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An Exploration of Saudi Women's Experiences and Perceptions Towards Participation in
Physical Activity and Sports in the United States.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Health, Sport, and Exercise Science
with a concentration in Recreation and Sport Management

by

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Abstract

A significant proportion of Saudi women are currently living in different Western countries, including the United States of America. Physical activity and sports participation play a significant role in maintaining health and well-being for all individuals. Understanding their physical activity experiences and perceptions regarding participation in sports activity during their stay in the United States is important. This study aimed to understand if the length of residence in the United States and/or acculturation to the U.S. environment could significantly change Saudi women's patterns, attitudes, and behaviors towards sports and fitness activities. This qualitative study was carried out to explore and describe their physical activity and sports participation during their transition time in the U.S. A sample of 13 Saudi women (ages between 22 to 51 years old) living in the United States agreed to participate in the study. The study was sampled from different cities in the United States to reduce research bias. All the participants had lived in the United States for at least 3 years. The participants shared their experiences and the meaning of those experiences through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that varied from 45 to 60 minutes depending on the participant's willingness and time. All of the participants signed an informed consent letter to be tape-recorded with their permission. Results indicated that factors such as the sociocultural and environmental factors of the U.S. during their stay in the United States have shaped their perception of and behavior regarding physical activity; thus, they were more likely to report a significant increase in value on physical activity due to cultural influence. Recommendations for future research were also suggested in this study.

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Dedication

*I dedicate this to Prof. Merry Moiseichik and to the Saudi women who participated in this study,
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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Physical activity is well recognized as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles and linked with energy expenditure (WHO,2018). It includes (e.g., playing, hiking, swimming, running, dancing, gardening, walking, cycling, and recreational pursuits (Rahman M et al., 2019). Regular physical activity helps maintain the human body's physical functioning and prevents disease (Al-Hazzaa et al.,2018). The health benefits of regular involvement in physical activity are various; for instance, it helps to control weight, reduces stress and depression, improves self-esteem and self-confidence, enhances social support, and increases mental health, which in turn, results in improved academic achievement, positive affect, and cognitive function (Ryan & Deci, 2007). For optimal health benefits, it is suggested adults and young people accumulate at least 150 min per week of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity. Such activity improves one's health and well-being as well as reduces the risk of noncommunicable diseases and depression (Powell et al., 2011).

Despite the known benefits of physical activity and exercise, a significant proportion of adults and young people remain physically inactive and over 60% of adults worldwide fail to achieve the recommended guidelines for physical activity (Aubert et al., 2018). More specifically, females consistently exhibited less physically active than males (WHO,2008). For Arab countries, recent statistics show a lack of physical activity among Arab women ranging from 33% to 86% in different countries such as Jordan, Kuwait, Syria, and The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Al-Maena, 2013). As for Saudi society, findings from local research revealed that, over a period of ten years,

the kingdom had one of the highest levels of obesity in the world, particularly among women (University Center for Obesity Research, 2012).

Perhaps one of the unknown facts, obesity among women in Saudi is due to persistent social stereotypes and the conservative culture in which women live, which identifies physical activity and sports as male activities (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). For decades, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was guided by various disagreements and constraints concerning women and girls by denying them the same opportunities as men in social, political, and economic life across the country. Saudi women were restricted at home, illiterate, and publicly were not permitted to drive. They needed male permission to apply for a passport, travel outside the country, study abroad or travel overseas, depending on male relatives, and had to comply with cultural gender roles (Harper, 2007). Moreover, according to Hamden (2005), even when Saudi females were allowed access to the education system in principle, the overall objective was to prepare them to be mothers and wives.

Saudi Arabia was the only country in the world that did not allow physical activity and sports for women to the point of prohibiting it in many contexts until recently (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). For example, when the government introduced a state schooling system for girls in the early 1960s, women did not receive physical education or participate in any form of physical activity in schools, while all boys' primary, intermediate, and most secondary state schools had compulsory physical education classes (Mobaraki, 2010). This was due to the conservative belief that women's participation in physical activities is offensive to tribal traditions and contrary to cultural values (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; AlMunajjed, 2010; Yusuf et al., 2015).

Until recently, the government acknowledged that the possibilities, opportunities, and social activities of women and girls in the country were limited because of the country's traditional and conservative society and the hegemonic masculine system (Gorney, 2016). Accordingly, in April

2016, the Saudi government established a new plan called Vision 2030 that embodies Saudi Arabia's objectives that form and intend to ensure its firmer inclusion into the global, the reduction of the country's dependence on oil, as well as diversity its economy and develop a public service sector for good health care (National Transformation Program www.vision2030.sa). One of the main objectives of Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision was to guarantee Saudi women equal rights and opportunities to make sense of their societal and personal identities about changing gender roles in Saudi society (Muhammad, 2017).

In September 2017, a royal decree was developed to give Saudi women more freedom as the decree seeks to overhaul its economy. For the first time, the kingdom's women can license private women's soccer clubs, enter sports arenas and cinemas, obtain their driver's licenses, and drive. The justification behind this was to guarantee women equal rights and opportunities across the country, which would elevate women's mobility and independence to take more responsibility in public spheres (Thompson, 2017). Furthermore, in August 2019, the government decreed in the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) that adult Saudi women and girls would not require a man's permission to obtain a driver's license, no longer be subjected to guardianship laws, could live independently, work, study abroad, and travel alone (Al-Eisa, 2018).

Regarding physical activity, the Saudi vision for 2030, sought to implement far-reaching social and lifestyle changes by promoting physical and social well-being, adopting a healthy lifestyle, and elevating women's participation in sports and physical activity. As a sign of the country's commitment toward improving the health and well-being of Saudi women, physical education courses and curricula were offered in all state schools and now Saudi universities offer a bachelor's degree in physical education for women in Jeddah, Taif, and Riyadh (Muhammad, 2017). Already, some gyms known to operate without proper licensing have begun to formally register with the

government. New gyms or even entire chain organizations catering to women have begun to appear.

The Research Problem

For several years, the Saudi government has been working diligently toward tackling gender equality among the kingdom's women by granting them equal rights and opportunities as men, especially in sports participation by loosening restrictions and barriers, opening women's facilities and clubs, and providing educational curriculum in schools to improve adherence to practice sports activity. Yet, it surprises many people that Saudi women have not embraced physical activity and sports. Several studies and reports have been generally limited to the sample of Saudi women within the kingdom and are mainly quantitative. For instance, Al-hakbany, and Al-Hazzaa, (2018) revealed that the percentage of Saudi women getting adequate exercise remains very low and is also more likely to correlate with a higher incidence of women being obese or overweight, which compromises their longevity and health. In addition, according to the World Health Organization report, Saudi females' inactivity rates range between 60% and 67.7%, (WHO,2018).

Even though the outcomes of all the aforementioned studies are well-acknowledged and cannot be overlooked, there have been no studies examining the experience and perceptions of Saudi women's sports and fitness activities of women who live for an extended period of time in a foreign country like the United States where the exercise message is persistent, and American women can often be seen participating in it regularly.

Looking at the U.S., being physically active is one of the most essential steps that Americans of all ages can take to improve their health. Perhaps because of this, practicing physical

activity and other recreational forms of exercise (e.g., walking, hiking, or riding bicycles to work or the store) to enjoy better health outcomes have been a part of the United States culture's lifestyles and traditions (University of Pittsburgh, 2014). The United States culture promotes and supports the enhancement of engagement in physical activity and sports to significantly impact the health and well-being of the population (Adler & Stewart, 2010). Indeed, the messages of the tremendous benefits of being physically active for one's health are everywhere in the media resources and the culture at large. The New York Times headline touted the report "The closest thing to a wonder drug? Try exercise" (Carroll, 2016). Studies have shown that American women are largely driven to engage in recreational exercise for a variety of reasons, including improving physical health and managing weight (Berman et al., 2005). More importantly, most American women engage in physical activity over concerns about body image and appearance (Ahearn, 2012). Due to this fact, it seems reasonable to conduct a study to determine whether or not Saudi women practice physical activity while they sojourn in the U.S and if the length of residence in the United States and/or acculturation to the U.S environment could result in a significant change in the patterns, attitudes, and behaviors of Saudi women towards sports and fitness activities where messages of the significance of sports activity and its health benefits are often heard through social media resources, websites, and television. Saudi women, therefore, are more likely to be exposed to women of the host country who are exercising regularly.

The Research Questions

Through the examination of the lived experiences of Saudi women who have resided for an extended time in the United States and their attitudes toward physical activity and sports participation, this study is centered around the following research questions:

- 1) What is the reality of Saudi women's sports and fitness activities prior to and after living for an extended time in the United States?
- 2) How do Saudi women perceive the value of physical activity while they are in the U.S.?
- 3) How do Saudi women describe their experiences in terms of their practicing physical activity in the U.S.?
- 4) What influences Saudi women's attitudes and behaviors towards participation or non-participation in sports and fitness activities in the U.S.? and how malleable were those factors?
- 5) What is the relationship between acculturation into the U.S. culture lifestyles and traditions and Saudi women participating in sports and fitness activities in the U.S.?
- 6) What are the biggest constraints that stopped Saudi women from participating in sports and fitness activities in Saudi Arabia?

Significance of the Study

Saudi women who come to the United States to study or work or accompany their spouses are exposed to the U.S., culture lifestyles that encourage an active lifestyle for everyone across the country. Due to the lack of literature surrounding Saudi women in the United States that specifically addresses their attitudes and behaviors toward physical activity and sports, the need to obtain a greater and richer understanding of whether Saudi women's perspectives and experiences toward practicing physical and sports activities change with an accommodation to the United States culture lifestyle and tradition, which is generally different from the Saudi culture. The real motivation for conducting this research arose for two primary reasons. First, sports and other recreational forms of physical activity were not a part of the cultural history of the Kingdom until recently, and Saudi women there are still not generally embracing it. Contrastingly, the United

States provides widespread availability of recreational sports facilities that encourage a wide range of physical activities for all people, which contributes to the practice of physical activity and other forms of exercise for all individuals.

Another compelling factor behind this research is the fact that in line with the Saudi Vision 2030, Saudi women are freer than before to make their decisions for their societal and personal identities because they are no longer subject to their guardian's permission to do so. This factor is a crucial component of this research because, although most studies that addressed Saudi women's participation in physical activity and sports are well documented, no research to date has investigated these issues that specifically concern Saudi women who are experiencing a culture change where exercise for women is encouraged and recommended for its health benefits. Understanding the experience and perceptions of Saudi women who sojourn in the U.S. is essential to be accomplished before planning and establishing effective public health strategies and policies for increasing physical activity levels among Saudi women.

Research Objectives

The major objective of the current study was to express the current status of participation in sports activities among Saudi women living in the United States. Along with the main objective, the research aims also to achieve the following:

- 1- To investigate knowledge, attitudes, and barriers relating to participation in physical activities and sports among Saudi women living in the United States.
- 2- To examine Saudi women's perceptions and behavior toward participation in physical activities and sports in the United States.

- 3- To express the relationship between acculturation into the U.S. culture lifestyles and traditions and examine the sports and fitness activities among Saudi women living in the United States.
- 4- To explore the biggest constraints that stopped Saudi women from participating in sports and fitness activities in Saudi Arabia.

The Need for the Dissertation Study

To date, there has been no research undertaken to understand the experience and perceptions of Saudi women living in the United States regarding their physical activity and sports involvement. As Gosadi (2016) reveals in a study, environmental influences play a significant role in promoting or inhibiting physical activity and sports at the individual and group levels. Given all this would Saudi women living in the United States for an extended time embrace physical activity and sports and practice these activities regularly. The result of this kind of research could assist in developing programs and policies that would overcome the lack of women's physical activity and sports and may inspire policymakers and government bodies to develop effective and far-reaching interventions that could assist in combating physical inactivity and encouraging an active lifestyle among the Saudi women and girl, for the next Saudi generation.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study, which is to examine if the length of time residence in a foreign country like the United States could result in a significant adjustment in the patterns, attitudes, and behaviors of Saudi women toward sports and fitness activities, is derived from the segmented assimilation theoretical framework of Portes (1996). Segmented assimilation theory proposes that immigrant groups selectively adapt traits/norms of the host culture and retain those of their culture

of origin depending on their context. Additional researchers (Alba & Nee, 1997; Gordon, 1964) have continued the work of Portes with the specific goal of the length of residence in the United States leads to the gradual adoption of the traits of the host culture with a loss of those from their home country. As this study captures the reality of Saudi women's sports and fitness activities experiences and perceptions and the factors that influence their attitudes and behaviors after living for an extended time in the United States, the researcher uses a qualitative approach as the main methodology for this study. By definition, the qualitative method is often adopted to better understand a shared experience through the individual perception or interpretation of others (Guest et al., 2013). As will be noted later in this work, the driving research questions of this study are rooted in opinions, thoughts, perceptions, and experiences that are difficult to answer through a quantitative approach to data collection. This procedure is necessary because the evidence surrounding Saudi women living for an extended time in the United States does not yet exist to describe their physical activity experiences in the U.S. and the factors that influence their physical activity behaviors.

Definition of the Terms

The following terms are used in specific ways in this dissertation and so are defined to ensure clarity of meaning.

Physical Activity. It is known as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure that includes playing, hiking, swimming, running, dancing, gardening, walking, cycling, and recreational pursuits (Caspersen C, 1985).

Sports and Exercise. are procedurally defined as a group of skills, and movements, as well as physical and sports exercises done with a team to obtain recreation and improve mental abilities and physical qualities (Krouse R, elt, 2017).

Culture. Culture represents the vast structure of attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, customs, practices, rituals, and values that are used to describe a specific country or geographical region (Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991).

CHAPTER II:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Physical activities and sports play a vital role in people's mental, emotional, psychological, social, and physical development (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Given the rise in the number of Saudi women who sojourn in the United States, it seems relevant to gain an understanding of their physical activity experiences in the U.S. and the factors that influence their physical activity behaviors during their stay in the United States. Currently, the extent of the lived experience of Saudi women regarding their physical activity experiences in the United States and the factors that influence their physical activity behaviors is not fully known due to the lack of research surrounding them. Learning the nature of Saudi women while living in the United States, understanding their physical activity experiences, and the factors that influence their physical activity behaviors are of particular interest.

The literature review serves as a foundation for this study. The study sets a way to frame a greater and deeper understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Saudi women toward participation in physical activity and sports while living in the United States. Considering the above, this chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, for the international population's understanding of Saudi culture, general information on the Saudi Arabian population, particularly women, is provided. Background information on the country and culture of Saudi Arabia, religion, family, gender roles, and the educational system in Saudi Arabia will be addressed especially since the study focuses on the experience of this population. The second section describes the transition experiences, challenges, acculturation, and factors affecting

individuals entering a new culture. The third section explores the reality of women's lifestyle in general, and sports participation in Saudi society, through the identification of the motives for practicing physical and sports activity especially “before” and “after” the sweeping reforms of Saudi Vision 2030 will be stressed at length to frame an understanding more clearly of their evolving role in Saudi Arabian society. A review of research on physical activity and sports including the following: the definition of physical activity and sports, benefits of physical activity and sports, barriers to physical activity and sports, and health risks posed by physical inactivity creates the fourth section. This point will be provided, emphasizing the role of physical activity level and recreation sectors, particularly for Saudi women in Saudi, and highlighting the factors affecting their engagement in physical activity.

Saudi Arabia: Background

Country description: In 1932, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded by King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Bin Saud. Saudi Arabia is located in the Middle East and is considered the largest country occupying about 80% of the Arabian Peninsula (Hilal, 2013). The total population as of 2021 is more than 36.4 million made up of 44.8% women and 55.2% men and the young population in the kingdom compromise nearly 60% of the whole country’s population (Salam, 2014). Saudi capital is Riyadh, and its main language is Arabic. Saudi is bounded by the Persian Gulf, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar on the East; by the Red Sea on the west; by Kuwait, Jordan, and Iraq on the north; and by Oman and Yemen on the south. Saudi is a monarchy; the king is the supreme head under which all other administrative bodies, such as government agencies and ministries operate, whose official title is the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. The King appoints a Crown Prince to help him in his functions, the country's second king.

Religion

A heavy focus on Islam must be considered to comprehend the morals and values of the Saudi population. Islam is the major religion of Saudi Arabia, where the kingdom's population practices the Islamic religion, and their beliefs are fundamentally reflected in all aspects of their public life (Long, 2005). Saudi Arabia is the home of Islam's two holiest shrines, Makkah and Medina (Alkahtani, 2013). The word Islam stands for submission or peace in Arabic and is regarded as a divine law revealed by God through the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him (Hikmat & Beiruty, 2004). Muslim is the name given to those who follow the Islam religion, and Islam is the second largest and fastest-growing religion in the world behind the Christian faiths (Ali et al., 2004). In Saudi, there are two major groups across the country, 85–95% of Saudi Arabian citizens are Sunni Muslims, and about 10 –15% are Shia and both groups believe in the almighty position of Allah, the Quran as the divine message of Allah, and the prophet Muhammed as the messenger of Allah (Alkahtani, 2013). The country does not allow the practice of non-Muslim faiths (Vassiliev, 2013). The country is governed by Shariah law that derives from two main sources, The Holy Quran and Sunnah, with the support of Shariah scholars (Alkahtani, 2013). Sharia is the law of the kingdom, which means “the pathway to the source” and it is respected by all Muslims (Long, et.al., 2010). Sharia derives from two main sources, The Holy Quran and Sunnah, with the support of Shariah scholars.

Culture

There are many definitions of culture, but for the sake of this research, culture is described as “networks of shared elements that provide standards for perceiving, believing, and interactions, which are derived from the morals, values, and teachings of the Quran and learned behaviors passed down through the generations” (Hong, 2009, p. 4). Saudi traditional culture is known as a

strong collectivist and patriarchal society, whereby loyalty to the family and tribe is significant rather than the individual, in contrast to individualistic nations such as the United States, which is viewed as assigning priority to the individual seen as an independent self-more than family goals (Maisel, 2015). Added to that, Saudi culture is bonded by Islamic religious instructions that refer to the lived experience of being a Muslim, while the American culture is a country founded on a mixture of ideas and ideals from varied quarters, factors like democracy, Christianity, traditions, and entertainment have all been intertwined into a single unit appearing as the American culture (Triandis et al., 1988).

The society of Saudi has a high cultural homogeneity and is built around tribal and Islamic affiliations where culture, religion, tradition, and family-oriented structures are the basis of the social structure across the society (Al-Bakr et al., 2017). Saudi citizens maintain cultural elements that deeply define their norms, beliefs, customs, and traditions, with considerable pride and satisfaction (Long et al., 2010). Moreover, Islamic principles and local traditions and customs of the Saudi population have shaped the very basis of the country's legacy and are difficult to pull apart because of the intermingling of tribal and Islamic affiliations (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

Family

In Saudi, the most critical social institution is the extended family (Long, 2010). Traditionally, the father is the head of the family with the great responsibility of supporting the family financially and providing for their needs, and the women's function is to manage the household duties and the upbringing of children (Kellerman & Rhodes, 2004). Saudi citizens embrace a powerful sense of loyalty to their tribes, which are considered the most significant entity because they enhance the social status of an individual (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). In this regard, the Saudi Arabian culture teaches people to be very devoted to their families and tribes have a significant

impact on the individual lives and kinships of Saudi citizens (Maisel, 2015). As a society, the people are close to their families and friends and a fundamental practice in Islam is respect for elders (Alkahtani, 2013).

Moreover, marriage is a civil contract that has to be witnessed by family members and includes the specific amount of money that the husband will pay to the woman. Thus, Saudi women do not take their husbands' names; instead, they retain their fathers' names because they are legally considered to belong to the family of their birth throughout their lives (Long et al., 2010). During the marriage, the wife submits to her husband, who has complete control over all they do. Before marriage, the father or male relatives set the standards for women's work, education, and behavior, while husbands take over the role when they marry her. It is worth noting that men are legally allowed to marry up to four wives; however, all wives must be treated equally (Maisel, 2015). Hence, foreigners need to realize that women in Saudi Arabia are under the absolute authority of men and that polygamy for men in the country is legal.

Gender Roles

The strict religious principles and traditions are integrated into the culture of Saudi and influence nearly every aspect of Saudi Arabian society (Alkahtani, 2013). The country follows the Wahabis' interpretation of the Qur'an, which is well-known for its keen observation of the segregation of sexes. Gender segregation and male guardianship are widespread practices in every part of society (Hilal, 2013). These aspects are fundamental practices in the everyday fabric of Saudi citizens, which significantly prohibits the social interaction of sexes in every sector including cafes, restaurants, banks, education, and the public sphere (Long, 2005). Saudi is a predominantly masculine society (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). To understand this, according to the World Economic Forum's 2017 Global Gender Gap Report, the Kingdom is one of six places listed as

the worst-performing country in the world for gender equality and the empowerment of women. In Saudi, until recently, women's daily lives were directly limited and entitled to a male guardianship system, regardless of women's age (Doumato, 2010). Male guardians can be fathers, husbands, brothers, or even minor sons. Under the system of law, Saudi women must comply with cultural gender roles and need their male guardianship approval to work, receive education, travel abroad, and even for exercising (Kassem, 2012).

Educational System in Saudi

The educational structure in Saudi Arabia ties into Islamic teachings and values. All educational levels are built on the teachings and values of Islam. Saudi Arabia has devoted significant attention and resources to the area of education (Al-Munajjed, 2009). In 1953, the Ministry of Education was established to provide and manage all education services for all Saudi citizens (Hanley, 2014). The educational system in Saudi includes a sizable number of primary and secondary schools available to the citizen. The educational system also offers students free education, books, transportation, student resources, and health services. Since the establishment of the education system, the Ministry of Education ensures all public education systems financed by the government are separated by the single-sex education policy from elementary level to institutions of higher learning, except for kindergartens and nurseries and foreign international private schools where mixed-sex classes are allowed (Hamdan, 2013). The policy outlaws combining boys and girls in single classrooms in public schools and all students must be taught by a teacher of the same gender. This also applies to learners in international schools that are funded either fully or partially by the Saudi Arabian government (Al-Ahmadi et al., 2011).

Women in Islam

In order to understand the essence, morals, and values of the Saudi Arabian population, the role of women in Islam must be understood. The role of women is generally reflected and dictated by the Islamic religion. To understand the influence of Islam as a religion on women regarding physical activity, the Qur'an (the holy book of Islam) and the Hadith (the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed) are essential resources for committed Muslims, especially women. Islam does not allow free interaction between men and women who are not related to others or family members in all matters including sports and recreation. According to the Qur'an, in Sura An-Noor, it is stated that a female is allowed to interact with, talk to and see those male relatives who are not permitted to marry her, which includes her father, brother, paternal uncle, maternal uncle, and grand-father" (Holy Qur'an, 24:31). In the Muslim world, particularly for Muslim women, religion provides many ways in which they structure and approach their life based on their beliefs and values. Muslim women are not a homogeneous group and there are differences in how they choose to resolve religious and other cultural demands. For instance, some Muslims chose to wear the hijab (headscarf) and the Islamic dress code, while others do not like Oman, which is generally one of the Muslim countries where women prefer to wear modest clothing when they practice sports (Tolaymat & Moradi, 2011). From a Western perspective, wearing the hijab may be seen as a sign of oppression, however, these allegations reflect the lack of understanding of the Islamic culture, the hijab is a symbol of modesty, and some women believe wearing the veil is Allah's will and choose to wear it to uphold religious values and to protect them against unwanted attention (Ali, 2005).

The Value of Physical Activity and Sports

Through Sports, Islam promotes good health and encourages all people to be involved in sports and fitness activities to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The Prophet Mohammad shared many insights in the Qur'an and Hadith and advised his Muslim followers to participate in many forms of sport, which even today are considered the best form of exercise (Hikmat,2004). Islam also set some rules and regulations that should be adopted as a reference in generating every movement of his people who were being diverted from the true teachings of Islam. For example, dress codes and limits on mixing with men in sports environments are barriers for Muslim women to participate in sporting activities (Ellin,2009). According to Kay, (2005) for many Muslim women to participate in sports they need to be out of sight of men". Moreover, the Holy Book of the Islamic religion, the Qur'an, stresses in many chapters to Muslim women to be modest in dressing by saying that, "O prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and the wives of the believers that they shall lengthen their garments. Thus, they will be recognized (as righteous women) and avoid being insulted. God is Forgiver, Most Merciful..." (Holy Qur'an,33:59).

Regarding physical activity, the tremendous benefits of physical activity and sports for one's health and well-being are well acknowledged. Physical activity plays a critical role in people's health and can serve as a conduit for leading to increased fitness, mental well-being, and social relationships (Kohl et al., 2012). To date, published primary studies on physical activity have been recognized as a vehicle for all men and women in communities and society to be physically fit, emotionally stable, and skillful (Clarke et al., 2017). Physical activity has been extensively recognized for its role in promoting health, and controlling weight, and is associated with decreased stress and improved mental health (Kohl et al., 2012). World Health Organization

has recognized these activities for all gender to engage in sports as well as it is the main factor in providing a significant benefit for both men and women linked with lowering the risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease, and certain types of cancer (WHO, 2018). Notably, physical exercise indirectly allows individuals opportunities to meet and communicate with other people in different social roles and cultural norms (Berger et al., 2017).

Although there is general agreement for physical activity and sports for one's health benefits, there are massive constraints that both men and women may face when it comes to physical activity and sports. For example, time constraints have been recognized as one of the most significant obstacles for many people who have busy schedules. It is hard for them to find time to participate in physical activity. Generally, some individuals may have physical disabilities or health conditions that make it challenging to engage in certain types of physical activity. Added to this, a study published in the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health* found that financial constraints were one of the most significant barriers to involvement in physical activity and sports for both men and women (Wilbur et al., 2006). Another study published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* revealed that social constraints were a significant barrier to some individuals who may feel uncomfortable or self-conscious when exercising in front of others (Humpel et al., 2002).

Saudi women's participation in physical activity and sports is confronted with distinct types of controversies due to cultural and societal norms. For example, Hartman's (2003) review of studies on Saudi women's views toward physical activity revealed that Saudi women's physical activity and sports needs have long been overlooked, and women in the country face numerous barriers to participating in physical activity. Given that this dissertation addresses the reality of

Saudi women's physical activity and sports, the role of women in Saudi Arabia “before” and “after” the sweeping reforms of Saudi Vision 2030 will be addressed at length below.

The Status of Women in Saudi Society

The role of Saudi women in the kingdom is complicated. As Al-Ahmadi, (2011) reveals in a study, some customs have been deeply rooted and entrenched in the culture of Saudi as the belief that Saudi women are expected to stay home, cook, clean, and raise children, while men have more freedom of movement outside of the home (Sidani, 2005). The concept of male guardianship has been, and still is, one of the strongest norms for them that has significantly hindered women's ability to exercise their rights and participate fully in public life (Forsythe,2009). As a result, the normal view in the everyday fabric of Saudi women was that they were not allowed to drive, need male's permission to travel abroad, depend on male relatives, and must comply with cultural gender roles that make it an undesirable way of life for women in their daily lives (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

When it comes to the issue of women's participation in sports, only conservative norms of the cultural society of Saudi consider physical activity as male-dominated, which has resulted in social norms being defined in such a way as to justify the nonappearance of Saudi women in physical activity as a belief that it is offensive to tribal traditions and contrary to cultural values (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; AlMunajjed, 2010; Yusuf et al., 2015). Research has demonstrated that women's attitudes and behavior opportunities to exercise or sports participation are limited, and social and cultural sensitivities restrict Saudi women from exercising in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia more than in other Arab or Muslim societies due to the implementation of Islamic principles in the society (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

Saudi women were locked into restrictive traditions and prohibited from exercising and playing sports for decades (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Women's sport in Saudi Arabia faces several challenges to access, comprehensiveness, and quality programs due to persistent social stereotypes and conservative culture (Hartmann, 2003). As a result, Saudi females lack resources and facilities and face resistance based on religion, tradition, and culture (Whyte et.al., 2011). Even when women and girls have access to opportunities to take part in sports principles, they may encounter a significant set of challenges, inequalities, and deprivations in their daily lives, which prevents them from participating in sports and physical activities (Forsythe, 2009). One example of women being marginalized was when the country introduced state schools and curricula for girls in the early 1960s, but never added physical education classes for girls' k-12 curriculum, and schools are segregated by gender, meaning that females are taught in entirely different buildings and do not have the facilities for physical education (Al-Bakr, 1997).

Moreover, at all the universities, most physical education funding is allocated to buildings that are designated for male students because they are given facilities for physical activity, unlike female students (Al-Munajjed, 2009; Mtango, 2004). This is especially relevant in Saudi Arabia, where gyms and recreation centers on campus are only located in male buildings that are segregated from women's buildings. Moreover, women's physical activity needs have long been ignored in terms of funding. For instance, Wilcke (2012), found that Saudi women in the country receive less funding and support than men's sports facilities and teams. The debate about women's and girls' sports activity does not focus on rights or discrimination but rather on the health benefits derived from an active lifestyle. For example, Sajeed (2015), stressed that the limitation among women in Saudi society has caused a major impact on women's lifestyle behaviors, resulting in a significant increase in their inactivity levels.

The New Age of Saudi Arabia

The country has been undergoing rapid development accompanied by modernization, lifestyle transformation, and inclusive urbanization throughout the country to provide a basic standard of living for Saudi citizens (Thompson, 2015). The motivations behind these developments seem clear, such as greater centralization of society; and removal of impediments to intended political, social, and economic changes. In fact, the pressure to shift away from habits and values previously endorsed has become more obvious in recent years (Abdalla, 2015). A range of societal changes are currently challenging traditional Saudi culture and might reshape the Saudi culture including the usage of social media and the women's rights movement currently challenging traditional Saudi culture and will continue to do so in the future (Almujaibel, 2014). Equally important, over 110,000 Saudi younger people are studying outside the country in North America, Europe, and the UK which may, in turn, result in bringing new ways of thinking and behaving, outlooks, beliefs, and values from the countries where they lived (Ansari&Parker,2016).

Saudi Vision 2030

For Saudi Arabia to maintain its economic stability, the Saudi government established a new plan called Vision 2030. Saudi Vision 2030 represents the country's objectives that form and intend to wean the Kingdom away from oil dependence into a knowledge-driven economy and nation, as well as to develop a public service sector for good health care for the future in Saudi Arabia (National Transformation Program www.vision2030). The real ambition behind Saudi Vision 2030 is to implement far-reaching social and lifestyle changes by shifting the awareness and culture of the society to provide citizens with a basic standard of living across the country

(Thompson, 2015). Much of the focus of Vision 2030 is on women's empowerment and allowing them the equal rights and opportunities that were male dominated in the past in every sector such as education, employment, and political participation (Abdalla, 2015). One of the important parts of Vision 2030 is changing the culture of society, by paying greater attention to ensuring a firmer inclusion for women in the country's development, and to overcome traditional society and culture (Abdalla, 2015). It has been anticipated therefore, that enabling the increased visibility of and greater public roles for Saudi women in society will lead to further normalization in society, which may, in turn, result in this transformation and will help women realize their individuality and prompt additional changes to their situation (Gorney, 2016). Accordingly, the roles and status of Saudi women have been changed to assess women's rights to make sense of their societal and personal identities about changing gender roles. For instance, In June 2016, the government permitted Saudi women to enter sports stadiums, licensed private women's soccer clubs, and permitted women to drive for the first time (Al-Bakr et al., 2017).

Nowadays, Saudi women can pursue professions and jobs that were previously restricted and have greater mobility and independence to take more responsibility in public spheres and occupy higher positions in Saudi society. Recent studies emphasized that over the last decade, social and economic policies have rapidly shifted and the percentage of women employees in the workplace has almost doubled, according to official statistics, to 32% from nearly 18% (Al-Eisa et al., 2018). Moreover, in the last four years, the Kingdom has sprinted towards narrowing the gender inequality gap by permitting women to make their own decisions for their societal and personal identities. In August 2019, the government decreed in the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) that adult women are no longer subjected to guardianship laws and can live independently, work, study abroad, and travel alone (Alsharif, 2019).

Women's Sports and Saudi Vision 2030

In progress toward achieving Saudi Vision2030, expanding social change in Saudi through the advancement of Saudi women in society, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman stated that when it comes to Saudi women's nonappearance in society, it is the outcome of Saudi culture, which is to some extent conservative and therefore encourages women to remain at home to serve their children and husbands (Thompson, 2017). Optimistically, participation in more sporting and physical activities heads the list of strategies for the development of Saudi to create a vibrant society with fulfilling lives and to implement far-reaching social well-being, and a healthy lifestyle, especially for women and girls across the country (Thompson, 2017). Accordingly, the government began to allow sports centers for women and physical education for, initially, girls in private as well as in public education. Further, the General Authority for Sports, which functions as a sports ministry, announced a new female department and appointed Princess Reema Bint Bandar Al Saud, a member of the Saudi Royal family as its head. In this newly created role, she is responsible for setting up a series of recommendations, including licensing women's gyms and establishing a physical education curriculum in girls' state schools (Almarhaby, 2018). Therefore, as a sign of the general move to increase and normalize women's participation in sports and other forms of physical activity in the Kingdom, most Saudi universities have recently offered a bachelor's degree in physical education for women in Jeddah, Taif, and Riyadh. Already, some gyms known to operate without proper licensing have begun to formally register with the government. New gyms or even entire chain organizations catering to women have begun to appear.

The Saudi Arabian state asserts equality among the entire Saudi population, in all aspects of their lives in general, and allows women's participation in physical activity and sports by loosening restrictions and barriers, opening women's facilities and clubs, and providing an educational curriculum in schools to improve adherence to practicing physical activity. Still, a high percentage of Saudi women remain completely inactive, which in turn led to an increase in the prevalence of overweight and obesity among these women (Alhakbany, Al-Hazzaa, 2018). Recent evidence conducted to project the prevalence of adult obesity in the kingdom from 1992–2022 revealed that the inactivity rates of Saudi females range between 60% and 67.7%, (Al-Quwaidhi, et, 2022).

Why do Saudi women in the country remain insufficiently active with all the known benefits of physical activity and exercise. Extensive studies were conducted focusing on Saudi women's participation in physical activity and sports and revealed numerous and complex barriers among Saudi women across the country. Crucial factors identified in previous studies can be related to internal or personal factors such as not liking physical activity, not seeing its usefulness, and thinking that they are not competent to practice such activities (Al-Marzooqi et al., 2017). Studies also have found that these factors can be related to external factors such as lack of sports resources, and/ or failures of family support and motivation for a physically active lifestyle (Alhakbany, Al-Hazzaa, 2018).

Acculturation and Physical Activity

Research suggests that the physical activity attitudes and behavior of any population are shaped by multiple factors including individual preferences, cultural traditions, beliefs, and environmental factors (Lee et al., 2012). Environmental factors play a vital role in shaping people's

health and well-being, which consequently would have a strong influence on their attitudes and behaviors (Macdonald D et al.,2009). As such, considerable evidence suggests environmental changes in people's behavior occur when people migrate to other countries, in which increased levels of acculturation have a positive impact on one's actual physical activity behavior after temporal migration by adapting to the culture of the host country (Graves, 1967). This is called acculturation. According to Graves, (1967) acculturation is described as the differences and changes in attitudes and behaviors that individuals experience when they increasingly acquire the dominant society's cultural values. As Berry, (1997) divulges in a study, the process of acculturation may lead to physical and psychological changes including adaptations to social interaction, norms, and values of the new society. The process of acculturation can be broken down into two steps. First, upon arrival in a host country, adaptations start to emerge when the individual begins to experience and engage with others in the new environment. Further, these changes may cause the individual to become disassociated with the ways of thinking and behaving, outlooks, beliefs, and values of the original culture. The second phase of acculturation occurs when an individual's attitudes shift from the original culture to the host culture (Berry, 1997). Yet, there has been no study that fundamentally explains whether acculturation into a new culture that is different from an individual's original culture has a direct, modifying, or mediating impact on health behavior as much as lifestyles and traditions.

Moreover, Berger and Pargman (2006) reported that physical activity can be considered a coping strategy that the international population can use to deal with acculturative stress, as it is known to be linked to both physiological and psychological benefits. Regular involvement in physical activity and sports indirectly allows individuals opportunities to meet and communicate with other people in different social roles and cultural norms. Therefore, it can serve as a tool for

socialization; it can enhance an individual's capacity to interact with social groups (Milroy, 2010). Further, according to several studies, physical activities have been mentioned as a mechanism for lessening the transition and preserving cultural identity (Byon et al., 2010).

The United States Culture Lifestyles and Tradition

The United States of America is by far the most attractive country for cross-cultural travelers, particularly with the different resources for people who choose to live in the region that fuels this attraction (Pumariega, 2003). The country has seen an increase in the number of international immigrants who primarily move to the U.S. to seek success and improve their lives. The U.S. has a physical activity lifestyle. The U.S. environment encourages its population to practice physical activity (e.g., walking, hiking, or riding bicycles to work or the store) to enjoy better health outcomes (Adler & Stewart, 2010). According to some scholars, the distance to and availability of active places for recreation is positively related to physical activity and sports behavior, and people who live in more walkable communities are more physically active than those who live in less walkable communities (Powell et al., 2003). In the U.S., a study conducted from 2003 to 2015 among American populations revealed that the average daily participation rates in physical activity and sports exercise rose by 3.6% and both men and women tended to be active as well as being more involved in different forms of sports. Therefore, a recent report emphasizes that both men and women of the American population were more likely to exercise in 2015 than they did in 2003; men's participation in sports and exercise on an average day increased by 4.9 %, and women's participation increased by 2.3 %, respectively (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017, May).

Among the U.S. population, research has indicated that women are driven to engage in recreational exercise over concerns about body image and appearance concerns (Clarke et al., 2017). Indeed, the messages of the tremendous benefits of exercise for one's health are everywhere in the media and the culture at large. In support of this, the Western beauty ideal for women has shifted from being very thin to obtaining an athletic body; thus, social media trends such as "fitspiration" encourage women across the country to exercise to achieve a lean body (Tiggemann et al., 2015). Added to that, the New York Times recently featured, "The closest thing to a wonder drug? Try exercise" (Carroll, 2016). The country's culture promotes and supports the enhancement of engagement in physical activity and sports to significantly impact the health and well-being of the U.S. population, which begins early. For example, in the U.S educational system, physical education classes are offered for both boys and girls beginning at the age of 6 that is concerned with developing students' physical competence and confidence as well as their ability to use skills to perform in a range of activities (Talbot, 2001). In addition, across the country, there are large and well-equipped sports facilities and gyms that enhance engagement in physical activity, all of which have significant health benefits and assist all individuals to attain an optimal level of health and well-being by promoting an active lifestyle (Lachman, 2006).

Saudi Women in the U.S. and the Challenges

As above mentioned, the government in Saudi Arabia has assured numerous rights to Saudi women; freedom to make decisions for their societal and personal identities. Consider, for instance, the decree, issued in 2017, allowing Saudi women to drive, or the decree dispensed in 2019 permitting Saudi women over the age of 21 to travel without male guardianship approval (Chulov, 2018). Accordingly, there has been an increase in the number of Saudi Arabian

population, particularly women, who sojourn in the U.S. as they seek success and improve their lives. Recent statistics show that over 84,000 Saudi Arabians come to the United States for education, to visit, work, or accompany their spouses (Saudi Arabia Ministry of Higher Education, 2018).

Undoubtedly, entering a new environment with plural societies and experiencing a new culture is challenging (Berry, 1997). Indeed, the difference between Saudi Arabian and the United States cultures regarding the political system, social structure, economics, values, norms, and attitudes may lead to creating psychological and social problems (Dao et al., 2007). Heyn, (2013) reveals that in a study of the Saudi population upon arriving in the United States, they experience many psychological and social problems when they encounter a world culturally different from their home country, which varies in severity. For some, social loss (being far away from their home country), lack of family support and friends, and ample exposure to the culture, and traditions of the host country may make them feel lonely, irritable, depressed, and disorientated, which significantly challenges them during the transition time in the host country (Dipeolu et al., 2007). Not surprisingly, using the English language as a second language which generally differs from the Arabic language to converse, interact, and communicate with the American people is an obstacle for them (Razek & Coyner, 2013).

Milroy (2010) stated that physical activity can serve as a tool for socialization; it can enhance an individual's capacity to interact with social groups. Residing in the U.S., a new culture may lead to opportunities that influence participation in sports activities through increased public awareness of the importance of women's physical activity is likely to facilitate a change in sociocultural norms and encourage behavioral change. As mentioned earlier, existing studies

conducted on Saudi women have reported that Saudi women's attitudes toward physical activity in their native countries have been heavily impacted by societal and cultural norms; however, due to the transition into the U.S environment that encourages a wide range of physical activities for all people might influence their attitude and behavior toward participation in physical activity regularly. More importantly, if the traditional lifestyles and values of Saudi women are linked to their physical activity level, then interventions may need to be accomplished prior to developing and implementing targeted physical activity intervention programs for them.

Factors and Barriers Affecting Physical Activity

The relationship between acculturation into American society and physical activity and sports among Saudi women is not entirely clear. Cultural beliefs, norms, and values play a vital role in the Saudi population's daily lives as a collectivist society. However, according to some scholars, sometimes these populations from Eastern cultures may have to adjust to vastly distinct cultural norms of the host country and may have to sacrifice some of the core values in their self-identity to socialize with the host country's population (e.g., behaving in an individualistic pattern) (Obeidat et al., 2015). Islam promotes and acknowledges the importance of participation in physical activity to be healthy, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said, "Entertain [yourselves] and play, for indeed I dislike harshness to be seen in your religion" (Virden et al., 1999 p. 4). In fact, the impact of Islam reflects in all matters of the Muslim's lives whether it is physical activity and sports or any other undertaking of life, especially for women. As mentioned earlier, Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and its cultural and political atmosphere

revolves around it, yet the relationship among Saudi women's attitudes, beliefs, and physical activity behavior is not entirely clear.

Looking across the U.S. as an open society, there is more opportunity and several gyms where women can participate in a variety of exercise activities. However, for Muslim women, there are special Islamic codes regarding their participation in sports activities. For example, a study published in the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health* found that there are a few Islamic principles concerning Muslim women participating in physical activity and sports including maintenance of the "Hijab" as they are required to dress modestly and avoid sex integration in recreation facilities and sports environments. Clothing constraints and lack of access to gender-segregated exercise spaces were the most significant barriers to physical activity for Muslim women in the United States (Yousefian et al., 2011). Muslim women who veil or cover their bodies with a hijab have difficulty and this is often stated as a reason for not engaging in sporting activities (Eldoumi et al., 2019). Another study published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* found that cultural and religious norms and obligations were significant barriers to physical activity for Muslim women in Canada (Ahmed et al., 2011).

In the Muslim world, women are expected to stay home, cook, clean, and raise children rather than get involved with outside activities (Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2008). Many Muslim women are expected to fulfill traditional roles such as taking care of the household, cooking, and caring for children, which can limit their available time for physical activity. A study conducted in the United Arab Emirates found that domestic responsibilities were a significant barrier to physical activity among Muslim women (Al-Kaabi et al., 2015). Added to that, Muslim women are required to perform daily prayers, which can take up a significant portion of their time.

Additionally, during the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast from dawn until sunset, physical activity may be limited due to the lack of food and water intake during the day. In support of this, a study conducted in Saudi Arabia found that religious obligations were a significant barrier to physical activity among Muslim women (Al-Eisa et al., 2015). Equally important, Muslim women may be expected to take care of children or other family members, which can limit their available time for physical activity (Akhter et al., 2016). This devotion to family is so highly valued that performing physical activity can be perceived as self-indulgence, an activity that can lead a woman to be neglectful of her family's needs (Nordin et al., 2003).

Similar Studies

Since the Saudi population who come to the United States has increased in number each year, comprehending the commonalities or research on international immigrants' experiences is critical. As stated above, environmental influences play a significant role in promoting or inhibiting physical activity and sports. According to researchers, Non-Western migrant populations who live in foreign countries are more likely than host populations to be physically inactive (Gosadi et al., 2016). It is argued that this difference will disappear completely as they adapt to the host country's culture. In support of this, only one study in the U.S., conducted by Kandula & Lauderdale (2005), examined the years in the United States and levels of acculturation into American society and physical activity engagement among an Asian population and demonstrated a positive relationship. Further, another study among Korean adults using a multi-dimensional measure of acculturation found a positive relationship between acculturation into American society and physical activity (Lee et al., 2012).

Currently, the extent of the lived experience of Saudi women regarding their physical activity experiences in the United States and the factors that influence their physical activity behaviors is not fully known due to the lack of research surrounding them. Given all this, there is an urgent need for a greater and richer understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of Saudi women living for an extended time in the U.S. who have strong exposure to the United States lifestyle and the tremendous benefits of exercise for health and well-being heard through media and television, which in turn, may result in embracing physical activity and regular exercise.

Summary

The presented literature offers a way to frame an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Saudi women regarding their physical activity and sports levels, attitude, and behavior while living in the United States. The review has been organized into four areas, including (a) in-depth information on the country, the culture of Saudi Arabia, religion, gender roles, and the educational system in Saudi, (b) describe their transition experiences, challenges, acculturation, and factors affecting individuals entering a new culture, (c) explores the reality of women's lifestyle in general, and sports participation in particular in Saudi society, through the identification of the motives for practicing physical and sports activity especially “before” and “after” the sweeping reforms of Saudi Vision 2030, and (d) literature on physical activity and sports, including the following: the definition of physical activity and sports, benefits of physical activity and sports, and explore the biggest barriers and constraints to physical activity and sports among Saudi.

CHAPTER III:

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

Because of the lack of literature surrounding Saudi Arabian women's experiences and perceptions of living in the United States regarding their physical activity experiences, this study is designed to investigate if the length of time in residence in the U.S. is positively associated with a significant change in the patterns, attitudes, and behaviors of Saudi women s' towards sports and fitness activities. The essential points of this chapter will cover the use of a qualitative research design, research prospective, sample selection, data collection, data analysis procedures, instruments, and ethical considerations.

Methodological Framework

While there was no research conducted on the growing segment of Saudi women living in the United States a qualitative method fits well for this research to generate a greater and richer understanding of the perceptions and attitudes among them. In this setting, the qualitative approach was determined to be the best for this research. Qualitative methods are often adopted to express the "whys" and "hows" of someone's behavior, opinion, perceptions, and experiences that are difficult to achieve through a quantitative approach to data collection (Guest et al., 2013). The researcher used the segmented assimilation theory for this research. Segmented assimilation theory proposes that immigrant groups selectively adapt traits/norms of the host culture and retain those of their culture of origin depending on their context (Portes, 1996). This is a theory to develop a rich theoretical understanding of Saudi women when living in the U.S. culture that embraces physical activity for women. The most difficult value of Saudi women happens to come from no

physical activity and exercise in Saudi Arabia, however, with increased length of residence and become into continuous first-hand exposure to American counterparts, these women may commence adapting to the United States lifestyles and traditions, especially the practice of sports and physical activity. This is called acculturation, which is described as the differences and changes in attitudes and behaviors that individuals experience when they increasingly acquire the dominant society's cultural values (Graves,1967). Determinants of physical activity among these women remain under-explored and there is a need for a greater understanding of the relationship between acculturation and their physical activity experiences and the factors that influence their physical activity behaviors while living in the United States and their intention to continue them upon their return to Saudi Arabia.

This study utilizes six driving research questions that are rooted in experience and offer a first-person point of view and allowed these women to speak freely about their physical activity experiences in the U.S. The following research questions are: (A) What is the reality of Saudi women's sports and fitness activities prior to and after living for an extended time in the United States? (B) How do Saudi women perceive the value of physical activity while they are in the U.S.? (C) How do Saudi women describe their experiences in terms of their practicing physical activity in the United States? (D) What influences Saudi women's attitudes and behaviors towards participation or non-participation in sports and fitness activities in the United States? and how malleable were those factors? (E) What is the relationship between acculturation into the United States culture lifestyles and traditions and Saudi women participating in sports and fitness activities in the United States? (F) What are the biggest constraints that stopped Saudi women from participating in sports and fitness activities in Saudi Arabia?

Sampling

Anytime research is conducted with human subjects, ethical considerations must be completed. Before conducting the research, this research project was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Arkansas. All the interview questionnaires, a recruitment letter, and a participant consent form were gathered and submitted to the IRB. The recruitment material for this research aimed to explain the basic information about the study, inclusion criteria, and contact information for the researcher. All the interview questions were written in English and then translated into Arabic based on the participant's main language (See Appendix A). The confidentiality of the participant's information was maintained by keeping records to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

The selection of the participants was based on a criterion sampling approach. The following four criteria were 1) Have grown up in Saudi Arabia and moved to the United States as an adult, 2) Be 20 years or older, 3) Have been living in the U.S for more than three years, 4) Be available to meet for an hour on the designated date, time, and location, and (5) Be willing to participate in the study. It was vital to discover the reality of these women toward participation in physical activities if they were involved in sports activities prior to arriving in the U.S. and explore differences in the way they perceived physical activity while they lived in the United States.

Recruitment

Recruitment of participants took place at the beginning of the Spring semester in 2023 (i.e., January and February) after the IRB at the University of Arkansas approved the study. At first, to recruit potential participants for the research and to begin the process of identifying eligible

candidates for inclusion in this research, the researcher began to recruit participants through the University of Arkansas as it had many Saudi women. The researcher contacted the international office at the University of Arkansas about the study and asked them to email a recruitment script (see Appendix B) to all Saudi women who came to the U.S. to pursue higher education or to accompany their spouses to Arkansas. The primary investigator's contact information was included in the recruitment script email and interested potential participants could communicate with him to receive more information or to respond to any concerns about participating in the research. In addition, flyers inviting participation were posted at the Islamic center at the local mosque in NWA, where most women attend regularly for prayer (see Appendix C). Moreover, the Saudi Arabia Culture Mission (SACM), an organization in charge in the U.S. context of all Saudi Arabian population and their families in the U.S., was asked to advertise the research for all Saudi women of inclusion in this research. This organization plays a critical role in providing maximum access and recruitment of potential participants to be involved in the study (see Appendix D). Moreover, this research used social media platforms such as Facebook to recruit participants. These Facebook pages contain most of the Saudi Arabian population, especially women, who live in different places in the U.S. (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ksauniv>). To increase the number of respondents a snowball sampling was also followed by asking participants to share the study information with those they knew who would be willing to participate in this research. During the distribution of the survey, it was thought that it would be much more difficult for a sole male researcher to recruit and then conduct the interviews with females who are not related to him or part of their family members, due to the conservative structure of Saudi Arabian culture. It was thought that he may need to rely on a female cultural broker to assist in the recruitment and

collection of the data. However, all potential participants agreed to get involved in this research and to do the interviews without the use of a female.

Participants

The current study's inclusion criterion holds that the participants were Saudi women who lived in the U.S. In qualitative research, as Creswell, (1998) suggested in a study, about 10 participants is an appropriate number for conducting participant interviews to elicit more detailed and rich descriptions of the participants. For this research, 81 responses were received from the Qualtrics screening survey, but only 13 of them consented to participate in the interview by providing contact information. When all met all the criteria of the research and agreed to participate, they were contacted by email to schedule a time for the interview. Each participant was from a different city in the United States and no one of the actual participants was from Arkansas, which helped to reduce research acquiescence bias that occurs when responding by a tendency to agree with what they believe the researcher thinks. All of the study participants were Saudi women who came to the United States to study, visit, or support or accompany their spouses (See Table 1). Twelve of the study participants were born in Saudi Arabia and moved to live in the United States, while one participant who identified herself as a Saudi woman was born in the United States while her father was studying in the U.S. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 51 years. Most of the participants had lived in different cities in the United States for 3 to 8 years. Eleven of the thirteen participants were graduate students, while the other two were undergrad students. Ten of the participants self-identified were married and three of them indicated that they were single.

*P.C. Means Participants Code. *Nm.C. Means Number of Children.

P.C.	Age	Marital Status	Nm. C	Education	Years of Residence	State of Residence
1	51	Married	5	Master's	6-7	Florida
2	31	Married	2	Master's	3-4	Chicago
3	33	Single	-	Master's	3-4	Oklahoma
4	31	Married	2	Master's	7-8	Massachusetts
5	22	Single	-	Bachelor's	3-4	Pennsylvania
6	35	Married	3	Master's	6-7	Chicago
7	36	Married	3	Master's	5-6	Florida
8	34	Married	2	Master's	3-4	Iowa
9	30	Single	-	Master's	3-4	Detroit
10	32	Married	3	Master's	6-7	San Diego
11	38	Married	-	Bachelor's	5-6	Chicago
12	39	Married	2	Master's	6-7	Maryland
13	36	Married	1	Master's	4-5	New York
Table 1: The Participants' Demographic Characteristics						

Data collection

Data collection took place for 45-60 minutes using a semi-structured interview via Zoom. Interview times were arranged to suit the participants' schedules. The primary investigator was responsible for all communication via email and text messages with potential participants who consented to participate as well as scheduling and conducting all the interviews. All participants requested to conduct the Zoom meeting without their faces and self-identity. Ten of the interviews were held in a study room at the university library, while the other three were held at the researcher's residence. All the participants were given the right to choose whatever language they preferred when answering the questions. All interviews were recorded with their permission.

The interview was started by providing a general background about the study and explaining the purpose and the objective of this research to see if anyone of the participants would have any questions that needed to be clarified, as well as ensuring the confidentiality of their identities. During this interview, questions were open-ended, and they were asked about their experiences in the United States and how those experiences impacted their life. The interviews consisted of different questions designed to elicit open responses with accompanying prompts and probes for the participants to provide depth in their responses. For example, the participants were asked at the beginning to provide their background information such as their name age, family, education level, length of time living in the U.S., state of residence in the U.S., and any interests or hobbies. After that, open-ended questions explored their reality in terms of practicing physical activity and sports to gain a greater and richer understanding of their experiences and perceptions toward physical and sports activities while living in the United States. Examples of interview questions were: Do you consider yourself an active female or not, and what types of activities do you do? “Were you active in Saudi Arabia, or have you started participating in it in the U.S.?” “How do you perceive the value of physical activity while you are in the U.S.?” “What influences your attitudes and behaviors towards participation in fitness activities in the U.S.?” “How malleable are those factors?” “According to your experience, what are the most significant constraints that stop Saudi women from participating in sports and fitness activities in Saudi Arabia?” No further interviews were conducted when data saturation was reached. Saturation means there was no new information generally discovered in the data collection process.

Data Analysis

In alignment with the data analysis approach, the researcher delayed data analysis until all interviews were completed. With the six primary research questions as guides, the researcher allowed salient themes to organically arise from the raw response data. All the interviewees were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. All recorded participant responses were reviewed at least three times before transcriptions were created. All the transcribed interviews were reviewed by the researcher for accuracy and references to participants' names were removed for anonymity. Each participant's information was assigned by a number, so their real names were not disclosed, and their identities were protected. Once transcriptions were completed, the research began to create themes. Creating themes is a critical aspect of qualitative analysis, which begins with identifying any major themes, then narrowing them down to the most important, creating a list of themes based on importance, and finally supporting themes with theory (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Then, the researcher extracted significant statements across the transcripts that spoke to how the participants experienced participation in physical activity and sports during their time in the United States. The data from the full transcripts were grouped into significant statements, sentences, or quotes of the participants, and the researcher set in motion the development of a textural description of what participants actually experienced while living in the United States in terms of sports participation (Creswell, 2007).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is described as the accuracy with which data are collected and analyzed by the researcher (Reissman, 2008). In this study, trustworthiness was ensured by accurately recording all interviews of the participants and then sending their transcripts back to them so they

could check to see if what they said during the interview still resonates with them, or to amend it as they suggest. In addition, conversations with some of the participants in this research were taken either via Zoom or over the phone to clarify specific conversational details that would help to ensure that the analysis accurately captured the participants' intended meaning.

Researcher Perspective

The investigator's function as both data collector and analyst is a unique characteristic of qualitative research. Based on scientific perspectives, the investigator must be taught and equipped for the assignment to gather and analyze data that are accurate, valid, and dependable (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). To ensure accuracy, the investigator must be skillful at preventing unwanted bias while remaining acutely sensitive to the facts. I am a Saudi Arabian male Ph.D. candidate in Human Performance, Recreation & Sport Management at the University of Arkansas. The practice of qualitative research and theory was an essential part of my curriculum. In a series of qualitative techniques courses, both traditional and independent studies through my study and I read a lot of theory and published research. I also conducted interviews before and analyzed qualitative data through my curriculum requirements for the doctoral program at the University.

An important aspect of conducting this research was that physical activity and sports among Saudi women has piqued my interest, in part owing to my role as a physical educator at one of the biggest universities in Saudi. The inclusion of physical activity and sports among women and girls started just a few years ago in Saudi Arabia and I am always concerned about the role that physical activity and sports can play in people's lives; thus, I feel a professional obligation to broaden the subjects and to bring continued awareness and discussion to the topic. I have long been aware of the barriers and obstacles that women may encounter in the way of practicing sports,

which in turn correlated with increasing health issues linked to the lack of physical activity and sports facilities. I believe that, as a Saudi citizen who comprehends and understands the social culture and behavior of Saudis toward women's involvement in physical activity, is foundationally grounded in the belief that it is a male world only. Many women in Saudi Arabia do not participate in sporting activities over concerns about stereotypes or feeling constrained by cultural traditions and beliefs. This matter brought me face-to-face with my view, environmental influences play a key role in promoting or inhibiting the role of physical activities and sports in an individual's behavior and lifestyle. Given the number of Saudi Arabians, particularly women are seen throughout the U.S environment, I came to believe that if they live for a long term in the U.S, they are more likely to adapt to the culture lifestyles, and traditions of the host country as they are exposed to American women who practice physical activity and other forms of sports and that may, in turn, result in reshaping their attitudes and behavior regarding physical activity to be physically different from those who are in Saudi. Due to this, the need to understand their physical activity perspectives and experiences in the U.S. is a crucial step to be accomplished, which spurred me to the research project of this thesis.

Summary

This chapter addressed the methodology design in which 13 Saudi women were interviewed to understand their experiences and perceptions of living in the United States regarding their physical activity experiences in the U.S. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview format and analysis of the data was conducted and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Finally, he explained the procedure of ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and the research perspective.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory study was to describe the lived experiences of Saudi women who sojourn in the United States (i.e., studying, visiting, being a housewife, or accompanying their spouse) toward physical activity and sports participation. Specifically, this research examined whether or not the length of residence in the United States influences Saudi women's attitudes and behavior regarding physical activity and sports performance. In doing this, semi-structured interviews via Zoom, varying from 45 to 60 minutes, with 13 Saudi women were conducted. The perceptions and experiences of Saudi women who live in the United States helped the researcher to obtain a greater and richer understanding of their physical activity experiences in the U.S. The chapter introduces the 13 participants of this research (see Table 2). The quotes and explanations from the participants were chosen to best depict and clarify the themes that emerged from the data. As the participants were promised full anonymity and confidentiality, each one of them was assigned a number.

This chapter is divided into seven sections. The first section introduces the demographic information of the participants. The second section addresses their experience of living in the United States. The third section concentrates on the cross-cultural influences on the participants' personal beliefs and values after they have lived in the United States. The fourth section focuses on the participants' perceptions of the barriers and constraints to physical activity in Saudi. The fifth section concentrates on physical activity in cultural adjustment in the United States. The sixth section describes the participants' facilitators and the constraints to practicing physical activity

and sports. The closing section concentrates on changes they made in their attitudes and behavior regarding physical activity and sports while they live in the United States.

Description of Participants

The study participants were comprised of 13 Saudi women who came to the United States to study or work or accompany their spouses. All participants were originally from different cities in Saudi Arabia and live in different cities in the United States with family members. Each study participant was assigned a number to protect their personal identity. The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 51 years. The length of residence in the United States among all the study participants varied from 3 to 8 years. Ten interviews were conducted in English, two in Arabic, and one in mixed Arabic and English. Seven participants were recruited through the screening survey; the other six participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Nine of the participants identified as graduate students in a variety of fields of study, including curriculum and instruction, nursing, business administration, and communication, and the other two identified as undergraduate students at a higher education institution. Two participants had already finished their master's degrees and lived in the United States with their spouses as a housewife. Ten of the participants were identified as married and the other three identified as single. All the participants identified as active women and were involved in many recreational forms of physical activity and sports like running, walking, swimming, hiking, attending gym clubs, doing track, and playing soccer. All the participants' physical activities varied between 3-5 per week, except one participant who practiced physical activity every day. Also, the length of time spent doing sports activities varied from 30 to 60 minutes depending on the participant's schedule. The participants' demographics are summarized in Table 2.

P.C.	Age	Type of Physical Activity	Frequency (Days)	Duration (Minutes)
1	51	Cycling, Yoga, walking, Cycling	3-4 Days	30 Minutes
2	31	Elliptical, Treadmill, Cardio, Walking	5 Days	90 Minutes
3	33	Walking	3-5 Days	90 Minutes
4	31	Walking, Jogging	7 Days	90 Minutes
5	32	Elliptical, Cardio, Walking	2-3 Days	30 Minutes
6	22	Swimming, Hiking	4-5 Days	30 Minutes
7	36	Elliptical, Treadmill, Walking	2-3 Days	90 Minutes
8	34	Walk, Cardio, Treadmill	2-3 Days	30 Minutes
9	30	Dynamic stretches, Yoga, walking	2-3 Days	30 Minutes
10	32	Walking, Running, Role Plate	2-3 Days	90 Minutes
11	38	Basketball, Soccer, Swimming	5 Days	90 Minutes
12	39	Elliptical, Treadmill, Walking	3-5 Days	90 Minutes
13	36	Walking, Yoga	3-4 Days	90 Minutes

Table 2: Participants' Demographic Data.

Experiences of living in the United States

All the participants of this study resided in the United States and experienced personal challenges. Missing their culture back home and their own family life, while they lived in the United States was the most challenging thing they experienced. In addition, there was an apparent disconnect for the participants between their home collectivistic culture and the United States' individualistic culture. Below each theme generated for the study will be expressed and quotations that show it is shared.

Missing home

Although all the participants were here with a family member, the extended family is a critical part of a Saudi women's life because in Saudi Arabia socialization happens at home. Most of the study participants addressed missing their family and their culture back home as a significant

challenge they encountered during the transition. One participant pointed out that “For the first year feeling homesick was the biggest challenge. I called my family once every two days” (P.C 3).

Another participant expressed that:

When I came here, I felt down and somewhat lonely during my first years. I missed my family and my friends. Part of this is the social life around here is not as strong as ours. Although my husband and my kids are here with me, I miss my family as we used to socialize most of the time. So, for me, this is one of the challenges (P.C3).

One of the participants shared a similar thought with:

At first, I came here alone and one of the hardest things that impacted me was eating alone. I used to live with my family, and we used to eat together and be more socialized, especially when the food is served, but here I had to be alone, and this made me feel like I don't feel like eating anything (P.C5).

Lack of social support

The lack of social support was a significant challenge for most of the participants especially during their transition into the U.S. culture. One of the participants came to the United States to pursue higher education. She is the mother of four children and is accompanied by her children and husband, as she noted:

I came here alone, just me and my children in the first year. My husband could not get permission from his work to travel, and I ended up coming alone. Oh, my god, it was very, very difficult when I stayed here because, you know, taking care of my kids and doing other things by myself was very difficult, but I need to complete my degree and get what I came for (P.C 5).

One participant explicitly indicated her feeling upon her first year in the United States “Being away from home and thinking about your family and wondering about them most of the time was a challenge being in the United States” (P.C 4).

Another one shared a similar thought with her statement:

For me, the first year of living in the United States was the biggest challenge ever. Although I live here with my family members, I missed my closest friend and my time back home, especially on the weekend. I used to hang out with them (P.C 9).

The challenge of the new cultural environment

Another theme that emerged was that the study participants experienced greater cultural discrepancies (e.g., the difference between the two cultures regarding the social structure, values, norms, and attitude), which resulted in being severely restricted at the beginning from becoming freely involved in the social interactions in the United States later. For most, the perceived challenges reported included such themes as cultural differences, language difficulties, and fear of racism and prejudice. These themes are depicted in more detail below.

Cultural differences

All 13 Saudi women reported they experienced struggles with involvement in the United States society during their first year. All participants referred to the women-only universities or classes in Saudi Arabia. For example, one of the participants indicated that the most challenging thing she experienced was “the school environment is totally different from our country.” She acknowledged that:

In Saudi Arabia, the school environment remains an almost entirely segregated society where men and women don’t mix’ unlike here, all the U.S. schools’ environment contains both men and women. When I came here, I did not feel comfortable at all because I never used to interact with male students, but day by day I realized if I spoke only of education, the experience in the classroom, or the class activity it is ok (P.C 4).

Another participant shared a similar thought with “Saudi Arabia has gender-segregated schools and public spaces. We have women-only universities, and all public facilities are sex-segregated unlike here in the U.S.” (P.C 6).

Language challenges

Most of the participants reported they experienced struggles with using English to communicate or even to speak to other people. For instance, one participant acknowledged that:

learning a new language is not an easy thing to do because in Arabic we use totally different letters and always we write from right to left, but here in English, we write left to right, so that was one of the challenges I had (P.C 2).

Another participant captured her experience:

The language difference was not an easy thing to do. I had to study like twice what I should study in Saudi because of the language, and I had to carry a dictionary with me to translate any word that I did not understand at all. I kept using the dictionary book at every place I go to until I mastered it, and I could not communicate well (P.C10).

Fear of experiencing racism and prejudice

Another salient theme expressed by all the participants was their fear of experiencing racism and prejudice. For example, one participant did explicitly mention it in her interview. She captured the way she experienced prejudice:

Prejudice I see it here sometimes while I am at the mall or doing a grocery at Walmart. For me, the rigorous experience I faced was when I enrolled in swimming classes, and I paid for everything. That day I went to the center, and when I was there most people were giving me a weird look, then the coach approached me and said, you are not allowed to swim while you are wearing this and pointed to my outfit. It was an Islamic attire I bought it from Amazon. Honestly, it's kind of humiliating for me and they never let me practice it. I ended up finding another place where I got my certificate (P.C 6).

Other participants may have experienced racism and prejudice during their stay in the United States; however, they did not mention it in their interviews.

Cross-cultural influence on personal beliefs and values

Most of the participants acknowledged that living and residing in the United States expanded their self-awareness and broadened their idea about other cultures' traditions and values, which in turn resulted in reshaping some of their personal beliefs, norms, and values. The broader idea that

emerged was acknowledged by the participants who felt more empowered and motivated as well as had gained respect for and became more open to other cultures exhibited in the United States. In the sections below, a description of how their personal beliefs and values have evolved is addressed.

Concepts regarding them as women

Most of the participants reported having to shift their ideas about themselves. For example, one participant revealed that “because of the strict gender role in Saudi Arabia, we were not permitted to meet or talk to another male who is not a family member, at the beginning, it was hard for me to ask or get advice from others in the United States who were not from my family members.” She continued, “It was initially hard for me to open conversation or even ask questions when I arrived in the country, but now I feel it is easy to talk to anyone or ask for help” (P.C 7).

Another participant shared that:

There is no law or rule forbidding women to talk to men who are not related to them. We are all Muslim right, and we know what Islam teaches us, but it never forbids talking to another person. You know let me say it. I do not want to hide it or something. It is cultural things (P.C 5).

Other participants shared a similar thought that:

With women being allowed to drive and have the right to work and go everywhere just like men, I believe it will not be a problem for other women who will travel outside the country, and it will disappear someday from our culture (P.C 7).

Other participants stated that living in the United States has helped them to recognize how important it is for them to gain more advantages and improve their skills to provide a positive view of Saudi culture to their American counterparts. One participant found herself explaining the reason for wearing the veil (Hijab) to her American classmates and friends and how it is a symbol

of modesty and adheres to Islamic values. She also indicated that she is responsible for “correcting the negative picture of American counterparts about Saudi Arabian culture, especially the treatment of women” (P.C 4).

Transformation of Saudi women

The most exciting aspect revealed by the data was the transformation of Saudi women during their transition to the United States. Empowerment and motivation to become a change agent were reported by the majority of them. To illustrate, the participants commented on some sort of self-motivation or confidence that empowers them while living in the United States. One participant specifically mentioned: “Living here helped to overcome my cultural beliefs, norms, and values of Saudi. I am using this opportunity of living here as a chance to develop and make myself stronger” (P.C 11).

Another participant spoke of the challenge of being a mother of four children and trying to balance school responsibilities and family needs. However, she spoke of it positively when stating: “I need to challenge myself. All the time, I say to myself, I can do this. I know, it is a new challenge, but I can do it” (P.C 5).

Most of the participants’ overall response reported being self-independent in the context that they had gained self-confidence after they live in the U.S. and do not need their husbands/ family members to do things here and intend to do this when they return to Saudi Arabia. For example, one participant captures the essence of the theme when she expressed, “I had to learn how to balance my life and do things for myself that my family members/ spouse used to do for me. Even when it comes to school matters for my kids or any issue, I believe I can handle it on my own deprived of relying on my husband” (P.C 7).

Interestingly, some participants shared a similar comment by using observations of American women counterparts as examples that empowered them as one participant noted:

In the beginning, it was difficult to do things on my own like drive automobiles or use any form of public transportation without a male escort, but here in the U.S. women can do everything. They can manage to work, go to school, care for the children, and jobs and somehow, they can do many things by themselves. I keep that in my mind, it does not matter between a Saudi woman and an American woman, it does not matter, so women are strong, and they can do what they want to do (P.C 13).

Respecting other cultures

Most of the respondents reported that living in the United States has helped them to be more cognizant about respecting other people's ideas and other cultures. One participant recounted that "I have been here for more than four years, and within these years I can say I become open to others' ideas, and opinions, and more open to accepting people's ideas even about our culture" (P.C 2).

Another participant shared similar ideas:

Through the time I have lived here, I have gained some experience with other communities, customs, traditions, values, and religious rituals. I look at people as equal and I have gained some experience in how to work with all people and get a more open mind and open being in this world (P.C 7).

Participants' perceptions and constraints of physical activity in Saudi

As the researcher examined the participants' transcripts, it became more obvious that the perceptions the participants shared were heavily impacted by Saudi societal and cultural norms. To gain a better refinement of the opinion of each one and allowed them to speak freely about their perceptions regarding physical activity, the participants after they shared their personal background, were asked to define a physical activity and did they consider themselves active before they migrated to the United States.

Nine of the participants reported having negative perceptions regarding physical activity and sports exercise and their potential experience of practicing in Saudi. The other four participants did not explicitly state whether or not they had negative perceptions. Most of those who reported having negative perceptions felt that in their native countries, they were not regularly active, or socially encouraged to practice physical activity and other recreational forms of exercise until recently. Participants pointed out how the limited facilities for physical activity were a barrier for them as well as the absence of encouragement was also mentioned. The overall negative perceptions reported that emerged from the transcripts were: (a) lack of cultural and parental awareness, and (b) high gym costs. In the sections that follow, the specific perceptions the participants experienced are expressed in more detail.

Cultural acceptability

Most of the participants mentioned that Saudi culture itself had a negative influence on their physical activity because of the limited opportunities available for them compared to men in Saudi Arabia. Most of the participants showed that they were not allowed to be involved in any kind of physical activity or work out in public or even attend gym centers. One participant explicitly shared:

It is not generally accepted by the country's culture that women to be active in public spheres of life, be it for work, sports, or social activities. We face cultural and social pressures that reduce our opportunities to practice sports activities as men do. These difficulties are rooted deeply in social restrictions and taboos in Saudi (P.C 13).

Some participants reported that parents did not allow them to practice exercise outdoors for religious and safety reasons. One explained: "My parents didn't see a benefit of being physically active and believed I do not need to be active since I am still young, and I do not have any health problem" (P.C 4).

High gyms prices

As the researcher examined the participant's transcripts, the most exciting aspect revealed by the data on reducing women's physical activity in Saudi was an increase in women's gym memberships. Interestingly, there was a pervasive dissatisfaction among all the study participants with complete consensus in terms of gym costs being an obstacle to physical activity. One participant acknowledged that "I think the most reason for me to not perform physical activity in Saudi is because of the limited number of women's fitness facilities" (P.C 13).

Another participant expressed a similar experience with the increased prices of gym memberships for women in Saudi:

Women's gym costs in Saudi are unbelievable. It is too expensive with a limited number of options and a lack of maintenance. I have noticed a huge difference between male and female gym membership prices, men's membership is way cheaper than women's (P.C 9).

Another participant explicitly expressed her dissatisfaction with women's fitness costs as follows:

When I went back home last summer, I was searching for a gym membership near my home. I discovered that female membership prices range from SR900 (\$240) to SR4,000 per two months, which is much higher than family membership costs here in the U.S. and despite the high prices in Saudi gyms and sports facilities, the quality of services is poor (P.C 13).

Physical activity in cultural adjustment in the U.S

To illustrate the discussion of the experience of Saudi women's attitudes and behaviors towards participation or non-participation in sports and fitness activities while they live in the United States, it was critical for the researcher to elicit more information from the participants to understand how well individuals accommodated themselves to their new surroundings; that is, whether or not they had been able to incorporate the cultural beliefs, norms, and values of Saudi into their lives in the host country.

Regarding physical activity, the participants' overall response stated that when they arrived in the United States, it was initially hard for them to engage in physical activity and practice physical activity as it was not a part of the Saudi component, and they reported having no knowledge about how to perform it. Over time, when they became into continuous first-hand contact with their American counterparts in the new environment, all the participants reported that they were heavily influenced by the local culture and environment of the United States and were more likely to be physically active during the transition time in the United States than they were in Saudi. They suggested that coming to the United States and experiencing the cultural lifestyles and traditions was a crucial source in their experiences that helped them recognize the tremendous benefits of physical activity and exercise for one's health and well-being. The most facilitators that primarily contributed to all the participants being more physically active in the United States included environmental factors, the availability of recreational sports facilities, and cultural traditions.

Environmental

The environmental feature is a significant factor that helped them to be active compared to the climatic condition in Saudi Arabia, as well as the availability of parks and natural environments. Most of them recounted the following:

The climate in Saudi is a major obstacle to physical activity. Even in the morning if we want to practice sports activity in or outside the home, wearing hijab (veils) to do sports under the sun limits it. But the weather here in the U.S. contributes much to exercise outside the home and atmosphere and the natural factors here help more to keep me active (P.C 13).

One participant explained how the environment in the U.S. helps her be physically active as she likes to walk every day. She stated that:

I live in New York, and I found myself relying more on walking as a means of getting to school or the grocery store than relying on motorized transportation. Honestly, I used to

walk a lot, I go from my home to the university by walking, and I do everything by walking (P.C 8).

Availability of recreational facilities

Most participants explicitly commented about the widespread availability of recreational sports facilities as a major facilitator of physical activity participation for them. They mentioned the following:

What interests and motivates us more to do sports is the widespread availability of recreational sports facilities. All gyms in the U.S., are well-equipped and offer a variety of classes for all age groups (i.e., indoor and outdoor) which encourages us to practice sports and exercise easily (P.C11).

Similarly, most of the participants reported that they were physically active, exercised regularly, attended centers to learn swimming, had several sports classes at the university or off campus, walked 3-4 times a week, and even did track and played football with their kids at the park. Most of the participants mentioned that they were doing weightlifting to improve their muscles. One participant mentioned:

Sometimes, not all the time, I have to push myself to practice sports, even if I may have several assignments or things to do at home, still I must do sports at least for 30 minutes. I live in Oklahoma, and at the complex I live in, we have like a gym, not exactly a gym, you know what I mean, a small sports facility center with a swimming pool for free. I would go there just to exercise. I agree that regular physical activity is a crucial tool for me; I must be physically active to live with a healthier and fitter body (P.C 4).

Some other participants were not active at all in Saudi and when they moved to the United States, they considered themselves active because they walked every day around the compound with their kids or by themselves. One participant considered doing housework as an activity for her. She noted:

I just want to ... give you in the beginning ... to give an example of my daily active day. I am a mom and have 3 kids. Working at home cleaning and tidying the rooms and so on for

just maybe 20 minutes or a half hour or an hour, I see what I do is enough for me as exercise because I get tired fast (P.C 9).

For most, not all, there was a reason most of the participants decided to start practicing physical activity and other forms of sports when they moved to the States. Because they wanted to meet people and get to know the culture and the lifestyle around them. More importantly, they wanted to lose weight and do something to fill the time, especially those who were single. One participant mentioned:

For me, I used to be not active back home, but I can say positively say moving and doing something for my health. When I moved to the United States, I stepped away from it and I did not exercise for like a year, anything towards effort for a year. I think it is because of the school requirements. Then, I started saying to myself, that is ridiculous that I used to be really in shape, so, I need to start doing something to continue it throughout my life (P.C 3).

There was a complete consensus on the accessibility of facilities in the United States. All the participants stated that the gyms here are well-equipped and offer a variety of classes for all age groups. The gym costs in the U.S. are much cheaper than in Saudi, which elevated the opportunity for most of the participants to be more physically active. One participant recounted a specific instance in which she described:

“I signed up for a family membership at one of the biggest gyms near my complex. Each month I pay around \$25 for a membership, and we are allowed to use the facilities for the at the gym any time” (P.C 12).

Cultural traditions

All the participants stated that living in the United States has helped them to realize the importance of physical activities and sports on health and quality of life. They indicated that the United States has more awareness about the importance of physical activities on the health and well-being of individuals than Saudi Arabia. For instance, one participant explained that the overall

rules here in the United States are more flexible and she can wear the hijab and engage in activities like swimming, running, and jogging without constraints. She stated:

It is their culture, lifestyles, and traditions. Here in the U.S., there is greater individual freedom and fewer social commitments. American people do outdoor physical activities like running, jogging, cycling, and hiking without any inconvenience issues. I wear a hijab and I do any sport because of the implicit encouragement of culture and social status here (P.C 4).

Moving towards change

A review of the interview transcriptions of the study revealed that all the participants stated that living in the United States has helped them to gain a positive change in their attitude and behavior toward their physical activity and sports participation. For instance, while most participants were active degree-seeking students and lived with their relatives, time for promoting their health outcomes and improving their physical activity levels were important for them. For instance, the majority stressed that back home they used to be more socialized or as housewives stay at home and gathered with their relatives most of the time and never considered doing any sports activity, which is not a good thing for our health. However, when we moved here, we realized the importance of being physically active and disliked this habit and were motivated to change this habit. One participant shared:

“This is something that I need to do 3 to 4 times a week because it makes me feel good and it relieves stress. I had a little time for myself. I started enjoying it, I started liking it” (P.C 1).

An issue of interest was the participant’s attitude and behavior toward making a huge shift and achieving desirable health outcomes was often associated with a motivating factor such as family encouragement. To illustrate, the participants in this study were asked about their family values regarding physical activity levels, and what mostly shaped these values for them while they are in the United States. Most participants felt that they were motivated and encouraged to be

active by their family here. They identified their family as a motivational resource for them to be active. One participant explained: "My mother used to exercise to maintain her health and fitness. Until recently, she went to the gym and exercised" (P.C 5).

Another participant also captured her experience of moving toward change:

My husband always influences me positively and never negatively influences me. He advised me to go to the gym and exercise together. It was like an important thing. He tries to promote a healthy style, and always encourages me to walk for at least 20 minutes every day to be active. Because of his encouragement, I get motivated, and I feel more energetic (P.C 7).

When participants were asked about the influence of the Islamic religion on their performance regarding physical activity and sports participation, the majority mentioned there is no influence. Most participants stated that Islam emphasizes the development and maintenance of spiritual and physical strength regardless of gender and is recognized as being one of the factors encouraging them to be more active. One participant stated that "Islam religion has nothing to do with women's participation in sports and doing activities within the boundaries of Islam, and wearing Hijab will not impact the practice of sports activity" (P.C 8).

Summary

This chapter introduced the 13 participants of Saudi women who sojourn in the United States that agreed to participate in the interview and shared their experience toward physical activity and sports participation. Analysis of the data revealed what they experience is tied to their cultural beliefs, norms, and values. Factors that contribute to understanding their experience are understanding of how the length of time residing in the United States influenced their patterns, attitudes, and behaviors toward sports and fitness activities through the transformative process that

developed through the length of time residing in the United States. Based on the data findings, the closing chapter will provide conclusions and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Utilizing a qualitative approach to analyze the data for this study, the researcher attempted to comprehend the lived experiences of Saudi women who sojourn in the United States (i.e., working, studying, visiting, or accompanying their spouses). It is worth noting that this research will be the first research conducted to examine the experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports among Saudi women after living for an extended time in the United States.

Given that the broader goal of this chapter is to summarize, analyze, and interpret major findings from the participants' lived experiences and perceptions while living in the United States, this chapter begins with an analysis and discussion of the study findings; thus, it is critical to remember the study's research questions:

- 1) What is the reality of Saudi women's sports and fitness activities prior to and after living for an extended time in the United States?
- 2) How do Saudi women perceive the value of physical activity while they are in the United States?
- 3) How do Saudi women describe their experiences in terms of their practicing physical activity in the United States?
- 4) What influences Saudi women's attitudes and behaviors towards participation or non-participation in sports and fitness activities in the United States? and how malleable were those factors?

- 5) What is the relationship between acculturation into the United States culture lifestyles and traditions and Saudi women participating in sports and fitness activities in the United States?
- 6) What are the biggest constraints that stopped Saudi women from participating in sports and fitness activities in Saudi Arabia?

To discuss the participants' lived experiences towards participation in physical activity and sports after living for an extended time in the United States, this chapter will first go over the findings, which are in five broad categories: (1) the participants' perceptions of physical activity and sports prior to and after living in the United States; (2) the participant's lived experiences after living in the United States; (3) the cross-cultural influences on the participants' personal beliefs and values after they have lived in the United States; (4) the participants' experiences towards participation in physical activity and sports along with what, if any, obstacles and barriers were experienced in terms of physical activity and sports in the United States; and (5) the possible changes the participant's made in their attitudes and behavior regarding physical activity and sports while they live in the United States.

Summary and Discussion of Broad Categories

Perceptions of physical activity and sports participation

The actual perceptions that Saudi women held about participation in sports and physical activity before living in the United States were negative. After living in the United States, Saudi Arabian women primarily reported having a positive shift in their perceptions and viewpoints about physical activity and sports participation. The following is a discussion of the key findings from this first broad category.

Perceptual ideas of physical activity prior to living in the United States

This research has found that environmental influences play a significant role in prohibiting or promoting physical activity and sports participation levels. From the participants' overall response, all the participants were more likely to report decreased value on physical activity due to the cultural influence of Saudi Arabia, resulting in a negative perception prior to living in the United States, given the limited choices available to them. These perceptions of several environmental factors include the lack of cultural awareness, lack of facilities, and high gym costs. They singled out Saudi culture as the main barrier to practicing sports activity. This is a potent indication of what the (mostly quantitative and limited to women sample in Saudi) studies have described; the pressure among Saudi women in the Kingdom to adhere to cultural and religious standards that reduce their opportunities to practice physical activity (Alhakhbany, Al-Hazzaa, 2018).

Perceptual changes after living in the United States

The participants in this study reported having a significant change in their perceptions after having lived in the United States. One of the changes in perception for all 13 participants was that they felt more likely to be physically active; they exercised regularly, attended gym clubs, ran, walked, and played soccer with their kids at parks. Most of them reported adopting some of the U.S., lifestyles, and traditions after they came into continuous first-hand contact with their American counterparts, resulting in a considerable influence and change in their values and behaviors including valuing a sports culture. After living in the United States, the participant' stressed profoundly understanding the value of physical activity; thus, they reported retaining these values that are placed on them when they back to Saudi. No research was found that specifically

addressed Saudi Arabian women living in the United States regarding their participation in sports activities.

Experiences of living in the United States

Through the interview, the study participants offered in-depth responses about their lived experiences when queried about living and residing in the United States. The subsections below focus on their individual experiences while they lived in the country.

Missing home and lack of social support

The most personal challenge that the participants from this study experienced during their transition time in the United States related to missing their home and lack of social support. All the participants stated the difficulty of being away from their homes and family members where they were surrounded by their social support. There is evidence to support the findings that Saudi women living in the United States had difficulties related to a lack of support, loneliness, and homesickness (Almutairi, 2018). Extensive studies among the international population living away from their country were also consistent with the study's findings regarding loneliness, lack of social support, fear of discrimination and racism, language difficulties, and a changing sense of identity (Al-Nusair, 2000; King-Irani, 2004; Nydell, 2006; Dundes, 2002). On a similar note, Shaw (2010) concluded that social support was significantly negatively correlated with acculturative stress among the Saudi and Arabian Gulf international population. This is because of the collectivist culture from which the Saudi people come where the extended family is an important aspect of their life and is the primary basis of identity and a key source of support (Long, et.al., 2010).

Another personal challenge that Saudi women experienced through their time residing in the United States related to fear of racism as one of the participants recounted a specific instance regarding this issue. In support of this, Shabeeb (1996) found in his study that the Saudi participants encountered social and personal issues like those encountered by other international students, except that Saudis, as Arab Muslims, face discrimination because of differences in appearance and culture, which many non-Muslim international populations do not encounter.

The participants from the current study reported that their experiences of living in the United States while challenging at first were beneficial. After that, they felt as though the experiences they had in the United States helped them learn a lot about themselves as a woman, their American counterparts, and the United States in general.

Cross-cultural influences on the participants' personal beliefs and values

The third area of this discussion of the current study concerns the possible influence of Saudi women's cross-cultural individual experiences in the United States on their personal values and beliefs. The current study discovered that the participants felt they had some shift in a few of their personal beliefs and values as females. They described their transition into the U.S. culture and traditions as positively associated with subsequent changes in their beliefs, values, and perceptions about themselves. They explicitly stated that the U.S. culture helped them to realize and discover their self-equality and felt more motivated and empowered to do things by themselves instead of relying on their family members. Notably, they now believe that they have the right to drive and do whatever they want to assert their societal and personal identities.

The finding from the current study was consistent with findings from the international student literature. Shaw's (2010) study concluded that the majority of her study participants

intended to finish their studies and return home to help make Saudi Arabia a better place and to alter the awareness of the country's culture. An important finding in the current study worth noting is that the Saudi Arabian women living in the United States also believed their experiences of living in the U.S. society and coming into continuous first-hand contact with American counterparts contributed to a deeper respect for other cultures and a more open mind. This is similar to Shaw's (2010) study in which she found that her Saudi student participants indicated that experiencing the U.S. cultural lifestyles and traditions positively affected their conception of cultural norms, values, and traditional gender roles by helping them realize their individuality and prompted additional changes to their rights in Saudi society.

Cross-cultural influences on the participants' physical activity

The fourth broad area in the current study addressed if the length of time residing in the United States results in a significant adjustment in the patterns, attitudes, and behaviors of Saudi women toward sports and fitness activities. Within this broad area, two main ideas emerged: their physical activity experiences and attitudes and their primary motivators and facilitators in the U.S.

Participants' physical activity experiences in the United States

From the participants' overall response, they reported having trouble practicing sports activity in the U.S. when they first arrived in the United States. Indeed, the most difficult value of Saudi women happens to come from no physical activity and exercise in Saudi Arabia, however, with increased length of residence, these same women tend to adopt the cultural values of their American counterparts, resulting in subsequent changes in their attitudes and behaviors toward practicing physical activity on daily basis. The study finding is partially consistent with the results of past studies among diverse populations in the United States (Lee et al. 2012; Lee et al., 2000; Wolin et al., 2006). The environmental factors, general facilities, lifestyle, culture, and accessibility

of gyms are all factors that facilitated and encouraged Saudi women to be physically active in the United States.

Some environmental factors, such as fear of experiencing racism or prejudice and the lack of women-only gyms act as barriers for these women to perform physical activity. The participants wear at least the hijab and indicated it was not comfortable for them to perform physical activity in combined-sex gyms. Aligning with study findings, dressing modestly and sex segregation in mixed classes with men's and women's sports facilities were issues reported by female Muslims as it is related to religion and public modesty (Nakamura,2002).

The participants' primary motivators

All the participants from this study revealed that their physical activity levels during the transition time for their exercising behaviors were influenced by the local culture and environment of the United States. Environmental features, general facilities, lifestyle, culture, and accessibility of gyms in the United States were identified as factors that contributed to increasing the levels of physical activity and sports participation during their transition time in the United States. This finding is consistent with Alsahli's (2016) study that most of his Saudi women participants in the United States society reported having an elevated level of acculturation and integration adoption of the U.S. culture and tradition, which in turn is associated with an increase in their physical activity levels. Also, there is evidence to support the findings that a shift from residing in the original culture and environment to a new environment can result in subsequent changes in values and behaviors that individuals make as they gradually adopt the cultural values of the dominant society (Lee et al., 2012). On a similar note, Penjamin K, (2013) found that everyone's values,

beliefs, attitudes, and behavior toward physical activity appear to be shaped by sociocultural and environmental factors.

Evidence from observational studies shows that immigrants associated with the length of time residing in the United States tend to participate in and sacrifice some of their core values in their self-identity to adjust to the host culture as the mainstream culture will not change to meet their needs (Ahmed et al., 2011). In reality, the studies are significant because the scholars recognize differences in ethnic minority group adjustment while interacting with mainstream culture, as well as the factors that account for these differences in the degree of adjustment.

Participants moving toward change

The last broad area of this discussion concerns the favorable change in the attitudes and behaviors of Saudi women after residing in the United States towards physical activity and sports. The participants of the study revealed that living in the United States has helped them to gain a positive change in their attitude and behavior toward their physical activity and sports participation. Most of the participants showed that active living is a new way of life for them, which they did follow in Saudi because it was not a part of the cultural history of Saudi. An interesting finding revealed from the current study is that they were generally influenced by the values of physical activity after they began experiencing and interacting with their American counterparts. Interestingly, the current study found that the participant's family members who lived with them in the United States played a key role by promoting and encouraging them to be physically active.

Aligning with the study findings, Alsahli (2016) reported that participants have a similar knowledge of physical activity and reported perceiving their family's encouragement to be

significant. Most respondents reported having an improvement in their health and well-being after living in the United States.

Theoretical Implications

Using a segmented assimilation theoretical framework to examine Saudi women and their physical activity experiences during their time in the United States was determined to be the best for this research. Segmented assimilation theory proposes that immigrant groups selectively adapt traits/norms of the host culture and retain those of their culture of origin depending on their context. Additional researchers (Alba & Nee, 1997; Gordon, 1964) have continued the work of Portes with the specific goal of the length of residence in the United States leading to the gradual adoption of the traits of the host culture with a loss of those from their home country. The current study found that there is a consistent relationship founded between residence length and physical activity among Saudi women living in the United States. Saudi women have taken on the American understanding of the value of physical activity. This study emphasizes the specific sociocultural and environmental roles in shaping Saudi women's perceptions of and behavior toward physical activity and sports participation. Environmental factors, general facilities, lifestyle, culture, and accessibility of gyms are factors that facilitate Saudi women being physically active in the United States. In this setting, Saudi women getting acculturated were more likely to report being physically active after they lived in the United States. The study finding is partially consistent with the results of past studies among diverse populations in the U.S. (Berrigan et al., 2006; Ham et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2000; Wolin et al., 2006). An important finding in the current study worth noting is that the participants in this study were more likely to report decreased value on physical activity due to cultural influence in Saudi Arabia. Factors such as cultural and parental constraints, social obligations, high gym membership prices, and social practices were perceived as obstacles for

these women toward physical activity in Saudi. In support of this, Samara (2015) found that the primary constraints preventing Saudi women in Saudi from participating in physical activity and exercising regularly are the absence of support facilities. In addition, another study expressed that the absence of facilities, the lack of cultural awareness, and the cultural traditions were deemed the major causes of Saudi women's inactivity in Saudi (Alotaibi, 2019).

Looking forward and suggestions

Raising awareness of the tremendous benefits of physical activity among Saudi women was the recommendation obtained from most of the study participants, thereby enabling the Saudi population, especially women to gain multiple physical activity benefits. Indeed, the public in Saudi needs to be educated about the importance of women's physical activity and sports, which might facilitate a change in sociocultural norms and encourage behavioral change within the society that promotes active living among women in Saudi. Indeed, governments and policymakers in Saudi play an active and crucial role in developing and supporting the sporting life of their citizens. This is true at the high-performance level and in community sports systems for people of all ages and different genders. Hogwood and Gunn (1984) indicated that implementation is always connected to specific policies as responses to specific problems in society. Indeed, its education system is one of the major forces for social change. From the participants' overall response, the participants stated that the Saudi government should implement new policies and strategies to improve women's physical fitness and healthy lifestyle and these policies that tackle the low levels of physical activity could therefore have a substantial impact on the overall population health.

Saudi government needs to address the issues and the factors behind women's physical inactivity, which in turn will help programs and initiatives to implement significant strategies and policies that could help to remove such difficulties and barriers for women in sports activity. The

Saudi government and policymakers should work diligently toward tackling the inactive lifestyles among women in Saudi by holding seminars, courses, and programs regarding the importance of women's physical activity. Second, identifying sports activities and events that women and girls in Saudi should be interested in and prefer to involve in. Most importantly, defining the challenges that woman faces while participating in sports and physical activities and trying to eliminate these challenges. One of the most important recommendations that should also be implemented in Saudi is to establish model women's clubs that take care of all women's sports and physical activity across the country, which in turn, results in motivating inactive women to practice sports and physical activity. Equally important, empowering Saudi women to prepare plans and strategies related to their issues in society, especially woman's participation in physical activities and sports participation. All that needs to be accomplished is investing woman's energies and refining them to make women's sports achievements, building women's latent capabilities, and helping them discover their true strengths. The matter is related not only to money but also to mentality and thinking.

As mentioned earlier, some environmental factors, such as traditional perceptions among Saudi Arabian women and others of physical activity being embarrassing or intimidating, act as barriers, the Saudi government should provide a safe environment for the Saudi woman to practice sports in accordance with the community and procedures and the regulations of the international sports federations and organizations. Moreover, one of the most important recommendations that should also be implemented in Saudi is opportunities for less expensive gyms and excellent and fewer social and cultural obligations. Health educators and promoters need to emphasize the role of physical activity in the prevention of chronic diseases, in addition to managing them. To design a profound strategy for policymakers to take into consideration the ease of access to walking and

bike riding areas around the community should be prioritized by the kingdom health authority to promote the concept of health through physical activity participation. Moreover, channels such as social media should also be utilized to bring continued awareness and discussion to promote physical activity levels, especially among inactive women.

Research strengths and limitations

The qualitative nature of this study involved in-depth interviews that allowed the researcher to capture descriptions of lived experiences of Saudi women who sojourn in the United States toward physical activity and sports participation. For the purpose of this study, the method of the qualitative method was well suited for the research question at hand on understanding the perceptions and experiences of Saudi women living in the United States. Equally important, while qualitative methods are a strength of this study, the nature of qualitative research is such that findings may not be generalizable. Added to this, the results of this study of a small sample of 13 Saudi women living in the U.S. may be descriptive of the experiences of this group, nevertheless, they are not necessarily descriptive of other women who sojourn in the United States or the entire population. The small sample size is considered a limitation of the current research. Although the data were saturated for the research, the sample size is not large enough to generalize about the entire Saudi women living in the United States.

Recommendation for future research

Why do Saudi women living in the United States report being more physically active and conversely were more likely to report decreased value on physical activity due to the cultural influence of Saudi?

Based on the results of the study on the experiences and perceptions of Saudi women living in the United States towards participation in physical activity and sports, the recommendations for future research on the subject include using mixed methods research with particularly a larger sample of Saudi women living in the U.S, seems to be beneficial which may reveal vital information about the subject. The possible direction for future research on the subject is important because the lived experience regarding their attitudes and behaviors towards participation in sports and fitness activities in the U.S. is still in its initial stages, which leaves the possibilities for future research. Future research, including the participants' family members, and spouses, appears to be vital in fully comprehending their perspectives and perceptions about the participants' engagements in sports activity in the United States. Additional research on Saudi Arabian women living in the United States regarding their attitudes and behaviors, inclusive of research seems important in fully understanding the eating habits of Saudi women in the US compared to those who continue to reside in Saudi is needed. Moreover, future research should be conducted among Saudi women who lived in the U.S. and returned to Saudi to better understand their attitude and behavior toward physical activity and sports. Finally, more research is needed to investigate inactive Saudi women living in the United States verse inactive women who live in Saudi to better understand the possible aspects that influence their physical activity behaviors.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



To: Ahmed Hassan M Sumayli
From: Douglas J Adams, Chair
IRB Expedited Review
Date: 01/20/2023
Action: **Exemption Granted**
Action Date: 01/20/2023
Protocol #: 2211437916
Study Title: An Exploration of Saudi Women Experiences and Perceptions Towards Participation in Physical Activity in the United States.

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Merry L Moiseichik, Investigator

Appendix B

International Student Email to Saudi Women Students at the University of Arkansas

Dear Saudi female,

I am Ahmed Sumayli under the supervision of Dr. Merry Moiseichik, Professor in the Department of Human Performance, Recreation & Sport Management at the University of Arkansas in the United States. I am conducting a research study that serves as a part of my doctoral dissertation to examine the experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports among Saudi women living in the United States.

I am recruiting Saudi women who sojourn in the United States (i.e., studying, visiting, or being housewives) to investigate the current state of participation in sports activities as well as to express their knowledge, attitudes, and difficulties relating to participation in physical activities in the United States.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please take a few minutes to read the interview questions at: https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cVZj9XNEWuFmgC

and hopefully, you can provide us with your contact information, by the end of the survey, to schedule an interview with you via Zoom which will be audio recorded that my wife and I will conduct at a time convenient for you.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and your answers will be anonymous.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me by email: Ahsumayl@uark.edu

Ahmed Sumayli

*Ph.D. candidate, Department of Human Performance, Recreation & Sport Management
The University of Arkansas*

Kind regards,

Lauren Denny (she/her)

Receptionist | International Students and Scholars

Office: 479-575-5003 | FAX: 479-575-7084

[Schedule an appointment](#) or [chat with an advisor](#)

550 N Garland Ave | 104 Holcombe Hall

The University of Arkansas | Fayetteville, AR 72701

iss@uark.edu

international-students.uark.edu



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Appendix C RECRUITMENT FLYER



Would you like to take part in a study exploring physical activity and sports among Saudi women living in the United States?

We are currently looking for Saudi women between the ages of 18 and 45 years who regularly exercise or are physical activity in some way for a study at the University of Arkansas

Women who are eligible to take part in this study will be asked to take part in an interview that will conduct at a time convenient for you, involving approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will focus on the experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports among Saudi women living in the United States.

There are no risks associated with conducting this interview. Please be assured that your confidentiality will be protected to the extent allowed by law and university policy. Your identity will be removed, and a code will be assigned to serve as a pseudonym to protect your identity. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to start or continue this study. You can withdraw at any time.

Please note that this study is *ONLY* designed for Saudi women living in the United States over the age of 18; if you are not a Saudi woman currently living in the United States and/or under the age of 18, are not eligible to participate in this study.

If you are interested in participating in this study please scan below for the study or if you need more information in regard, please contact me, Ahmed Sumayli at (479)966-1919 or by email at ahsumayl@uark.edu



Thank you.

Appendix D

Letter to SACM Seeking Access to Saudi Women Platform (English / Arabic)

Letter of Permission to Saudi Arabian Culture Mission (SACM)-English

To: Amira H. Al kadhi

Administrative Assistance

Re: Dissertation Research

Assalamou Alaykoun,

This is Ahmed Sumayli, Saudi National ID # 1079362743. I am a Ph.D. student in Human Performance, Recreation & Sport Management at the University of Arkansas. I am working on a dissertation study entitled: The experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and Sports among Saudi women living in the United States. This study may be an opportunity for you to help add to our knowledge and understanding of Saudi women's experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports in the United States and provide information that may benefit other Saudi populations who will come to study in the U.S. in the future.

Please accept this letter as an invitation to allow me to conduct a part of my research through (SACM e-mail) by encouraging all Saudi Arabian couples to participate in this important study.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Ahmed H. Sumayli

Ph.D. Student

University of Arkansas

Department of Health, Human Performance, and Recreation

(479) 301-1389

ahsumayl@uark.edu

Appendix D (cont.)

Letter of Permission to Saudi Arabian Culture Mission (SACM) – Arabic

الملحق (أ) : طلب تطبيق استمارات الدراسة على المبتعثات السعوديات في الولايات المتحدة الامريكه

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

أ / أميره القاضي

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته,,

أنا الطالب أحمد الصميلي مبتعث لدراسه الدكتوراه في جامعه اركانسس . رقم الهويه 1079362743.. انا حاليا طالب دكتوراه تحت إشراف الدكتورة ميري موسيشك، أستاذة في قسم الادارة والانشطه الرياضيه في جامعة اركانسس في امريكا. هنا استبيان كجزء من متطلب بحث لدراسة الدكتوراه والذي يهدف لدراسة تجارب وخبرات النساء السعوديات في الولايات المتحدة في ممارسة الرياضة والانشطه البدنيه وفهم الخبرات والعوائق عن مشاركتهم . الفئة المستهدفة من الاستبيان هم المبتعثات أو المرافقات السعوديات في الولايات المتحدة.. لن يستغرق الاستبيان أكثر من 5 دقائق. اذا كنتي مهتمه بالمشاركة في الدراسة الرجاء وضع بيانات التواصل وسيقوم الباحث بالتواصل مشاركتك في هذه https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cVZj9XNEWuFmgC معك .. الدراسة تطوعية و جميع البيانات التي سيتم جمعها في الدراسة ستعامل بسريه تامه. أمل نشر الاستبيان للمبتعثات السعوديات المتواجدون حاليا في الولايات المتحدة كي تشارك في الاجابة على الاستبيان.

كان الله في عون العبد مادام العبد في عون أخيه

.. إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة بخصوص الدراسة ، يرجى التواصل بي على البريد الإلكتروني:

Ahsumayl@uark.edu

Appendix D *EMIAL*

Saudi Arabian Culture Mission (SACM) Email – Arabic

عزيزتي الطالبة

أتقدم بجزيل الشكر والامتنان على كريم تعاونكم وتخصيصكم وقتاً للإجابة عن استبيان بحث الدكتوراه ، حيث أقوم بإجراء دراسة بعنوان : (دراسة تجارب وخبرات النساء السعوديات في الولايات المتحدة في ممارسة الرياضة والانشطة البدنية وفهم الخبرات والعوائق عن مشاركتهم)

واشكر مساهمتكم في إنجاح هذه الدراسة من خلال الإجابة على الاستبيان، والمساهمة في نشره بين جروبات الطالبات السعوديات في الجامعات الأمريكية

رابط الاستبيان : https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cVZj9XNEWuFmgC

الباحث/ احمد حسن صميلي

Appendix E

Email Recruitment to (International Office at the U OF A, SACM)

Hello, my name is Ahmed Sumayli, and I am a doctoral student in Human Performance, Recreation & Sport Management at the University of Arkansas. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study designed to explore the experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports among Saudi women living in the United States. The purpose of this study is to investigate the current state of participation in sports activities among Saudi women living in the United States as well as express their knowledge, attitudes, and barriers relating to participation in physical activities in the United States. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Merry Moiseichik in the Health, Human Performance, & Recreation department at the University of Arkansas.

This study may be an opportunity for you to help add to our knowledge and understanding of Saudi women's experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports in the United States and provide information that may benefit other Saudi populations who will come to study in the U.S. in the future.

I am looking for potential Saudi female participants who meet the following criteria:

- Have grown up in Saudi Arabia and moved to the United States as an adult.
- Be 20 years or older.
- Have been living in the U.S. for at least three years.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please click here to fill out the screening survey and provide your contact information to that schedule an interview with you via Zoom interview for approximately 60 minutes will conduct at a time convenient for you. You will also find the list of interview questions so that you will know ahead of time what will be asked of you. https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cVZj9XNEWuFmgC

All the interviewees and the data collected through the survey and the interviews will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and there are no risks associated with this research.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the form, please contact Ahmed Sumayli at (479)966-1919 or by email at ahsumayl@uark.edu or my director, Dr. Merry Moiseichik at (479) 601-3063 or by email at merry@uark.edu. For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Coordinator, at (479) 575-2208 or by e-mail at irb@uark.edu.

Thank you for considering my request. If you have questions, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Ahmed H. Sumayli

Ph.D. Student

University of Arkansas

Department of Health, Human Performance, and Recreation

(479) 301-1389

ahsumayl@uark.edu

Appendix F

Screening Survey Text

We are requesting your participation in an online survey in this study that aims to explore the experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports among Saudi women living in the United States. The purpose of this study is to investigate the current state of participation in sports activities among Saudi women who are currently in the USA as a part of my doctoral requirements. This study may be an opportunity for you to help add to our knowledge and understanding of Saudi women's experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports in the United States and provide information that may benefit other Saudi populations who will come to study in the U.S. in the future.

Please note that there are no risks associated with completing the survey for this research study. Participation is voluntary and refusing to participate will not adversely affect any other relationship with the University or the researchers.

The surveys will be completing a demographic questionnaire for reporting purposes ONLY. Also, you will be asked if you are willing to participate in a Zoom interview for approximately 45-60 minutes of your time by providing your contact information to schedule the interview.

By completing this survey and providing your contact information, you are consenting to participate in the study, and you acknowledge that you are 18 years of age or older.

Please be assured that your confidentiality will be protected to the extent allowed by law and university policy. Your Identity will be removed, and a code will be assigned to serve as a pseudonym to protect your identity.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the form, please contact Ahmed Sumayli at (479)966-1919 or by email at ahsumayl@uark.edu or my director, Dr. Merry Moiseichik at (479) 601-3063 or by email at merry@uark.edu. For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Coordinator, at (479) 575-2208 or by e-mail at irb@uark.edu.

Thank you !!

Appendix J

Qualtrics Screening Survey

I. Personal Information

Age: _____

Highest degree earned: _____

Grade level you are teaching: _____

interest and hobbies: _____

Physical Activity for Saudi Females

- How long have you been in the U.S.? Why did you come to the United States?
- Do you feel that you can discuss your perceptions about physical activity and sports patterns before you came to the U.S., your personal experiences including any personal challenges experienced and barriers relating to your involvement in physical activities and sports?
- What changes have you made in your habits since coming to the U.S.? Does physical activity and sports roles change since you came to the U.S.?
- What made a difference in your decision to take up physical activity and sports roles?
- What is physical activity means to you, and do you think you are a physically active woman?
- When you become an active woman, would you think of a time when you started a particular physical activity but ended up quitting? Describe that time to me.?
- What goals did you set for yourself related to being a physically active woman?
 - *What motivates you to exercise?*
 - *What goals did you set for yourself related to being a physically active woman?*
 - *Regarding the last 2 weeks, how often did you exercise? Where? How?*
 - *What motivates you to exercise?*
 - *What goals did you set for yourself related to being a physically active woman?*
- If you are a student here, how do you balance physically active roles and your family, husband, children, and school responsibilities?
- ❖ Do they think the differences among cultures will hold others from being physically active and contributing to sports activities? WHY?
- ❖ Would you continue your physical activity and sports roles when you back to Saudi?

II. Please answer the following question in the space provided below:

11. What could be improved to encourage others to involve in physical activity? (or anything to add)

Please provide your contact information if you would be willing to have it for approximately 45-60 minutes that will conduct at a time convenient for you.

Name:.....

Email:.....

Thank you for considering my request. If you have questions, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Ahmed Sumayli

Ph.D. Recreation and Sport Management candidate

University of Arkansas

Appendix H

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: The experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and Sports among Saudi women living in the United States

Principal Investigator:

Ahmed H Sumayli

University of Arkansas

Department of Human Performance, Recreation & Sport Management

ahsumayli@uark.edu.

479- 966-1919

Administrator(s): Advisor

Dr. Merry Moiseichik

Department of Human Performance, Recreation & Sport Management

Merry@uark.edu

479-575-2870

Description: This study is interested in examining the experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports among Saudi women living in the United States. This project will serve as Ahmed Sumayli's dissertation for the requirements of the doctoral degree in Human Performance, Recreation & Sport Management under the supervision of her doctoral program chair, Dr. Merry Moiseichik. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study: The purpose of this study involves the desire to acquire meaningful information to investigate the current state of participation in sports activities among Saudi women living in the United States as well as express your knowledge, attitudes, and barriers relating to participation in physical activities in the United States. This study may be an opportunity for you to help add to our knowledge and understanding of Saudi women's experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports in the United States and provide information that may benefit other Saudi populations who will come to study in the U.S. in the future.

Who can participate in this study; To participate in the study, you need to meet the following criteria: (a) be a Saudi woman who grow up in Saudi Arabia and moved to the United States as an adult., (b) be 20 years or older and (c) have been living in the U.S. for at least three years.

Having already completed a screening survey, you are now being asked to participate in the interview portion of this study; Participation in the study has already completed the screening survey and scheduled an interview, and they are now being asked to participate in the interview. The Zoom interview aims to ask about your experiences and perceptions towards participation in physical activity and sports while you are in the United States. All Zoom interviews will be recorded with your permission and used for this research. More importantly, all the interviewees and the data collected through the survey and the interviews will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study; This interview is expected to last 45-60 minutes.

Risks and benefits: There are no risks associated with this research. The benefits will be developing and improving the knowledge about the current level of Saudi women's participation in physical activity and sports in the U.S

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.

Confidentiality: All information will be recorded with your permission and used for this research. All data of this research will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. More importantly, the recordings will be transcribed anonymously, and the recordings and your contact information will be deleted once your survey and interview transcripts are stored anonymously.

Right to withdraw: Any participant in this study is free to participate in this study or to quit this study at any time. You may choose to withdraw your participation from this study at any time until after your interview has been transcribed.

What do I do if I have questions about the research study; You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Faculty Advisor as listed above for any questions that you may have about the study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact, Ro-Windwalker, the University's IRB Coordinator, at 479-575-2208 or irb@uark.edu.

I have read this informed consent document and understand that I can print or save a copy of it for my records. The risks and benefits have been explained to me and my participation in this interview indicates my consent for my responses to be used in the research as described.