

An Analysis of Peer Groups Influence on Sports Involvement of Female Athletes in Rivers State Secondary Schools, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The study examined the peer group influence on sports involvement of female athletes in Rivers State Secondary Schools of Nigeria. Data were collected with the use of questionnaire, from a sample of 102 female athletes, randomly selected from 17 secondary schools that took part in 2003 All Secondary Schools Sports Festival in Rivers State. Three hypotheses were formulated, tested and verified significant. Results from the percentages and Chi-square statistical methods used to analyze the data indicated that peer groups significantly influence the sports involvement of female athletes in Rivers State Secondary Schools. The summary table shows that a total of 2.61 percent of the responses indicated that peers have no significant influence on female involvement in sports among secondary schools' female athletes in Rivers State, as against 47.06 percent and 50.33 percent responses that respectively favoured the peer groups' influence. This study concluded that peer group is an institution, which fills the gap in socialization process. And that peer groups influence female sports involvement among secondary school girls in Rivers State of Nigeria. Based on the results and findings of this study, recommendations were made among them which were: sports administrators should administer sports that are free from traditional stereotyped roles expected of normal girls and boys at secondary schools which may stop peer group influence among girls. Females in Rivers State should be allowed to be involved fully in sports like their male counterparts.

INTRODUCTION

Gender difference in the play behaviour of children is found early in life and in a variety of activities. Girls are permitted a wide range of play activities and choice throughout childhood. By the age of puberty, however, games and sport participation appears to be male phenomenon. Learning by observing is pervasive in children, their learning behaviour is fashioned by observing people, they imitate parents, mimic their siblings and peers in play and model themselves after sports heroes. With the prestige attached to sport success, both locally, nationally and internationally there are vast numbers of progressively younger girls entering into training and sport programs of extreme intensity, duration and persistence. Today girls are being subjected to intensive training with a view to developing and making them world champions. Success can be accomplished in some sports especially swimming if training starts at an early stage; however, training at an early age in some other sports is hazardous such as boxing, and weight lifting. It is on record today that the youngest competitor in any sports to break a world record was Karen Muir of South Africa, who was 12 years old when

she broke the 100 m backstroke record for women swimming (Chu 1998; Drinkwater 2000; Benefice et al. 2001; Krane 2001). The heated discussion and debate for the demand by some females that all male sports be integrated is a huge success in the field of sports (Wyrick 1974).

Coaches, peer groups and members of the nuclear family are important for youth sports. Girls' sports participation is further influenced by a number of macro, micro system factors, such as the social class background, ethnicity, culture and sub-culture, religion, gender, place and type of residence, number of children in the family, ordinal position and age.

It is observed in Rivers State like other states in Nigeria that at adolescence, the reference group of many youths switches from the family unit to the age group whereby family influence becomes subordinate to the influence of peer group. Peer group pressure operates to influence sports related facets of a child's style. During childhood, peer groups are found in the immediate neighbourhood and tend to be similar in values to the individual. Influential peer group provides a greater likelihood of non-diversity in interest and values concerning sports. The school along with the family and peer group is

an influential institution in the process of female sports role socialization (Loy et al. 1989; Festle 1996; CGMCS 2002; Heyward 2002).

Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to:

- a. Peers groups' influence on the female athletes in Rivers State Secondary Schools.
- b. The use of closed ended questionnaire for data collection.
- c. The use of descriptive and inferential statistics for data analysis.

The Problem

The researchers observed that there were higher levels of instability and inconsistency of some secondary schools females in athletics performances in the state, especially during inter-collegiate sports competitions. Some secondary schools female athletes performed well at local competitions only to put up a most disappointing performance in external competitions. While it was noted that the behaviour of human beings can always change in direct relations to environmental changes, it is most unlikely that such changes in performance in sports could be drastic. It is also noted that some extraneous factors such as lack of regular practice, inadequate facilities and equipment, and inappropriate instructions might play some crucial roles in the unstable nature of athletes' performances, studies on sport performance in Nigeria are yet to identify the part being played by peer groups influence on sport competitions generally. It was on the basis of this submission that this study has been undertaken to assess the influences of peer groups in our secondary schools female athletes in relation to competitions. Specifically, the study was designed to find out whether (a) the peer group influences the sports involvement of female athletes in Rivers State Secondary School, (b) If, to make some recommendations.

Review of Related Literature

The peer group is an institution, which fills the gap in the socialization process that occurs during later childhood and adolescence. The peer group's massive influence was established through parent's ultimate search for survival which leaves babies to the care of Day Care Cen-

tres; where their various lifestyles are designed in accordance with the norms set by the children in attendance at that particular Day Care Centre (Awosika 2005; Orunaboka 2006).

Membership in the peer groups is voluntary and an individual may belong to one or more group at the same time. The group is the bridge between childhood and adulthood, when society is complex enough that attainment of full adult status cannot be insured in the family unit (Einsen-stadt 1963). In some cultures, peers supersede parental figures as the principal models and agents of socialization. Some authors suggested that the peer group is becoming the most socializing agent. In present day society, people look primarily to their contemporaries for guidance and directions. Modern man values mostly the judgment and approval of others in his environment (Bronfenbener 1962; Reisman 1966; Awola 1996; Royce et al. 2003).

Although the initial interest in sports is often stimulated in the home, peer groups have the potential to reinforce or inhibit subsequent development. The peer group serves as a powerful socializing agent for sports participation especially as the child moves into adolescence (Eitzen and Sage 1982). Axthelm (1970) posited that the basketball playground in New York Herelm captures the interest and energies of thousands of youngsters and this phenomenon is duplicated in the inner cities of most of America's metropolis. Lack of sports oriented peer group often leads individuals to reduce their involvement. Similarly, entrance into a new peer group which is sport-oriented can suddenly revive an earlier interest or stimulate a new interest in primary or secondary involvement (Loy et al. 1989). According to Rosenberg (1986), the influence of friends increased steadily from the age of eight to ten years to that of sixteen to eighteen years. Coleman's (1961) study on high school athletes observed that students chose athletes more often than scholars as persons they would like to be friends with. The influence of the peers is also confirmed by the findings of Medrich et al. (1982) that the more friends a girl has, the more likely she is to play team sports, but the increase was not steady and linear among boys.

It was observed by authors in sports administration and organization that discussion of the various facets of inter-scholastic and inter-collegiate sports will be based on the point of view that the interest and purpose of these programs

are to offer equal competitive opportunities in sports to all students: girls and boys, women and men. Today, girls and women want to participate in sports and our society is gradually accepting this fact. However, myths pertaining to the inability of girls and women to compete, as well as ill-founded concepts regarding their psychological and physiological reactions to competition will die slowly in Nigeria (Orunaboka 1998).

The dearth of female athletes today in Rivers State may be attributed to so many factors, among them are parental and peer group influence. Parents always emphasized the following statement to their children "I did not send you to school for sports but for reading books". Based on this strong instruction, some peers discourage members of their group who are interested in sports participation. A female athlete is suddenly withdrawn from school by the parents. Those females who measured well in physical education at first degree branch out to other professions, all because of the fear of what the future would be in the midst of their male counterparts (Orunaboka and Nathan 2007).

But in the advanced countries, girl athletes are more popular with both parents, as male and female peers and are found more often in the social elite. Other analysis revealed that the more a girl actively participates in athletics, the higher her measures of status with her peers, the more official leadership positions she holds in school organizations, the more she attends girls' and boys' athletic events as a spectator, the higher her level of scholarship (Koivulu 2001; Theberg 2000). Many studies have noted an association between female athletic participation and higher education aspirations.

It is consistent with Lewko and Ewings's (1980) suggestion that for young females to become highly involved in sports, many sources of influence have to be present to overcome their past stereotypic experiences. During adolescence, most of the peer influence is sex-linked. Female athletes report receiving more support from female friends than from male friends (Synder and Sprietzer 1996). Greendofor (1977) using multiple regression analysis, found that peers were the major influence throughout each life cycle stage. Similarly, research on Olympic aspirants in track and field by Kenyon (1969), demonstrated that the peers served as the most important social system in regards to socialization into active sports role.

Through dint of hard training, females who were encouraged by their parents and peer groups in Nigeria have their names written today in gold at local, national and international sports halls of fame. These gold names were written by females like Modupe Oshikoya, Utitofon Uko, and Regina Okafor, in 400 metres, 100 metres, and 200 metres respectively. Mary Onyali 100 metres, Bella Ogunlana in wrestling, Kudirat Owolabi in table tennis, Alaoma Abia in handball, Chioma Ajunwa long jump, Fatima Yusuf 400 metres, Maria Usifo in 400 metres hurdles, Tina Iheagwam in 100 metres, Falilat Ogunkoya in 400metres and many others, but none from Rivers State, if any not well known. Today most of these female athletes are well- educated. They are all graduates in different professions, happily married with children, they are still respectful and respectable all over Nigeria and their communities (Orunaboka and Elendu 2009).

Condry and Siman (1974) however suggested that there is a balance between parents and peers influence on a child's sports involvements. Most studies suggested a significant impact of peers on one's sport involvement.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sample: The sample of this study consisted of 102 female athletes from 17 secondary schools in Rivers State that were involved and participated in 2003 All Secondary School Sports Festival in Rivers State.

Instrument: A self-structured questionnaire was developed by the researchers, and validated by a jury expert in the related field. It consisted of 8 items testing the influences of peer group in sports involvement of female athletes. A three-point rating scale adapted from that developed by Thompson (1993) was used for the 8 items to indicate the level of influence, thus: Always, Occasionally, and Never.

Hypotheses

Three hypotheses were formulated and they are as follows:

H01: Peers level of participation in sports will not significantly influence the sports involvement of the female athletes in Rivers State Secondary Schools sports competitions.

H02: Peers level of encouragement in Girls sports will not significantly influence the

sports involvement of the female athletes in Rivers State Secondary Schools sports competitions.

H03: Peers level of appreciation in Girl sports will not significantly influence the sports involvement of the female athletes in Rivers State Secondary Schools sports competitions.

Data Collection and Analysis: The data were collected by the researchers who personally administered the questionnaire to the female students. The purposive sampling procedure was used. The percentage was used to describe the frequencies of the coded responses. The Chi-square was employed for the rejection and acceptability of the hypotheses setting the alpha level at 0.05.

RESULTS

The average age of the female students was 17 years. Result on experience in competitions indicated 65 percent of the subjects had above 6 years competitive experiences at local and interstate levels while 35 percent had below 6 years experiences in competitions at local and interstate levels.

Table 1 shows that 31.37 percent have their peers participating in sports Always while 66.67 percent participated Occasionally. Only 1.96 percent of the total number do not take part in sports at all. Further analysis shows that a calculated value of 34.05 was greater than the critical value of 5.991 and this means that peers level of participation in sport have significant influence on the female athletes under study.

Table 1: Peers level of participation in sports (N=102)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Always	32	31.37
Occasionally	68	66.67
Never	2	1.96
Total	102	100.00

$\chi^2 = 34.05$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.05$

Out of 102 responses, 5.88 percent do not encourage their girl friends to take part in sports at all (Table 2). However, 39.22 percent encouraged their participation Always while 54.90 percent encouraged them Occasionally. Further statistical analysis shows a Chi-square value of 38.33 as against a critical value of 5.991. The

result showed that the calculated value is greater than the critical value. The level of peer encouragement in girl friends' sport involvement was therefore significant.

Table 2: Peers level of encouragement in girl friends sports involvement (N=102)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Always	40	39.22
Occasionally	56	54.90
Never	6	5.88
Total	102	100.00

$\chi^2 = 38.33$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that 70.59 percent of the peer appreciated their girl friends' involvement in sports Always and 29.41 percent appreciated their involvement Occasionally and there was none that Never showed appreciation. The calculated Chi-square value of these responses was 8.94 against a critical value of 5.991. This shows that the level of appreciation of peers was significant.

Table 3: Peers level of appreciation in girl friends participation in sports (N=102)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Always	72	70.59
Occasionally	30	29.41
Never	-	-
Total	102	100.00

$\chi^2 = 8.94$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.05$

A summary of the responses of peers influence on their girl friends involvement in sports shows significant with a calculated cumulative frequency of: Always 144 (47.06). Occasionally 154 (50.3%) and Never 8 (2.61%) subjects. Though this study was not on association but Table 4 shows significant association between the levels of influence of Always and Occasionally to the three categories of influence on participation, encouragement and appreciation.

DISCUSSION

Peer groups exhibited higher level of influence in the female athletes involvement among secondary schools in Rivers State. It was noted that the next socializing influence a child has as she leaves her home is the peer group she associates with. She has to fulfill and satisfy the

Table 4: Peers influence of girl friends involvement

	<i>Always</i>		<i>Occasionally</i>		<i>Never</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	
Participation	32	31.37	68	66.67	2	1.96	102
Encouragement	40	39.22	56	54.90	6	5.88	102
Appreciation	72	70.59	30	29.41	-	-	102
Total	144		154		8		306

norms and values of her associates in order to be fully integrated and accepted as a member of that particular group. Authors like Loy et al. 1989, Festle 1996, CGMCS 2002, Heyward 2002, among others observed that the school along with the family and peer group is an influential institution in the process of female sports role socialization. They suggested that the peer group is becoming the most socializing agent. In present day society, people look primarily to their contemporaries for guidance and directions.

Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 show peers in sports socialization of female athletes. Further analysis of the tables show that peers have a significant influence on the sports involvement of their girl friends.

These findings agree with Riesman (1966) who said that the peer group has become the most socializing agent. This means that peer's influence is considered greater than even that of the parents. The findings of this study also corroborate with the findings of Bronfenbrenner (1962) who asserted that peer supersedes parental figure as the principal models and agents of socialization in some cultures. The findings of Eitzen and Sage (1982) state that when a sports role is stimulated in a child in the home, the peer group influence only reinforces its development. Thus, the peer group serves as a socialization agent.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that the peer group is an institution, which fills the gap in socialization process that occurs during the later childhood and adolescence.

Based on the findings of this study it was concluded that peer groups influence female sports involvement among secondary school girls in Rivers State of Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Sports administrators should administer sports that are free from traditional

stereotyped roles expected of "normal girls and boys at the primary and secondary schools as to stop peer group influence among girls.

2. Sports administrators should be prepared to face up to date challenges of discrimination on the basis of gender and the best way to do that is to furnish equitable opportunities for all interested students, regardless of gender.
3. Girls should be allowed in Rivers State to be involved fully in sports like their men counterparts.
4. There should be academic scholarship/ sponsorship for deserving female athletes by the state government.
5. Sports competitions should blend be with the school programmes, so that athletes do not have set back in their academic studies.
6. The research unit should be able to carry out studies that will improve on the present mode of female level of sports participation in Rivers State of Nigeria.

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