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## **Politics of gender in sports administration and leadership in Zambia**

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### **Abstract**

This was a phenomenological study aimed at investigating experiences of women in sports management and leadership in Zambia given the limited numbers of women in sports administration and leadership positions. Thus, this study sets to find out the reasons for the low rate of female involvement in sports administration and leadership in Zambia. This involved finding out roles played by females in administration and leadership of sports, difficulties that they face and how they mitigate the challenges faced. Purposive sampling involved 13 coaches, 8 physical educators, and 20 sports administrators. Semi-structured interviews and documentary studies were used to collect data from participants. Findings indicate that the sports industry was male-dominated. Female sports leaders faced challenges including gender stereotyping, lack of education and other capacity-building opportunities and lack of gender-sensitive policies that impeded women from taking up administrative and leadership roles. Governments and their agencies should implement policies to provide access to opportunities like educational programmes, ensure a safe environment for females and promoting the appointment of females to senior positions in sports.

**Keywords:** *Access to opportunities, gender, gender stereotyping, male domination, sports administration and leadership*

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### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the experiences of women in sports administration and leadership. The study focussed on gender and leadership within the sports profession (coaches, sports administrators and physical educators) in the Zambian districts of Lusaka and Kabwe. For a long time, women have been expected to live up to traditional gender roles that are held by both men and women in mainstream society. While they have made notable progress in administration and leadership in business corporations and the public sector, little has changed in the sports sector with still very few women than men in senior decision-making positions in management. Women tend to occupy less visible positions of leadership, particularly in the sports fraternity, although some women have occupied top positions around the world and have certainly set examples for all types of observers and admirers.

Women's participation in sport is influenced in a multitude of ways, both positively and negatively, directly and indirectly, internally and externally, and intentionally and unintentionally. What motivates girls and women to participate will change over time, and factors influencing participation will have multiple cultural and social origins. Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2008:267) pointed out that "The many reasons for this gender gap between men's and women's participation rates in sport can be grouped into practical, personal and social

and cultural domains. This overview of gender gaps can provide ideas for sports deliverers to implement what may encourage and enable women and girls to participate more.”

From the foregoing, as far as female leadership is concerned, there is generally, a severe gender imbalance, but this imbalance is more pronounced in the field of sports, especially in sports administration and leadership (Phiri, 2016). This disparity makes one wonder whether the gender imbalance in sports administration and leadership positions is because the females decided not to want to become administrators and leaders or other factors are hindering them from becoming sports administrators and leaders. Thus, this study sets to find out the reasons for the low rate of female involvement in sports administration and leadership in Zambia. This involves finding out roles played by females in administration and leadership of sports, difficulties that they face and how they mitigate the challenges faced.

In the past and in recent times women in sports have relatively been proactive and have held positions of administrators, Head of Departments, Coaching among others. The women who have held these positions have performed exceptionally well, if not better than their male counterparts (Chasha, 2018). As much as the representation of women in sports remains a matter of much concern, it is imperative to understand that the majority of research that has been carried out in the past on the topic under study has concentrated on the ‘developed’ nations. In Zambia, statistics show that few females take part in the management of sports at all levels in all sports disciplines (International Paralympics Committee, 2010; Startoe and Cunningham, 2007). Thus, this research will apply itself to the investigation of the experiences of women in sports leadership; focusing on women working within the sports profession (coaches, sports administrators and physical educators) in Zambia. Irrespective of the various efforts at international, national and ministerial levels by the governments and other stakeholders to see more females in sports organisation and management, the extent to which females participate in these positions of sports in Lusaka and Kabwe districts of Zambia is still not clear. In line with the above problem statement, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- a. To what extent are women involved in sports administration and leadership in Zambia?
- b. What roles do women fulfil in sports administration and leadership?
- c. What are the challenges that women in sports administration and leadership encounter?
- d. What are some of the strategies women in sports administration and leadership put up to overcome these challenges?

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate the experiences of women in sports management and leadership in Zambia to understand how gendered social norms and practices affect their attainment of roles in sports administration and leadership positions.

In answering the research questions, the study was guided by an interplay of two theories, namely Raewyn Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity serves as an analytical instrument to identify those attitudes and practices that perpetuate men’s domination over women. In line with this, Jewkes and Morrell (2012) describe hegemonic masculinity as a set of values, that men in power set up to include and exclude others, and to promote gender inequality in society relative to a hierarchy of masculinities, power, and patriarchy among other issues. According to Eisenstein (1999), patriarchy exists in and is maintained by all other social structures including marriage, family, sexual division of labour and society. This domination of positions of power and challenges that result from the marginalization of women confirms feminists’ views that patriarchy undermines the position of women by excluding them from participating in the social, economic and political agenda (Omwami, 2011).

The second theory is *the Social Cognitive Theory* which explains how people acquire and maintain certain behavioural patterns while providing the basis for intervention strategies (Bandura, 1997). The theory is relevant for designing both educational and behavioural programmes. It clearly explains the relationship that exists between the levels of administrators’ information on gender and their attitude towards women leadership in the sports sector which is later observed in the kinds of behaviour they engage in.

The two theories interweave to provide a theoretical explanation of its findings in the sense that they help to explain why women find themselves fulfilling in sports administration and leadership the nature of roles that they fulfil; and the barriers that stand in their way to the attainment of higher roles but also using feminism as a backdrop, provide a basis for understanding some of the strategies women in sports administration and leadership put up to overcome these challenges. The theory of feminism is used in the current study to explore gender relations and the status of women in sports as exemplified in the findings of the study. This is important because feminist research challenges power relationships that exist in most of the social sectors including sports which are seen as a sexist and male-dominated institute (Messner and Sabo, 1990). Therefore, it can be said, based on the theory that, if administrators are equipped with the rightful and adequate information on gender, the results will be seen in the behaviours that these leaders will portray. For instance, it was expected that with adequate knowledge on gender, administrators would not disengage women from certain positions and leadership activities. This would ultimately affect the extent to which women are involved in sports administration and leadership in Zambia since, in sports, gender differentiation is powerfully constructed to favour men, leading to the development of subordinate roles for women.

### **Literature review**

The percentage of women in leadership has changed in the recent past. Gender inequality remains prominent but the current trends as observed by Moran (2012) show that there has been progress made in hiring women in leadership roles. The trends show significant strides in recognising women but sadly, there is still a gap. Still, change resulting in equality and balance at the executive level is slow in coming. As of 2005 only 12 out of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) 116 members were women. Out of 202 National Olympic Committees (NOC), only nine have women presidents, five of them in Africa. As part of its Women and Sport policy, the IOC established targets in 1997 to increase the number of women in executive roles to 10 per cent by 2001 and 20 per cent by 2005. For comparison, the percentage of women participants at the International Labour Conference, by region, including ministers during 2001 and 2005 was 22 per cent (International Labour Organisation, 2005). One area directly linked with advancing the cause of gender equality in sports is leadership. Worldwide, the number of women in decision-making and leadership positions is still relatively small. Some attribute their lack of presence at the executive level to "glass-ceiling" effects, social and cultural barriers, a lack of female candidates and a less than the supportive professional environment.

The level at which females are involved in sports organization and management has become a matter of concern for all stakeholders worldwide. According to Sartore and Cunningham, (2007) females were under-represented in sports organizations and this scenario is prevalent all over the world; the only exemption possibly been Canada where equal opportunity policies seem to have been fully implemented. According to Martel (2007), Canada's sports survey showed that by 1991, 42% of women were employed in sports administration and that equal participation in sports had been achieved, with 49% women participating on equal grounds as men.

However, Pfister and Radtke (2009) study on German sports federations showed that nearly all of the top-level sport positions were held by men; specifically 96.6% presidents and 80% of other top executive positions. Of the positions at the national level in Germany, the proportion of women to men in leadership was even more striking, with men occupying 91% of the 682 positions and women occupying only 9%. The German regional sports federations consisted of 18 men and only one woman. Additionally, women composed of only 20.1% of the regional federations' executive positions. Out of 2726 administrative and leadership positions at different levels of the German regional sports associations, women only occupied 14%. The

number of women in administrative and leadership positions in Germany decreased greatly as the status of the job increased at all levels of governance, from the regional to the national levels. However, in line with the feminist agenda of promoting women participation in sports at the highest level throughout the world, organisations in sports have been formed to develop a sporting culture that enables and values the full involvement of women in every aspect of sports ((National Organisation for Women in Sports Physical Activity and Recreation, 2012).

The issue of women and their role in the sporting world includes all the issues currently being debated in the wider world-such as women in decision-making roles, and women in management. On a local front, the organisation of sports in Zambia is seen to have been dominated by men and boys, leaving women and girls in the background doing very little. Few females take part in sports as athletes. Starting from the lowest level of sports organization such as the schools and community sports teams, to the highest level of sports organization in the country, to the Ministry of Youth and Sports headquarters, there are very few females occupying decision-making positions on organizing committees for sports (National Organisation for Women in Sports Physical Activity and Recreation, 2012). The situation is worse when it comes to coaching, where there are very few females appointed to take up this challenging duty in different disciplines.

The situation is even worse when it comes to management because females are a minority in sports organizing committees (International Paralympics Committee, 2010). This defeats logic because studies conducted across the world have pointed out the different roles women fulfil in organisations as sports managers and leaders; women are known to be involved in planning, organising events and travels, writing concepts and post-event reports, training and officiating. In these roles women tend to be slightly more effective in comparison to men in leadership roles that place a high premium on communication, empathy and emotional intelligence (Budworth & Mann, 2010; Cohen & Huffman, 2007; Dreher, 2003). Eddy and Cox (2008) stated that women physical educators were proactive in advocating for the participation of women in sports. These women who were pioneer physical educators played tripartite roles of teaching, coaching and administration which have continued to expand. Regardless of the above, however, many women do not stay in middle management roles and therefore are not proportionately reflected in the pursuit of senior administrative and leadership positions. For example, Cunningham (2008) argued that women leave management roles in different sports settings because they often face hostile, antagonistic and difficult work environments. These challenges have devastating consequences for women in sports administration and leadership. Dixon, Warner, & Breuning (2008) and Hums and Grappendorf (2007) have established that women leave mid-career roles for a variety of reasons and therefore are not prepared or available to compete for senior leadership roles.

Research conducted in the United Kingdom indicated that pressure to adhere to social stereotypes caused most women and girls not to participate in sports and physical activities. The values held by communities are so heavily stereotyped that they hinder females from taking part in sports in most cases (Allender, Cowburn, and Foster (2006). This view in the UK is reflected in Zambia where Matafwali (2010) has argued that socio-cultural norms and constraints are some of the factors that are hindering girls and women's involvement in sports and physical activities. She indicated that girls were highly restricted in many areas, which, if countered would open up opportunities for them to get involved in sports and physical activities. It is clear from the studies cited that traditional barriers, such as leaving homes unattended to or being seen by men outside their family, restricted women's involvement in sports, including sports administration and leadership. If women do not participate in sport in general, they are unlikely to seek administrative and leadership positions within the sports sector.

Despite increasing numbers of women in senior sport management positions over the past thirty years, men remain dominant in these roles, indicating a level of gender inequity within sport management (Hoeber & Shaw, 2003). In other words, despite the societal mandates used to increase the number of women in administrative and leadership positions, the traditional



stereotypes remain. Gender inequity in sport organisation boards, particularly in decision-making positions, remains a significant issue. There is consensus in the literature that, globally, women continue to be under-represented in leadership positions. Patriarchal selection practices and organisational cultures reinforce this inequity, despite evidence that men in leadership roles recognise the problem. While gender equity policies exist, actions to pursue gender equity are more limited. Patriarchal language, gendered stereotypes and person-profiling persist, resulting in specific emotional and practical challenges for women in sports leadership positions (Evans and Pfister, 2020).

According to the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2008), these classes of obstacles can be classified into three groups. These are personal, social-cultural, and practical. This classification can help to identify various ideas that can be put in place by sports administrators and organizers to motivate and enable more female participation in sports. Personal barriers include body size and shape, personal security, family and adult influences on young girls and lack of self-confidence. Social and cultural obstacles comprise a male-dominated sports culture, lack of or inadequate media representation of women's role in sport, male chauvinism, sexual harassment and abuse, while practical barriers consist of the lack of childcare, expenses, transport, access to facilities and lack of specific sports attire and equipment.

Massao (2001) and Ivan (2019) have cited factors such as physique, social attributes, role models, media coverage and finance as some of the factors affecting females' participation in sports. Females were still viewed as fairer and weaker sex such that some sports were deemed to be too dangerous for them. The social attitude that a woman's place was in the home continues to affect women's participation in sports. He clarifies that women failed to spend more time for training since they shared the time to do house chores. Development of those sportsmanship characteristics like psychological toughness, muscular body and competitiveness were looked at to be for males and not for females. Consequently, females shunned sports and physical activities for fear of being regarded as social misfits. This leads to the assumption that women are not suitable candidates for leadership positions based on their gender.

Some researchers like (Eagley, 2007; Scott & Brown, 2006) believed that the underrepresentation is due to gender bias in the workplace, while others believe that leadership practices of women are often under-recognized or rewarded (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Whatever the reason, it is clear that a disproportionate number of women occupy senior leadership roles in the sports industry. All this points to a chauvinistic arrangement of society that the feminist movement is attempting to overcome. Despite the gender stereotypes that suggest that women are incapable of leading, there is enough evidence to prove that women are capable of leadership. Rink (2002:72) is of the view that "Women leaders bring a different perspective to leadership, thus the proposition to include more women in leadership positions in various organizations." It was reported from different literature that due to low female participation in sports organisation and management, the industry of sports has been robbed of potential leadership in women, there were few role models and the achievement rate of gender quality was slowed down.

In the past few decades, this trend has been confronted and challenged. Girls and women have "*tackled*" narrow, negative, and limiting concepts and ideas that they should not participate in sports, sweat, show aggression, or compete, and have begun to include physical strength and athletic prowess in the definition of femininity. As a result, traditional stereotypes for females have slowly been changing and evolving. This will likely continue as girls and women stop feeling that they need to choose between sports and femininity.

As per the feminist agenda, challenges that involved culture as well as contextual factors that comprise of structural (e.g., gender role stereotyping, the opportunity for promotion and advancement, discriminatory hiring practices, organizational policies inhibiting work-life balance) and social determinants, required concerted efforts mooted to shift power relations. This includes investment in networking, mentoring/role modelling and favourable work-life balance.

The initial strategy proposed thus is for women to get exposure so that they gained increased strong collaborative skills and an understanding of the role of emotional intelligence.

Finance, fundraising and budget management were identified as important skills for a senior-level leader to acquire (Hoffman, 2010). Regardless of gender, an organization's leader must be equipped effectively with leadership skills.

The second strategy according to reviewed literature is networking. Developing relationships is critical in the sports industry and is said to be one of the most important strategies to secure a senior leadership position in the sports industry by women (Burton et al., 2017). Through strategic networking women increase their exposure and opportunities as they enter the field. Subsequently, it has been observed that increasing the number of women in the boardroom and other senior management positions can increase the appreciation for diverse talents and enrich the organization. Organisations are also advised to devise flexible schedules and family-friendly reforms such as maternity leave, to accommodate women. Further, developing social and capital networks can be used to mentor others and help women to develop careers and advance into leadership roles. To enhance personal development and acquire group support, women must develop networks to enhance their positions in workplaces and sports as well (Rink, 2002).

## **Methodology**

The study was purely qualitative. It used the phenomenological design which examines human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved. In phenomenological research design, respondents are asked to describe their lived experiences as they perceive them (Creswell, 2012). In line with this view, this study involved soliciting information from respondents about the experiences of women in sports management and leadership in Zambia. The researchers adopted this design because it provided them with the means to both obtain the lived experiences of the female administrators and leaders as well as information on the subjective knowledge and perceptions of the respondents with some degree of accuracy (Donalek, 2004).

The target population for this study included participants recruited from various sports organisations and educational institutions in Zambia. Purposive sampling was used as the method of selecting the participants in this study and included 13 coaches, eight (8) physical educators and 20 sports administrators and others in sports-related roles at Olympics Youth Development Centre (OYDC) and Kwame Nkrumah University bringing the total sample to forty-one (41). A purposive sampling procedure was used to choose a sample that was reliable and able to provide the researcher with the information needed. According to Simuchimba (2005), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the sampled members are selected based on their knowledge and expertise regarding a research subject, in this case, experiences of women in sports management and leadership in Zambia. The study used semi-structured interviews where open-ended questions were asked, as it took on the form of a conversation to explore the respondents' views, ideas, and attitudes around certain aspects that came to light during the interviews. Interviews are a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, programme or situation (Taylor, 2005). This method is useful as it allows participants to express themselves in their own words and offer personal views of their experiences and interpretations (Flick, 2002). Interviews enabled the participants to talk about and interpret their experiences and communicate how they observed circumstances from their perceptions. Individual interviews with the different respondents assisted us to explore their views and experiences on specific matters that arise during the data collection (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). These semi-structured lasted between 20 -30 minutes each and were all recorded on an MP3 recorder for further transcription and analysis.

Data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously. Themes and patterns were sought in the data. Data analysis commenced in the field. We made use of inductive thematic analysis to analyse the data and to answer the research questions that guided the study. The primary purpose of using an inductive approach was that it lends itself to the development of

research findings derived from the raw data ((Creswell, 2012). The decision to use thematic analysis was based on the fact that this approach provided us with a flexible and useful research tool that provided rich and detailed data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Another advantage of thematic analysis was that it reports on the experiences, meanings and reality of the respondents. Hence, a detailed understanding of the experiences of women in sports management and leadership in Zambia could be obtained. This detailed understanding is supported by Braun and Clarke (2014) who mention that thematic analysis reflects on reality and unpicks the surface of reality.

Thematic analysis is viewed as an in-depth and organised method of assessing the relevant data. Furthermore, the thematic analysis focuses on identifying key concepts, themes and meanings that emerge through the data analysis which will offer meaningful answers to the research question (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Theron, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) maintain that thematic analysis involves the searching across a data set to find repeated patterns of meaning or codes.

Data collected was further analysed by use of textual and structural analysis. Under textual analysis, the researcher identified the critical and common descriptions by respondents while structural analysis involved the researcher's interpretation of what the sports administrators and leaders described regarding their lived experiences. This is in line with the practice suggested by Muzata, Simalalo, Kasonde-Ng'andu, Mahlo, Banja and Mtonga (2019). All ethical considerations in this study such as; seeking permission from the university ethical committee, site authorities and respondent issues of confidentiality were taken into account and other basic research conventions. For respondents, all were given chance to consent to their participation in the study. In addition, their identity was kept anonymous.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The findings have been presented descriptively, with verbatim statements reported. For ethical reasons and also for easy identification of respondents, participants in this study were assigned the following codes; coaches (C1-13), physical educators (PE1-8), and sports administrators (SA1-20).

### ***The extent to which women are involved in sports administration and leadership in Zambia***

The study sought to establish the extent of women involved in sports administration leadership in Zambia. Most of the respondents stated that women were significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions in professional sport in Zambia in positions such as coaches, sports administrators, and lecturers in sports courses and technical organisations. Some responses from participants include:

*I think it is very low. Take time to look at organisational charts for sports associations in Zambia. As an administrator, I interact with many women and they undoubtedly have ambitions to be promoted to a senior-level role. (SA1-20).*

*For me, we are above moderate. I joined the sporting fraternity as a leader at the time percentages for female sports leaders were below 8 percent. I am almost retiring and I am happy to see a lot of women and girls in professional sports leadership. The numbers are not matching with those of men but the proportion of women advancing to senior roles is growing and at a good pace. (SA1-20).*

The study has shown that even with the advancements that women have made throughout history, very few women have risen to top positions in sports administration and leadership in Zambia. Statistics in this study showed that in the two sites and affiliated institutions women leaders at senior management were below 8 percent. These findings on the low extent to which women in sports held senior positions correlates with earlier studies which showed that few females are

seen to take part in the organisation and management of sports at all levels, in all sports disciplines (IPC, 2010; Sartore and Cunningham, 2007). An earlier study indicates that out of the forty-three (43) sports associations in Zambia, only six (6) had at least 50 per cent women representation on their national executive committees, of which most were in supporting ranks (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2012). Additionally, a review of the extent to which females were involved in sports management and organisation carried out by NOWSPAR indicated that nineteen (19) per cent average representation of females on Sports Association Boards in Zambia and only one association had a woman as president (NOWSPAR, 2012). It indicates that this has been the case throughout history in that, women had to fight for a place in society.

According to Women Sports International (2010), women are under-represented in the leadership and decision making positions in all sports and sports-related organizations. These findings in Zambia agree with the global literature on the subject. Although numbers of women participating in sports continue to grow, there has not been a corresponding addition in the number of women in top-level administrative positions within the sports industry (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010; Strawbridge, Deleger, Roberts, & Kaplan, 2002). Due to this trend, the lack of female voices at the decision-making levels of sports enterprises is becoming increasingly apparent.

### ***The roles that women fulfil in sports administration and leadership***

Bailey, Ciannelli, Bond, Belgrano & Stenseth (2005) suggested that females in leadership were role models to girls in sports participation. They stood to motivate and inspire the lives of young girls as they pursued their sports professional careers. The study intended to find out what roles women fulfil in sports leadership. Respondents were asked to list the roles that women fulfil in sports administration and leadership in various organisations, and most respondents indicated that most of the roles women fulfil in sports leadership consists of administration, followed by organising, coaching and guidance. Respondents submitted that:

*“We (women) are in the recent years doing very well in leadership. We are very good at administration and organising sports activities. The other thing I just learnt is the fact that beyond coaching and training, women are being preferred by athletes due to additional role of mentoring and counselling; also fairness in the selection of players and participants.”* (SA1-20).

*My job description gives the roles as if it is for other Heads of Department. I supervise the Physical educators, coaches and oversee sporting activities of the university. I have to do reports on all these. Outside the university being one of the renowned universities offering Physical Education and Sports and Sports management courses, we are involved in community and consultancy work. I help sport management in schools, sport policy makers.* (SA1-20).

Others submitted detailed roles women fulfil in sports administration and leadership as follows;

*Planning for meetings, tournaments and work plans/seasonal calendar for training as well as planning meals for the athletes. Coordinating the activities before, during and after the tournament, facilitating financials, medicals for the teams to perform well, managing teams and staff on a day to day basis.* (SA1-20).

In addition, the participants confirmed that their role included *planning future activities, looking at policies and practices, writing concept papers and reports, coaching, selecting teams and sourcing funds or partnerships for events and trips.* (SA1-20).

From the interviews with administrators, physical educators, staff and coaches it was clear that women fulfil different roles in sports leadership and overall had a bigger role to fulfil in sports



administration and leadership than men. The organisation of tournaments, counselling of athletes, coaching, planning, training and clerical works are among the many roles women fulfil in sports leadership. These findings on the basic roles of women in sports administration and leadership support confirm the conclusions from other research on women leadership (Yukl, 1998) and are also in line with Kotter's (1990) view that the essential functions of leadership include producing a feminist movement within an organisation. This is in line with Strawbridge et al (2002:46) who stated that "Obviously, more and more women are making sports administration their careers at higher levels and the women who have persevered and are functioning in these top positions have much to teach us." From this, we note that understanding the cluster of skills is one of the necessary steps to guiding women who are seeking to take up sports administration and leadership.

### ***The challenges encountered by women in sports administration and leadership***

This study focused on various challenges that made women become discouraged, disillusioned, or disenchanted and/or because of other circumstances, are not considered or presented as a candidate for senior-level positions. The study established numerous challenges that female sports administrators encountered in the discharge of their work. Prominent among these was the lack of readiness by sports bodies to hire women to top positions and higher expectations from women. Other reasons are family responsibilities, inexperience, and failure of women to handle the pressure of work. The in-depth interviews with the administrators revealed that women encounter in sports administration and leadership as follows:

*Women are few at the policy-making level and this is the same at all levels in the sporting arena and structures. One of the causes is that throughout history men are regarded to be strong and better organisers. The causes mainly are linked to beliefs and norms. Cultural beliefs, as well as wealth and, defeat the element of education background especially in this age of corruption dominated systems. (SA1-20).*

*Corruption, male selfishness, nepotism and male-dominated cultural beliefs have caused the denial of better leadership from women. Equally, women not standing by each other. Unnecessary competition to protect positions is a challenge I have to say this. (SA1-20).*

*Governments have no clear legal framework. No proper system in the distribution of work. There is no order in the Ministries related to education, gender and sports. Qualifications do not matter like in other sectors. Those in top management favour their relatives or tribemates. Promotions are done on tribal grounds. In addition, lot of abuse for women even if they have the right qualifications. (SA1-20).*

It came out prominently from the majority of the respondents that, social-cultural perceptions, lack of networks and mentors, lack of support for local and international training in capacity building, and lack of readiness by the institutions' administrators to support even few hired women for top positions through timely feedback and motivation are among challenges to womens' ascendancy to top leadership positions in the sports sector. The findings of this study are in line with research literature concerning women leadership in sport which has tended to focus on the barriers women face (Sartore and Cunningham, 2007), job inequities (Shaw and Frisby, 2006) and perceptions regarding competency (Burton and Peachey, 2009). Lack of strong networks (McKay, 1997), the minimal influence of these networks (Claringbould and Knoppers, 2012) and lack of mentors (Abney, 1991) have been cited as the most prominent barriers women face in moving into sports administration and leadership. Furthermore, research suggests that

women in sports organizations are more likely to be hired into positions with less power, less pay and fewer opportunities for advancement.

This is in line with the finding of Dreher (2003) earlier reported that family responsibilities and or work-life balance demands often take a higher level of priority for women in comparison to men. It is notable that before the current research, the challenges continue to occur because of a lack of deliberate government policies to encourage women leadership in male-dominated sectors like sports. Given this, Burton, (2015) notes that career progression is often hindered for women working within the professional sports industry due to a multitude of factors. While most organizations are cognizant of the need to have gender-friendly policies, people's attitudes have proved hard to change, and women are still perceived as inferior to men. The other strategy is linked to understanding barriers themselves in the face of culture. Pheko (2009) proposes a change of people's attitudes, embracing cultural diversities, as well as accepting of women as equals while Chabaya et al. (2009) recommends re-socializing of individuals and embracing gender equality as a way of addressing cultural stereotypes that prevent women from seeking for leadership positions. Finally, as earlier pointed out the lack of female representation in senior leadership roles and an accompanying voice of role models at decision tables fosters and perpetuates the stereotype that women are not capable, or sufficiently qualified to assume senior leadership positions.

### ***Strategies used by women in sports administration and leadership to overcome the challenges***

Scholars have cited several obstacles that women in sports leadership needed to overcome such as; eliminating organizational cultural barriers, lack of leadership and mentoring programmes for women and, lack of flexibility in their work schedules to promote a family-oriented and supportive work environment which would allow for the success of women. The study also sought to establish some of the strategies women in sports leadership put up to overcome the identified challenges. Although women's participation in sports has generally improved in the recent past, there are still serious challenges they face in terms of how they are perceived compared to their male counterparts. Overall, women's participation remains low. The lack of education and training, gender segregation, lack of resources, patriarchal culture and heavy reproduction burdens place a limit on women's participation in sports and sports management. Higher education and formal training offered women little advantage for consideration for promotions and higher wages because women are considered inferior.

The interviewees revealed their experience of how they overcame challenges including having mentors and role models to their career success and career trajectory, challenging perception, studying further, and networking with other women leaders. Thus, research participants proposed mentorship, skills improvement, networking and having positive role models as solutions to raise their career success and career trajectory. Women need to have access to the perspectives of other women who have forged their way into senior leadership roles in the Zambian sports industry and beyond. The following is what some participants said:

*One of the many ways for me in my career is having mentors, some of who I met in books and I always advocate this for women emerging leaders as a way to position themselves as strong candidates for senior sports leadership roles.” (SA1-20).*

*I have not only taught from primary to university level but I followed a variety of sports and this positions me with higher understanding. Knowledge and skill above the followers have been a great panacea for me to overcome the challenges of perception. Secondly, my understanding of what it means to work hard, manage my time, helping athletes on how to win and lose graciously and managing negative feedback in the sports industry is useful. I have learnt and encourage young women in sports to know when to shut up and get down to business. Many of the things for*

*office work can be summed up in a concept of teamwork, one understanding of the dynamics of a team and the culture is the way out of many barriers. (SA1-20).*

*“I had to employ a maid and also sensitise my husband on the demands of my work at the time I got promoted from assistant coach to head coach for the national team.” (C1-13).*

*The reason some women have not sought these jobs could be that they are afraid of rejection. I have been fortunate to never have my gender be a discouraging factor in my career. To overcome this challenge, women need to get out of their comfort zone and imagine no barriers. This is the only way out. It worked for me and it is working for those I trained. (C1-13).*

The majority of respondents submitted the following summed up points for ways to overcome challenges;

*It is imperative for women to consult others on how they are managing and leading organisations. Women need to join associations that can help them uplift their standards and be able to participate in women leadership conferences. Women also need to develop systems to have confidence in themselves too. (SA1-20).*

There was consensus that most challenges women in sports leadership faced were overcome by mentoring. This entails developing relationships with other professionals within the industry. The positive influence of mentoring on an employee in a new workplace is widely acknowledged in the literature (Kram, 2005, Dougherty and Dreher, 2007; Godshalk and Sosik, 2007; McKeen and Buyaki, 2007; Banja, Ndhovu and Mulendema, 2015; Banja, 2017, 2020). Investing in strategic networking would increase opportunity and exposure for women entering the field. Further, nearly all respondents submitted that;

*Women should be given 100% scholarships to be able to advance their education and other skills necessary to compete for top jobs in sports. (SA1-20).*

The study reveals that women are overcoming the barriers that were set in the past and more women today are successful in leadership roles in the sports industry. Moreover, networking was suggested as an important strategy to secure a higher number of women in senior leadership positions in professional sport. This can be attained through joining associations, forming collaborative support teams, attending conferences and exchange programmes that can help them uplift their standards. This finding supports the views of (Burton *et al.*, 2017) who state that developing relationships is critical in the sports industry. Through strategic networking women, increase their exposure and opportunities when entering the sports field. The major strategy is that developing women leaders provides a means for empowering women and ensuring that they are equipped with skills to assume leadership roles.

The study explored the experiences of women in sports leadership in Zambia. Women in the sports industry have not yet reached equity with men in management and leadership representation because of gender barriers. Segura's (2007) *Feminist Analysis of Hegemonic Power of Patriarchy* throws light on how social structures such as marriage, family, sexual division of labour and society, in general, conspire to marginalize women by excluding them from public life which includes sports administration and leadership. Similarly, the *Social Cognitive Theory* has helped to explain both the relationship between male administrators' attitudes towards women leadership in the sports sector and how this attitude affects behaviour

towards women and the resultant low-level participation of women in sports administration and leadership. This demonstrates that although policies have to some measure redressed the general absence of women in leadership positions in sport, the reality is that women are generally absent from sports organizations due to gender inequality in sport. The findings are used to recommend what can be done to improve social actions, policies, activities and behaviour change (Dube, 2011:124).

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study has shown that despite women being highly educated with brilliant qualifications, they remain largely invisible in sports leadership positions due to cultural stereotypes that confine women to a second class status despite their proven ability in various roles. To ensure equity there is a need for appropriate gender balance at all levels of the sporting sector; men and women need to have equal access to leadership positions and compete on equal terms for job opportunities. The findings may influence the development of a policy with the understanding of how women in a male-dominated environment can be motivated to challenge the masculine hegemony. Though the findings of this study focused on leadership experiences in sports, the factors uncovered are similarly relevant to women working in other male-dominated settings outside the sports and education sector. Uncovering these realities by addressing the research questions was enabled by the use of appropriate methods of collecting data, namely interviews that targeted key female sports administrators and leaders and elicited information about their lived experiences.

The study recommends that governments and their agencies should formulate and implement empowerment policies that increase access to opportunities, and help create a safe environment in the sports sector for girls and women. The government through line ministries should make deliberate efforts aimed at strengthening women participation in sports leadership. For instance, positions in sports organisations should be opened up to women in such a way that if a man heads an institution, a woman should be deputy and vis-versa. This will help cement the roles women play in sports administration and leadership and mitigate against the many challenges women administrators face in the execution of their duties. Further, women already in sports leadership positions make use of the strengths in their network by mentoring juniors to overcome the weaknesses thereby helping their fellow women develop their careers and aspire for top leadership. Additionally, sporting and institutions of learning offering sporting programmes should foster a more general shift in career development awareness and consciousness that promotes a conducive, responsive and nurturing workplace culture that is supportive of the career development of women who aspire to senior administrative and leadership positions.

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