little income that is received is spent on recreation and amusement, these types of activities might be expected. Further since three-quarters of the women did not have any personal income, their options might be further reduced to activities that had little direct costs associated.

Sports participation was low for these Iranian women. Sports are often considered a metaphor for change. In her essay on her experience as a

scholar in Iran, Aitchison (2003) noted that a time lag often exists between sports embodiment and wider policy developments. Only 7% of the women said they participated often in sport and 27% said they never did. Kay's (2005) examination of Muslim girls' responses to sport also showed the issues that arise relative to sport as a mirror of social change and vice versa. From the results of this study, either sports activities are not reflective of women's changing roles in Iranian society, or the roles are not moving toward a more Western perspective.

Some of the items chosen to measure constraints were borrowed from existing items that have been used in North American constraints research. In developing the questionnaire, great care was taken to include items that were reflective of the culture of Iran and the Islam religion. These items about culture pertaining to Iran came from the Iranian authors' experience with women and leisure. Thus, some of the items related to community structure as well as the items dealing with culture were items that might not be seen if the questionnaire was given in the U.S. The results of the constraints examination for these Iranian women were interesting to note because the typical constraints found in Western cultures such as personal issues were not at the top of the list.

The constraint area that we termed community structure was the most constraining area as indicated by these Iranian women. This category of constraints dealt primarily with the lack of infrastructure that existed to facilitate leisure opportunities. These constraints reflected a social ecological framework. Stokols (1992) suggested that the core assumption of social ecology is that multiple facets of both the physical environment and the social environment influence the well-being of people. In other words, environments enhance a range of behaviors by promoting and sometimes requiring certain actions and by discouraging or prohibiting other behaviors. According to McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, and Glanz (1988), five classes of factors affect how or why one might participate or fail to participate in a healthy behavior such as leisure: intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and public policy. The finding that community structures were most salient underlined the importance of examining leisure from institutional, community, and public policy perspectives. The Iranian women perceived the government's lack of concern about leisure, and especially leisure for women. This lack of concern and subsequent facilitation of activities was likely exacerbated by the cultural issues associated with the role of women in public places. Little apparently has been done to assess the needs of women regarding what leisure opportunities they want as well as the social issues associated with health and safety. From the standpoint of the authors, change has occurred in the past three years with more governmental budget spent for programs focused on women's needs. In fact, some newspapers now have a specific page dedicated to women's sports.

Not unexpectedly, the personal constraint of home expectations was an important constraint for these women as were economic issues. These concerns are often ranked high in other studies that have examined women's

constraints (Henderson et al., 1996). The importance of family is highly valued in Islamic cultures (Kay, 2005), which can be both a place for leisure as noted in the frequency of family gatherings as well as a constraint because of the household responsibilities. Many Muslims believe that family associations are calming and relaxing and help people live longer.

The middle grouping of constraints related to social security and cultural issues. Some of these constraints such as fear of violence and lack of information might appear in constraints lists from women in other parts of the world. The social security issues related to overcrowding, hygiene and cleanliness, and the behavior of others in public are issues that would probably not come forward as constraints in the U.S. These social security and cultural constraints were important in Iran. The cultural based constraints suggested that the Iranian women believed value was not placed on leisure for women and the traditions that restricted the freedom of women (e.g., needing to ask for permission, not participating in gender integrated activities, and leisure perceived as only for men) inhibited their leisure. In comparison to literature from Western countries, the closest connection might be to some aspects of entitlement to leisure, although that constraint is more intrapersonal than structural as are the cultural constraints of these Iranian women.

The constraints that were of lesser importance for these Iranian women were three factors that related to personal issues including personal responsibilities, interests and skills, and health and psychological safety. As a society considered more collectivist, these personal issues probably would not be as predominant as they might for women in North America or northern Europe who might be more independent or individualistic in their perceptions of constraints.

Due to communication technology and globalization, the lives of Iranian women are changing rapidly. Opportunities for education and professional positions are providing incentives for women to improve their lives. Some of the women, including two of the authors of this study, perceive the need to work hard and push leisure to the background. Our study examines the leisure of Iranian women in a slice of time that will continue to change in the future.

As noted earlier, an interpretive study might have been more useful than a quantitative study since this population had not been studied. However, many of the items developed not found in other questionnaires related to constraints were important to test. An interpretive study would provide a richer sense of the meanings of these constraints as well as how the everyday lives of Iranian women can be better understood.

Further research is clearly warranted to understand women and their leisure in different cultures. Because so much misunderstanding exists about people from the Middle East and because more is to be learned about the connections of leisure, culture, and religion, additional work should be explored. As Shaw and Henderson (2005) recommended, our study focused on a broader definition of structural constraints to include not just imme-

diate individual barriers, but social security and cultural dimensions. Because of the influence of religion and the collectivist nature of Iranian society, the research focused on redefining structural constraints. To examine this group of women in this culture would be impossible without expanding the conceptual constraints framework. Researchers such as Stodolska and Yi-Kook (2005) also have called for this expansion. Further, if more is to be learned about women's leisure, then continuing to examine the diversity that exists both within societies and between societies is necessary (Henderson et al., 2002).

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