
Gender and sport participation in Montenegro

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Abstract

Since 2006, when the Montenegrin Parliament declared independence, Montenegro had experienced impressive economic growth averaging an annual rate of 8% (until early 2009 when the effects of the global economic crisis began to have an impact) and an upward trend in human development indicators. Nonetheless, these economic trends have been accompanied by a rise in gender inequality in many institutional sectors. This study is the first to investigate that status of women in Montenegrin sport. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to examine gender differences in sport participation rates as well as women's experiences with both facilitators and barriers to sport involvement. The facilitators to sport participation were family support and a "love for the game." Participants in the focus groups discussed barriers including: lack of family support; gender division of labor; school–sport balance; and lack of resources. Evidence-based strategies to increase and improve women's sport participation in Montenegro are discussed.

Keywords

barriers, facilitators, focus groups, gender, Montenegro, sport

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Introduction

Researchers in the United States and elsewhere have found that girls and women's participation in sport is linked to a number of positive outcomes including a decreased likelihood for breast cancer and osteoporosis in adulthood, decreased incidence of smoking or illicit drug use, improved educational outcomes and academic performance, and decreased likelihood of depression, suicide and risky sexual behaviors during teenage years (Staurowsky et al., 2009; Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, 2007). Girls' sport participation in the United States also has been associated with family satisfaction and improved quality of life for girls (Sabo and Veliz, 2008). Systematic summaries of extant research in the US conclude that girls and women who participate in sport benefit from a number of positive psychological outcomes including increased levels of self-esteem and confidence (Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, 2007; United Nations, 2007) and socially, girls and women experience empowerment through their sport participation (United Nations, 2007). Participation in specific sports has also been associated with educational achievement among both girls and boys (Sabo and Veliz, 2013).

Although sport can provide many benefits, girls and women in many countries, including the Global North, face a number of different obstacles that can limit their interest and participation in sport. These barriers vary in terms of their complexity and potential to be remedied, and can range from a lack of proper clothing and equipment, to cultural stereotypes, or decreased opportunities that result from war and political conflict. For example, cultural stereotypes play a role in many countries, channeling girls and women into specific sports. These sports are often less culturally valued than the sports men typically play, resulting in fewer resources for female athletes, less prize money and lower salaries than men's sports (United Nations, 2007). Women from certain cultural backgrounds may also encounter barriers to their participation based on cultural beliefs. For example, certain Muslim women in Egypt, depending upon their interpretation of the Koran, see sport and physical activity as in conflict with their religious beliefs (Walseth and Fasting, 2003). In Afghanistan, the political climate and the cultural beliefs of the Taliban have proved a significant barrier to participation in sport, particularly girls and women's participation in sport. Moreover, economic factors play a role. For example, researchers in the United Kingdom have found that women who work in what they termed "routine" or "semi-routine" jobs like care assistants, shop assistants and cleaners had lower levels of participation in physical activity and sport than women who worked in professional or managerial roles (UK Sport, 2006).

At the same time, researchers note the ways that girls and women's sport participation can be encouraged and facilitated. For example, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Zambia provides proper clothing so that girls can play football (United Nations, 2007). The Afghan Women's Network helps to create opportunities for girls and women to participate in sport and physical activity. In the United States, Title IX (governmental legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex) has had a tremendous impact on increasing the levels of participation of girls and women in high school and collegiate sports (Carpenter and Acosta, 2004). Non-profit organizations design and deliver programs specifically to address the needs of girls, and in particular the needs of low-income,

minority girls (Cooky, 2009). Advocacy groups, NGOs and other organizations throughout the world are working on behalf of girls and women to increase participation and to improve upon those opportunities. The majority of the published research on gender and sport, appearing in higher profile journals, focuses on Western/Global North and/or developed countries (Brady, 2011). Certainly, little is known about the current context of girls and women's sport in Montenegro. The purpose of this study was to conduct the first evidence-based research assessing the current status of girls' and women's sport participation in Montenegro, at all institutional levels. The research identifies who plays organized sport in Montenegro, and the factors (family, education, economic, gender stereotypes, and so on) that contribute to, or that limit, girls and women's participation in sport. The goals of the study were to determine the numbers of girls and women participating in sport, as compared to boys and men in similar categories, to identify why girls and women do or do not participate in sport, and to examine perceived sport experiences of female athletes and of those who work in professional roles (coach, medical staff, manager, delegate, and so on) in female athletics.

As research in the United States has shown, sport provides many benefits (see Staurowsky et al., 2009; Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, 2007). If the same is true for girls and women in Montenegro, then there are important implications for women in sport in Montenegro. Increasing the number of girls and women participating in sport, and improving the quality of their sport experiences, can have a number of societal benefits to the development of Montenegro in the 21st century, including improved academic performance, the enhancement of physical and psychological health, and the social advancement of girls and women. Gender equity at all levels and in all institutions can promote human development and human capital in this newly transitioning society. The findings generated by this study may also serve as a benchmark for future monitoring and assessments of gender and sport participation in Montenegro. This research may also help researchers in the United States and elsewhere to understand the similarities and differences in the trends of women's sport participation.

The purpose of the first wave of the study (Wave I) was to conduct a baseline assessment of opportunities and funding among men's and women's sports in Montenegro to determine any gender disparities in participation. This information provided the overall trends in sport participation in Montenegro to determine the extent of gender equality or inequality in the country and to identify any gendered patterns in participation, such as differences in participation rates regionally, by profession (coach, medical staff, manager, etc.), or by sport. The purpose of the second wave of the study (Wave II) was to determine the factors that may serve as barriers to participation for girls and women, as well as to identify the factors that facilitate girls' and women's involvement in sport. The overall objective of the study was to assess, both quantitatively and qualitatively, female sport participation in Montenegro to determine patterns of gender equality or inequality, to identify key facilitators and barriers, and to develop evidence-based strategies for increasing women's sport participation, and to inform the development of gender-specific sports policies and legislation.

At the time of the study, Montenegro lacked the systemic, institutional, and individual capacity to produce and maintain adequate baseline statistical data in many developing

fields, and sports were no exception. There has been no systemic effort on a national level to collect and maintain the gender-related data in sports, which could then be used to inform policy development and implementation. For the first time, this study produces the relevant information needed not only for research, but for policy. We hope the findings generated by this study will serve as a benchmark for future monitoring of gender equality and assessments of gender and sport participation in Montenegro. This research also yields insights on the similarities and differences in the trends of female sport participation in transitioning societies.

Gender inequality in Montenegro

Since 2006, when the Montenegrin Parliament declared independence, Montenegro has experienced an impressive economic growth averaging an annual rate of 8% (up until early 2009 when the effects of the global economic crisis began to have an impact) and an upward trend in human development indicators. Nonetheless, these two factors have been accompanied by a rise in gender inequality. In Montenegro, women do not have equal opportunity nor institutional conditions to effectively contribute to social, cultural, economic, and political development in ways that might allow them to benefit from that very development (Montenegro Department of Gender Equality, 2007). The wider regional economic and political instability and the ensuing political and military crisis of the 1990s only further exacerbated the situation, which contributed to a significant deterioration in the overall position of women in the Montenegrin society. Here we draw upon the data available at the time of the study to accurately reflect gender relations. Within the realm of politics, although 51.8% of the population in Montenegro is female, women held only 11% of all seats in the Montenegrin Parliament and only 7% of all seats in local parliaments. Of a total of 17 ministers, only one was a woman, and similarly only one out of 21 mayors was a woman. The extent of women's participation in business is similarly sparse. An estimated 39.5% of all employees were women yet only 7.2% perform managerial tasks, and only 1% were business-owners (Montenegro Department of Gender Equality, 2007). Only 6% of women owned cars and only 8% own or co-own homes and/or apartments. In terms of domestic violence, civic sector research showed that every third woman in Montenegro is a victim of physical violence. In 2008, the rate of reported cases of domestic violence increased by 7.8% (European Union, 2008), as had the number of murders committed as the culmination of long-term family violence. These statistics may actually underestimate the actual incidence of domestic violence, as women are often unlikely to report such cases, particularly given the lack of support networks and resources for abused women. The data on education revealed a similar picture in terms of gender inequality. While the overall literacy rates in Montenegro were quite high, the number of illiterate women was four times higher than the number of illiterate men; 4.2% versus 0.8% (Statistical Office of Montenegro, 2010). Additionally, men achieved higher levels of education. The gender disparity in educational attainment increased with advanced level degrees; e.g. whereas 50.7% of men and 49.3% of women completed masters' degree programs, 78.5% of doctoral degrees were awarded to men, compared to 21.4% awarded to women (Statistical Office of Montenegro, 2010).

Overall, the national outlook of gender inequality was reflected regionally, however there were some disparities among the three main regions (north, south, and central) in terms of economics and social resources. Moreover, Montenegro is ethnically diverse and economic disparities vary among those ethnic groups. In the north of Montenegro, which is the most economically underdeveloped region and traditionally more conservative, relative to the south and central regions, only 30% of women were employed compared to a 45% employment rate for women living in the south or central regions of Montenegro (Montenegro Department of Gender Equity, 2007).

Women in Montenegro experience discrimination with respect to income, career promotion, professional development, and participation in strategic decision-making. There is a general consensus that a first step forward in addressing this situation is to improve institutional mechanisms for enforcement of gender sensitive policies (e.g. the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights) that would eliminate cultural and gender biases in national strategic frameworks and to mainstream gender awareness into all relevant programs and policies nation-wide. Sport plays a very important role in Montenegrin national identity, especially during times where economic crises exacerbate the gap between classes with potential negative impacts on the vulnerable population, given it is a transitioning society and a relatively new nation-state. Ensuring higher participation of women in all social, political, and economic institutions, including sport will contribute to the overall level of human development and stability in Montenegro.

Methodology

Background of the study

The Montenegro Olympic Committee and a Montenegrin NGO called Inovativnost partnered with the Women's Sport Foundation (USA) to assess gender and participation rates in Montenegro. The second author worked for Inovativnost at the time of the study and contacted the Women's Sport Foundation to assess interest in establishing a research partnership. The last author was the research director for the Women's Sport Foundation and identified researchers in the United States with an expertise on women's sport participation (first, third, and fourth authors) to design and assist the Montenegrin partners in the design, implementation, and analysis. This study is a unique, multi-cultural collaboration between scholars, researchers, and advocates from NGOs, non-profit organizations, and universities in Montenegro and in the United States.

At the time of the study, Montenegro lacked systemic institutional and individual capacity to produce and maintain statistical databases in many fields, including sports. There had been no sustained effort on a national level to collect and maintain gender-related sports participation data to inform policy development and implementation. Thus, this study represents the first evidence-based investigation into gender and sport participation in Montenegro.

The research design combined descriptive statistics with focus groups in order to describe and analyze participation rates (in part to establish baseline data that could then be used to track trends in participation rates over time) as well as barriers and

facilitators to sport participation to better understand the contemporary context of sport participation.

Wave I: Quantitative assessment of gender and participation

According to Montenegrin law (Law on Sport, article 87- Official Gazette (36/11)), the National Sport Federations (an umbrella group of each sport) are required to keep a registrar of the people within their club or association. Clubs and associations submit this information to the National Sport Federation for their sport. Members of the Montenegrin research team requested these registrars from the seven most popular sports in Montenegro (football (soccer), volleyball, basketball, water polo, handball, judo and track and field) and received completed surveys from the associations and clubs from six of the seven sports (water polo provided only partial data and was thus excluded from our analysis). As such, we have complete data for each of the sports associations and sport clubs from the 21 municipalities; thus providing a representative sample of sports participation in Montenegro. Considering that the research was conducted in summer 2010, when many athletes are changing clubs, the data was collected at the end of the 2009/2010 sports season.

Descriptive statistics were generated from raw data solicited by the sport associations (data on referees, medical staff, and delegates) and sports clubs (data on coaches, managerial staff, and athletes) for each of the 21 municipalities within the country at the end of the 2009–2010 sports season. We assessed the number of clubs within each of the seven sports identified to determine the geographical distribution of sports opportunities, gender differences in participation rates, the distribution of men and women as athletes, managerial staff, coaches, medical staff, referees, and delegates. There had been no systemic effort on a national level to collect and maintain the gender related data in sports to inform policy development and implementation. This study seeks to address that gap.

Wave II: Qualitative assessment of gender and sport participation

In December 2010 and January 2011, the second author in collaboration with Montenegrin professors with expertise in focus group methodology conducted a total of 10 semi-structured focus groups. Two focus groups, comprised of six to nine female athletes, were conducted in each of the three geographical regions (North: 13 participants; Central: 17 participants, and South: 14 participants) for a total of six focus groups with 44 female athletes. Female athletes were recruited through the Montenegro Olympic Committee. Focus groups were heterogeneous in terms of sport-type as female athletes from various sports participated in a given focus group in order to create diversity in experiences. Focus groups were homogenous in terms of gender and geographic location (two focus groups with female athletes from the north region, for example). We wished to explore how athletes got involved in sport, and to identify the facilitators that enable their participation and the barriers they, and other women in Montenegro, confront. We also asked female athletes their thoughts on addressing barriers to girls and women's participation and what suggestions they had for increasing and improving female sport participation in Montenegro.

We also conducted focus groups with sports professionals who work in women's sports. Sports professionals are individuals who are hired by the sports clubs or associations and are not athletes (i.e. coaches, managerial staff, medical staff, delegates). Two focus groups were conducted with female professionals and two focus groups were conducted with male professionals. Eleven female professionals participated in two focus groups (one group had five participants, one group had six) and eight male professionals participated in two focus groups (four participants in each focus group) for a total of four focus groups with 19 women's sports professionals. Women's sports professionals (male or female) were recruited through the Montenegro Olympic Committee. To enhance openness, focus groups were homogenous in terms of gender but were heterogeneous in terms of type of sport and professional role (coach, delegate, medical staff, etc). We wished to explore the dearth of women in decision-making positions in sports clubs and associations (as was determined through the descriptive statistics from Wave I) as well as to examine their perceptions regarding the trends in participation rates (Wave I) and facilitators and barriers to female athletic sport participation. As with our female athlete focus group, we asked women's sports professionals their thoughts on addressing barriers to girls and women's participation and what suggestions they had for increasing and improving female sport participation in Montenegro.

Focus groups were conducted either at a university in Montenegro, at a local high school, at the Montenegro Olympic Committee building, or similar public spaces. All focus group participants signed a consent form and completed a demographic questionnaire (name, sport, years played, for athletes; years with the team, years in professional role, for the professionals). The focus group moderator also verbally explained the rights of the participants. Human subjects' protocol was followed according to research procedures in Montenegro, informed by protocol in the United States. The Montenegro Olympic Committee approved the protocol for the research, which upheld ethical treatment of human subjects, including the confidentiality of the responses and of the participants and the secure storage of data. All participants are identified by pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

The focus groups were conducted in Montenegrin and audio-recorded. Transcripts of the focus groups were transcribed verbatim in Montenegrin and subsequently translated to English by members of the Montenegro research team. Focus group transcripts were analyzed by members of the United States research team in consultation with a member of the Montenegro research team, the second author. Two researchers independently read the transcripts and analyzed the transcripts and coded the transcript using open coding procedures (Corbin and Strauss, 2007). Open coding allows researchers to examine in detail to uncover ideas and meanings of the participants. In the open coding, transcripts are read in detail. The open codes were reviewed for consistency and no discrepancy was found. The open codes were then further analyzed using axial coding procedures (Corbin and Strauss, 2007). In axial coding, thematic patterns between the codes that emerged in open coding are identified and connections and linkages among the open codes are examined. These patterns were developed into major themes, which are reported in the results. To ensure the interpretive validity of the data, the research team performed member checking of themes. This involved the first and fourth author reviewing themes. Any

Table 2. Percentage of men and women in sports, by region.

			Region				Total
			Northern	Central	Southern	National level	
Gender	Male	Number	1028	2281	883	742	4934
		%	72.9%	71.7%	76.0%	90.0%	75.0%
	Female	Number	382	899	279	82	1642
		%	27.1%	28.3%	24.0%	10.0%	25.0%
Total		Number	1410	3180	1162	824	6576
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3. Percentage of men and women, by sports.

			Sport						Total
			Football	Volleyball	Basketball	Handball	Judo	Track and Field	
Gender	Male	Number	1309	250	570	530	1234	1041	4934
		%	87.3%	48.7%	86.6%	55.0%	80.0%	74.3%	75.0%
	Female	Number	190	263	88	433	308	360	1642
		%	12.7%	51.3%	13.4%	45.0%	20.0%	25.7%	25.0%
Total		Number	1499	513	658	963	1542	1401	6576
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

48.7% men) and handball (45% women, 55% men). However, each of the other four sports were male-dominated with approximately 75% or more of participants male: track and field (25.7% women vs. 74.3% men), judo (20% women vs. 80% men), basketball (13.4% women vs. 86.6% men), and football (12.7% women vs. 87.3% men). It should be noted that football and basketball had the lowest percentages of women. The greatest gender disparities occurred in football and basketball.

While women participated in many sport clubs, they were also underrepresented within sport clubs. Women were almost absent from decision-making positions in sport clubs and federations. Women typically occupied low-level, entry positions such as secretaries, and there were very few, if any, female directors or managers. A similar pattern of findings issued among coaches. There were some women coaches in a few sports, but male coaches tended to dominate even in the women's clubs.

Facilitators to sport participation

In the following sections we present the results from the focus groups. Female athletes and professionals (those working in sports as a coach, referee, delegate, etc.) were asked to discuss what factors led them to participate in sport. The major themes across all focus groups were family, friends, and "love for the sport."

Family and friends. Nearly half of female athletes said a male relative was a source of encouragement, such as a brother, father, or uncle who either played sport or was a coach who encouraged them to get involved. Female relatives also played a role. When asked what things made it easier for them to play sports, female athletes mentioned family and specifically their mother. As Sanja explained, "Understanding and tolerance from the family is the most important, whether we talk about sports or anything else." Ljiljana agreed with the importance of parents in facilitating her sport participation, "...the influence of parents in the early years is the most important since parents wish the best for their children, to take them off the street, to motivate them to do something else."

Other female athletes also mentioned that parents encouraged their children to participate in sport to "get them off the streets," which gave them something positive to do.

Many female athletes mentioned a sister or an aunt who played, or a mother who encouraged them to sign up for sports. When asked about what helped get her involved in sport, Milica said, "Family and my mom! My family is a huge support and they push me to train." And in some cases, athletes said both their parents were important in supporting their participation. Abida said, "My parents are my biggest support, along with my friends, especially during competition." Maja, a footballer, explained, "Both my parents are athletes, our entire family is sports oriented so we were brought up with immense love for sports."

While family played a critical role in encouraging girls to sign up for sport, and in providing role models for girls, friends were also mentioned as a factor in getting girls involved in sport. Many athletes discussed how they played sport because their friends, who also played, encouraged them.

"Love for the sport." The other major theme that emerged in the majority of the focus groups that female athletes attributed to enabling their sport participation was the "love for the sport." There were references to character, persistence, fighting spirit, winning spirit, and the challenge of sport, specifically the desire to disprove the notion that "boys are better." Female athletes discussed how they developed a passion for the game that became a part of who they are. Milena explained, "I started playing football when I was very young, and my love for the sport is the main reason keeping me in it."

It is this "love" for the game that kept women in sport, even when confronted with considerable barriers to their participation. Female athletes discussed how their love for sport helped them to overcome barriers and to make the necessary sacrifices to become a female athlete. The love for the sport served to get girls into the game, and kept them in the game. In that way, love for the sport played a key role in facilitating girls' sport participation.

Most female professionals established a career in sport because they played sport when they were younger. Similar to their female athlete counterparts, female professionals also mentioned "love for the sport" as a key factor in their entry into sport and in facilitating their sport participation and professional sport careers. They discussed their desire to continue on in the sport and their love for the sport: "I love what I do and when I come to the practice and see those girls, I have a responsibility toward them and that is why I fight" (Vanja, football).

Moreover, female professionals discussed how “love for the sport” was critical in overcoming barriers.

When I came here (from former USSR) in ‘91, we didn’t have enough food to eat but we still practiced twice a day on a field that had no heating. Our club survived due to enthusiasm of its players and people who led the club. We had a deal – if we don’t win the matches, we don’t get what we signed our contract for. Some people stayed and some left. The results are incredible – a little country like Montenegro has the results that many larger countries don’t. (Tina, handball)

Tina’s discussion illustrates the importance of individual resilience in the face of significant barriers to participation. The lack of access to the basic necessities of life, let alone of sport (food, proper shelter, etc.), poses tremendous constraints on female athletes, yet Tina and others persisted in spite of these constraints. Yet, individual agency is enacted in a complex web of interconnected social forces and, thus, experiences are not similar across all individuals. Put simply, although some female athletes were able to transcend these barriers to participation because of their “love for the sport,” this does not indicate that these barriers did not constrain the participation experiences of other women. Indeed, some of the most robust and engaged discussions centered on the structural, cultural, and interpersonal barriers female athletes confront, which were more readily identified and more deeply engaged in the focus group discussions.

Barriers to sport participation

Both the female athletes and professionals in women’s sports discussed the barriers women faced in sport. In most focus groups, discussions about barriers were often directly attributed to experiences with gender inequality (discussed in more detail below, and include division of labor in the family, negotiating school/sport balance, lack of resources, gender stereotypes, and so on). Forms of gender inequality were the principle barriers to girls and women’s sport participation and to a professional career. Female athletes spent a great deal of time discussing the barriers and obstacles they had encountered. In comparison, the discussion of the facilitators to sport participation was relatively brief and rarely evoked detailed stories, examples, lived experiences, and emotions. This disparity in the findings suggests that barriers to sport participation were a more salient facet of women’s sport experiences than facilitators. The key barriers that emerged are discussed below.

Family. While family dynamics often served as a facilitator to girls’ participation, they also functioned as a barrier. Several participants discussed how their mothers explicitly discouraged them from participating in sport. After Sanja graduated from high school, she wanted to attend college so she could continue to participate in sports while in college. Instead, her mother advised her to stop playing sport and to focus on her education because, “after all, you’re a girl.” Sanja’s mother’s perspective illustrates both the reality that professional opportunities are limited for women in sports, as well as gendered cultural expectations of young women. Sanja explained that it was her father that

encouraged her in sport, despite her mother's concerns. When Mira was young, she wanted to play football. Her mother however, did not support this decision. Instead, her father got her involved in handball, a more culturally appropriate sport for girls and women. As Tanja, explained:

Well, even some parents believe that their girls shouldn't play football. One of my friends was interested to join my club and I gave her the contacts. After a few days I asked her how it was going. She said that her parents don't agree with her playing football and they told her it would be better if she stuck with dolls. And that was the reason she cited for not starting the practice. Her parents thought football was too rough of a sport and that it is [sic] meant for boys only and she gave up.

Parents were also pressured by other family members to prohibit their daughters from playing sport. Ana's aunt begged her mother for a year to stop her from playing handball. Iva said that her grandmother asked her during visits, "How long will you keep this up [playing sport]? When will you get married and have kids?" Even when parents are supportive, they often are aware that others may feel differently. Maja explained that while her mom was very proud of her accomplishments in school and in sport, she does not tell people she plays football.

Several female professionals also discussed the family as a barrier to girls' participation. Gordana, a former coach and referee explained:

Twelve years ago you couldn't see a female participating in sport or doing some running exercise. My uncle said to me: Stop playing sport and go and get married. Sadly, here it's all about entrenched stereotypes – if you are a woman, you need to stay home and give birth to babies and cook.

Gendered division of labor. In Montenegro, as in other countries, women who marry are expected to balance children and family obligations with their athletic career. Hochschild (2003) referred to the labor that employed women do inside the home, such as taking care of children, cooking and cleaning, as the "second shift." Men in general, and male athletes specifically, were not expected to participate in this "second shift." As Jelena said, "Men continue with sports after their 20s, while women, if they have kids or get a job, immediately stop with their (sport) career." As such, men do not face the same constraints on their time given that the gendered division of labor in households places the burden of domestic labor primarily upon women.

While female athletes were aware that the gendered division of labor was a barrier to a future career in sport, the female professionals had experienced it directly. The gendered division of labor produced a context wherein women were confronted by the choice between a family or a career in sport. For women who want both, in order to balance the conflicting responsibilities and obligations of having a family and being an athlete or a professional in sports, they explained they must make difficult "sacrifices." One male professional in women's track and field said:

I think it's more difficult for a woman to be away from the house for a long time with the family and kids, they often choose to stay at home and this in my view is the biggest barrier as I don't think it'd be logical for a mother to be away from her kids for long periods of time.

Many female athletes and female professionals discussed the sacrifices women have to make in order to play sport or to continue in a career in sports. As Iva observed, "If you are seriously involved in the sport and train professionally, there is very little time for anything else." Female athletes and professionals had to sacrifice school/education or family in order to be successful in sport. It is their "love" for sport or support from their parents however, that helped them to overcome this specific barrier. Jelena said, "I don't think we could do what we do unless we really loved sports...but we have to think of our future. If we get injured then we have to have something to fall back on, and that's education."

Female professionals also discussed how they had to negotiate the expectations of being both a wife/mother with their sport involvement. "When we get back from a game, he [her husband] goes in the shower and I go in the kitchen..." (Svetlana). Svetlana explained that if she made more money they would be able to go to a restaurant to eat. Katarina stated she did not fly to sport events because she is a "responsible mother" but at the same time, she does not feel this is a form of gender inequality. Instead, she explained, "...you have to sacrifice certain things and I did it on my own terms." Tina, now a single mother, said her husband left her because of her decision to continue with handball (at the professional level), a decision he did not approve of.

Female professionals were concerned with the lack of facilities and support for working women who are mothers, such as places to breastfeed. Zorka had to balance motherhood with sport. She explained, "I would run, breastfeed, then back to practice, diaper duty, for two years." Gordana, a referee, recounted an experience when she attended a conference in Rome. While at the conference, another female referee spoke about the difficulties in making it in the profession, given the challenges of family obligations. Gordana recalled, "She [the referee] cited the family support as the key variable that makes a difference. I don't have a child so I can dedicate more time to sports, but if I had, I don't know."

Female athletes were also aware that the gender division of labor would be a barrier they too would eventually confront. Female athletes mentioned that as women get older, they have children and thus more responsibilities, while men have fewer as they get older. When asked why she thought there were not more women professionals in sport, Stasa explained, "Woman is the pillar of the family and she needs to take care of everything, and a man has less responsibilities." Jelena added, "...they [female professionals and athletes] think they can't give 100% effort or they will neglect their child." Mirjana offered, "I agree that women have more responsibilities and in Montenegro men spend all their free time, of which they have more, for sport activities."

Female athletes also discussed the low pay with a career in sport, "...when you commit to something, you expect to make a living out of it...if you are a woman working in sports, you have a very uncertain prospect in terms of financial compensation" (Mirna). Female athletes, particularly those from the North, were reluctant in their desire to have a career in sports (e.g. coach, referee, manager) after their athletic career ended. Milena said, "I don't know what the opportunities for women will be then, but under these circumstances, I wouldn't want to stick with sports." Mila also expressed a lack of hope in the future of sport. When asked why there was a lack of women in sports professions, Mila offered, "I think most of them give up when they see that there is no future."

Sport/school balance. While most female athletes in our study did not have children or family obligations, there were other sacrifices required to be a successful female athlete.

Similar to the sacrifices women in sports careers must make to balance family and career, a key barrier discussed by the majority of female athletes was the challenge of balancing time commitments between sport and school. This was seen as a unique challenge for female athletes, as male athletes either have more opportunities to participate and earn money in sport, or they are “revered” at their school. Many female athletes realized there were either few opportunities to advance in their sport (either as an athlete or as a professional) or that being an athlete was a risky profession that could at any time end with an injury. This led female athletes to de-emphasize their sport training. Education was viewed as a necessary backup plan if/when their sport career ended. As Zana explained, “If you do sports and you are good, that can open a lot of doors in your life. But without the education, you don’t have anything.” Ljiljana noted, “School is something that provides us with a base. We know that we cannot do sports all our lives, so we simply need to plan on doing something else other than sports, so this is school.” Iva wanted to go to college for physical education but planned to leave Montenegro after graduation. She said, “I don’t think I could have a bright future in sports in Montenegro.”

Sonja used to play handball professionally, but now only plays occasionally because, “I tried studying and playing at the same time but it just didn’t work.” Tijana also said it was more difficult for female athletes, “Imagine how much money does one football player have? He is taken care of for his whole life. We have to dedicate our time to school because a female athlete has to have something on the side, because if she leans only on sports, she is doomed.” Ana said, “There are girls who go to the most difficult high school, starts on a team, has all A’s and gets all her obligations done – with guys this is different, they don’t think, if I break my leg in ten years, what will I do?”

While emphasizing school was not inherently a “negative” outcome, the fact that female athletes did not receive the same types of support from the educational system as male athletes was perceived as a barrier. Radmila noted the lack of support she received from her school:

Professors have very little understanding for women athletes and they often say, “Why the heck do you do sports? You won’t be able to do anything with it in your life.” So no matter how much I study and how many good grades I get, it doesn’t make any difference.

Ana recounted a similar experience. Her teacher laughed when she said she played football. Ana’s teacher did not support her absences for competition whereas male students who are athletes were excused from classes. Ana explained:

This past Saturday, we had to be in school to make up some lost classes but I had a game. So, I told my teacher, “I’ll be away because of my game, but I’ll bring a note from the club.” When I came to school on Monday she asked me, “Where were you on Saturday?” I gave her a note and reminded her of our chat, but she said, “I don’t care about sports.” On the other hand, there is this guy who plays football and when he is away for a game he doesn’t even have to bring in the note...he is excused.

Societal beliefs/gender stereotypes. In societies that uphold patriarchal beliefs, there often exists the “frailty myth,” whereby women are thought to be physically and athletically weaker than men. According to the frailty myth, this gender difference is due to the

natural, biologically inherent differences between men and women. However, researchers argue that once women were given the opportunity and access to sport participation, the so-called “performance gap” between men’s and women’s sport performances narrowed (Dowling, 2000). Yet, despite women’s improved performances, in the United States and in nations elsewhere, the ideology of male superiority in sport continues to persist. Female athletes discussed how these myths and stereotypes of women’s natural inferiority served as a barrier to female athletic participation. As Tina explained, there is a belief in judo club that women do not “do anything while men sweat and practice hard.” Moreover, she said the belief was that “Women can achieve results with much less effort than men.” Indeed, a male professional illustrated this stereotypical perspective when asked in the focus group if there was gender inequality in sport.

Girls are not serious in training, they chat around and can’t wait for the training to end, while a guy kills himself. At the competition, with the little effort she put in, she wins a medal, while a guy who invests so much more than she did, can’t make it through the first round.

As Ljiljana noted, even if natural differences exist between men and women, it should not matter. It does not prevent women from being as good of an athlete as a man. She explained:

(Many people) think that women cannot do sports, maybe for physical, mental or some other reason. I don’t know. This is really basic, but most people think that women cannot be as good an athlete as can be a man [sic]. Women and men cannot be compared on the basis of their natural physical predisposition, but a woman can be a great athlete, so women should be compared against other women, men with other men.

Similarly, there are myths regarding the influence of sport participation on the development of the female athletic body. Athletes discussed the societal stereotypes on how football causes “crooked legs” and basketball or volleyball makes one “tall.” Slavica said, “One stereotype is that if you play volleyball or basketball that you’ll be taller. You won’t, especially if your parents are smaller.” Sanja, added, “I play judo and often times people ask me if all girls who do judo are big.” These stereotypes served as a barrier preventing girls and women from getting involved in sport. Some athletes thought that girls do not participate in sports because they believed sport would make them “look like men” (Tina, judo). Nikola, a male football coach, said he had to personally contact a principal to make sure his athletes were not made fun of in school. Nikola explained, “...they [both teachers and students] verbally abuse my girls, telling them to stop playing sports as they’ll look like men.” At the same time, the pressure on women to conform to particular standards of beauty was a reason girls may participate in certain sports. For example, some female athletes said they thought girls participated in sport to lose weight. Yet, none of the athletes interviewed said that weight loss was a reason they got involved, or was a factor that facilitated their sport participation.

However, according to female athletes in this study, low body image leads to insecurities in physical education classes and this may serve as a barrier to participation. “Boys make it worse. When they see that the girl is insecure, they start exploiting that weakness” (Mirna). Radmila added, “And girls take it not so well. We’re girls after all and any

comments that regard our physical looks are tough to take.” Sanja explained, “Boys use words as compensation mechanism [if girls are better than them] to try and erect barriers.”

Female professionals also confronted stereotypes regarding their abilities. The assumption many people held is that as women they were inherently not as competent or as capable as men in the same positions. Illustrating this belief, when asked if there was gender inequality in sport in Montenegro, a male professional said:

I don't think it's a sign of discrimination if we haven't had a woman be a president of a judo association. It's just the way things are. Someone with enough ambition needs to show up.

Female professionals in sport said they have to go beyond expectations to prove that they are capable at their jobs. “Men are in the key decision making positions, and if there is an attempt for a woman to break through it just fails. The stereotype says that men are reliable and women are not mentally stable” (Mila). Vesna, who is a basketball professional, explained, “...being a coach or other position requires a certain set of skills and competencies and that you [a woman] have to prove that you have them before you can do this job.” Other women said they confronted the stereotype among men in the profession regarding their lack of abilities. “When I report back from a seminar they [men] laugh at me. As soon as you show that you may know a bit more than they do, that's it: a wall” (Vanja, football). “I think as girls, we have had to push and work much harder than guys to get certain things that they get as guys, in all different segments in sports” (Zorka, physical trainer). These stereotypes regarding the lack of women's competence served as a barrier to female professionals in sport.

Similar to most countries, sports in Montenegro are gendered. In other words, certain sports are viewed as culturally appropriate for men (e.g. football, basketball and judo), while others are viewed as culturally appropriate for women (e.g. volleyball). This gendered aspect of sport varies historically as well as cross-culturally. For example, while in most European and Latin American countries, football is a male-identified sport, in the United States, given the historical development of American football, “soccer” is viewed as culturally appropriate for young boys and girls, particularly in suburban, white communities (Messner, 2009). However, regardless of the country, women who participate in stereotypically masculine sports encounter resistance. Female athletes in Montenegro that participated in stereotypically masculine sports said they too encountered resistance and lack of support. Iva, a volleyball athlete, explained:

In Montenegro, if a woman does football, people say “what is she doing in football, that's a men's sport.” The society and family's stereotypes can act like a powerful hindrance for women to do sports.

Verdrana, a football player, also said that football (which she feels is not adequately represented in the media) was not accepted in Montenegro, “...and when you say which sports you do, people usually say, ‘What do you mean football, that is not for women.’” Ana, also in football, added:

Usually men are associated with sports, while a girl will play with her dolls, play a piano and won't be taught (to throw) a ball or run out on a court. I stood out in my neighborhood when I played football while other girls played typical girls' games.

Female athletes resisted and challenged these sport-related stereotypes. Sanja did not agree that football is a men's sport. "Football is as much a male as it is a female sport, and in my case, I like football now as much as I liked handball before." When asked about the obstacles women in sports face, Stasa explained:

Women tend to have more responsibilities and face more barriers. Guys do sports from a very early age and there are more guy athletes. Women in Montenegro don't do football because of a stigma that is a guy's sport. I think that our society is mainly responsible for that stigma.

Sanja added, "When I tell people I do judo they get into this defensive stance, and I feel like a monster. And they say, 'Uh watch out, there is that judo player, don't mess with her.'" Later in the focus group she discussed how the boys in her school spread rumors about her saying she beats people up and she breaks their arms and legs.

Lack of opportunities, support, and resources. Female athletes, female professionals, and a few male professionals discussed the lack of opportunities, support, and resources available to female athletes as a key barrier to female sport participation. In the United States and elsewhere, women's sports advocates have been somewhat successful in their efforts to increase girls and women's access to sport and to improve the equitable distribution of funding and resources, as well as to ensure equal access to sport facilities. Without equitable access to sport opportunities, facilities and resources, girls and women will have a difficult time overcoming cultural barriers.

One key barrier female athletes face is lack of support. They perceive a lack of support from their family, their sport association, and the society in general. Tijana said, "Imagine how difficult it is to cheer yourself on, to be your only support?" This lack of support from the sport association was especially salient for football players and for female professionals in football. Maja, a football player, said:

The football association does not care if we compete or not compete. We don't have a league and sometime while we are en route to play a match against someone we find out that the game has been cancelled. (...) When girls start talking about sports, men all shut up and move elsewhere and start talking amongst themselves. They don't support what we do and I don't know why.

Nikola, a male professional in football, also stated there was a lack of support in the association for women's football. He said the association must be willing to change.

Women are marginalized in sports in Montenegro regardless of what we are talking about, that marginalization is higher in one (sport), lower in another, but present everywhere.

Another male professional agreed the football association will continue to have problems because "they [the association] don't invest in women's football even though UEFA

[Union of European Football Associations] is very strict and wishes to support development of women's sport." A female athlete in football said, "Our basic problem is, the Football Association of Montenegro does not want to develop (women's) football." A female professional in women's football alluded to the possible misappropriation of funds:

I am sure the UEFA allocates funds for female football but who knows where that money is. They [UEFA] give us funds, specifically allocated for female football but the people from the association take it as "Well, they allocated funds to the association. We will spend as we see fit".

This lack of support from the sport association was not specific to football, although it seemed more salient to the experiences of athletes and professionals in that sport. Female athletes in other sports also noted the lack of support from their associations. Elvira said, "This year the women's junior national team [in track and field] was abolished, while men get to go all different types of competitions across Europe." Sanja lamented that the women's basketball team could not go to the European Championships.

Many female athletes identified a lack of facilities as a barrier to sport participation. Rajka explained, "When it comes to track and field, it is difficult to be a part of this sport when we don't have basic conditions to play, such as a field." There is only one track and field facility in the country, and it is located in the southern part of the country. This makes it difficult for athletes in the sport as they must travel or move in order to access the facility. Sanja posed an important question: "How will we accomplish success if we don't have anywhere to practice?"

In some cases where facilities existed, they were sub-par. Several female football players said they practiced on fields that were smaller than regulation size because regulation size fields were not available. Some sport facilities had no heat, and in some communities there was no indoor gym. As a result female athletes, especially those from the northern region lacked access to facilities to practice during the winter months. Pavle, a male professional in volleyball, said, "At one point we had about 100 girls playing in a very small hall. The last two years, we have a 10:00pm slot for practice and can you imagine a child that lives five kilometers out of town coming to practice at 10:00pm and going back home almost near midnight when temperatures are -20 Celsius."

In addition to an overall lack of facilities to practice and compete, a lack of equal access to facilities was discussed as a barrier. As Pavle mentioned in the above quote, women are relegated to the less desirable time spots for practice. Women's sport advocates in the United States have noted this is a key form of discrimination of female athletes. Slavica, a volleyball player, also concurred:

Men get the best time slots for practice while girls have to do away with what we have or even try and practice in the bleachers. In our city, us and the gymnastics team never get any court time, whereas karate, where mainly men play, are OK. The regular times we can use the court is either when we are already in school, or after 10pm.

Another key barrier is the lack of financing, funding and sponsorships available to female athletes. This presents a barrier as the athletes or their families must pay for sport participation. The following quotes from female athletes illustrate the burden lack of funding poses:

I've been on a national team for five years. I am a professional athlete, yet the last stipend I paid was in 2009 and no one is asking me, how are you paying for the physical therapy, how are you handling the lack of equipment? (Tijana).

You have to get full equipment, transport to and from practice, everything else you need for practice; it isn't cheap. Plus, the municipality hardly ever pitches in. (Sonja).

Adding an additional burden, since most female athletes do not earn salaries in sport, they often must work to support themselves and to pay for the costs related to their training and participation.

A lot of girls try working and playing sports in order to maintain one source of funding going as you can't really make a living in most cases doing sports as a woman in Montenegro. It is difficult to do both. (Mila, professional, volleyball referee)

Female athletes also noted the unequal distribution of resources within the same club as a barrier. One female athlete said:

The men's team gets all the equipment for free. They even have salaries on the monthly level, while we have to pay for our own shoes and jerseys, not to mention salaries!

Ljiliana said:

The amount of resources that they have relative to us was striking and evident, and when we travel they usually get a charter flight just for their team while we have to bum it with buses and red eye flights.

Female professionals and female athletes stated that funds were distributed when women's teams/athletes produced results. Nadu, a female professional in track and field, said:

I understand this logic but it is difficult when it is applied for female sports as there isn't many female athletes so it's a difficult thing to bank on one of them succeeding and then having an investment.

Several female athletes also talked about the perception that results bring in funding, but thought this logic itself was a barrier. Radmila explained, "In some cases it can be an excuse, as in 'we're expecting results and then we'll invest.' All the while they know that results will never come." Ana said, "Yes, it's all connected. We have to succeed to attract support, but we need support to succeed!"

Discussion

The International Working Group for Women and Sport (IWG) is a global coalition of organizations, foundations, and individuals committed to the use of the Brighton Declaration and other United Nations-based diplomatic instruments (Convention to

Eliminate Discrimination Against Women, UN Beijing Platform for Action) to enhance opportunities and resources for girls and women in sport. The IWG has hosted major international conferences every four years since its inception in 1994. Each conference features a research report to document the status of efforts over the past quadrennial. Two examples of these documents offer hundreds of case studies that identify similar barriers as those we discovered in our examination of gender and sport participation in Montenegro (Fasting et al., 2014; White and Scoretz, 2002). These documents have examined women's participation and the barriers girls and women encounter in small island states (Trinidad and Tobago), Asian and Middle Eastern states (Malaysia, Saudi Arabia), Central and South American states (Colombia, Nicaragua) as well as for Aboriginal and Native American peoples.

Similar to the girls and women in Montenegro, girls and women in these countries encounter similar barriers. These barriers include a need for sport policy and resources, education efforts to address the impact of negative stereotypes and myths about women, access to opportunities for physical activity and sport, fewer quality physical educators and coaches, fewer athletic role models for females, and lack of basic safety and sanitation provisions. A monograph produced by the United Nations (United Nations, 2007), two World Health Organization studies (2002, 2004), and a "sharing good practice" report issued by the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE) (Kluka et al., 2000) all reaffirm our findings regarding the barriers to female sport participation. Given the prevalence of research from a number of countries about the barriers for girls and women in sport, there can be little debate that action is necessary. What remains to be determined is the will of sport organizations and governments to act.

This study represents the efforts of individuals and institutions in Montenegro to address the current state of girls and women's sport in Montenegro, and as the first evidence-based study on gender and sport participation, represents the Montenegrin government's and sport organization's desire to address gender inequality. There have been tremendous gains made in women's sport in Montenegro, but efforts need to continue to achieve gender equality. Many of these gains are the direct result of individual efforts to develop female sports, and positive change has occurred because of individual people and their dedication and passion for women's sports. Individuals cannot be expected to carry this important task alone, although grassroots efforts are necessary to the successful development of girls and women's sport. This was a point reinforced in the focus group interviews with male professionals. Nikola, a football coach, explained, "The association is key. Women athletes are getting older without an opportunity to really showcase their talent. I am helping out, other individuals are helping out but without a system, without the institution, nothing will change." Pavle, a women's volleyball club founder, agreed, "Before you can think about having a change, you need support from the highest levels and support from your own environment." Dragan, also in football, noted the limits of individual efforts without institutional support: "What we have in Montenegro is a lot of enthusiasts and individuals who are fighting for different sports, but that's not sustainable."

Igor Vušurović, who at the time of the study was the director of the volleyball association in Montenegro, helped make volleyball illustrative of the successes possible in women's sport when individual efforts are supported and facilitated by institutions.

Although volleyball does not have a long history in Montenegro, volleyball and handball are two sports that have gender equality, in terms of sport participation. At the time of this study, there were over 400 young girls participating in volleyball sport academies in Montenegro. These successes can be attributed in part to the success of the men's volleyball team in the 2000 Olympics (Igor Vušurović was a member of that team) and the efforts of individuals to develop the women's sport alongside the men's. Having a former professional male athlete employed full-time in a key decision-making position, with a full support staff, has enabled the development of the sport for women.

What this case illustrates is that while grassroots efforts are necessary, resources and support from the associations and from key institutions in Montenegro must accompany those efforts. While efforts to improve female sport participation will take time, governmental offices must play a key role. Moreover, it is necessary that institutions such as the Ministry of Education and Sport and the Montenegro Olympic Committee continue their efforts to strengthen their partnerships with key stakeholders in order to successfully develop female sport in Montenegro.

In this regard, we encourage grassroots efforts to establish an NGO devoted to women's sport in Montenegro. This NGO would have the primary role of working with government, sport associations and communities to develop female sport/physical activity. The NGO could then partner with the International Working Group on Women and Sport by signing the "Brighton Declaration." The IWG is a body of NGOs from around the world whose main goal is to promote and develop opportunities for girls and women in sport throughout the world (Meier, 2005). Several female athletes, and female and male professionals agreed with the importance of establishing a committee or working group on women's sport. These individuals could be recruited to become members of this NGO.

In the United States, and elsewhere, researchers and women's sports advocates have emphasized the importance of equal opportunity and equitable distribution of resources in sports offered in educational settings. In 1972 the United States legislature passed Title IX of the Educational Amendments. Title IX is federal legislation that prohibits educational institutions that received federal funds from discriminating on the basis of sex. As most sport opportunities in the United States are offered in educational institutions, Title IX has made significant improvements in the distribution of opportunities for girls and women's sport. For example, before its passage, in 1971, only 294,105 girls in the United States participated in high school sports. By 2009–2010 (the time of this study) that number had grown to 3,172,637 (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2009–2010). Moreover, Title IX has ushered in changes that have led to improvements in access to facilities, equipment and resources necessary to participate in sport.

Although the sport system in Montenegro is much different than in the United States, as most athletes in Montenegro participate in club-based or professional sports, the reality that legislative action can produce significant gains in gender equality is one that may be considered in Montenegro. Legislation that ensures equal opportunities and equal distribution of resources, and that has government oversight and is enforceable may facilitate the positive changes female athletes and professionals in women's sport wish to achieve.

These efforts are important not only to the individual athletes who will directly benefit, but to Montenegrin society as a whole. The United Nations views sport as an integral way to empower girls and women (United Nations, 2007) by leading to improvements in women's physical and psychological health as well as improving educational outcomes. These improvements would positively contribute to the development of the Montenegrin society. More equitable gender relations in society can lead to overall improvements in family, education, politics, and the economy as well as in other institutions. Indeed, international bodies and Non-governmental organizations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, Beyond Sport, and Game Set Peace, all recognize that developing sport is a key way to achieve gender equality in society. Sport is also an important component in achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (Meier, 2005; United Nations, 2007). The Montenegro Olympic Committee also recognizes a need to promote gender equality within the Olympic movement in Montenegro, and has established a Women and Sport working group to develop a strategy and four-year action plan for addressing women's sports.

We conclude with a quote from Vesna, a member of the basketball federation:

The success in Montenegro really ought to be measured by the number of girls participating. If we have a mass following, something good will happen for those girls and for the society.

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