

## **An Investigation of Constraints Restricting Urban Nigerian Women from Participating in Recreational Sport Activities**

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### **Abstract**

Recreational sport participation is valued as a way to improve overall quality of life. However, in developing countries such as Nigeria, past research studies have focused on factors attributed to recreational sport participation of men. Research has yet to investigate factors contributing to recreational sport participation of women. Thus, the purpose of this study was to highlight the experiences of Nigerian women's recreational sport constraints and factors that facilitate their participation. Using data from interviews with women in Lagos, the findings suggest that women experience structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal constraints, as well as negotiate constraints through prioritizing, compromising, and anticipating. This study contributes to the limited body of research on constraints as it relates to recreational sport of Nigerian women.

**KEYWORDS:** *Constraints, leisure, Nigeria, recreational sport activities (RSAs)*

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## Introduction

In most rural regions in Africa, the edification of young women is mainly focused on being an obedient wife and a good mother (Silberschmidt, 2001). Women and girls are socioculturally expected to exemplify feminine behaviors, obey male dominance, and embrace a genuine ethic of care for their family (Tamale, 2005). For instance, in the Baganda tribe of Uganda, Ssenga women train young Ugandan women and girls on how to embody appropriate feminine behaviors. The Ssenga etiquette for girls is to learn the proper manners of how to sit, walk, and conduct herself in the presence of males, as well as to respect elders and take care of the family (Tamale, 2005). Females do all kinds of work, whether housework or professional responsibilities, and they have “little time to relax, recuperate, and be selfish” or participate in leisure activities, such as recreational sports (Deem, 1987, p. 424).

In conjunction with patriarchal ideologies, the development of women’s recreational sport in most developing regions of Africa seems to be of low priority because of issues relating to literacy, famine, health care, domestic abuse, genital circumcisions, and local and national security (Summerfield, 2000). Further crises such as high unemployment, war, refugees, structural adjustment programs, and HIV/AIDS have likewise stunted the growth and development of women’s involvement in recreational sport activities (RSAs) (Elbe, 2006).

Recreational sport activities (RSAs) are leisure activities that combine both sport and recreation. These activities fall under the rubric of play (Chalip, Schwab, & Dustin, 2010); and do not have to be competitive or require particular equipment or rules (Mobily, 1989; Parks & Quartermain, 2003). Recreational sport activities are typically conducted during leisure time and are an unstructured means of entertainment (Sivan & Stebbins, 2011). People participate in RSAs for a number of reasons, and one being for the purpose of leisure (Shaw, 1986). RSAs have important benefits, and a number of studies (e.g., Frisby, Reid, & Ponc, 2007; Godbey & Mowen, 2010) have examined the positive outcomes of the physical activity component of recreational sport. These studies have reported that physical activity enhances circulatory health, provides mental clarity, promotes successful aging, and promote social interaction. Despite these noted benefits, for some women, leisure is limited to passive relaxation (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993).

Extant Nigerian research studies (e.g., Akindutire, 1992; Ojeme, 1989) have examined constraints to men’s recreational sport participation but have yet to investigate Nigerian women’s recreational sport constraints or facilitators. As a result, an exposition of how Nigeria affords men recreational sport opportunities, but limits women, is missing from the literature. Hence, the purpose of this study is to highlight the experiences of Nigerian women and their recreational sport constraints, as well as examine tactics used to facilitate participation. In this investigation we employ leisure constraint theories (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Jackson et al., 1993; Hubbard & Mannell, 2001) to provide (a) an understanding of the recreational sport patterns of Nigerian women, (b) to identify constraints that restrict Nigerian women from participating in recreational sport activities, and (c) to identify constraint negotiation strategies Nigerian women employ so as to participate in recreational sport activities.

## Literature Review

### Leisure Constraint Theory

Constraints inhibit people's involvement in their desired activities (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Crawford et al., 1991). Crawford and Godbey (1987) categorized leisure constraints as structural, interpersonal, or intrapersonal constraints. Structural constraints are external factors, such as insufficient financial resources, inclement weather, lack of time due to work, lack of access and opportunity, and inadequate machinery or facilities that intervene between leisure preferences and participation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Jun, Kyle & O'Leary, 2006). Similar to structural constraints, interpersonal constraints are also external factors; however, they occur as a result of a lack of positive interactions or relations between individuals' characteristics associated with leisure activity (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Henderson, Stalnaker, & Taylor, 1988). These are antecedent barriers that influence an individual's interest and preference on choice of leisure participation. Such constraints can occur as a result of a lack of support from family and friends, or the demands of or lack of time due to family obligations (Crawford & Jackson, 1987; Henderson, et al., 1988). Finally, intrapersonal constraints are linked to internalized psychological states and attributes that affect an individual's preference for leisure activities. Examples of intrapersonal constraints include: emotional states, prior socialization attributes, personal abilities, knowledge, skills, and interests that influence one's leisure (Crawford & Godfrey, 1987; June et al., 2006).

Crawford, et al. (1991) proposed that leisure involvement is dependent on the triumphant negotiation of constraints in a sequential manner. Hence, unlike the model of leisure constraints by Crawford and Godbey (1987) that suggested constraints are independent barriers that deter interested participants from participating, the hierarchical model ranks these three constraints within an individual's decision-making process. The researchers argued that the three constraints could be located on a hierarchy or continuum from most proximal to the most distal. In the model, intrapersonal constraints are suggested to be the most powerful of the three constraints; while structural constraints are suggested to be the least powerful.

Jackson, Crawford and Godbey (1993) later expanded the hierarchical model of leisure constraints by suggesting that people are able to enjoy leisure participation because they are capable of successfully negotiating leisure constraints. They stated that successful negotiation of leisure constraints is influenced by the interaction between the strength of one's motivation and his or her perceived constraints. Thus, this proposition referred to as the negotiation and balance proposition, suggests that people are able to participate in their choice of leisure because their motivation to participate overcomes leisure constraints.

Hubbard and Mannell (2001) extended the leisure constraint negotiation model and tested four alternative models that examined the relationship of constraints, negotiation, and physically active leisure. Of the four models examined, independence model, negotiation-buffer model, constraint-effects-mitigation model, and perceived-constraint-reduction model, the researchers were only able to establish support for the constraint-effects-mitigation model. This model sug-

gests that negotiation techniques lessen the negative effects of participation constraint. In other words, people have the ability to modify leisure activity when faced with constraints (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Son et al., 2008). The model also supports the idea that people who perceive more constraints are still able to participate and are more able to participate at a higher rate than people with lesser constraints (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Son et al., 2008). In other words, motivation to participate in an activity is as a result of a person's ability to negotiate constraints.

### **Women's Leisure Constraints**

Numerous studies have examined women's constraints as it pertains to leisure, recreation, and physical activity in the past few decades (Crawford & Stodolska, 2008). Noted articles by Henderson (1996), Shaw (1994), and Little (2002) have impacted the manner in which people conceptualize constraints and its interactions with different forms of leisure participation, including recreational sport. Shaw's (1994) framework for the analysis of women's leisure experiences provides valuable insights to understand the gendered factors that hinder women's activities, constraints of women's leisure and recreation, and utility of leisure and recreation as a way to resist politics and power. This broader framework was based on three guiding principles: (a) recognition of the contradictory aspects of leisure in women's lives, (b) recognition of the different ways in which constraint factors are associated with women's leisure, and (c) recognition of the different ways in which resistance can be associated with women's leisure. Moreover, research studies on women's leisure, recreation, and physical activity provide more awareness on women's leisure experiences, matters of oppression, and discussions on empowerment. These kinds of studies have been successful in adding new information to the literature, particularly information that has led to broadening the gendered meanings of leisure (Henderson, 1996).

Apart from studies that have summarized approaches used to understand women's leisure experiences, there are a good number of empirical studies that have examined factors that inhibit women from participating in leisure. Most of these studies have based their findings on samples from more developed regions of the world, such as North American, Europe, and Australia. For example, Harrington (1991) examined the work-leisure relationships of working women in a teaching and research university in North America. She discovered that time, devoted to family, housework, and after hours work commitments, was a significant constraint that interfered with leisure. Also, Bolla, Dawson, and Harrington's (1993) study of women in the province of Ontario revealed, despite having ample access to recreational activities, the women were constrained by household responsibilities, children, perceived lack of skills or competence, and scheduling issues.

There are other studies that have focused on constraints as it affects recreational sport-like participation. For instance, Alexandris and Carroll (1997) examined demographic differences in the discernment of constraints on recreational sport participation related to demographic differences in annual sport-participation rates of Greeks. They found that women perceived more constraints than men. The most frequently cited constraints were time constraints due to work,

school, family, social commitments, poorly kept crowded facilities, accessibility, and transportation. On the other hand, the least cited constraints included psychological constraints and lack of interest. Little's (2002) study examined the interface between constraints and women adventure recreation. She reported that sociocultural factors, such as gender role expectation, played a major part in deterring women from participating in adventure recreation. Also, a large number of the women were limited by guilt (i.e., remorse for deserting family, especially children), and fear of injury or health concerns. Little also found that, while women experienced constraints, they were able to negotiate constraints by restructuring their adventure experience or by strengthening their commitment to adventure as a life priority.

A separate group of studies has focused on non-Euro- and Americentric perspective of women's sport and recreation participation in less researched populations like Muslim Americans (Livengood & Stodolska, 2004) or Indian Australian women (Sawrikar & Muir, 2010), and in countries such as Iran (Arab-Moghaddam, Henderson, & Sheikholeslami, 2007), Turkey (Koca, Henderson, Asci, & Bulgu, 2009), and South Africa (Pelak, 2005). For instance, Pelak (2005) examined South African women's experiences, motivations, and constraints to participate in soccer. She discovered that they were dominant group construct that created socio-cultural and physical boundaries which lead to collective identities and naturalized male privilege that inhibit women soccer players. These women were treated with hostility and were seen as outsiders discouraged from participating in soccer. Pelak insisted that seeing women as outsiders lessened their collective power to challenge men's supremacy and "reconstitutes the game's historical masculine construction" (Pelak, 2005, p. 59). Furthermore, the legacy left behind by apartheid was omnipresent in shaping women's access to sport. Sawrikar and Muir's (2010) study also was conducted to determine recreational barriers that Indian Australian women faced and ways in which these barriers could be overcome, so as to include them and other minority women in public policy developments. They discovered six recreation and sport constraints: affective, physiological, sociocultural, access, resources, and interpersonal issues; and concluded that sport organizations and/or government agencies should implement practical strategies such as providing affordable childcare, focusing on sport and recreation education, and increasing the number of positive media images of ethnic minority women partaking in sporting activities to help Indian women overcome some of the barriers.

## **Methods**

A qualitative approach was employed in order to explore information on Nigerian women's recreational sport participation. This approach allowed the researchers to understand the recreational sport participation patterns, barriers, and negotiation tactics Nigerian women used to overcome constraints. This type of research design was adequate to obtain information from two groups of Nigerian women: one group is made up of women who perform recreational sport and the other group does not participate in recreational sport. The goal of this research study was not intended to generalize its findings to all Nigerian women or women across Africa, but to acquire insights into the experiences of the women and tell

their stories from their unique point of view. Furthermore, the researchers utilized a naturalistic inquiry to analyze the data collected by means of personal one-on-one interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This type of inquiry allows the researchers to study Nigerian women in their own natural settings and environments through the use of a combination of interviews and observations.

### **Sample**

Nineteen women were interviewed in this research project; and sampling ended once theoretical saturation had been attained. At the time of the interviews, the women's ages ranged between 19 and 74 years old—with the majority (58%) of the women below the age of 40. All the women are multilingual and communicated effectively in English. They all have graduated from high school, and seven participants were in the process of earning their bachelor degrees, while 12 of the women have already attained bachelor degrees. At the time of the interviews, 11 of the women were employed, one was retired, three were current students, three were housewives, and one was unemployed.

### **Data Collection**

The study participants were recruited using both purposive and snowball sampling. Initial contact was established with participants by making repeated visits and announcements at the community's church (St. Peter's Catholic Church) and mosque (Osolo Way Community Mosque), both located in Ajao Estate, Lagos, Nigeria. The researchers chose to establish contact through the church and mosque because religion is a very important part of the Nigerian culture. Over 98% of Nigerians are Christians or Muslims (United States Library of Congress, 2008). The high reverence for religion in the country demands that on Fridays and Sundays, Muslims and Christians attend to their respective religious obligations. A major implication for initially selecting church and mosque goes as the study's participants was to have a good pool of Nigerian women represented in this research study. Additional participants, who were not members of the church and mosque, were suggested as a result of this approach. Given that seven out of the 36 states in Nigeria were represented in our sample, the researchers feel the multi-state pool will further validate the precision of our findings.

Individuals who were interested and willing to participate in the study contacted the researcher, who then scheduled a meeting time and place most convenient for the interviewee. Participants who did not have a place to meet and those from out of town were interviewed in a conference room at a well-known local currency exchange and travel agency called Jonaz Bureau De Change. Permission to conduct the interviews was secured by the researchers through the Institutional Review Board and the Nigerian National Health Research Ethics Committee. After obtaining consent, the data was collected with the aid of semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The interviews were conducted in English by the first author of this article who is a native of the community. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Questions asked addressed participants' definition and meaning of recreational sport activities, involvement in recreational sport, lack of participation in recreational sports, and facilitators or restrictions to participation. Some sample questions include (1) How would you define recreational sport?; (2) Do you participate in any RSAs and if so, what activities do you participate in?; and (3)

What are some challenges that affect your ability to participate in your preferred activities?

### **Data Analysis**

Following established procedures for naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the transcripts were coded at three different levels: first-level coding, first-level categories, and second-order theme coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). NVivo 8, qualitative data analysis software, was used to organize the data, as well as assist the data analysis process. First-level coding involved coding the interview transcripts on the basis of common words or expressions used by the participants. First-order codes included words such as awareness, "family," "work," safety, "health," and expressions such as "no time because I have to cater for my husband and kids" or "there are no facilities nearby." In total, 36 themes pertinent to the research emerged and were coded during this process. In employing the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), five categories emerged from the data based on similar dominant themes that related the women's experience together. For example, all remarks questioning women's involvement and interest in recreational sport activities were coded into a theme titled "inappropriate recreational sport activities." Other examples of the first-order categories included "lack the awareness of recreational sport participation benefit," "no participation partner," and "no money." The final stage of the data analysis process involved the researchers grouping similar categories together into more comprehensive conceptual categories. Eventually, the data analysis declared that Nigerian women that do not participate in recreational sport are limited due to constraints and women who do participate are able to do so because of recreational sport facilitators.

## **Findings**

### **Nigerian Women's Recreational Sport Patterns**

In order to avoid assumptions of universality, the women were asked to articulate in their own words the meaning of recreational sport. The women asserted that recreational sport involved activities done during one's leisure time to benefit personal health, promote socialization/networking, and are fun. For example, Chizoba, a 37-year-old mother who at the time of the interview performed RSAs, regarded recreational sport as synonymous with exercise-like activities. During the interview, she focused on how sport and recreation activities enhanced the quality of her life through the following statement:

It keeps one healthy and agile. They are activities you indulge in during your leisure time, either for the purpose of health or shedding weight, and proper functioning of the body. Some examples of activities I do are jogging, football, and jumping that can either be competitive or just for fun.

Chizoba's comments resonated with other women's definitions. Oma, a 54-year-old mother expressed that RSAs are interesting "activities that are done at leisure hours." These are activities that "one wants to do all the time because it allows one to regenerate; it gives you joy and keeps one fit." Similarly, Nnenna, a 79-year-old retired teacher who at that time participated in walking with her friends, expressed



her definition to include “interactions with others and making new friendships.” She defined recreational sport as activities “we do in order to exercise our body and in order to interact with other people, meet with people, and socialize with people.”

In addition to their definitions, these women were able to provide examples of activities they performed and thought as recreational sport. Some of the women, including Chizoba, Andi, and Chinaka, who were active recreational sport participants, mentioned activities such as walking, jogging, trekking, football, swimming, lawn-tennis, and basketball. Chizoba expressed her love for trekking and skipping. As she stated, these activities made her “shed weight proportionally” because it was rigorous and made her sweat. Likewise, Andi, a 36-year-old stay-at-home mom provided some examples of activities she considered to be recreational sport. Although she mainly took part in walking, running, and jump roping, she included activities such as football, swimming, lawn tennis, and basketball. Chinaka, a 35-year-old newlywed who was not involved in any activity, also provided examples of recreational sport. She stated that recreational sports are “like exercise activities, such as running, jumping, and javelin.”

### **Constraints that Limits or Prevents Participation in RSA**

Most of the women, whether or not they performed recreational sport, communicated their concerns about recreational sports constraints. The findings and narratives of this study established that structural factors are more restraining for this group of Nigerian women than interpersonal or intrapersonal constraints. Structural constraints, such as inadequate facilities, financial constraints, cultural norms and traditional expectations, and the lack of time served as major factors that influenced their preference and participation in recreational sport activities; whereas, interpersonal and intrapersonal factors, such as psychological barriers, no participation partners, lack of passion and/or interest, influenced their ability to participate in recreational sport activities to a lesser degree.

**Nigerian culture.** The women reported that the Nigerian culture and tradition played a major role in influencing their recreational sport participation. They noted that traditionally, women are expected to be less involved with recreation and sport than men, but should be more concerned about the family. During the interview, Patricia noted that in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, there is a “belief that women are not provided with recreational sport opportunities because people feel it is a man’s thing.” Patricia’s concerns reverberated with other women interviewed. For instance, Uju who is of the Igbo tribe stated that in “Igbo land women should not be seen playing sports at a certain age.” She expressed that women should be concerned with “being married and not supposed to mix up with males to that extent because of our culture.” Further, she explained that the family members of women who participate in RSAs will be the first group of people to “remind the individual that you are not supposed to be doing such things.” Moreover, Uju noted that women who choose to “continue performing recreational sport despite their family members warnings, will be seen as nuisance.” Nnenna also had some concerns and reservations of the Nigerian culture. During the interview, she expressed that Nigerian women are expected to work in the house and are trained to be respectable females through the following statement:



As a child growing up, there is the idea that a girl cannot jump. Girls don't jump! Jumping is only meant for men because there are certain things girls cannot do... Because it is the norm! The same thing that said that girls cannot go to school is the same thing that stops them from performing recreational sport.

Nnenna as a young girl always wanted to be able to run and play with the boys. However, because she was a girl, she had to "work in the house [chores]." She stated, "Boys did not work, so they had more time to recreate. Girls had no time for recreational sport because they had to work off their tails doing domestic work." Unlike the boys, girls had "little to no opportunities." Nnenna specified that these types of restrictions still exist in Nigeria and hopes that someday both sexes will be given equal opportunities.

**Lack of infrastructural support.** During the interview, the women repeatedly expressed their concerns about the inadequacies of sport and recreational centers as a major factor that influences participation. Some of their concerns were about outdated facilities and equipment, incompetent recreation and sport personnel/management, and the lack of governmental support. For instance, Chizoba's expressed how recreational facilities are not well equipped and maintained to accommodate women who want to participate in RSAs through the following statement:

People import these old machines and expect you to pay as much as they pay in the Western world. Like the pools you know, you have to change the water and can't leave the water for days. But there is not electricity to pump water. They will leave the water and when you go to swim, the water will be smelling [sic]. It is not nice to pay money to go swimming in dirty water?

Chizoba's concerns were supported by other women. For instance, Deborah, a 36-year-old accountant, stated that she stopped playing handball because there were no proper centers available to participate. Other women such as Chioma and Nnenna also stated their concern about the debilitated infrastructures for women who perform RSAs. Chioma insisted that the infrastructures once intended for recreational play no longer exist. As she stated during the interview: "Within a twinkle of an eye, the government relocated spaces to individuals and organizations that built warehouses and other things." There are no spaces available for people to do anything; making everywhere congested. Similarly, Nnenna reported that there was only one facility in Surulere, Nigeria, the National Stadium, available to perform recreational sport around her community. During the interview, she stated that it was impossible to do well in swimming when there are no swimming pools in the neighborhood.

**Money.** Although a majority of the participants in this study were employed, some expressed their concerns about the cost of participating in RSAs. Money influenced both women who participated and those who did not participate. The cost of recreational club membership and the expenses of owning recreational apparels heightened both perceived and actual recreational sport constraints. For instance, Ada, a 32-year-old travel agent, who reported she did not participate in

any form of RSA, expressed that the primary reason for her lack of participation was associated with cost of membership. She relayed, "I need to get some money to pay for the entrance? I have not been to one though, so I do not know how much they cost. It might not be too expensive, or it might." Ada did not know how much it cost to become a member of a recreation club, but she assumed that she did not make enough money. Ada's concern also resonated with other women, particularly Chizoba who complained about the expenses of registering at a recreational center:

I know the gym is too expensive for me... it is 5000 Naira [\$31.32] per month. It is affordable, but if you are not a member, I think it is 500 Naira [\$3.13] every time you go. Well, in Nigeria it is expensive doing anything, especially registering in a gym. We end up paying 150,000 to 180,000 Naira [\$989.55 to \$1,127.46]. Because of the money involved, we do it unprofessionally [not in recreational facilities]. Sometimes we just go to the field on our own with maybe some friends.

Other women, including Augusta, Olamide, and Tinuke also had additional concerns about this barrier. Augusta, a 48-year-old entrepreneur who at the time of the interview did not perform any RSA stated that there were some "university recreational centers around her neighborhood, but they were expensive." The expenses led her not to participate. Similarly, Olamide, a 35-year-old bank manager complained that recreational centers are not cheap and just a few people can afford membership. She insisted that recreational centers in Nigeria are asking for "monthly and yearly subscription fees that most people cannot afford." Such concerns were also expressed by Tinuke, who stated that the decent gyms are expensive. To be in the gym for an hour, she pays "about 5000 Naira [\$35] and a three month subscription will cost 70,000 [\$500]." During the interview she complained that money was a major problem and was her number one recreational sport constraint.

**Time.** The lack of time was amongst the most significant impediment that influenced these women's recreational sport patterns. The lack of time was expressed in two different points of view. The first point of view focused on these women spending time caring for their families. Chizoba, like most of the women, spent most of her free time taking care for her family, particularly her young children, and has very little time for RSAs. She expressed that free or leisure time is a rare commodity for Nigeria women. She expounded her concern through the following statement:

As a mother, the time is not there, especially when the kids are small. In the morning you prepare the children for school, tidy up the house, go to work, pick up the children and prepare lunch. You know the time is not just there. I am a young mother and I have these children, which are my first duty.

Chizoba's complaints resonated with other women. For instance, Dumebi, a 49-year-old who is widowed, indicated that she no longer participated in any activity because since the death of her husband, she became the sole person looking after her teenage boys. She was more concerned on how to care for her children than

recreational sport. She spent all her time and energy for her family, and this led her not to consider participating in recreational sport. Similarly, Olamide expressed that there was basically no time for recreational sport. She stated, "Married women, especially mothers with children, more than half of your time is spent looking after the kids. Mothers help with their homework, get them ready for school, and keep the family together."

The second viewpoint expressed how the women's jobs and careers likewise interfered with time to participate in RSAs. Eleven of the 19 women in this study had jobs. During the interviews, the women expressed that they worked Mondays through Fridays, and sometimes on Saturdays. Ada noted that:

There is no time in the sense that I go to work from Monday through Friday and some Saturdays. There is not much time for me in the week. When I come back home from work on Saturday afternoons, I hardly have any energy to do anything else but chores at home.

Ada's comments resonated with most of the women. For instance, Deborah noted that Nigerian women have very limited time and their time is given to work. She leaves home at 5 a.m. and returns at 9 p.m. Similarly, Patricia expressed that there is very little time to participate in recreation sports activities. As she stated, there is no time, because in Nigeria working women spend the whole day in the office from 9 to 5 Monday through Friday. By the time they get home, it is usually late and all they want to do is sleep and get ready for the next day.

**Psychological barriers.** At one point in these women's lives, they all participated in some form of RSA. Most of the women mentioned issues such as injury fears, safety fears, and the inappropriateness of RSA as barriers that influenced their involvement. These internalized factors interfered with the women's desire to participate in recreational sport. Moreover, these barriers were mainly psychological—it did not inhibit the women's physiology or biology. Although some of the women discontinued recreational sport participation because of these barriers, others were able to deal with these constraints.

**Injury fears.** Injury fears were well echoed by the women as a factor that influenced recreational sport participation. During the interviews, some of the women mentioned they stopped participating in recreational sport after they sustained injuries. For instance, Ijeoma, a 27-year-old stay-at-home mom and student revealed that an injury she had in high school influenced her decision to stop running. Throughout the interview, she focused on how RSAs can lead to injuries through the following statement: "I had an injury and that's why I stopped. I was an active participant in sport, but I had a major injury to my toe. That was basically what stopped me from running; so I had to step out." Ijeoma's comments reverberated with other women's injury fears. For instance, Chizoba noted that she was unable to continue running since her two operations. She was scared and did not want to indulge in any activity because she had two surgeries and did not want to reinjure herself. Similarly, Sarah, a stay-at-home mom and student, who at the time of the interview did not participate in any activity, was very concerned about injuries. Although she had never gotten injured, she knew of people who had broken their legs participating in RSA; and being that she is not in the best of shape she wanted to be more careful.

**Safety fears.** Safety concerns were expressed by the women as an important psychological factor that interfered with recreational sport participation. The women noted that their neighborhoods do not encourage recreational sport participation. For instance, Oma revealed she was concerned with the crime rate in Ajao Estate, and as a result refused to take walks or runs around the neighborhood. Also, Chioma a resident of Festac Town, a different city in Lagos, likewise complained about inconvenient “unsafe places that doesn’t allow people to walk around without being disturbed by the traffic.” Chioma noted that places around her neighborhood that “have less interfering traffic are filled with dropouts [thugs] smoking Indian hemp [Marijuana].” Andi also stated that there was a lot of traffic, which made it very difficult to walk in the evening because she was “scared of crazy drivers” hitting her.

**Recreational sport activities perceived to be inappropriate for women.** The RSAs the women liked were seen as inappropriate for women because as Patricia stated, “It supposedly affects women’s fertility and builds muscles just like a man.” Patricia, a 38-year-old office manager who at the time of the study did not participate in any RSA expressed her concern with this statement: “Some believe it affects your fertility. That is one of the reasons women are not encouraged to participate in sport. You hear things like this, as a women don’t you want to have children?” Uju, a 19-year-old student who at the time of the interview participated in RSAs likewise expressed her concerns about fertility. She was informed that participating in RSAs can “lead to complications in the womb and it also takes one’s personality away.” Other women such as Olamide and Tinuke also provided instances of the inappropriateness of RSAs for women. Olamide noted that RSA is inappropriate “because as a woman, if you are going to be fully involved in recreational sport, you have to consider child bearing and all that.” In addition to concerns of fertility and childbirth, some women were worried that recreational sport participation altered their physical appearances. Tinuke expressed, “Recreational sport activities overstretches women’s bodies, and as a woman your body should be succulent.” She goes on to state, “As you get involved in sport, you develop muscles. As a woman who has muscles, men will tell you that you look like a man. Rather than looking like a man, most women want their bodies to be soft.”

**Lack of participation partners.** The women noted that they had no positive reinforcement or support, some of the women experienced intimidation by male participants when performing RSAs. Such factors influenced Mary’s desire to play soccer. When asked what constraints influenced her recreational sport participation, she indicated that she would love to play soccer, but there are no women-only soccer clubs or fields. She expressed her concern in the following statement:

Well, most of the times when I see guys playing, I just can’t join, because you are scared that they will just hit you... but I don’t find girls who play football that much, so that’s about it. Not being able to find girls to play with.

When asked why it is difficult to find women or girls who play recreational soccer, Mary emphatically responded that “football [soccer] is not just a girl’s sport.” These women noted that part of the reasons why they stopped participating in RSAs was

because of the negative experiences and interactions expressed while performing. The women did not receive any positive reinforcement, particularly from males. For instance, Augusta indicated that part of the reason she was not involved in any RSA was because she was not encouraged. She has an uncaring husband who does not encourage her participation because he is not interested. Augusta's experience resonated with most of the women interviewed. For example, Chinaka recalled an occurrence when she played with boys and was intentionally hurt. She expressed her concern in the following statement:

When I was in secondary school they [referring to boys] said that I can perform. They forced me to follow them, but the reason why I did not want to do it, was because they hit me and sometimes I would fall down you know. I will be injured so I do not want to go further on.

**Recreational sport is a low leisure priority and lack of passion.**

Women who did not participate in any RSA at the time of the interview expressed that they did not have a passion or interest for leisure activities that involved sport-like activities. The women indicated that recreational sport was a low leisure priority, particularly women who lack passion or interest for RSAs because they preferred other leisure activities. These women revealed that they needed time to relax after working, caring for the family, and performing religious commitments. During the interviews, a few of the women including Sarah and Efi insisted they did not have any interest in recreational sport. Sarah stated that she was not talented in that area. She expressed that although sport is very good, especially for the body, she was not one for performing RSAs. Likewise, Efi reported her dislike for recreational sport. She did not enjoy recreational sports and did not have any interest in participating. When asked why she did not like recreational sport, she responded, "I don't like sports maybe because I don't have a passion for it... There are other things I care about... I really cannot run from here to that bus stop because I do not enjoy it. I am guessing that it isn't for everybody." Efi comments resonated with other women. For instance, Mary during the interview expressed that she stopped participating in running because she lost her passion for it. She said, "I used to participate in running but right now there isn't any passion for it. So it is not one of those things I like anymore."

Another barrier the women indicated was that recreational sport is a low leisure priority because they preferred to use their leisure or free time to rest and recuperate. In addition to relaxing and recuperating, the women mentioned that recreational sport was a low leisure priority because they spent their free time performing religious and spiritual activities. Most of the women expressed that they spent the week days working, Saturday performing domestic chores, and Sundays at church. Sunday was a time to worship and also a time to meet up with friends and family at church to socialize. For instance, Olamide expressed that she worked Monday through Friday and arrives home at 6 or sometimes 7 p.m. to prepare dinner for the family and on the weekends she is occupied with domestic chores. The only free time she has is used to rest so that she would not be worn out on Monday. Olamide's comments were well echoed by most of the women in this

study. For instance, Patricia mentioned that Saturday was the “only time to get the domestic things done, and on Sunday you go to church; after church one comes back to prepare food,” and the only thing she wants to do afterward is rest. Likewise, Oma commented that she rather stay at home and relax after cleaning up, making food, and running errands.

### **Recreational Sport Facilitators**

**Using personal spaces for RSA.** Some of the women were able to negotiate constraints because of their willingness to adjust, adapt, and create spaces in their homes and environment that fostered recreational sport participation. Their homes and streets were transformed into makeshift recreation centers. For instance, Tinuke during the interview acknowledged that she performs her exercise in her house and sometimes works out on a discreet secluded road. She expressed her ability to cope with recreational sport constraints through this means in the following comment:

Just like I said earlier, I may not have the money to go to the gym, but I do my little exercise whether in my bedroom or in my compound. I have a big compound in Abuja and I use the back [backyard] to exercise myself. I can also jog around my environment [neighborhood] and that is it.

Likewise, other women, including Ijeoma, who was also successful in negotiating constraints insisted that she was able to jog around the house. She, like other women interviewed, was inhibited, however, her motivation to participate in RSAs outweigh recreational constraints experienced.

**Cut back on work, family, and other responsibilities with the assistance.** Several of the women mentioned the use of aids such as house-helpers and relatives allowed for additional time and energy to perform RSAs. They highlighted the importance of having some form of assistance to share the workload. For instance, Oma noted that women have less time and energy for recreational sport because they take care of the home. She acknowledged that the only way to lessen responsibilities is to have house-helpers who can take up some of the chores. Oma once had a house-help who cleaned her home twice a week but suddenly stopped. Afterwards Oma’s participation gradually declined and eventually she stopped performing RSAs. Similarly, Olamide expressed the importance of assistance when interviewed. She highlighted the need for a house-help through the following comment:

There was a time I was going to Federal Palace hotel; all the way in Ikeja [capital city of Lagos] on the weekends. That was before I got married. Ever since then, I have stopped. So for me, it is just the time and the phase I am in [married with a kid]. I am a nursing mother; I cannot leave my son alone—he is a very small boy. I do not have a house help. So I do not have the time; it is just the phase.

Both Oma and Olamide are examples of women who were unable to participate in RSAs because they lacked house-helpers or family members who could assist them. On the contrary, women such as Augusta were successful in coping with recre-

ational sport constraints because they had family members or house-helpers willing to assist with daily responsibilities. She was able to have time to jog in the morning because she had some family to care for her home while she went jogging, and as a result she has the time to perform recreational sport.

**Increase overall quality of life.** Some women mentioned that they were motivated to continue performing RSAs because it promoted health and overall wellbeing. For these women, the benefits of performing outweighed the consequences of not participating. For instance, Nnenna participated because it was important to her health and overall quality of life. During the interview, she stated that her doctor told her to continue participating in walking through the following comments: "My doctor advised that I must do some kilometers of walking every day, and after doing it I feel happy. So, the walking is part of the exercise and it is very good—a very healthy exercise." In addition, walking allowed her to make new friendships with women around her neighborhood who enjoyed walking as much as she did: "Three of us know that walking is healthy for you—spiritually and physically. Three of us participate either in the morning or in the evening. We do a lot of walking!" These women are able to overcome structural and intrapersonal constraints such as, safety, lack of access, and lack of infrastructures, by getting together to take walks around the neighborhood. Likewise, for Chioma recreational sport participation was an avenue to feel happy and create friendships. She made new friendships with people around her neighborhood that enjoyed and appreciated trekking and skipping. In the following comment, she expressed the ease of asking her neighbor to participate in recreational sport: "Nigeria is not like abroad. Here we live as friends and you can pick somebody to take a walk with, skip, and shed weight together, and they will be willing if you can educate them."

## Discussion

By giving voice to 19 Nigerian women living in Lagos, the meaning, examples, barriers to recreational sports participation, and coping mechanisms were identified in this study. The women's meaning of recreational sport is similar to that of Parks and Quartermain's (2003) as well as Mobily's (1989) definitions of sport and recreation. Recreational sport activities such as walking, jogging, football [soccer], swimming, and lawn tennis are performed during their leisure or free time. The principal perspective for the women is that recreational sports are active, refreshing, and performed to enhance overall quality of life. RSAs promote healthy lifestyles and provided ways for the women to lose or maintain weight, as well as control cholesterol levels. Furthermore, recreational sport provided an atmosphere for them to gather and have meaningful interactions. Thus, it provided an avenue for Nigerian women to interact with peers they would otherwise not see. Some women are able to use recreational sport as an avenue to create new friendships with others interested in performing RSAs.

The findings of this study confirmed Crawford and Godbey's (1987) categorization of constraints as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Also, the findings affirmed Jackson and Henderson's (1995) proposition on fundamental constraints diverse people experience within their respective locations. The constraints factors identified in this study have also been found in other prominent



research. Similar to Pelak's (2005) study, our research investigation found that gender boundaries and roles influence women's recreational sport participation. Also, comparable to Alexandris and Carroll (1997), women were influenced by the lack of participation partners. More importantly married women seemed more inhibited than single women because they had more responsibilities and ethic of care to their families.

Most of the constraints identified in our study are considered as structural, and include insufficient time, lack of money, lack of infrastructural support, and Nigerian culture. Structural constraint factors were repeatedly mentioned as the main reasons why Nigerian women were unable to perform RSAs. In addition to structural constraints, intrapersonal constraints are seen as barriers that influence recreational sport participation and are not as prominent as structural constraints. These barriers included injury and safety fears, lack of passion or interest, and RSA is a low leisure priority. Also, interpersonal constraints were present but were the least obvious of the three constraints mentioned by the women. The main interpersonal constraint identified in this study was the lack of participation partners. These barriers are linked to a lack of positive reinforcement or support by men. In some cases intimidation by male participants discouraged women from participating in recreational sport.

Although some studies within North America have reported that intrapersonal constraints are the most pressing barriers that condition people's will to act or their motivation to participate in recreational sport; thus, suggesting that intrapersonal constraints are most proximal while structural are most distal, our study is not emphasizing a true hierarchy (Raymore, 2002). This is because every participant was affected by constraints differently. Structural constraints are the most obvious constraints reported because they not only influence women's participation, but also hinder their preference for RSAs due to the limited choices available. Intrapersonal constraints are not as obvious as structural constraints in this study because the main issues raised by the women focused on lack of time, lack of money, cultural and traditional issues, and lack infrastructures. It is unlikely that Nigerian women will have negative internalized psychological feelings that condition the will to act or motivate participation because of reasons such as, the sluggish and unpredictable economic situation in Nigeria, women spend all their time working or caring for the family, and also the lack infrastructures that support recreational sport participation. The presence of motivation or lack of motivation to participate in recreational soccer for example, can only exist when there is time available, disposable income, and developed recreational infrastructures and equipment for women. Without structural facilitators or support, structural constraints will continue to be obstacles that limit women's recreational sport participation.

To understand why structural constraints were considered most obvious by this group of Nigerian women, it is critical to discuss the lack of utility within governance. The provision of sport and recreation, like everything else in Nigeria, is mainly controlled by the government. They are responsible for providing public facilities such as stadiums, soccer fields, and recreation centers. In addition, the government provides resources for sports and recreation services in federally funded schools at the federal, state and local levels, the Nigerian Football Association,

and the Nigerian International Athletes Association. However, the government has been unable to adequately fund these institutions because of poor economic conditions, corruption, and fraud. These and many more issues diminish the allocation of resources available for sport and recreation in Nigeria (Ojeme, 1989). The limited resources available for sport and recreation are used to fund programs that benefit Nigerian males, while females are left with nothing. Women interested in participating in recreation and sports are structurally constrained because there are no infrastructures or resources available to support their interest. Furthermore, the Nigerian culture and tradition exacerbates barriers that discourage women's recreational sport participation. Rather, the tradition encourages marriage and child bearing and rearing. The cultural pressure and social expectation of women in Nigeria threatens their equal access to recreational sport. Factors such as cultural barriers based on traditional views and social importance of recreational sports as well as economic constraints are important determinants of participation (Arab-Moghaddam et al., 2007).

Based on our findings and past literature on constraints, we suggest that in Nigeria, women are inhibited more by structural constraints than intrapersonal or interpersonal constraints. A few studies provide support for this position in other developing nations. Arab-Moghaddam et al.'s (2007) study of leisure constraints of Iranian women found that structural barriers are the major constraints limiting Iranian women's participation. Lack of structure in the development of women's leisure was related to cultural constraints, traditional views, and the lack of social significance of leisure for Iranian women. Additionally, Koca et al.'s (2009) investigation of Turkish women's constraints to leisure time physical activity (LTPA) found that women were unable to participate in LTPA because of three structural constraints: work and raising children, lack of time due to family and work responsibilities, and lack of money.

Though all the women in our study were able to report on their barriers to participation, recreational sport constraints did not completely stop all participants from performing their preferred activity. Women who were unable to overcome barriers ended up not participating. These women were as aware of recreational sport facilitators as women who performed, but the constraints were too inhibiting that they could not cope (Jackson et al., 1993; Son et al., 2008). Women who were successful in negotiating constraints employed facilitators that included, using personal spaces for RSA, having family members and/or house-helpers assist in childcare, and an increased awareness of the importance of RSA on the quality of life. Hubbard and Mannell's (2001) constraint-effects-mitigation model applies to the experiences of these women. The negotiation techniques minimize the negative effects of recreational sport constraints, allowing the women the ability to modify, adapt, change, and restructure activities in order to participate in their preferred activity. In addition, these women espoused behavioral, cognitive, and spatial transformations so as to continue or start recreational sport participation.

The negotiation strategies employed are similar to those utilized by Australian women in Little's (2002) study. Nigerian women were successful in prioritizing, compromising, and anticipating recreational sport barriers. Prioritizing enabled women to acknowledge the importance of recreational sport in their lives. This

was expressed by the women's desire to participate in RSAs despite the presence of constraints. The women in this study negotiated constraints because they believed that recreational sport participation is important and improved overall quality of life. Staying healthy was an incentive for the women to continue participating in RSAs; the benefits of participating outweighed the consequences of not. Also, compromising were exemplified by the Nigerian women's ability to create make-shift sport recreation centers by reconstructing their personal living spaces (Little, 2002). Compromising is the willingness and ability these women had to adjust, adapt, and make changes. Finally, anticipating allowed the women to make life adjustments and have available resources, time, energy, and the right state of mind to perform recreational sport.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study have provided some indication on the influence of constraints of recreational sport involvement among a group of women in Nigeria. The research study found that all the women faced a multitude of constraints. Some were unsuccessful in dealing with constraints while others were successful in negotiating through recreational sport barriers. Those who performed RSAs were motivated by health and/or social benefits as well as their overall quality of life. They were able to successfully use recreational sport facilitators to cope with constraints. The findings of this research study have both systematic and applied implications. From the systematic position, this study (a) showed that Nigerian women share a similar understanding of the meaning of recreational sport with people in other parts of the world; (b) found that the women experience similar constraints to recreational sport and employ analogous constraint negotiations as other people, particularly women in other similar countries; and (c) filled a gap in the literature; as it is the first to study recreation sport constraints and constraint negotiation that affect Nigerian women. By conducting this study and displaying the findings, we hope to continue the dialogue of leisure, sport, and recreation participation experiences of diverse people. We also hope to bring to light the recreational sport constraints and constraints negotiation of certain groups and populations that are hardly researched.

Furthermore, this research study has some contributions for practical recreational sport developmental opportunities in Nigeria and other similar countries. The findings showed that Nigerian women wanted to participate in recreational sport despite constraints, particularly structural barriers. Some women in this study were successful in dealing with recreational sport constraints, and based on the findings we recommend that women living in Nigeria who want to participate in recreational sport should (a) transform personal spaces for recreational sport purpose; (b) cutback on work, family, and other responsibilities by having house-holds or family assistance; and (c) be aware as well as educated on the importance and benefits for performing recreational sport.

Despite the above contributions, we assert that for there to be any sort of long-term fix to factors that inhibit Nigerian women from RSAs, there has to be some economical contribution from the government and private sectors, as well as developmental change. Change in the sense that there has to be equal opportunities

provided to men and women—not just in recreational sport, but also in schools and employment. In addition, there needs to be involvement by both government and private institutions in providing sport, recreation, and leisure services. Furthermore, there should be more awareness and education campaigns that highlight and explain the positive outcomes of women's involvement in RSAs. These campaigns will also address the misconceptions of infertility and masculinity associated with women's participation in recreational sports.

Although this research study is an initial step in understanding recreational sport barriers and constraint negotiations of Nigerian women, there are some sample limitations that should be discussed. First, this study did not assess the socioeconomic status and educational level of the participants. All the women had graduated from high school and classified themselves as working class citizens. It may be that women of other socioeconomic status are likely to have different recreational sport experiences and/or constraints. Second, this study did not take into consideration these women's tribal affiliations or how religion interrelates with sport. Investigating the effects of religious and tribal practices of Nigerian women's RSA may likely identify different constraints and constraint negotiations. Finally, this research study was conducted in Ajao-Estate, Lagos, which is a more liberal state in Nigeria. Broadening and expanding the sample to other states may solicit different findings and conclusions.

Future research studies should widen its scope by examining a larger number of Nigerian women by employing quantitative methodology or mixed methods. The combination of multiple methodologies will help create synergism—a situation where the collective effort of the research participants provides a broader range of comments, ideas, and opinions. Also, future studies should include variables such as socioeconomic status, age, tribe, religion and geographical location. More specific consideration of the proximity to recreational sport will also generate a more comprehensive study. Moreover, future research should follow up on the importance of structural constraints in developing countries and should continue to conduct cross-cultural studies to validate mainstream theories.

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