

STUDY GROUP ON IMPROVING INCLUSION IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT FOR MUSLIM GIRLS AND WOMEN

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN (IAPESGW)

with

SULTAN QABOOS UNIVERSITY, OMAN

11-16 February 2008

Hosted by the Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

Delegates

1. Nadhim Al Watter – (Iraq)
2. Maha Ebid – (Egypt)
3. Fatima El-Faqir – (Morocco CAANR)
4. Ilhaam Essa- (S. Africa)
5. Fadila Ibrahim Begovic Gafic (Bosnia & Herzegovina)
6. Haifaa Jawad (England, Iraqi heritage)
7. Nour El Houda Karfoul (Syria – SAAW)
8. Ilknur Hacisofraoglu (Turkey)
9. Maryam Jahrom (Iran)
10. Margaret Talbot (England (AfPE))
11. Wardah Salman (Malaysia)
12. Mona Al Ansari (Bahrain)
13. Eman Gaad (Dubai)
14. Gertrud Pfister (Denmark)
15. Tansin Benn (England)
16. Yoursa Al-Sinani (Oman)



Sponsors

- Sultan Qaboos University (College of Education)
- Leverhulme Trust (Research Fellowship – T. Benn)
- IAPESGW
- Westhill Trustees, (University of Birmingham, England)

Federations that supported staff to attend including Sport Association of Arab Women, Confederation for African Athletics Northern Region and Association for Physical Education UK

Universities of delegates

Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

Mosul University, Iraq

University of Birmingham, England

Alexandria University, Egypt

University of Stellenbosch, S. Africa

University of Sarejevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

Shiraz University, Iran,

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

University of Malaya, Malaysia

British University in Dubai

University of Bahrain

Hacettepe University, Turkey

The study group, held under the aegis of the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW), included scholars, practitioners and administrators in physical education and sport, from 14 countries – Bahrain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, South Africa, Syria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

The purpose of the group was both to affirm the value of physical education and sport in the lives of all the people of the world; and, by sharing a range of culturally and nationally diverse experiences, to identify means of improving the opportunities of Muslim women in and through sport and physical education.

The study group:

Applaud and thank the Sultan Qaboos University for its collaboration with the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women, in hosting the International Study Week on Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women in February 2008.

FOCUS - Improving global inclusion of Muslim girls and women in physical education and sport

While there is almost universal recognition of the value and benefits of participation in physical education and physical activity for women and girls, there are diverse challenges in global public dimensions and popular images of Islam and Muslim people across the world. While religion is commonly cited as the most important barrier, investigation reveals that cultural interpretations effect greater differentiation and provide often unnecessary barriers to women's empowerment through physical activity, sport and physical education.

The multi-layered complexity of any research which aspires to increasing understanding of the lives of Muslim girls and women, requires sensitivity in recognising the significance of context and the dangers of treating Muslim people as homogeneous. With the aim of respecting these two key points the purpose of this study week was begin international dialogue on improving global inclusion of Muslim girls and women through life-enhancing physical activity. This was started by finding a space in which to share experiences to increase understanding of the opportunities and constraints facing Muslim girls and women in physical education and sport in different countries. There were three intersecting axis for exploration by the research team: Girls / Women, Physical Education / Sport, Islamic and non-Islamic countries. The effects of diverse national situations and multiple political, economic, religious and social influences were central.

All scholars were members of the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW). This is an international non governmental organisation, established in 1949 with a Mission to support its members working for women and girls participation in physical activity by providing opportunity for professional development and international cooperation. It is a member organisation of the International Council for Sport Sciences and Physical Education (ICSSPE) which helps to construct international policy and aid work in support of sport and physical education. ICSSPE enjoys formal relations with UNESCO, WHO and the

IOC. The intention of this application for a study week at Sultan Qaboos University was to produce an agenda of work which would enhance the lives and work of each individual involved and have valuable outcomes for many others across the world.

It was anticipated that the study week would give contributors the time and space to share experiences, past research and future ideas on the central issue of improving opportunities for Muslim girls and women in physical activity. It was hoped that a productive network of scholars and practitioners would enable greater understanding, collaborative opportunities and international voice to emerge.

OUTCOME DECLARATION “ACCEPT AND RESPECT”:

1. Islam is an enabling religion that endorses women’s participation in physical activity.
2. We affirm the importance of physical education and physical activity in the lives of *all* girls and boys, men and women.
3. We emphasise the importance of good quality programmes of physical education and sport within school curriculum time, especially for girls.
4. We emphasise the desirability, in places where many children have limited access to school, of providing other ways of helping children to learn the physical skills and confidence they need to practise sport.
5. We recommend that people working in the sport and education systems accept and respect the diverse ways in which Muslim women and girls practise their religion and participate in sport and physical activity, for example, choices of activity, dress and gender grouping.
6. We urge international sport federations to show their commitment to inclusion by ensuring that their dress codes for competition embrace Islamic requirements, taking into account the principles of propriety, safety and integrity.
7. We recommend national governments and organisations include in their strategies for the development of sport and physical education, structures and systems that encourage women to take positions in teaching and research, coaching, administration and leadership.

OTHER OUTCOMES -

- A research agenda has started, for example with four delegates collaborating on an audit of practice in GCC countries in inclusion physical education.
- A book proposal (Edited by Tansin Benn, Gerturd Pfister and Haifaa Jawad) has been finalized).

- The Declaration was taken to the IOC Women in Sport Conference in Jordan, March 2008 by Nour El Huda Karfoul (President SAAW) and Darlene Kluka (President IAPESGW).
- Information will be shared at IAPESGW's symposium at ICSEMIS, China, August 2008.
- Further developments will be shared in a symposium at IAPESGW Congress, S. Africa July 2009,
- Further dissemination, strategic and developmental events agreed in Oman are underway.

Finally, the effects of the study week in the lives of participants are best communicated through the voices of some of the women themselves:

ABSTRACTS FROM REFLECTIONS ON THE WEEK IN OMAN

This week has opened a new window in my mind, some things I did not know before about Muslim women, for example in Europe, which have led me to think in a new way. It will help me in my association also. This week has helped me to understand that we can see the same thing by many views ... not just one. I am happy that I spent the week in this way. I am happy that I met great people and I received from them a good experience ... There was a change in me and I am happy for that ... there were many cases and experiences and situations ... and I am so glad because the result of our work – especially the expression – ‘Accept and Respect’ is so important. This is a very important message for everybody, even for all of us, not only for others – for us personally.

Nour El Houda Karfoul,
President Sport Association for Arab Women (SAAW)

The diversity of the women here is most surprising. I have had my eyes opened. I know only our country's experiences and we are just reading articles, but in articles people are not alive – you don't meet their real feelings in the articles, yes some authors and feminists are trying to do that but you don't get real feelings in articles. But here I met the real people from different countries, and it was very important for me, especially the women from different Muslim cultures. They have different visions of religion and religious practices and politics. So we can learn from these experiences. We need to know otherwise we only have ignorance.

Ilknur Hacisoftoglu (Turkey)

It has been an honour to be a part of this group. I think it has done some important work for Muslim women. I don't think I could have done such work as a Muslim women in my country for Muslim women. I think it is a great thing that women from outside my country have been able to do something for Muslim women inside my country. It is good that we have put an international dimension onto our debate.

Maryam Jahrom (Iran)

My hopes are captured in the Declaration – to Accept and Respect difference and the right to choose dress, gender group, sport – this was really my dream and it more than

came true, with all the movement to support Muslim women to participate in physical activity. And the people I met? I think they are all sensitive people – who have chosen to work in supporting other people, to care, and they are very caring about each other. All the skills required, different languages, experienced and less experienced scholars and practitioners, being part of that was great, and seeing how it was managed with patience, sensitivity and understanding – so it worked very well and I am glad people from so many different countries managed to see something of my country, Oman, for the first time and now understand something of what we are trying to do here at Sultan Qaboos University for women in physical education.

Yousra Al-Sinani, Oman