Disability Sport in Bangladesh: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Athletes with Disabilities in Dhaka Bangladesh

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The growing research on disability sport has begun to paint a holistic view of the lives of people with disabilities in the western world. Issues such as ableism are prevalent and pronounced (Cottingham, Hums, Jeffress, Lee, & Richard, 2017; Hardin & Hardin, 2004), often leading to disempowerment of individuals with disabilities as well as social barriers, generally perceived as more repressive than physical ones (Rimmer, et al., 2004; Rimmer, Ruban, & Braddock, 2000). These social pressures may be contributing factors in the dismal employment rates among people with disabilities compared to the relatively high substance abuse and suicide rates. Despite this, individuals with disabilities, and particularly athletes with disabilities, have persisted, and many believe that substantial improvements have been made to allow for a better quality of life and greater legitimacy (Cottingham, Carroll, Lee, Shapiro, & Pitts, 2016). Supporting research has been conducted in western countries such as the UK (Smith, 2013), Australia (Macdougall et al., 2017) and Canada (Gaskin, Andersen, & Morris, 2010). However, little is known about athletes with disabilities representing a more global diversity, who may not benefit from the affluency, legal protections, and individualistic culture of the western world.

In poor countries where resources are scarce, the common assumption is that disability sport is nonexistent. Yet over 180 countries train Paralympic-level competitive athletes, and more countries offer recreational disability sport programming; the majority being developing countries. In a collaborative effort, individuals from the US and Bangladesh have come together to study the lived experiences of athletes with disabilities in Bangladesh. This study was funded by (organizational names redacted until after abstract accepted). As an impoverished country with a unique position in Southeast Asia, as well as starkly contrasting socio-cultural norms compared to its western counterparts, Bangladesh was an appropriate selection for the study, and communications with researchers and disability sport practitioners of the country yielded a positive response. Remarkably, in the 15th poorest country in the world where the mean family income is less than $7 a day (Focus Economics, 2016), disability sport thrives. Our research will focus on local motivations for participating in sport when physical access and equipment are difficult to come by, as well as how athletes manage social and cultural barriers.

Data will be collected between December 5th – 22nd 2018 among identified participants of recreational and regionally-competitive disability sport. The PI will meet with Co PIs in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and conduct 30 interviews with local athletes with disabilities. Interview questions were developed with Bangla disability sport practitioners to provide face validity (Hardesty & Bearden, 2004). Some investigators will conduct the interviews directly in Bangla, while others will utilize a translator. An exploratory qualitative research design will be utilized to gain an in-depth knowledge of lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). We anticipate transcriptions will be completed by mid-January and analyses will be completed by mid-February.