

Female Students' Perceptions on Physical Education and Sport Curriculum: A Case of Two Higher Learning Institutions in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

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Abstract:- The aim of this study was to establish the influence of female students' perceptions on their participation in Physical Education and Sport (PES) in higher learning institutions of Masvingo, Zimbabwe. The study employed a qualitative case study. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used as data collection instruments. Data were presented in narrative form and analyses were done in line with the aim of the study. The sample comprised twenty female students who were purposively sampled from two institutions of higher learning. The study disclosed that the participation of female students in PES, in institutions of higher learning was, to a larger extent, influenced by stereotypical perceptions based on socialisation backgrounds, cultural norms and beliefs based on the idea that PES is for males, not females. The study also found that perceptions about injuries, muscularity and keeping up appearances in preparation for marriage contributed to the negative perceptions about PES participation amongst female students. The study, further revealed that some female students, though a minority group, had positive perceptions on their participation in PES and believed that PES participation empowered them, improved their self-esteem and helped them to live health lifestyles. The study recommended the need for government gender policies, conventions and declarations to focus on PES programs that might help change the perceptions of female students towards the development of their athletic potential. The study also suggested that institutions of higher learning introduce sensitisation programs where parents are involved as a way of transforming those perceptions that hinder the participation of female students in PES.

Key Words: participation, female students, Physical Education, sports, tertiary institutions

I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to establish perceptions of female students on their participation in PES at institutions of higher learning in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Across the world, the participation of female students in PES in institutions of higher learning seems to be influenced by individual philosophies. It appears as if the female students are guided by certain perceptions that influence their participation in PES. According to Social Cognitive theories, perceptions are important predictors of human behaviours for they represent people's attitudes, beliefs, judgements and cognitions (Kamtsios, 2010:11). In the context of this study, the perceptions of female students in institutions of higher learning could play a significant role in determining whether

or not they participate in PES. Female students may express beliefs and judgements which may be entrenched in their perceptions and attitudes. For instance, they may believe that their bodies are not as unique as male bodies which have been created to perform better in PES (Asakitikpi, 2010; Daimon, 2010; Kapasula, 2010; Witt & Loots, 2010). Such perceptions may suppress their zeal to participate in PES.

This means that female students may differ in their behaviour and attitudes towards participation in PES (Kamtsios, 2010). A study carried out in Greece that examined perceptions and attitudes towards participation in PES, found that female students were not enthusiastic to participate in more vigorous exercises unlike their male counterparts (Kamtsios, 2010). Over the years, females have tended to accept that PES is for males and activities that promote components of fitness such as strength, agility, power and anaerobic capacity are linked to male performance in PES. This means that if such perceptions are left unattended to, they may continue to seriously influence the participation of female students in PES. The need to carry out this study therefore was to establish the extent to which female students' perceptions influence their participation in PES in institutions of higher learning in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

The article takes the following form. Firstly, related literature shall be reviewed under two sub-topics, namely, female students' stereotypical perceptions that influence their participation in PES, and female students' perceptions of the physical self in PES participation. Secondly, the research methodology of the study will be discussed. The third section discusses findings under sub-themes and the fourth section presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Female students' stereotypical perceptions that influence their participation in PES

In both developed and developing countries, female students seem to be influenced by their perceptions in whether or not to participate in PES. It appears as if the perceptions of many female students in institutions of higher learning are informed by their stereotypical backgrounds that are rooted in patriarchy (Daimon, 2010; Witt & Loots, 2010; Amusa et al., 1999). This means that the perceptions of female students

towards participation in PES could be influenced by their cultural backgrounds. Manyonganise (2010) reiterates that the participation of female students in PES is influenced by their perceptions that are based on norms, values and beliefs of their societies. Thus, female students may decide not to participate in PES because of cultural perceptions such as fear of rejection from their families and societies due to violating cultural beliefs, values and norms (Daimon, 2010). Thus, at times, female students may be over-protected and over-valued by their societies to the extent of being barred from participating in endurance and power activities. Female students from such societies tend to perceive themselves not belonging to the playgrounds and that PES belongs to males. In the traditional African Shona culture, married females seek permission to participate in PES from their husbands and in-laws (Manyonganise, 2010). In many Zimbabwean societies, female students tend to be influenced to believe that they belong to the home where they are entitled to take various household roles such as mother, wife and food producer (Kapasula, 2010).

Accordingly, in Zimbabwe's traditional African Shona culture, statements like, *Mukadzi wakanaka anofanira kuremeredza murume wake nebabereki vemurume (A good woman should respect her husband and in-laws) or Mukadzi wakanaka anogara pamba achichengeta murume nevana (A good woman should stay at home, taking care of the husband and children)* are part of daily utterances. The traditional Shona society of Zimbabwe tends to construct the type of woman it wants, who is a strong home dweller (Kapasula, 2010; Manyonganise, 2010). Such a home is culturally synonymous with dignity, respect and morality, which are the qualities of an ideal African woman instilled through social values. The views of female students are expected not to clash with the identity of femininity as prescribed by their societies (Manyonganise, 2010). This implies that the way a female student perceives herself should be in line with what society approves of as the definition of femininity. This contributes to whether or not she should participate in PES as well as the choice of PES activities she may participate in. This may result in female students further associating themselves with child bearing and nurturing activities, viewing males as undoubtedly more competent and responsible. Such kind of socialisation seems to have negatively affected female tertiary students, especially in slowing down the achievement of parity, equity, access and relevance in PES participation.

Female students' perceptions of the physical self in PES participation

On issues of how the physical self such as muscularity influence female students' participation in PES, there are some female students in institutions of higher learning who have long standing beliefs that participation in PES is undesirable (Gorely et al., 2003). The argument is that female students' participation in PES enhances muscle enlargement. Female students may find an athletic muscular body to be ugly, undesirable and inappropriate and are thus, against the

idea of developing one (Gorely et al., 2003). There may be a possibility for such perceptions limiting the participation of many female students. This may result in the under-representation of female students in PES tournaments and games held at institutions of higher learning. For example, commenting on the image of a female discus thrower in a research on muscularity, gender and sexuality, Gorely et al. (2003) note that some female students argue that participation in PES results in masculinised, butch bodies. This implies that some female students may be against the idea of females' entering the 'male' domain. They may not participate in activities such as wrestling and body building that concentrate on muscle enlargement. It may be the mind-sets of many females that female students who participate in demanding PES activities may reflect maleness and be viewed as "women like men" (Daimon, 2010). Davis and Weaving (2010) also state that a woman who is muscular, for instance, is liable to be derogated as unattractive, masculine or lesbian. The current study, however, seeks to establish the extent to which the so perceptions of female students influence their participation in PES in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning.

In developed and developing countries, female students in many institutions of higher learning perceive participation in PES as dangerous for women because it results in injuries (Daimon, 2010). What this might imply is that participation in PES always results in different forms of injuries, which is not always the case. Perceptions of such a nature may negatively influence female students not to participate in PES. There are some female students who believe that participation in PES, particularly in vigorous activities, is injurious because females were created weaker than males and, therefore, should not take risks (Kamtsios, 2010). Accordingly, this has caused females to lag behind males, especially in male dominated contact sports such as rugby, boxing, soccer and wrestling which require stamina and lots of pushing, punching and dragging. The argument is that the female body has fragile bones and therefore can easily sustain fractures and dislocations during physical training (Gorely et al., 2003). Such beliefs may result in many female students shunning participation in PES as it is considered unsafe for it may cause serious injuries.

Studies worldwide have shown that generally, female students perceive participation in PES negatively as it could impact on their good looks. It is, therefore, not advisable for girls' to take part in PES. In most cases, girls intend to maintain their bodies and look attractive even during participation in PES (Velija and Kumar, 2009; Azzarito et al., 2006; Bailey, 2006). Research on the physical self perceptions of female students in PES conducted in the USA found that when females reach pre-adult stage they become particular with their beauty. They become more concerned about how they look in front of their male counterparts. Female students may fear that if they participate in PES their femininity images and good looks may be destroyed (Daley and Buchanan, 1999). This implies

that such perceptions and attitudes may negatively influence the female students against participation in PES.

Female students usually dislike participating in hot weather. They fear that they may damage their skin and make a mess of themselves. Females frequently rate themselves on appearance, demonstrating that physical features are an important component of identity (With-Nielsen and Pfister, 2011). As a result, female students tend to develop negative perceptions, lack confidence and interest when they reach pre-adult stage. They may also be discouraged to the extent of avoiding participation in PES. Sallis and Owen cited in Bailey (2006:397) state that female students may acquire patterns and justifications for exempting themselves from participating in PES. One of the major reasons they give is trying to keep up appearances. What the female students may fail to realise is that keeping up appearances could be complimented by keeping fit. This would lead to a completely developed individual. Most females believe that they are expected to be lady-like, cool and attractive (Delamont, 2001). Participation in PES may be detrimental to this. The feelings of many female students in many institutions of higher learning globally is that participating in exhausting PES activities, would reflect maleness and distort the characteristics of an ideal woman as summarised in the ancient Olympic times as beautiful, graceful, soft and feeble (Schneider in Davis and Weaving, 2010). Their belief is that participating in PES would make them women of lesser value.

Research has also established that there are other female students who construct sensible meanings around their bodies by choosing to participate in PES (Azzarito, 2004). Penny and Evans, cited in Azzarito (2004), note that such female students have positive perceptions towards their participation in PES and this influences them to participate in PES. In developed countries some female students perceive participation in PES as promoting the development of a sense of ownership of their bodies. Participation allows them to penetrate into traditionally male-dominated PES activities (Kamtsios, 2010). If female students participate in PES, their self-esteem might be boosted. They would bear a strong unrestricted identity or uniqueness as they participate in the various activities. Furthermore, some female students may have a strong sense of identity and self-direction through participation in PES. They prepare to become decision makers as referees, coaches, advisers, event planners and PES directors (Wadesango, Machingambi, Ashu and Chireshe, 2010). Thus, if females become decision makers, they contribute in developing PES policies and programmes. They also help in designing structures that increase the participation of female students in PES. Talbot refers to this as 'being she through PES' participation (Bailey, 2006). In line with the above, this research study sought to establish the extent to which female students in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning are affected by their perceptions into PES participation.

III. METHODS

Research design

The study employed a single qualitative case study design which Yin (2011) refers to as 'type one' case study. The main purpose of this case study was to establish how perceptions of female students at tertiary institutions influence their participation in PES. The current study also falls within the intrinsic case study. An intrinsic case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case which does not make an attempt to generalise beyond the single case or even to build theories (Robert Stake in Silverman, 2010). Stake further explains that with such a case study, the intention is to examine in depth, the intrinsic uniqueness of the individual case for its own sake. Burns (2002) notes that the aim of a case study is to understand in depth one case and not what is generally true for most. The current study was intrinsic because the researchers had their own intrinsic interest in this unique case on how female students' perceptions might influence their participation in PES. The use of an intrinsic case study allows the researchers to gain a rich and vivid understanding of events (Cohen and Manion, 2011) In this case, the researchers investigated in detail, the case relating to the experiences of female PES students.

Participants

The female students participants were purposively sampled from two of Masvingo's institutions of higher learning, namely, a state university and a teachers' training college. One of the major merits of purposive sampling was that it assured the researchers of getting participants who had the potential to furnish them with rich and credible information, which is usually difficult to find (Yin, 2011). Purposive sampling also allowed the researchers to meet their research aims through gaining insight and understanding into a particularly chosen phenomenon" (Burns, 2002: 465). The sample comprised twenty female students, ten from each of the two tertiary institutions. All the female student participants were aged between twenty-one and thirty years.

Research instruments

The study employed self-designed data collection techniques which included semi-structured individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The individual in-depth interviews with four of the twenty purposively selected female students sought to capture interviewees' views on the influence of perceptions on participation in PES in two the two institutions of higher learning in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Focus group discussions with sixteen female students sought to discuss, clarify and further shade light on some of the points raised by the interviewees who were involved in the individual in-depth interviews. The use of the two data gathering tools was to gain deeper insights and themes for data analysis as the research unfolded. It was also a way of allowing triangulation of data. The strategy enhanced data credibility and dependability (Maree, 2012 ; Shenton,

2004). Triangulation also allowed the researchers to cross-check the reliability of the information supplied by the female students.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Female students from institutions of higher learning who participated in the individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions expressed mixed views concerning how perceptions influenced their participation in PES. The majority of the female students had negative perceptions towards participation in PES which influenced their participation. A few had positive perceptions, indicating that participation in PES was beneficial to them. The following themes emerged from the two data collection instruments: stereotypical perceptions versus female students' participation in PES; perceptions about *Unhu/Ubuntu*; female students' perceptions about injuries and muscularity; perceptions on keeping up appearances in PES; and influence of positive perceptions in PES.

Stereotypical perceptions versus female students' participation in PES

Findings revealed that there were mixed feelings on how perceptions of female students influenced their participation in PES. The larger number of participants, three out of four, from the in-depth interviews and thirteen out of sixteen, from the focus group discussion, concurred that their participation in PES as female students' was negatively influenced by their perceptions derived from their stereotypical social backgrounds. Almost all the participants in this study indicated that PES was the domain for males. They noted that females were supposed to stay at home, responsible for domestic work in preparation for marriage, and thus not participate in PES. One in-depth interviewee had this to say:

I belong to the Zimbabwean Shona society, where I grew up being told that PES is for males and the domain of women is in the home. My family always expects me to clean the house, launder clothes and prepare meals for them as preparation for marriage when I grow up.

Similarly one focus group discussant also remarked:

I do not feel like participating in PES. My parents do not want me to engage in male activities. From girlhood I never participated in PES until I went to school. All my duties were in the home where I was trained to follow my mother's footsteps so as to become a hardworking housewife in future. Up to now, to be very honest, I participate in PES because at school we are all asked to.

This perception was reflected in the larger number of participants in this study. It may, thus, be conjectured that the female students have been conscientised during their socialisation process to believe and fulfil the expectations of their societies and families especially that their place was in

the home. This means that most of the participants did not support and appreciate PES participation. Their line of thought was rooted in their society's way of life. It may, therefore, be pinpointed that society has negative influence on female students' participation in PES. It tends to place more value on household chores in preparation for marriage. The results confirm Manyonganise's (2010) study where she notes that in many Zimbabwean families and societies, female students tend to be influenced to believe that they belong to the home and to various household roles such as child-bearing, taking care of the husband, preparing meals and laundering clothes for the family. It may be inferred that female students were not given opportunities to express the need for their societies to change their stereotyped mentalities on domesticating them.

Perceptions about Unhu/Ubuntu

Some female participants revealed that female students who participated in male dominated contact sports, rolling and grabbing each other were sometimes criticised by other female students for not respecting the *Unhu/Ubuntu* values of their society, for they did not value their bodies. The majority of the interviewees revealed that there was a lot of criticism and gossip amongst themselves about contact sport training such as boxing, gymnastics and wrestling. Participants indicated that in some cases female students who participated in PES were labelled and accused of violating societal norms and values. One interviewee expressed it thus:

As a young woman, I am not keen to participate in PES, especially in wrestling boxing and gymnastics, because of the negative comments sometimes passed by some of the female students during performance e.g "Ummm, musikana uyu akareruka, haana hunhu, haaremeredzi muviri wake. Hapana murume angada kuroora izvi (this woman is undignified and is mannerless, she does not value her body. No man would be willing to marry such.

Likewise, one focus group participant had this to say:

Whenever I am in the boxing ring, some of my female peers laugh at me, passing negative comments such as, "What kind of a woman is this who plays harmful sports, acting like a man." She has the potential of beating up her husband when she gets married. Ah! She is dangerous. She does not even care about getting injured and growing up crippled or ugly.

Such comments might discourage female students from participating in PES. The comments by the majority of participants seem to suggest that those female students who participated in PES were ill mannered and misfits in their societies and families, and would, therefore, be unsuitable candidates for marriage as they violated societal values (*Unhu/Ubuntu*). The participation in PES of female tertiary students may be greatly influenced by their perceptions and attitudes, instilled in them through the socialisation process.

The results were confirmed by Manyonganise (2010) who stresses that in the African traditional Shona culture of Zimbabwe, female students are expected to uphold the beliefs, values and norms as well as the identity of femininity prescribed by their society. What this might mean is that those female students who participate in PES in institutions of higher learning may participate because it is compulsory and have limited choice.

Female students' perceptions about injuries and muscularity

The larger number of the interviewees, revealed that they were only interested in taking part in a few light PES activities. They but did not like to participate in strenuous, aggressive activities or the traditionally male-dominated sports. They believed that such sports activities caused injuries and enhanced the development of enlarged muscles which made them appear muscular, funny and unattractive before males. They revealed that athletic and muscular bodies resembled male features. The female students believed that it was undesirable to develop such, as it compromised their chances of getting married. When asked to comment one interviewee observed that:

I do not want to participate in PES because I do not want to get injured or sustaining damaging injuries such as strains, sprains, fractures and dislocations. The development of large muscles like a guy is something else. Boys hate such girls who are muscular. They laugh at them and nick name them 'African chickens'. I do not want to look ugly and nicknamed.

Most of the focus group discussant shared the same sentiments with those in-depth interviewees. They noted that they were not enthusiastic to participate in PES because they would grow muscular and stout. They disclosed that they were sometimes labelled during performance and felt embarrassed. Focus group discussants further indicated that muscular bodies made them look like men and this distorted the characteristics of an ideal African woman. According to Manyonganise (2010), an ideal African woman is one who is soft, submissive, quiet, graceful, beautiful and weak.

One focus group discussant had this to say:

I am not keen to participate in vigorous and muscular PES activities. If I participate my society will regard me as a misfit for not respecting norms and values. It will be difficult for me to get a husband to marry for I will fall short of becoming the ideal woman my society wants me to be. I am very selective in the choice of activities I participate in. I do not want to look like a man.

The findings above tend to reveal that the female students were not keen to participate in PES. They did not want to look muscular like men. Furthermore, they did not want to get hurt or be deformed and look ugly. If that happened, they would, perhaps, be unattractive before men. What was interesting was

that the participants tended to agree that those injuries, being muscular, crippled and looking ugly were all not their portion. This would then continuously discourage the participation of female students in PES. It, however, appears that the majority of female students still have inadequate knowledge about the benefits of PES participation. Their mentalities seem to be hooked more on marriage issues than anything else. Daimon (2010) stresses that in many African societies, any female who engages in rough play may be recognised as man or be described as a woman who is like a man. It may be inferred that such negative stereotypes tend to have perpetuated negative perceptions and attitudes towards the participation of female students in PES in institutions higher learning.

The results imply that the perceptions of female students may be influenced by society's expectations. This may result in female students being discouraged from participating in PES. It may be argued that an individual's self esteem may be damaged when spectators pass negative comments during performance. Generally, the results show that there is still a strong mismatch between expectations in the field of PES, the expectations of society and the female students themselves. Hence, this issue needs to be addressed through research studies of this nature.

Perceptions on keeping up appearances in PES

On being asked how perceptions of the self influenced the female students' participation in PES, all the interviewees revealed that PES participation interfered with the general maintenance of their bodies such as make-up, manicure and pedicure. This interference tended to put them off from participating. Participants further revealed that, during practical lessons, their lecturers expected them to concentrate on the performance of activities but it was difficult for them given that they had to concentrate on maintaining their body images and keeping up appearances. One of the interviewees expressed this as follows:

In gymnastics, I put very little effort because activities such as rolling and headstand make me dirty and spoil my beautiful make-up manicure and pedicure. During training sessions, my lecturer expects me roll on the ground and does not care. All he wants are results.

Similarly, the majority of the focus group participants tended to agree with the interviewees when they disclosed that participation in PES made them look scruffy. They would fall and drag each other in the playgrounds during physical training, resulting in their expensive hair styles being damaged. An opinion from one of the focus group discussants clearly reflects this point:

At times, I really dislike participation in PES for it spoils my manicue and pedicue. My idea is to look attractive at all times and not to waste my effort and resources on maintaining nails' beauty that is

spoiled during practical skill practice such as the volley and dig passes in volleyball.

The results above imply that the perceptions of some female students deprive them of opportunities to participate in PES and to live healthy life styles. This is because they still tended to value only issues of keeping up appearances. This might mean that those female students do not understand the value of PES in their curriculum. Thus, those female students still did not believe that an individual's health was more important than her beauty. Similar results were reported by Daley and Buchanan (1999) where they found that female students in the USA frequently rated themselves on appearance features. They demonstrated that physical appearance was an important component of identity amongst adolescent females. Thus, at pre-adult age, many female students, even those in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning were more concerned about how they look than on how they might benefit through participation in PES. Apparently, the reason why female students concentrated on body images and keeping up appearances was that they still lacked enough knowledge and understanding of the contribution of physical activity to a healthy body and mind. Thus, in many instances, it may be the desire of many female students to look elegant, lady-like, thin and attractive, before, during and after participating in physical activities and sport in preparation for marriage (With-Nielsen and Pfister, 2011; Velija and Kumar, 2009; Azzarito et al., 2006; Bailey, 2006). Such perceptions may have a strong negative impact on the female students' participation in PES and this result in female students lagging behind their male counterparts in all spheres of PES.

Influence of positive perceptions in PES

Two out of four interviewees and three out of sixteen focus group participants had positive perceptions towards participation in PES. These participants revealed that they were aware that participating in PES was beneficial to them. It had cognitive and emotional benefits. They also noted that PES was a tool for good health, fitness and social empowerment through the skills and values they learnt such as teamwork, leadership, communication and respect for others. According to them, there was no reason not to participate in PES. Other benefits they mentioned included improving self-esteem, efficacy, monitoring stress and depression as well as a way of keeping slim and slender. One of the interviewees expressed it thus:

It is good to participate in PES because it keeps my body healthy, fit, slender and attractive. I also learn many social skills and gain confidence in myself. It also enables me to monitor my weight, stamina and anxiety.

Similarly, one focus group discussant had this to say:

Participation in PES is good for it develops us mentally and physically. It also empowers us as we

develop lots of skills, self-esteem and self actualisation. I, really enjoy participating in PES.

The above sentiments imply that those female students were aware that participating in PES had numerous benefits include the potential to develop an individual socially, mentally, emotionally and physically. Thus, the positive ideas raised by the smaller number of participants in this study, perhaps, emanated from the fact that those female students may have perceived that participation in PES was not for fitness only. It was also for health reasons since it reduced cases of cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, stroke, obesity and respiratory diseases. These ideas confirm the findings from an international study involving fifty countries that was conducted by Bailey (2006) in the USA. He suggested that the participation of female students in PES contributed to the holistic development of an individual. In relation to the findings of this study, Kamtsios (2010) also states that if Greek female students participate in PES regularly, their aerobic capacity, muscular endurance, coordination, agility and metabolic function, exemplified in improvements in bone density, lipid profiles and immune function, among others, will improve. It may be argued that positive perceptions of this nature may go a long way in transforming the perceptions of many female students who tend to have adopted their societies and families stereotypes on matters of PES participation.

V. CONCLUSION

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of the perceptions of female students on their participation in PES in institutions of higher learning in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. The study revealed that there were mixed reactions from the participants. The majority of the female students had negative perceptions which discouraged their participation in PES while a few had positive perceptions which encouraged their participation.

Participants, who were negatively influenced by their perceptions in PES participation, participated less or did not participate because they believed the stereotypical perceptions embedded in the cultural norms and beliefs of their own families and societies. It was also noted that female students' perceptions about injuries and muscularity as well as perceptions about keeping up appearances in PES tended to hinder their participation in PES. The research specifically concluded that the majority of female students in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning believed that PES was for males, not for females. This tended to negatively influence their perceptions towards participating in PES. In Zimbabwe, the majority of female students from the traditional Shona culture appear to have been strongly conscientised during their socialisation process to believe that PES is for male not female students. It was further revealed that female students have been domesticated to the extent of believing that their place is in the home, and, therefore, should not be found participating in PES with males. The study recognised that

female students who participated in contact activities and sports with male students, rolling and grabbing each other faced criticism from other female students for not respecting the norms of their society, *Unhu/Ubuntu* that places great value on the female body, protecting it from exposure, in preparation for marriage.

Of note in the study was that the majority of the female students believe that PES was injurious to them for their bones were so fragile that if they participated in PES they would be injured and their deformed body parts would make them unattractive to men, a belief that was influenced by patriarchy. Furthermore it was also discovered that none or lack of participation in PES amongst female students was caused by fear of being muscular bodied, which would make them look ugly and butch. The results of this study seem to suggest that participation in PES is centred on decisions determined by society and the family which are strongly linked to protecting the female body for marriage. This means that female students still lack support, encouragement and motivation from their families and societies at large to participate in PES.

It was also revealed in this study that there were a few female students who had positive perceptions about participating in PES for they believed that participation enhanced good health and fitness, social, cognitive and emotional benefits. The study further revealed that these female student participants believed that PES empowered them, improved their self-esteem and self-efficacy and helped them to monitor depression and stress. If female students in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions change their perceptions on PES participation, they might live healthy lives and be empowered to contribute to the labour market of their country just like males.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

From these findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education needs to introduce sensitisation programs where expert PES personnel would hold seminars and workshops with communities, parents and students as a way of helping them develop positive perceptions on PES participation and desist from practices that are rooted in patriarchy that place value on protecting the female body in preparation for marriage and appear to put little or no value on issues of PES participation which are linked to living health lifestyles. There is need to encourage female students to participate in traditionally male dominated sports such as soccer, cricket, sumo wrestling, karate, boxing and judo. This would also be a way of trying to address gender imbalances in PES.
- Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education, Higher and Tertiary Education, and Gender to work

in collaboration in organising workshops with communities, parents and female students in tertiary institutions in order to create a platform for extensive sensitisation. This could be done through discussions on the need to eliminate the belief that PES is for males, adjusting household responsibilities for female students and finding ways to modify attitudes and perceptions. Such workshops would consider how to get more female students involved in PES.

- There is need for tertiary institutions to introduce programs that aim at empowering and developing self-esteem and efficacy in female students as a way of challenging gender stereotypes in PES participation. Such programs would work towards promoting positive perceptions as a way of empowering female students. Empowering female students would also be a way of addressing gender inequalities and if gender inequalities are addressed, female students might gain a sense of value and worth knowing that they are safe, secure and competent enough to participate in PES.
- There is need for government gender policies, conventions and declarations to focus on PES programs that might help transform the perceptions of female students towards the development of their athletic potential and to live healthy lifestyles. What this might mean is that gender policies and programs that already exist in institutions of higher learning need to be revisited and redesigned as a way forward in trying to reduce the barriers that female students face in PES participation.

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