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## An Analysis of Gender Equity in Sport Leadership: The Women's Spoken Mind

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### ABSTRACT

The growing voice from women in all circles of life against their lower numerical presence in sport leadership has been the driving interest for this research to unearth the reality on the ground and factors that compound their failure to occupy positions of leadership in most National Sport Organisations. The study was a pure qualitative and employed a descriptive survey of 60 National Sports Associations in Zimbabwe. Women and men in leadership positions and those women and men not in leadership positions were chosen as participants in this study. Interviews and documentary analysis were the data generating instruments for this study. It emerged that the selection criteria used by men in sport leadership to women is biased towards single mothers who are free to travel with teams to sport tournaments than married mothers who are prone to work-home conflict. The researchers made the following recommendations: most women should be exposed to sport participation so that they get experience to qualify for selection.

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### INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT CAPTION

The absence of women in leadership positions in sport such as being chairpersons and presidents of national sports associations has created speculations and complains by the women folk against segregation and deliberate disempowerment of females by men who are in leadership positions. Various reasons have been echoed by researchers on differences in men and women leadership effectiveness. For instance, in a meta-analysis, Eagly and Johnson (2009) in [12] posits that, contrary to stereotypic expectations, women were not found to lead in a more interpersonally oriented and less task-oriented manner than men in organizational studies. Women have been found to demonstrate the democratic or participative leadership styles than men, Engen and Willemsen 2004 in [12].

However, those views seem to miss the contemporary women's view as postulated by women action groups like Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), Msasa Project, ZWALA to mention a few. The focus of their advocacy is that given the chance, women do have similar effective leadership potential. A snapshot of Zimbabwean women epitomizes women in leadership positions and the organizations they are leading are a living example of success. These are Zimbabwe Open University, led by Primrose Kurasha, Women University led by Hope Sadza, Zimbabwe Women National Soccer Team, under Rosemary Mugadza and many more.

Although the predicament of female leaders has improved significantly there is still a long way to go especially in the field of sport and recreation. This prevailing scenario in Zimbabwe is the prime concern of this study that in most national sport association 99% of the sports associations are led by male presidents whilst secretariat positions are for women. Does this situation justify women's inability to lead or there is injustice in the promotion mantra? Therefore, this study has taken an in - depth study seeking responses from women in those secretariat positions of sport, women coaches/trainers, and male presidents of national sport associations.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Why is it that most of the presidents of the national sport associations in Zimbabwe are males and the secretariat level is occupied by females? Women are seriously underrepresented in the top sports leadership. That scenario has prevented women from ascending into top leadership in sport fraternity. What are the underlying hitches that deter women from taking up those top leadership posts in sport?

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## **SUB-QUESTIONS**

1. How fairly is the selection criteria used to promote women into leadership positions in sport?
2. Why are women underrepresented in the top leadership in sport?
3. What underlying problems deter women from taking up top positions in the running of National Sports Associations?

## **ASSUMPTIONS**

The researchers had the following assumptions:

1. Those who promote officials to leadership positions have unfair criteria of selecting.
2. Women have ineffective leadership qualities to lead sport.
3. Family demands are too heavy for women to take up sport leadership posts.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study’s findings shall be distributed in community libraries for easy access by sports leaders and women activists groups, so that it is used as a referral literature with those who advocate for equitable empowerment drive. Also the findings shall be a visible wallpaper for sports administrators to read and correct unacceptable promotional methods between women and men in the sport fraternity.

## **LITERATURE**

### **The Selection Criteria in Sport**

Researchers have noted a significant improvement in numbers for women in leadership positions, but in sport there is still a long way to go. Women are still underrepresented in the upper echelons of sport in the world and in Zimbabwe in particular. The invisible barrier preventing women from ascending into elite leadership positions is termed ‘the glass ceiling’, [12]. It has been noted that even in female-dominated occupations; women still face the glass ceiling, whereas men appear to ride a “glass escalator” to the top leadership positions (Maume, 1999; William, 1992, 1995 in [12]. The scenario appear the same in Zimbabwe’s National Sports associations in which 99% of the presidents of national sports associations are men, why not sharing the positions equally with women? Another observation by [4] was that glass ceiling metaphor has some limitations and one is that everyone has equal access to lower positions until all women hit this single, invisible, and impassable barrier. The leadership labyrinth is equated to a journey riddled with challenges all along the way, not just near the top; therefore women are busy navigating their way to break the glass ceiling. This philosophy suits the female struggle to be recognised as effective leaders just like their counterparts (men), but their success requires men’s acceptance that women are also capable and the promotional criteria should be fair enough.

### **Why Women Are Underrepresented?**

There is a plethora of reasons why females are underrepresented in high-level leadership positions. [12] draws at leadership labyrinth that postulates three contributing factors that militate against women’s ascendance as human capital, gender differences and prejudice.

#### ***Human Capital Differences***

According to [8] this set of explanation denotes that women have less human capital investment in education, training, and work experience than men. Lack of these facets results in a dearth of qualified women, sometimes known as “pipeline problem”. Fewer numbers of women in sport leadership positions is a clear testimony of a leaking pipeline. The struggle among women to take up those positions is bloated by lack of educational qualifications, which is a strong arsenal to challenge hegemonic masculinity. Women possess less work experience and employment continuity than men, largely by the disproportionate responsibility women assume for child rearing and domestic duties [2; 4].

Furthermore, women with children are more likely not to be employed or to work fewer hours than women without children [9]. Such work-home conflict is a burden on women climbing the leadership ladder. In attempt to avert this work-home conflict, some women choose not to marry or have

children; others choose to become ‘superwomen’ and attempt to excel in every role [6]. Such culturally prescribed division of labour leads women to self-select themselves out of leadership tracks by choosing “mommy track” positions. These assertions relate squarely with many women’s predicament in African societies where marriage is regarded as a great achievement for a woman, and whoever has no husband is a social disgrace for the society, [3, and 11] therefore; this could lead most women to choose marriage than sport leadership participation.

The above African cultural school of thought has been observed by most women as valid source of self-prejudicing among women as single mothers seem to enjoy sport promotions since they have no marital demands that disturb them from attending sports tournaments which run for some days away from their homes. The same question is not yet answered empirically whether it is husbands who do not prefer wives who are sport leaders or not.

### ***Gender Differences***

The leadership gap also revolves around the notion that females are just different from men, [12]. One argument is that women’s underrepresentation in elite leadership positions is a result of differences in leadership style and effectiveness. Another off-cited barrier to women’s advancement is the presumed gender difference in commitment to employment and motivation to lead. However contemporary researches dispute this notion saying , women show the same level of identification with commitment to paid employment roles as men do and in terms of leadership styles women are more democratic and transformational. Such styles are also effective in their own right. Empirical research does indicate that women are less likely than men are to promote themselves for leadership positions [2]. The common observation by women activist groups is that women are jealous of each other, they do not vote for each other into leadership positions, therefore, women are enemies of themselves, [5].

One gender difference that advantages men in leadership is that men are more likely than women to ask for what they want [1]. It is true with sport, one should negotiate with others to access the right positions, experiences, opportunities, resources and assistance, but still, women can be exposing themselves to men’s moral decadence in which females end up as victims of sexual corruption to gain promotions. Those women good in sport might end up foregoing those leadership posts in order to save their marriages and dignity.

### ***Prejudice***

[7] posit leadership gap as revolving around gender biases stemming from stereotyped expectations that women take care and men take charge. This notion seems to be true since most women are promoted to clubs and national sports associations as secretaries to take care of sports organisations’ minutes, files, and funds only. A woman who challenges male dominated roles by breaking the glass ceiling is visualised as not ‘female enough’. These gender biases can be particularly detrimental in the decision-making processes for selecting elite leaders. Not only are the decision makers influenced by the stereotypes that disadvantage women in the leadership role, but also they may succumb to homosocial reproduction, (a tendency for a group to reproduce itself in its own image), [8]. In sport leadership, people prefer similar others and report the most positive decisions about and evaluations of people who are most similar to them, these are biases which can clearly disadvantage women when male leaders are looking for their replacements.

## **STUDY METHODOLOGY**

The present study was a descriptive survey carried out in all ten provinces of Zimbabwe focusing at stakeholders involved in sports leadership. The research became a pure qualitative as it sought to solicit information from participants in their natural settings using interviews, open-ended questions and documentary analysis.

### **POPULATION**

The population saturated with information pertaining the problem, involved Presidents of National Sports Associations, women in sports Leadership posts and women not in sports leadership posts but are sports participants.

### **SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES**

From a focused population of 150 sports stakeholders, a sample of 50 participants were selected using purposive sampling technique and ecological sampling technique to get information from certain areas of the country of Zimbabwe.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

99% of the participants agreed that married women are difficult to be assigned duties to lead teams especially to tournaments which run for days. That clearly suggests that married women are at a disadvantage in terms of having opportunities to be promoted to sport leadership positions because of work-home conflict predicaments. Furthermore, it might suggest that during such tournaments one’s leadership prowess is exhibited and no any association wants to take women to lead for the sake of fulfilling gender equality at the expense of bringing good results home.

The majority of single mothers openly agreed that they are at liberty to travel to any tournament and that provides them exposure and experience to lead teams. That suggests a richer opportunity to be voted to leadership posts than their other female married women who have family obligations. 100% of the married women participants view unmarried women who are into sport and leisure as prone to sexual harassment by male sports participants and sponsors. This view might be a strong factor that influences most husbands not to allow their wives no matter how best they are in sport, to venture into sport and leisure lifestyle. That belief by parents also could make them forbid their girl child to be outstanding in sport leadership as they assume she would not be a suitable marriageable material.

On the issue of selection criteria, responses have indicated that all categories of participants agree that the selection and promotion were biased towards unmarried women therefore it have never been fair.

The participants concurred with literature that family demands make even those sports talented women leaders to withdraw their leadership services even if they were lucky to be selected to lead a team.

90% of the National Sports Association presidents acknowledged women leadership as equally effective as men’s. This denotes that where leadership is ineffective it has nothing to do with gender but lack of experience which is not women’s fault, but women’s long discrimination and result of hegemonic masculinity, [10]. The issue of gender differences has no place in quality sports leadership, but the negating factor is little experience and exposure.

On the issue of being sexually immoral during sports tournaments, the majority of married women both in sport leadership positions and those not, have failed to deny this practice. The need to be promoted and eventually enjoy the leisure of travelling with teams and getting tournament allowances has been singled out as bait dangled to most young women by men in leadership who are the majority in sport administration circles. It could be true because women are more economically disempowered in most African countries. Women participants have pointed this as men’s fertile ground to exploit women.

Culturally, women strive to maintain their dignity and marriages, those found challenging men’s sinister motives are left out, or they chicken out on their own. Such women’s predicament and others not researched yet are too private and women victims have failed to seek legal recourse fearing to be left out in sports tournaments.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the findings the researchers made the following conclusions:

1. The selection criteria are not fair to accommodate married women in sport leadership.
2. Single mothers have more advantage to be promoted into sports leadership posts than married mothers.
3. The rights of women are infringed even in sport through gender stereotyping.
4. Women in sport leadership are still very few as compared to men because of work-home conflict.
5. Men provide glass-ceiling against women in sport leadership.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Both married and single mothers must be given equal opportunities to be selected to lead Sports Associations.
- Meritocracy should be the benchmark in selecting female sports leaders.

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- Sports Associations should adhere to principles of democracy and equality between sexes.
- Women should employ house maids who man their house chores during their absence since most women are not willing to leave their families going to sports tournaments for days.
- Men should be conscientized to have positive attitude towards accepting that women can also have effective and efficient sport leadership.
- Women should be given enough exposure to sport administration through participating.

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