

Female students' participation in physical activities in Oman

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The rising number of inactivity-related health problems for individuals and society is a critical concern in today's world. This applies also to many students who are at risk of low levels of physical activity. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that affect physical activity participation of female university students in Oman. The participation of female students in physical activity percentage in Oman raises a health concern as a very few students are physically active for different reasons such as, time, lack of sport facilities, family support and self-motivation to be physical active. Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) was chosen as the setting for this study, because it is the only university with a full sport facility for females only, and it is accessible to all students free of charge.

Literature review was conducted on the barriers that affect and or motivate female students' physical activity in Oman and the Arab world. Studies have shown that female students experience many different obstacles to participate in physical activity. These include lack of time, society and culture influence, lack of financial income, body image, safety, lack of support, lack of appropriate educational system and facilities.

The main aims and objectives of this study are based on two basic components: firstly, to identify the barriers that prevent the students from being physically active and the secondly to study what are the motives that motivate them to be and continue being physically active.

Through a qualitative research approach, six interviews took place with students from Sultan Qaboos University to gain a perspective on the current situation of the students' physical activity participation. After the interviews were transcribed and translated the data was analyzed by dividing it down into broader sections. The researcher sorted and selected the data based on the questions asked and the similarity of the answers to gain a comprehensive insight into the phenomena that is being explored and to find key patterns, themes and issues in the data.

The main results of this thesis revealed that the most popular exercises among university students is walking as it is convenient and it is an easy access.

Future research should include male students and students from different ages to investigate the similarities and differences within the group, continued research should be conducted with other private colleges and universities to broaden the study to different educational sectors

Keywords: Women's physical activity, university students, Oman, Arab female,

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Health benefits of physical activity are well known, as regular physical exercise is related to a better and longer quality of life. Studies have emphasized that regular physical exercise can reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety and it has been reported that the more active individuals report fewer depression rates than more sedentary individuals. (Joseph et al., 2013.)

Regular physical activity is also associated with better self-esteem of the individual. Studies have shown that sedentary life often leads to obesity and overweight which are some of many reasons for low self-esteem and confidence between people. (Joseph et al., 2013.)

Lack of physical activity among students raises a health concern also in Oman, as studies have shown that the percentage of students who are physical activity and the local Omani population is lower than what is recommend by the World Health Organization and International standers, women are at higher risk of associated health concerns due to their low physical activity and the high level of sedentary behaviours. (Al-Kilani et al., 2012.)

Literature review has been done on the barriers that affect and/or motivate female student's physical activity in Oman and the Arab world, studies on the barriers that affect female student's physical activity have shown that female students experience many different obstacles to participate in physical activity. These include lack of time, society and culture influence, lack of finical income, body image, safety, lack of support, lack of appropriate educational system and facilities. (Testa et al., 2016.)

Overweight and obesity among Omani women have increased in the past ten years. A worrying trend among young Omani women as the percentage of overweight and obesity has increased from 1980-2013. This puts the sultanate seventh on the list of nations with high overweight and obesity prevalence in women under 20 years old. (Al Tauqi, 2014.)

A study in 2012 on the trends of Obesity and Overweight among College students in Oman revealed that the main factors associated with overweight and obesity are the lack of physical activity, sedentary lifestyle, the increase use of cars as main of transportation and the lack of

nutritional knowledge about healthy food and lifestyle among the participants. (Al-Kilani et al., 2012).

The main aim and objective of this study is to find the factors that motivate and prevent female students to be and continue to participate in physical activity. The study is based on two simple components; firstly, to identify the actual barriers that prevent the students from being physical activity and the secondly, to study what are the motives that motivate them to be and continue being physically active.

The target group of this research are students studying at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. A qualitative approach was used to collect the data, interviews were conducted with six female students who are currently studying in Sultan Qaboos University to collect data that will be used for the study.

## 2. SULTANATE OF OMAN

### 2.1. The Omani Society: History, Politics, and Culture

Sultanate of Oman is a Middle Eastern country in the continent of Asia. It is located in the south-eastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Oman shares borders with three countries, which are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The Sultanate of Oman has a coastline length of approximately 1,700 km, and its geographical area is 309,500 square kilometres, which make it the second largest country in the Arab peninsula with a different land of steep mountain peaks to pristine beaches, vast deserts to rich croplands. Muscat is the Capital of Sultanate of Oman. The Sultanate of Oman is a small nation with a population of 4,671,459 million, where the Omani national citizens' are 2,573,245, and the expatriates are 2,098,241. (Ncsi, 2018.)

The Sultanate overlooks three seas, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Oman and the Arab Gulf Sea, Historically, it has been a seafaring nation, and Omani ships have sailed all over Africa, India, China trading commercial goods, crafts and cultural traditions. Women play an active role in the Omani society life where she has been appointed in the highest governmental positions in the country, for example, Minister of Education, Minister of Social Affairs, and Minister of Higher Education. Arabic is the official language, although language as English, Hindi, and Swahili are widely spoken. Islam is the main religion and source of legislation for the Basic Statute of the State. (Omantourism, 2018.)

Oman's main exports are oil and gas, along with fish, agricultural products and traditional crafts. Oman's tourism industry plays a growing role in the economy, offering museums, sightseeing, shopping, and international style accommodations. Oman indeed offers something for everyone, from water sports to desert safaris, from camel races to sanctuaries for turtles, birds, Oryx, and Arabian tigers. (Omantourism, 2018.)

Today, Oman is a modern monarchy led by Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The Sultan of Oman, his Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id Al 'Bu Sa'id holds an extraordinary amount of power, where all government policies, procedure, new rules, amendment of current systems, has to be approved by him only as there is no prime minister or parliament in the Sultanate. Moreover, Sultan Qaboos has no children to inherit his kingdom and become the future king after his

death, and he has not announced a designated successor yet. Instead, the ruling family should unanimously appoint a new Sultan after his death. In three days if they do not identify a new ruler, a letter left by the sultan will be opened that has recommendations whom to appoint as the new Sultan. (Omaninfo, 2017.)

## 2.2. Education and Physical Education in Oman

Education in Oman is provided free of charge from primary to secondary school. The development of the national educational program began in the 1970s and the 1980s. In 1970 there were only three public schools with approximately 900 male students in the whole country. (AL-Sinani, 2014.)

Currently, more than 700,000 students between the ages of 4-18 are studying in the public and private schools. According to latest general education statistics, most of the students are enrolled in public (government) schools with numbers reaching more than 650,000 followed by private schools with more than 100,000 students. (Ncsi, 2017.)

The Omani education system begins with grade 1-4 with the age group of 6-10. The second stage starts from grade 5-12 with the age group of 11-18. The educational syllabus has a variety of different subjects such as Islamic education, Arabic, English, mathematics, artistic and music education, sciences, environmental life skills, technology and social studies and physical education. The syllabus is divided between 40 class per week with 40 minutes per class and the school year is divided into two semesters, first semester from September to December and the second on from January to June (AL-Sinani, 2014). The subjects are taught by using different teaching techniques to meet the abilities of diverse students. Physical education occupies only two classes per week at each grade level. There is also integration among certain subjects, but physical education is not one of them.

The physical education syllabus of Omani educational school system includes a variety of individual and team sport activities such as football, volleyball, handball, gymnastics, basketball and track, and field, these sport activities are divided into different events over the two school semesters sports, and the activities vary from one grade to another. (Al-Sinani, 2014).

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) is the only government university in Oman and it is located in the capital city of Muscat. The construction of the university began in 1982, and in 1986 the first students were enrolled. The University has five faculties: Medicine, Engineering, Agriculture, Education, and Science. The College of Arts was established in 1987, the College of Commerce and Economics in 1993. The College of Law joined the University in 2006 and finally the College of Nursing in 2008 (About SQU, 2016). SQU is the only education university with Physical education studies.

Sultan Qaboos University is the university where most of the country's physical education teachers are educated. The Physical education studies are part of the education faculty, where all graduates graduate with a degree in physical education , there are no other sport related studies such as Sports Injuries, Sports Management in the undergraduate syllabus of the university .In 2015 the university had more than 15,000 students in different faculties. (Undergraduates Programs, 2017.)

### 2.3. Sport in Oman

For the past 47 years, the Omani sport sector has been managed by different ministries. Sport and all its areas were under the Ministry of Transportation, Labor and Social Affairs in 1972. Then in 1976, the sport sector was transferred to the Ministry of Youth Affairs by Royal Decree No. (12/76). In 1979, the sport sector was moved to the Ministry of Information by Royal Decree No. (28/79) to manage and run all the sport sector activities. In 1982, the responsibility for supervision of sport was entrusted to the Ministry of Education, and in 1986 its title was amended accordingly to read Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs. (Al-Busafi, 2012).

In 1989, the higher counsel approved an integrated national plan for expanding and improving youth facilities. In December 1991 the sport sector was moved to the General Organization of Sport, and Youth Activates (GOSYA) by a Royal Decree No. (113/91) Ministry of Sports Affairs was created in 2004 by the Royal Decree No. (120/04). The primary duty of this Ministry was to work with the other relevant sectors in helping the youth development in sport and identify talent and opportunities. (Al-Busafi, 2012.)

Currently, sport and all its activities in Oman are under the supervision of the Ministry of Sports Affairs, to which the sports federations report to administratively and financially. The sport federations control and supervise all sport clubs in Oman with financial support from the Ministry of Sports Affairs. The sport federations' primary task is to develop and promote the sport that they represent, and they are the supreme bodies that govern the sport clubs. All sport federations are voluntary organizations. Many of these federations have paid staff to manage affairs on a day-to-day basis, and some of the major sports (such as football) have many professional employees. With regards to the financial source of the sports federations, the government (through the Ministry of Sports Affairs), federations (80 % of their total budgets) and committees (100 % of their total budgets). (Al-Busafi, 2012.)

#### 2.4. The Political Status of Women in Oman

The Omani women have an essential contribution to the society in various political, economic and cultural sectors. The Government has encouraged this trend and continues to inspire women's participation in economic development by providing multiple forms of support and encouragement such as training, counselling, financial and marketing support ( *جريدة الوطن*, 2018).

The Sultanate has taken many measures to ensure women's rights in many areas. In the field of education and training, the indicators reflect the development of the educational situation of women. The illiteracy rate decreased from 29.5 percent in 2003 to 19.4 percent in 2010. Studies and series of books on social and economic life issues have been released by the government to keep maintain the development to increase female enrolment ratio in primary education during the school year 2013-2014. (omaninfo, 2018.)

In political participation, Oman was one of the first Gulf countries to provide women with political rights and begin integrating them into government structures. Since 1994, women were allowed to vote and stand in elections for the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council), the lower house of parliament, when only select individuals approved by government leaders could vote. Women have the right to exercise the political rights guaranteed by the national legislation. The law for the election of the members of the Majlis al-Shura was issued by Royal Decree No. (3102/85) indicating the conditions for election in the Majlis al-Shura, without any conditions or restrictions distinguishing between men and women. (omaninfo, 2018.)

In 2003 all Omani women received the right to vote and stand for election to the Consultative Council (the lower house of parliament). Although they were permitted to run, female candidates failed to win any of the 84 seats contested in the 2007 elections to the Majlis Al-Shura. Despite the disappointing result, the traditional image of women changed as more women became visible in their roles as political candidates, leaders, and decision makers. Women represented (18 %) in the Council of State during the fifth period (2011-2015) of the Council, while they represented (1.2 %) in the Majlis al-Shura in the seventh period (2011-2015). (omaninfo, 2018.)

Moreover, Omani women in positions of power and decision-making achieved an important parliamentary advantage for Omani women in particular and Arab women in general. They were elected as Vice-Chair of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Women's Parliamentary Coordination Committee, which was held the Arab Group. And in a number of international organizations, including the Islamic Organization Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, ISESCO and the Permanent Delegation of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, the World Trade Organization. (Breslin et al, 2010.)

In 2014, the Omani female Minister of Education was elected as a member of the UNESCO Institute for Planning in recognition of the importance and status of the Sultanate in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its interest in cooperation and joint action in the areas of the Organization's competence.

The participation of Omani women in the economic fields is essential and has an active contribution to the society. The Omani labor market has witnessed an increasing contribution to Omani women in economic activity and workforce in recent years. The work based on the efforts of women and men is the basis of wealth. In which women and man are the basis of growth in the present and the future. As per the Omani employment law, women have the same employment opportunities as men; they are equal in pay for the same work as well as equality in all functional benefits. (Breslin et al, 2010.)

## 2.5. Islam as a Religion

The Islamic religion was founded at the beginning of the 7th century by a person named Muhammad. He said that the angel from the god named Gabriel had visited him. During these good visits, which lasted for about 23 years until the death of Prophet Muhammad. The central beliefs in Islam are that God is the only true God and that Muhammad was the Prophet of God. A person can become a Muslim by acknowledging these two colonels. The word "Muslim" means "the person who surrenders to God." Islam claims to be the only true religion from which other religions (including Judaism and Christianity) derive. Islam is the language of submission to God Almighty, the total obedience to his orders, and surrender to God - the Almighty - by optional choice of the individual and not forced, the essence of Islam is the voluntary submission to the Muslim and accordingly be reward and punished. (Klausen, 2006.)

Islam is a complete divine approach revealed by God to our master Muhammad - Peace be upon him - and ordered him to inform this religion which contains the laws and divine laws that require the interest of the people in life, the Prophet - peace be upon him - the provisions of this doctrine, ethics, literature, and worship through the Sunnah and Quran. Sunnah is the body of traditional social and legal custom and practice of the Islamic community, based on the verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds and sayings, silent permissions (or disapproval) of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. (Klausen, 2006.)

Muslims establish their faith on five pillars:

Testimony: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

Prayer: Five prayers must be performed daily.

Zakat: Giving money to the poor, since all comes from God.

Fasting: In addition to the fasted fast, all Muslims must fast for the month of Ramadan (The 9th month of the Islamic calendar year)

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca, which takes place at least once in the lifetime of the person (during the 12th month of the Hijri year) (Klausen, 2006.)

In Islam precautions are taken to avoid free meeting and mixing of men and women as much as possible, Islam does not allow men and women to meet each other whenever and however they like. It has placed clear regulations and restrictions upon such behaviour and has defined the limits of interaction between men and women. Moreover, Islam has closed all doors that

lead to temptation and promiscuity. Islam forbids any mixing between the sexes that might provide even the remotest possibility of temptation. (Sfeir, 1985.)

Following the above rules that limits the interaction between men and women. Most of the schools in the Arab world are sex-segregated, for example in Oman all government schools are mixed gender till grade four only, then from grade five schools are sex-segregated including the teaching staff (Anon, 2016),

In Islamic societies, the family takes central focus. Age and gender determine one's social position in the family as well as in the community at large. The hierarchical organization of the family and the strict division of labor according to gender play an essential role in the Islamic culture. The family, as well as the community, force its members to assume specific tasks and duties, but in return promise support, protection and social status (Zussman, 1991).

According to the Islamic religion, men are the heads of the families and decide on all significant issues. A man is responsible for the woman in his family and has the final decision in a lot of her life decisions. The man is obliged to take care of his wife/wives who, in return, is/are committed to obedience. The husband has the right and the duty to control and "protect" the family members, especially the women and girls whose modesty is in the way they dress, talk and act around strange people. (Sfeir, 1985.)

Gender hierarchies related to the social and cultural superiority of men are based on the concept of honour and the regulation of sexuality. In Islam, sexual relations are only allowed after marriage. Sexual relations of unmarried couples are strictly forbidden and can be severely punished (in case of adultery even by stoning). Unmarried couple relations are treated as a dishonour for the family. Gender segregation controls female sexuality. Women should not appear in public places wearing indecent clothes, which are anything type of clothes that will show her body shape or part; they must be fully cover their bodies. (Nakamura, 2002.)

## 2.6. Women in Islam

A woman in Islam must cover her hair from puberty age by wearing a veil (Hijab), a woman should not wear tight or transparent clothes in front of men and must dress decently with long loose clothes that does not show her body shape (Islam.ru, 2013). Not all Muslim women wear the Hijab or follow the Islamic dress code. Islam does not prohibit women from being physically active as long as it is practiced within an Islamic framework from clothing to the surrounding environment, physical activity is compatible with the traditional Islamic rules concerning “modest clothes” and/or segregation of the genders. Women’s participation in sport and exercise in public is unacceptable to avoid even the remotest possibility of temptation between the two genders from the desire to protect men as well as women’s modesty. It is argued that running and jumping in front of men jeopardizes a woman’s dignity and that such movements expose too much of a woman’s body. (Fakier, 2016.)

Despite the change that has taken place in the Arab countries, women in sports are suffering from obstacles and problems for a full return to competition. There are still a lot of bad ideas that look at sportswomen and women who participate in sports and physical activity.

Physical activity is fundamental in our daily lives, and there is no difference between women and men. Unfortunately, the situation is very different among Arabs. There is no interest in women's sports. Gradually, it is slowly decreasing. It needs awareness and an integrated program to reach its level with a launch that puts it on the path towards a sophisticated women's sport that is full of Arab women. It is necessary to look at the social reality of women in our Arab Islamic society, which we must stand by to overcome the negative aspects affecting their underdevelopment and work in a collective form, especially in the ministries of youth and sports. Sports should be practiced in places where women cannot appear publicly. (Roth and Basow, 2004.)

Islamic sport scientists emphasize that health and physical activity are essential for both genders and should be sustained by sporting activities. They legitimize their point of view with various prophet Mohammed hadith (oral traditions about the words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed) and emphasize that Mohammed supported a healthy lifestyle, recommending physical activities such as running, horseback riding, swimming, and archery. (Sfeir, 1985.)

“Islamic religion does not try to depreciate, much less deny sport for women. On the contrary, it encourages great significance and function in physical sport activities. Islam has a constant concern with one’s body, cleanliness, purification, and force, with segregation of the sexes. But certain religious elements, such as Islamic fatalism have been dominant factors in controlling general access to sport” (Sfeir, 1985).

Some think that sport is not necessary for women, and that it does not fit in their biological composition, her dignity and prevent her from practicing sport activities, especially in adolescence and adulthood. This attitude is incompatible with the physiological and psychological needs of women. Recent studies point to the importance of sport for women in various stages such as men, with a difference in the nature and type of sport, and the different rules and practices of practice. (Pfister, 2009.)

### 3. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The development in the modern societies has led to a decrease in the degree of human movement in daily life, which has led to increased leisure time and free time, especially under the stressful circumstances of modern life. There are several physical and health related problems, such as cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes. Societies and governments recognized the importance of restoring the balance between welfare and human needs in movement and activity. Physical exertion has become the common advice of doctors and trainees to maintain a healthy lifestyle. (Dallman et al., 2009.)

Physical activity is a physical assessment that is compatible with different physiological processes and influenced by psychological aspects. A certain level of functional work for body organs can be measured and can be developed. The primary objective of the physical activity is to improve the body's ability to meet the usual physical requirements required by the daily living conditions, as well as the possibility of facing more difficult physical challenges in emergency situations or by performing a physical effort such as training or sports competitions and physical fitness. (Repository, 2017.) Physical activity can be achieved in different ways as per the Figure 1.

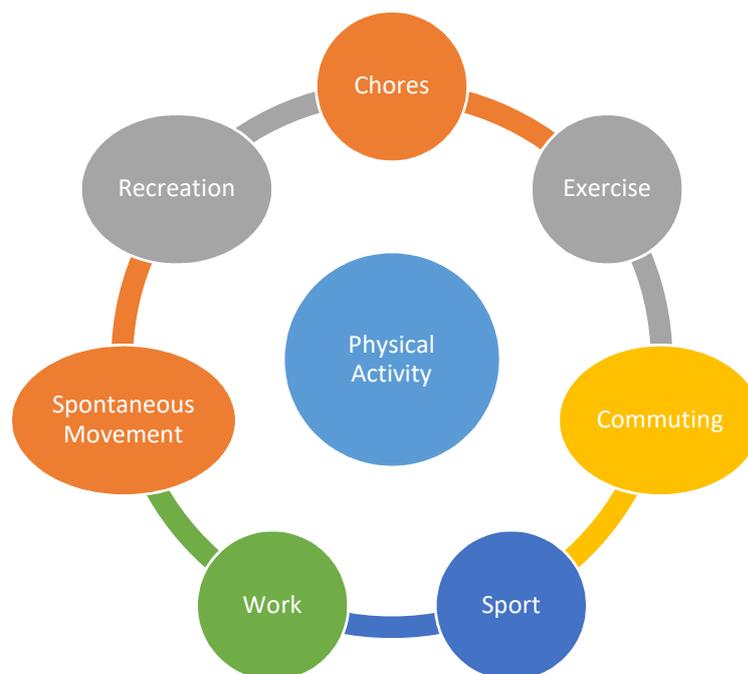


Figure 1. Different types of physical activity (Repository, 2017.)

One of the aims of physical activity is to achieve health protection and to provide a better life for the individual. It is highly related to the phenomenon of individual differences. Individuals have different physical and physiological abilities and motivations. They also differ in their daily living conditions. The concept of physical fitness and activity changed in the 20th century as muscle strength was a measure of physical fitness, especially in the past. The muscle packs was a symbol of physical fitness and masculinity, whereas women's elegance was first associated with physical attractiveness, where woman who was struggling and sweating was not attractive. (Repository, 2017)

In the 20th century, several ideas emerged that drew attention to the need to measure some important features such as bioenergy and used modern devices to measure body fat and strength, observations such as muscle strength is not alone the attribute of physical activity and fitness, Muscle strength alone does not contribute decisively to the judgment of a person's ability to work and exercise. (Repository, 2017.)

### 3.1. Benefits of Physical Activity

In the modern era, sport has held a prominent position among the multiple concerns of people as a means of preserving and maintaining health, as well as a mean to reduce the weight of the human body and to dissolve the body waste from excess fat, which has a negative impact on the health. These positive trends have strengthened sport and physical activity, The field of mathematical research or medical research in the modern age has added a new topic in medicine is Which deals with these issues and issues related to the performance of sports at the level of the functional and health, although the association of sports with medical sciences such as health and physiology, health, nutrition and treatment of injuries and natural treatment took place from the beginning of modern times. (Scully et al., 1998.)

The health benefits of physical activity are well known, as regular physical exercise is related to a better and longer quality of life, studies have emphasized that regular physical exercise can reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety and it has been reported that the more active individuals report fewer depression rates than more sedentary individuals. Regular physical activity is also associated with better self-esteem of the individual, studies have shown that sedentary life often leads to obesity and overweight which are some of many reasons for low

self-esteem and confidence between people. To talk about physical activity, we must have a good understanding of what is physical activity. Physical activity is defined as a voluntary corporal movement that involves skeletal muscle action and increases the energy expenditure over the resting levels. (Caspersen, 1995.)

The European Guidelines for Health-Enhancing Physical Activity Promotion Programmes define Physical activity as “any form of physical activity that benefits health and functional capacity without undue harm or risk.” The Council of Europe (1992) defines sport as “all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.” (Foster, 2000.)

Studies have shown that physical activity is linked with the improvement of social relationships, reduction of social inequalities, stimulation of public space use and sustainable development, which generate environmental sustainability and economic and social development activity. In addition to this, physical activity has been linked to better health, mortality, and quality of life. As an example, from the economic development’s point of view, increased physical activity levels can lead to the reductions of illness and therefore the reduction of health care and all the high-cost medication related to the disease caused by sedentary life. Increased physical activity can lead to better workers’ productivity that can help to reduce greenhouse effect gases and thereby their impact on pollution and climate change. (Adults Health, 2012.)

There are recommended guidelines for vigorous and moderate physical activities for adults between the age ranges of 18-56 years old. According to recommendations, moderate physical activity should be performed for 30 minutes five times a week, and vigorous physical activity should be performed for 20 minutes three times a week and for. There is a difference between exercise and physical activity, exercise is a physical activity that is organized, planned and repeated, it can be defined as an activity that is harder than what we usually do daily, it has an object and goal out of it like to lose weight, increase body muscles or running speed etc... Physical activity includes any body movement that contracts your muscles to burn more calories than your body would typically do so to exist at rest. Enjoying and planning your physical activity would improve your fitness and lifestyle. (Haskell et al., 2007.)

Regular physical activity plays an essential role in a healthy lifestyle, and it also improves physical and mental health. Higher physical activity has been linked with lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, obesity, hypertension, depression, and osteoporosis. (Van Der Horst et al., 2007.)

Physical inactive/Sedentary lifestyle has loads of risk factors on our lifestyles for all age groups, genders, socioeconomic groups and ethnicities. It seems that it is universally acknowledged that physical activities could bring loads of benefits to us. However, the statistics from WHO (2015) still make us concerned about physical inactivity. Worldwide, one out of four adults are not active enough physically. Besides, over eighty percent of the world's adolescent population does not have enough physical activities. (Van Der Horst et al., 2007.) Table 1 shows the physical, psychological and emotional, social and cultural and motor benefits of being physically active

Worldwide lack of physical activity is one of the top 10 risks leading to death, and it is also a vital factor for cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and diabetes (WHO, 2015). Adults who were taking part in more physical activities reported more satisfaction with their life. Besides, Sport and physical activities protect children from alcohol, drugs, and crime. (World Health Organization, 2010)

Table 1. Benefits of participating in physical activity ((Adapted from BC Centre for Excellence in Women’s Health, 2000; Tucker Center, 2007; World Health Organization, 2005) (Johnstone, 2012)

Physical health benefits	Psychological and emotional benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muscular strength and endurance</li> <li>• Longer and better quality of life</li> <li>• Cardio respiratory fitness</li> <li>• Bone health, osteoporosis prevention</li> <li>• Cardiovascular health</li> <li>• Healthy menstrual function</li> <li>• Pain management associated with both fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome</li> <li>• Healthy body composition and body weight management</li> <li>• Chronic disease risk reduction</li> <li>• Obesity prevention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoyment and positive affect</li> <li>• Maintenance of functional capacity and quality of life into old age</li> <li>• Positive self-perceptions and self-concept</li> <li>• Empowerment</li> <li>• Goal setting</li> <li>• Motivation for continued activity</li> <li>• Mature moral development</li> <li>• Optimal cognitive functioning</li> <li>• Stress management and mental health</li> <li>• Decreased levels of anxiety, depression, neuroticism and various kinds of stress</li> <li>• Positive psychological well-being</li> </ul>
Social and cultural benefits	Motor skill benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social capital and networks</li> <li>• Positive gender construction</li> <li>• Social inclusion</li> <li>• Improved academic outcomes (aspirations and achievements)</li> <li>• Diversity of perspectives</li> <li>• Positive relationships with adults and peers • Teamwork</li> <li>• Community involvement</li> <li>• Risk behavior prevention / reduction</li> <li>• Positive and healthy body image</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic motor skill competencies</li> <li>• Physical activity competencies</li> <li>• Talent development</li> <li>• Physical literacy – Fundamental movement skills – Fundamental sport skills</li> <li>• Physically active lifestyles</li> <li>• Performance related physical fitness</li> </ul>

### 3.2. Physical Activity in Oman

The Sultanate of Oman has a specific combination of tradition and modernity. In the 1970s, the Sultan initiated modernization nationwide which included a measure of women's rights. Sport has no specific culture in Oman but is supported due to their potential benefits in education, politics and health-related areas. All of the sport clubs in Oman are male dominant and especially men's football. Unfortunately, women's sport still faces considerable resistance because of the traditional society and Islamic rules to have women train in closed areas and to be dress as per the Islamic law.

According to Benn and Al-Sinani, 2010. "Almost the only physical activity that receives approbation is walking as it can be practiced in the outdoor gardens and neighbourhoods, and it can be practiced dressed in clothes that fit the society and the Islamic laws. Working and wealthy Omani women can afford to attend the new ladies' gymnasiums that are in the city." The two most common physical activity types among women in Oman are walking and training in the closed ladies only gyms. However, only the members of middle- and upper classes can afford the membership entrance fees to these commercial centres.

For adults, the available evidence on the prevalence of physical inactivity in Oman shows that it occurs in 33 percent of men and 41 percent of women. For college students, the prevalence is 43 percent in men and 57.8 percent in women; for adolescents, who are recommended to do at least 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per day, the prevalence of inactivity is 70.1 percent in boys and 84.6 percent in girls. (Mabry et al., 2014.)

Overweight and obesity among Omani women have increased in the past ten years (Al Tauqi, 2014). A report published in the noted medical journal Lancet highlights a worrying trend among young Omani women as the percentage of overweight and obesity has increased. Although figures for men in the same group to have seen an increase, the rate for women is higher at 42.3 percent compared to 24.5 percent for young men, from 1980 to 2013. This puts the sultanate seventh on the list of nations with high overweight and obesity prevalence in women under 20 years old.

Long time spent in sedentary behavior is an emerging public health concern in Oman, particularly with the high rates of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity are increasing in the country. One in five Omani adults sit for seven or more hours every day. (Mabry, Morsi and Owen, 2017.)

Obesity is a growing problem among young women according to Monika Seth, a nutritionist at Al Raffah Hospital (Private hospital in Oman), she said “It’s a matter of concern. In the last two months, she has seen a lot of overweight and obese young girls who are just out of 12th grade. According to Dr. Papp Fzabolcs, senior consultant, laparoscopic, general and bariatric surgeon, Al Raffah Hospital (Private hospital in Oman), “Oman is very much infected by obesity. It’s a pandemic. I see up to 25 new morbidly obese patients a week. By the time they get to the point of contemplating surgery after trying various diets and exercise, their quality of life is highly reduced. (Al Tauqi, 2014.)

In 2013 a study was done in Oman on Diet, physical activity and sleep duration among Omani adolescents, the research was done in the capital area Muscat, 802 Omani adolescents (442 females and 360 males), aged 15–18 years were randomly recruited to complete the study. The results of the study showed that only 40 percent of the men and less than 30 percent of the females met the current recommendations of 30-60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per day, with such low physical activity rates a concern is raised on the health of adolescents in Oman. The study also showed that one of the primary reasons for youth inactivity is because of the high use of cars instead of walking or cycling to school or even for short distance travel including trips, and the limited quality of physical education programmes and activities in schools, especially for girls. The rate of private car ownership is as high as 69 percent among Omanis. (Kilani et al., 2013.)

In 2013 a study in Oman revealed an increase in lifestyle-related metabolic syndrome and the prevalence of associated risk factors, such as type 2 diabetes (the frequency of which was ranked among the ten highest prevalence's reported worldwide), cardiovascular disease (CVD) and being overweight or obese. The study showed that women might be at higher risk of associated health concerns due to their low physical activity and the high level of sedentary behaviours. In 2001 a report by the Omani Ministry of Health revealed that, out of 5,006 new cases of type 2 diabetes, 51.5 percent were female. Furthermore, nearly 53.6 percent of Omani women were reported to be overweight or obese. Leisure activities during non-working days

and sitting at work for long hours contributed the majority of sitting time and was identified as one of the main reasons of overweight and inactivity. (Azza et al., 2014.)

A study on the trends of Obesity and Overweight among College students in Oman revealed that students reported exercising weekly; 38.6 percent reported exercising 4 to 6 hours a week, and 30.6 percent reported exercising 7 to 9 hours a week, more than two thirds of enrolled students were of normal weight (69.3%), 26.7 percent were overweight while obese students constituted only 1.4 percent of the sample. As per the study, the main factors associated with overweight and obesity were the lack of physical activity and the lack of nutritional knowledge about healthy food and lifestyle among the participants. (Hashim et al., 2012.)

In 2004 a program called "Nizwa healthy lifestyles project, Oman" was launched in Nizwa (Nizwa is about 1.5 hours from Muscat the capital of Oman, with a population of about 700,000) to promote Physical activity and a healthy lifestyle (Nizwa Project, 2012.). The Nizwa healthy lifestyles project is a community-based project for the primary prevention of no communicable diseases and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. The project focuses on four key aspects of health: physical activity; healthy eating; tobacco use; and prevention of accidents (traffic and household). Key components of the program include the 'Move for Health' program, building supportive environments for physical activity, awareness-raising campaigns, and increasing the capacity of healthcare professionals to promote physical activity. The community launched the program for the people of Nizwa; the program was one of the 1st programs that were launched for the public and managed by volunteers from the society.

By 2010 this project had a positive effect on health promotion and PA (Nizwa Project, 2012). The key findings of the project were as follows:

- Almost 50 percent of participants are reported to have changed their lifestyle due to Nizwa healthy lifestyles projects interventions.
- Awareness of physical inactivity as a risk factor for no communicable diseases increased from 6.9 percent in 2001 to 93 percent in 2010.
- Participation in leisure-time physical activity increased from 39.9 percent in 2001 to 71.3 percent in 2010.

Looking at the above program and the results that were published after six years from the beginning of the program, it seems that people are much more active and more into physical activity and exercise, but then looking at the other studies and data from the Ministry of health we can see that the problem is still there, and that people didn't benefit much from this program, or they didn't maintain the exercise after that. Additionally, the program was in public areas and outdoor therefore most if not all of the participants were men and boys, women didn't have much participation in the program.

In 2013 a study aimed to investigate the lifestyles of adult Omani women with regards to physical activity (PA) levels and sedentary behaviour (SB) was carried out between May and June 2013 by (Al-Habsi et al., 2013.) where 277 healthy women between the age of 18-48 participated in the study. The results showed that 34 percent of the participants were categorized as minimally active, 32 percent were classified as moderately active and 34 percent were classified as highly active. Women in rural areas spent significantly more time in moderate PA in comparison to those living in urban areas. Married women reported more moderate PA than those who were single.

### 3.3. Factors and barriers that influence participation of female in PA internationally and in Oman

Participation rates in sport and physical activity among women and girls are much lower than among men in the Arab world and the world in general. This gender gap is caused by many barriers, which can be categorized as 'practical,' 'personal' and 'social and cultural,' which plays an important role in the attitudes and behaviour of women and girls' in participating in physical activity and sport. The categories mentioned above can be summarized as per the following (Lrspport, 2008.)

Practical reasons that are lack of time, financial income, safety in the sport halls and access to facilities, sport facilities for woman only, are all part of the practical barriers that women face when trying to be physically active. (Lrspport, 2008).Some recommendations have been raised, to promote physical activity, which doesn't require transport, such as walking and running which can support women to take part in easily accessible physical activity, ensure that activities are offered in locations or facilities that are safe and appropriate for women and girls

to practice physical activity and sport in and consider different payment options and be as flexible as possible with membership fees and annual renewals for the public facilities. (Samara et al., 2015.)

Personal reasons that are body image, clothing, and equipment, lack of self-confidence, social influence, all play a main part in the personal barriers that prevent woman from being physically active. The relationship between body image and physical activity for women is a vicious circle; the more insecure they feel about their bodies, the less they participate in physical activity and this is because of the clothing and the fitness level, as it's known the sport clothing are tight and shows the body shape of the individual, the more insecure you feel about your body, the less you would want to wear tight clothes and show off your body shape. Parents and coaches should act as positive role models in their children sport life; they should be involved in their child's sporting activities and have positive, realistic beliefs in what their child competencies and what they enjoy doing. (Samara et al., 2015.)

Social and cultural reasons that are the male-dominated culture of sport, attitudes, and prejudices about sexuality, ethnicity, sexual harassment and abuse and lack of female visibility in the media and lack of female role models in sport are part of the social and cultural barriers that prevent woman from being physically active (Lrsport, 2008).

Studies have shown that sport can empower women, and it has great benefits to the health, but there can be structural barriers for Muslim women in sport, such as issues related to house chores, no freedom of choice and decision making, culture and religion regulations, sport clothing and the use of public places. The participation of women in sport and physical activity may not be accepted by some families because of the leading sporting and physical activity culture that sport is played outdoors, in mixed gender spaces, which can lead to the high visibility of women's bodies and be exposed to be seen by men (Benn, et al., 2010.)

Moreover the sport clothing are not accepted in the religion and in most of the Arab world Muslim families, the sport clothing style can cause controversies and conflicts with families and communities. Some women do not mind participating and taking part in physical activities in mixed-gender sport arenas without wearing hijab or following the Islamic dress code, but due to the family restrictions and the lack of freedom of speech and decisions making, they are

forced by their family or socio-cultures, to avoid participating in mixed-gender areas or participating without following the Islamic dress code. (Testa et al., 2016.)

In 2010 a study on Barriers and facilitators of weight management: perspectives of Arab women at risk for type 2 diabetes was conducted, the study showed that women who participated in the study were generally aware of the importance of physical activity and weight management to maintain a healthy lifestyle. However, almost all the participants expressed that it was challenging to adopt a healthy lifestyle behaviour on a regular basis (diet and being physically active) due to many barriers in their daily lives. These barriers were identified into the following (Ali et al., 2010.)

1. Personal barriers: include difficulty in controlling appetite, lack of knowledge on nutrition and healthy food preparation methods, and the loss of motivation to continue with weight management efforts when weight loss was not achieved. Competing demands such as housework and childcare responsibilities decreased women's engagement in the regular physical activity

2. Social environmental barriers include the lack of family support and encouragement to continue with the diet and exercise, the luxury of having a housemaid at home who does all the household work, therefore, the women just supervise, the social gatherings that we must attend and eat.

3. Physical environmental barriers lack ladies' clubs only and outdoor activities, the high fee of gyms membership, high weather conditions in the country that doesn't encourage exercising outdoor, safety concerns like walking alone on the streets or gardens.

## 4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. Research Questions

The main research question of this thesis is "what are the barriers and motivations that influence female student's physical activity at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)". For the data collection, a qualitative research method was used, where six interviews were conducted with the students to collect the data required to complete the study.

The questions were divided into four parts; the first part consisted of questions related to general knowledge about the interviewee's understanding of physical activity and what type of physical activity they participate in. The second part was about the personal aspects of the interview where the questions dealt with motives and barriers of being physically active. The third part of the questions was about the social aspects and culture, in other words how does their culture and environment affect their physical activity and what role does their society has on them being physically active. Where, the fourth part was the final part of recommendations and in their opinion how can we improve the participation of female in physical activity.

The interview questions were as follows:

#### **Part one -General knowledge of physical activity**

How would you define PA?

What kinds of physical activities exercises do you practice and why?

Thinking back to when you were young, what kind of physical activities did you pursue?

What kind of PA did you pursue before joining Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)? Are you still active and why?

Was your choice of university influenced by the sport facilities provided by SQU?

#### **Part two - Motives and barriers of participating physical activity**

From your own experience what factors motivate/prevents you from being physically active?

What would you like to change in the way you participate in PA?

What effect does your body image have on you being physically active?

Do you only participate in PA to lose weight? Closed question

### **Part three - Influence of social environment and culture**

How do you participate in physical activity with friends or family? What is their role in your physical activities?

What influence does your family have on your ability to participate in physical activity exercises? How and why?

### **Part four - Recommendations**

Are there other things you would like to share about your physical activities as a university student?

What are the major problems or reasons you have encountered when you attain physical Activity?

What do you recommend to improve the participation of female in PA?

The above questions were all suggested by the researcher and approved by the supervisor; the questions were chosen based on theoretical background and what the researcher felt will suit the culture and understanding of the students in Oman.

#### 4.2. Data Collection and Selection of the Participant's

The researcher selected Sultan Qaboos University to conduct the interviews that are be used to complete this paper. The reason behind this is that SQU is a government university, and it is the only university in Muscat that has a full closed woman sport facilities with all sport facilities such as a covered swimming pool, a football pitch, basketball hall, aerobic classes, tennis halls and many more, all of the facilities are free of charge for the students to use.

The researcher visited Sultan Qaboos University to interview the six female students at the premise of the University between the **22-25 October 2017** during the regular university timing when students were in the university attending classes and lectures. Information was gathered through open-ended questions and in-depth conversations. The interviews were conducted during the student's break times, which were coordinated before between the researcher and the students. One interview that was held on the 17th July 2017 was done in the student house as it was the summer holidays and there were no university classes at that time.

The interviews took about 20-40 minutes depending on the interviewee answers and responses, the interviews were held in Arabic and English, where all the interview questions were asked in English and then translated into Arabic as not all interviewee were comfortable with English. During the interviews, the interviewee did not take notes of any of the interviewee answers to give the interviewee a chance to express their thoughts without being interrupting or asked to repeat the answer.

All the interviewees signed a consent form that clearly mentioned that the interviews were recorded, they voluntarily took part in this interview and the answers and discussions that were held during the interviews will be used for my study. The students were selected based on the following criteria:

- Female students at SQU
- Age 18-24
- Are physically active from time to time
- Live in the capital city of Oman - Muscat
- Live outside SQU female student accommodation

The interview questions were in English and were translated into Arabic to give the students a better understanding of the questions, three students had the interview fully in English, one student had the interview in Arabic as she was more confident and could express more in her mother tongue language. The other two students responded with both languages Arabic and English.

Table 2 has an introduction of the selected students. The students names are anonymous to protect their identity and due to the confidentiality agreement signed before the interviews, all students other information remain truthful such as, age, materials status, and study major.

Table 2. Introduction of the participants

Name	Age	Major	materials status	Year of study
Student one	23	Bachelor in Science	Single	4 <sup>th</sup> year
Student two	19	Bachelor of Engineering	Single	1 <sup>st</sup> year
Student three	21	Bachelor in Science	Single	1 <sup>st</sup> year
Student four	21	Bachelor of Engineering	Single	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
Student five	22	Bachelor of Engineering	Single	4 <sup>th</sup> year
Student six	23	Bachelor in Science	Single	4 <sup>th</sup> year

### 4.3. Data Analysis

After the interview the researcher transcribed the interviews and wrote them all in a word document, the interviews were translated from Arabic to English as the research will be entirely in English. After the translation the research rechecking all the audio interviews to ensure that no information was missed during the translation and transcribing of the interviews.

The data was analyzed using the thematic analysis method, this method is a process of finding patterns or themes within qualitative data. The aim of this method is to identify themes and patterns within the data that are significant or interesting and use them to address the research or explain about the topic. (Smith, 1992.)

The data was dividing down into broader sections, the researcher sorted and selected the data based on the questions ask and the similarity of the answers to immerse herself within the data to gain a comprehensive insights into the phenomena that is being explored and to find key patterns, themes and issues in the data.

The patterns were used to describe finding such as ‘most of the participants reported that they lacked time to participate in any physical activity’, and themes were used to broad the categories or topics such as ‘barriers and motives to participate in physical activity’.

The researcher developed a data coding system and linking the codes of the data to form a main themes and concept. Colored pens were used to code different ideas, themes and patterns in the data.

## 5. RESULTS

After the interview the researcher transcribed the interviews using the thematic analysis method. The data was analysed as per the following themes:

### 5.1. General Knowledge of Physical Activity

Four of the six students had a good understanding of the definition of physical activity, they explained it very well and gave some examples of how they can stay active by only walking around the university campus during their break time.

Currently only one student is regularly physical active as she is overweight and is hoping to lose weight by being physical active, the other five not regular and often stay for months without participating in any physical activity. The most common physical activity practiced by all six students is walking as it's an easy access and can be practiced in the area where they live.

During their school days, three of the students were regularly participating in physical activity, where they participated in different sports in such as swimming, basketball, badminton, unfortunately none of them are currently active although all these activities are provided in SQU sport halls. The reason why the students were physical active when they were young is because they were in a private school where they participated in the activities provided in the school, the other students were not active as they didn't get the opportunity to be active as sports and exercise was not promoted in their regular life by their parents nor their schools.

Before joining SQU the most physical activity the students participated in was walking as it's easy to access the walking paths and it's an activity they did with their parents, some of the students participated in different other sports such as swimming, basketball, badminton unfortunately none of them are currently active from they joined SQU

All the six students only thought of the academic side when selecting to join SQU, none of the thoughts of the sport facilities the university provided, some of them didn't even know about it. This gives an indication that sports and physical activity is not in their daily life activities or lifestyle

## 5.2. Motivating and Preventing Factors of Physical Activity

During the interview the students spoke about different factors that motivate and prevent them in being physical active, they all had similar answers as below:

### Motivating factors:

- Staying healthy and fit
- Losing weight
- Being physical activity increases the concentration levels and release the stress
- Good time to spend socializing with friends and family
- Having outdoor space for females only with new sports equipment

### Preventing factors:

- Time management
- Society and culture barriers
- The sports clothing
- The hot weather in Oman
- The urban planning infrastructure does not support outdoor activities
- Lack of the awareness of the benefits of physical activity in the society

All six students agreed that they would like to be more physical active and have regular physical activity on their daily routine, one of the students mentioned that she would like to join a gym and have a personal trainer for a couple of months to increase her knowledge on the best practice of exercising

Body image is the main reason on why they exercise or participate in any physical activity as they all said. One of the students mentioned that she is only physical active when she gains weight once she loses the weight she stops any physical activity. One other students said that she is not physical active as she is thin she doesn't need to lose weight.

### 5.3. Influence of the Social Environment and Culture

All 6 students mentioned that their family and friends have a big role in them being physical active. The family role is more about encouragement and support where they need their family to support them financially to join gyms or participate in any activities that require to register and pay, one of the students mentioned that she always uses her partners car to drive to the gym and she would have not been able to go if it was not for her parents car

In addition the mental support from the family is very important, one of the students who is regularly active stated that is she doesn't exercise for a couple of days than her mother will ask her and inquire if everything is alright and why is she not physical active, other student mentioned that her mother always asks her to join her in her daily walk which is very useful as its good exercise and a good way to spend some alone time with her mother.

With regards with friends only one students mentioned that she goes walking with her friends and that they play an important role in her taking the walk or not as she doesn't enjoy walking on her own.

### 5.4. Recommendations

The students shared different ideas on how they can be more physical active in SQU, one mentioned that she always tries to use the stairs instead of the elevators. They mentioned they would like to have more sport activates and awareness on the benefits of physical activity at the university. One student mentioned she would like to have more healthy food at the university as the current nutrition option provided by the university do not help them in staying healthy.

The students also suggested some good ideas on how we can improve the participation of females in physical activity in SQU and in the daily lifestyles follows:

- Supported female sports clubs and gyms by the government with reduced membership fees.
- Improve the urban infrastructure, pedestrian walk routs and introduce garden's gyms where you can have different fitness equipment's and have certain houses for females only.

- Increase the physical activity awareness in SQU by having monthly festivals and events for the students.
- Have mandatory physical activity classes or optional classes where you can increase your credits within SQU
- Have more media awareness about the benefits of physical activity; this will help raise the awareness in the society and families.

### 5.5. Summary of the Results

All the six students agreed that the gym in SQU is not modern, the equipment's are limited and they are sometimes long waiting queues.

Only one student out of the six students was regularly physically active, she regularly participate in physical activity but has never used the SQU sport facilities nor did any of the other five students, although they are all aware of the sport facility but have never used it as the timings is not suitable with their schedules.

There are a couple of barriers that the students mentioned during the interviews that prevent them from being physical active. These relate for example to the society the students live in and the live style of the society in general plays a big role in preventing them from being physical active. The way the society looks at the female who is physical activity, they gets a lot of comments that they should not be physically active as it's not suitable for ladies and it's a waste of time.

The culture does not accept females to be physically active outdoor due to the mixed environments and man being around the road and open space. Moreover, the sports clothing which is tight and not suitable to wear in front of men as per the Islamic laws and culture traditions, plus the lack of confidence in the body image which makes it uncomfortable in front of others.

In addition, lack of awareness of the benefits of physical activity in the families in general, one of the students mentioned that “we were not brought up being physically active with our parents or neighbours, all the social gatherings are always meetings of food, sitting down and chats. One other student mentions that “none of her friends are physically active or interested in

participating in any physical activity event, they always prefer to go shopping and out for dinners or movies and she doesn't enjoy exercising alone.

The weather in Oman, as we have eight months of summer with temperatures above 35 degrees, it is challenging to have any outdoor physical activity, moreover the urban planning infrastructure in Oman is not built for outdoor physical activity; we do not have pedestrian paths for people to walk.

Moreover the lack of indoor sport centres for females only plays a huge role in not being physical active. As mentioned before Sultan Qaboos university is the only University with an indoor sport facilities for ladies, yet none of the students interviewed have used any of the facilities, one of students mentioned "The SQU sports facility is far from the main buildings where the classes are conducted and parking's are limited, with the hot weather they can't walk all the way to the sport complex.

One other student mentioned that "the gym in SQU is old with old equipment's, plus there are no lockers in SQU for the students, therefore I will have to carry my gym bag throughout the day with all my other books and staff which is not convenient"

Time management has a huge impact on the students being inactive, they have loads of university work from assignments, exams, projects and their own personal life which makes it is very challenging to spare time for any physical activity. During the interviews I asked if time is really a barrier or is physical activity not a priority. one of the questions I asked was will you cancel a meeting with your friends to go to the gym or to do some physical activity, all of them answered "No", they agreed that being physical activate is not a priority, never the less they all agreed on the being physical activity increases the concentration levels and release them from stress.

Moving to the factors that motivate them, they all agreed on the benefits of physical activity and how important is it to be physical active to their physical and mental health especially with all the illness and sedentary lifestyle of today world.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is the main reasons that motivates them to participate in any physical activity. losing weight was the one reason they will all participate in any physical, one

of the students clearly mentioned that “I only started participating in physical activity to lose weight, it’s the one reason why I am still physical activity as I don’t like it when I gain weight”, other student mentioned “I don’t have a weight problem therefore I don’t exercise” which indicates that losing weight plays a huge role in their participation in any physical activity.

Moreover, having outdoor / indoor space for females only with modern equipment’s and affordable membership prices is a motive to participate in more physical activities and sports, this will be an excellent way to exercise and socialise with others at the same time, one students who doesn’t enjoy exercising alone mentioned “when I join the gym I make new friends therefore even if my close friends are not interested in any physical activity I can still go to the gym and have some friends to talk to while exercising”.

Some of the ideas the students had to promote physical activity for students are as following:

- Have more female sport clubs and gyms supported by the government with reduced membership fees to increase the participation of females in physical activity.
- Increase the physical activity awareness in SQU by having monthly festivals and events for the students
- Have mandatory physical activity classes or optional classes where you can increase your credits within SQU
- Have more awareness in the media about the benefits of physical activity; this will help raise the awareness in the society and families.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a research an indication whether the findings of this study is consistent with the similar research from the field.

According to the analysis and literature review it is recognised that women face a lot of obstacles to participate in any physical activity in the world in general and the Arab world in particular. Sport as a system and practice may not always be suitable with the regulations of Islam religion and the community culture and traditions. The early studies of the similar issues like the book “Muslim Women and Sport” have also addressed the situation of Muslim women in sport and the challenges and difficulties women face to participate in sports and physical activity in the Arab world. (Pfister, 2009.)

During the interviews all six students agreed the time if the number one factor that prevents them from being physical active, they mentioned that they are always busy with university work and their personal life issues which does not allow them to be physical active on a regular basis. During the interviews I asked them is time really a barrier of participating in physical activity is not a priority, they all answered it's not a priority.

Moreover, the high temperatures around the year and lack of indoor sport facilities prevents them being physical active, Oman has eight months of summer with temperatures between 30-50 degrees which limits outdoor activities, it's almost impossible to have any outdoor activities such as walking, cycling or jogging during the day time. And due to the lack of closed sport facilities for females only, it makes it challenging to stay physical activate due to the high cost of the gyms.

Lack of encouragements and support from the society, one of students mentioned that “my father doesn't not allow me to go out alone for a walk in the neighbourhood, and walking is the only exercise I can do as it's free and can be done at any time”.

Moreover, being raised in a community that is not physical active is another factor, this has effected the way they look at physical activity. The lack of support and encouragement of the family and surrounding has effected they participation in physical activity, as sports and being active is not a priority in their community.

Studies of Arab adults have similar conclusions to research conducted in other parts of the world: time constraints, health perceptions and lack of motivation all serve as barriers to physical activity. In a review of the challenges and barriers influencing physical activity among Arab adults, researchers found that time constraints due to family and society responsibilities, Lack of motivation, information, past exercise habits, family support and encouragement are the most common barriers to physical activity among Arabic adults. (Benjamin and Donnelly, 2013.)

Other factors as childhood history with physical activity can affect the levels of physical activity during adulthood. A childhood history of physical activity is presented in three categories: parent’s participation in physical activity during childhood, school-based physical education (PE) experience, and an individual’s level of physical activity during childhood. Having active parents during childhood is reflected positively in the physical activity levels of individuals later in life. (Telama, 2009.)

As per the data collected many female students face different kind of challenges to participating in physical activity that can be summarised in the figure 2:

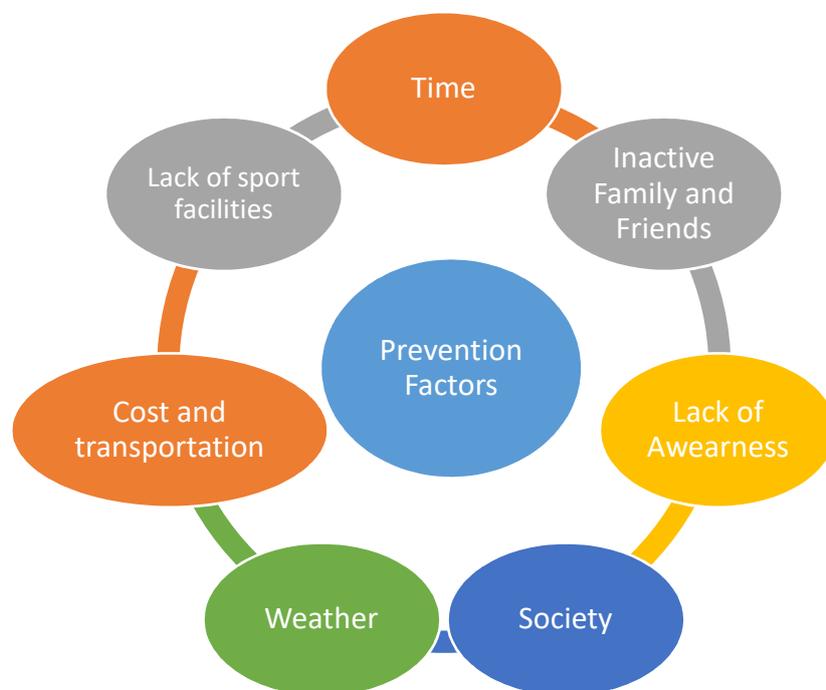


Figure 2 - Prevention factors of being physical active

## 6.1. Motivational Factors

Moving to the motivational factors of being physical active, physical activity is vital to form a healthy body image and reduces the level of obesity. Losing weight was the number one factor why the students participate in any physical activity, they all agreed that body image is very important, they increase the amount of exercise when they want to lose and maintain their weight.

Based on a study by (Allender, 2006), the most identified main motivations for physical activity are sense of success and accomplishment, pleasure, as well as skill development. However, the most common external motivations are body image, weight management, social network, and health benefits.

With all the health issue related to sedentary lifestyle. All of the six students agreed that being physical active is good for their health, the students are aware of the importance of being physically active to prevent them from any illness related to sedentary lifestyle.

Moreover, participating in physical activity is a good time to socialize with friends and family. With physical activity, the individual gains the spirit of cooperation with others when participating in physical activity in different places, one of the students mentioned that “she enjoys going for a walk with her friends as it’s a good way to catch up and talk about different topics”.

Above all exercise and physical activity develops attention and increases concentration. Regular physical activity improves the student’s mood and improves their concentration during studying. In addition to physical activity, the individual gains the spirit of cooperation with others, gain self-confidence and develops courage. The motivational factors to be physical active from the data collected can be summarized in the below figure 3.

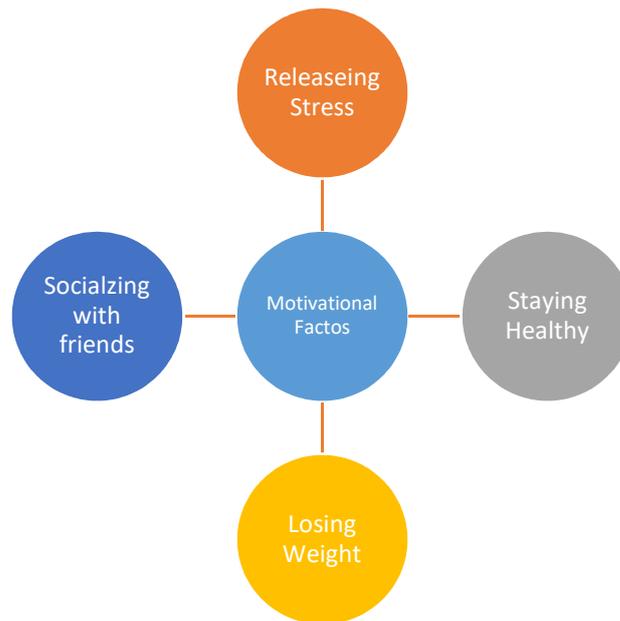


Figure 3 - Motivational factors of being physical active

In conclusion, time and lack of facilities appear to be the main barrier for the students to participate in greater physical activity. However, there does appear to be sufficient knowledge about physical activity itself among the students. In light of this, developing more culturally sensitive exercise facilities for women, as well as creating more facilities and implementing university health promotion programs for physical activity would be of great value, at least for university students.

Government entities, religious leaders, and role models could play an essential role in promoting more active lifestyles. Separate exercise facilities for both genders, accessible and affordable community programs using existing physical spaces such parks, schools and sport clubs could be developed to promote physical activity among the students and the community.

## 6.2. Limitations of the thesis and Future Research Suggestions

Several limitations were acknowledged in the completion of this. First of all, the study was done with Sultan Qaboos University students only which may not represent all Omani university students. Considering having more than fifteen thousand students in Sultan Qaboos

University, the interviews were done with six students only which is a small number comparing to all the students who are studying in Sultan Qaboos University.

Research limitations also include time, since the data collection could only have been collected during a certain period of time where the students were at the university and free.

Future research should include the male students and students from different ages to investigate the similarities and differences within the group, continued research should be conducted with other private colleges and universities to broaden the study to different educational sectors. Conducting the research in other private colleges and universities can provide answers to student's physical activity understanding and how they participate in physical activity.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 2 – Consent Form

**Project Title:** Physical Activity of female student of the age 18-24 in SQU

**Researcher:** Khadija Al Bakri

**Project Supervisor:** Hanna Vehmas

**Please indicate your agreement by ticking the following boxes after each of the statements and sign where indicated below:**

1. I confirm that I have understood the information given for the above study and understand what is expected of me.
2. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary.
3. I understand that I am free to stop the interview at any time and I am free to withdraw my data from the study until 15 Nov 2017
4. I give my consent to being audio-taped during the interview.
5. I agree to the use of direct quotations providing that any quotations are anonymized.
6. I confirm that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the interview, and if asked, the questions were answered to my full satisfaction.

#### **Data Protection Act**

I understand that data collected from me during this study will be stored on computer and that any computer files containing information about me will be made anonymous. I also understand that this consent form will be stored separately from any data that I provide.

I agree to University of Jyväskylä recording and processing my data and that these data will be used for a postgraduate thesis, and may be presented in other academic forums (e.g. academic journals, at conferences, or in teaching). I understand that my data will be used only for these purposes and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act.

**Your name (print)** .....

**Your signature** ..... **Date** .....

**Researcher's name (print)** .....

**Researcher's signature** ..... **Date** .....

Thank you for this information. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions on +968 95099663, or email me on khadoo101@gmail.com