Development Perspectives: Girls’ Sport Participation in post-9/11 Afghanistan

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As awareness of living conditions in Afghanistan grew after the October 2001 U.S. invasion and subsequent fall of the Taliban, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) targeted the country to offer various services and programs. The purpose of this poster is to highlight international sport for development NGO work in Afghanistan by focusing on research conducted with participants in an American-based sport NGO program in June 2007. A review of economic, political, religious, and socio-cultural conditions in Afghanistan, informed by feminist theory; international relations theories; health, human security, and reconstruction policy; and researcher field journals informed the framework of the study. Girls’ sport and physical activity experiences in this specific post-9/11 context in Kabul were examined through the use of in-depth qualitative interviews and ethnographic methods. Analysis of interview transcripts yielded five themes: 1) hope for future; 2) pride in participation/accomplishments; 3) physical activity centered around the home; 4) positive benefits of sport participation; and 5) value for girls’ sport participation. The findings informed the development of a best practices model for sport NGO programming, which includes recommendations to develop cultural proficiency, position girls’ sport/physical activity programs as healthful practices, teach activities suitable to local conditions, and work toward the goal of sustainability. Further, sport management academic programs are discussed as important sites for the training of students who are interested in applying management principles and practice to work in the international, physical activity-related non-profit sector.