



MUSLIM WOMEN IN SPORT: Removing Barriers and promoting Physical Activity

APSE Southern Region Conference
May 2023

Content:

- Introduction to MSA
- What are the barriers to participation for Muslim and Racially Diverse women?
- Empowering Muslim and Racially Diverse women through sport
- What your organisation can do to promote physical activity to this under-represented demographic



SPEAKERS



Yashmin Harun BEM
Founder & Chair
Muslimah Sports Association



Ibtisam Belola FRSA
Trustee
Muslimah Sports Association



We are MSA.

We create safe spaces for ethnically diverse women to engage in sports and physical activity without compromising their religious or cultural beliefs.

WE INSPIRE | WE DEVELOP | WE EMPOWER

ABOUT MSA

- Established in 2014 MSA gained charity status in 2019 and offers over 15 sports weekly
- Winning multiple awards MSA has received recognition throughout the industry, engaging with the House of Lords Sports & Recreation Select Committee to talk about the challenges facing females in ethnically diverse communities.
- MSA has supported several Local Authority Sports and Leisure teams and sports clubs to engage with ethnically diverse females in sports, sharing best practices throughout the country.



ABOUT MSA

Develop tailored coaching courses working closely with the Football Association, British Fencing, GB Archery, London Sport, Sport England, Badminton England and Basketball England.

Engage in placed based approaches of connecting to local organisations and entering partnerships. This

has included working with:

- Vision Redbridge
- London FA
- Sported
- London Sport
- Essex FA



ABOUT MSA



Our awards :

- British Rowing & 'Social Inclusion' Project of the Year 2022
- Archery GB Participation Project 2021
- Outstanding Volunteer & 'Spirit of Britain' 2020
- Faith & Belief Awards
- FA Grassroots Football Award
- FA 'For All' Award, & She Awards 2019
- London Sports Workforce Award 2018
- The Muslim News Award 2017.

Why we do what we do

We know the playing field is not always level. MSA believes having more positive representation of Muslim and ethnically diverse women will lead to an increase in participation at all levels.

By removing existing barriers to sports and activities, we can be part of a bigger picture of work that helps to address many of society's biggest challenges.

MSA has seen the impact of what sports and physical activity has on its community: making people happier and healthier.

What are the barriers to Muslim and Racially Diverse women in sport?



WE INSPIRE | WE DEVELOP | WE EMPOWER

What are the barriers to Muslim and Racially Diverse women in sport?

Lack of women only and appropriate facilities

Taking part in modest attire

Cultural norms

Family commitments

Discrimination

- Some of these barriers are not exclusive to Muslim and Racially Diverse women, indeed MSA's women only sessions are popular with those of other faiths and none.
- The above list is also not exhaustive, there are universal barriers to participation in sports for some groups around cost of sessions

80% of British Muslim women said they would be likely to attend women's only sports sessions if they were available to them.



Lack of Women only spaces/activities

- A predominant barrier appears to be the lack of women only spaces/facilities that prevent participation in sports.
- A lack of awareness of those sessions that are available
 - In our commissioned survey, when asked whether respondents are aware of any women's only events or sports associations who run appropriate activities, 65% of surveyed British Muslim women said "No"
- 80% of British Muslim women said they would be likely to attend women's only sports sessions if they were available to them.
 - Of those that picked Unlikely or Very Unlikely to participate in their chosen sport(s), 64% mentioned "Lack of women only facilities" (especially for sports such as swimming) and that they cannot find "comfortable environments" to participate.

**'Coming to a
womens only
swimming
session and
being told there
were male
lifeguards. That
defeats the
whole purpose.'
18-24yrs, London**

**There are no
women only
sessions in my
area.'
35-44 yrs,
Bradford**

Available sporting facilities aren't necessarily accessible

- We found that 43% of British Muslim Women do not think that current sports facilities are appropriate to them.
- When asked “Do you have sports facilities available to you”? 49% indicated they do and 26% reported they do not however further follow up questions indicated that despite having sports facilities available, 43% of British Muslim women do not think that current sports facilities are appropriate to them.
- This partially explains why in our survey we saw that 97% of respondents wanted to increase their participation but simultaneously 37% indicated that they will not take part in sports.
- Having access to adequate sports facilities is integral to being able to increase and improve levels of participation.



Further barriers to participation

Cultural Barriers	Discrimination	Hijab Friendly	Family commitments	Modest Attire
We found that 65% of respondents agree that there are religious/cultural barriers that limit/stop their participation in sports.	The potential of encountering discrimination (28%)	17% highlighted the issue of lack of hijab friendly facilities and spaces as a key barrier to participation.	22% mentioned lack of time and other family commitments as a barrier to participation in sports	Other barriers to participation in sports include lack of modest sports attire (52%)

'The expectations from culture/family to give up childhood sports, as I matured and became older.' 25 – 34 yrs, Manchester

"I used to play netball for a semi pro club in east of England when I was 18 and I was wearing hijab and I got discriminated by my coach and other players as everyone else was white. No one stuck up for me. So I left and my opportunity to go pro." 25-34 yrs, London

"Racism in high level football from coaches and players. I had my hijab ripped off. Not suitable football clothes for women as everything is tight. Taken out because of my ethnicity." 25-34yrs, London

Empowering Muslim and Racially
Diverse women through sport



WE INSPIRE | WE DEVELOP | WE EMPOWER

Intergenerational bonding and success through football



- Mother and daughters trio Shmaila, Zoeya and Zaina began their journey with MSA five years ago. They found Friday night football to be their outlet and a time they could spend together to build their relationship as a family.
- Shmaila is now a level one football coach and featured in the Women's Euros 2022 Exhibition in Newham and at a local gallery exhibition on Muslim women and sport.
- Zoeya had the joy and privilege of joining the historic Women's Euro 2022 as a Visa Ball Kid.
- Zaina was successful within a competitive selection process to become a #LetGirlsPlay Ambassador.
- Zaina joined England defender Lotte Wubben-Moy on ITV news to discuss the importance of girls having the same opportunities as boys to play football as part of her role as a #LetGirls Play Ambassador.
- As an ambassador Zaina will work to influence decision-makers within communities and schools to encourage and inspire change.





Encouraging participation and spectatorship to foster a love of sport

- Encourage experimentation to try out new sports with taster sessions.
- Organise trips to stadiums to watch matches and meet players.
- MSA has partnered with the Golf Association and semi-professional Nicola Bennett to engage with more women from ethnically diverse backgrounds to play golf.
- Annual Al-Noor Foundation Dragonboat which led to a partnership with Fairlop Rowing club to encourage Muslim women to take up rowing.
- Partnering with Archery GB and Badminton England to increase diverse workforce
- Partnerships with Essex FA and the FA to increase the workforce thereby increasing role models
- Working in several consortiums to encourage partnership and influence project work to engage and increase visibility of young Muslim girls



What your organisation can do to promote physical activity to this under-represented demographic

WE INSPIRE | WE DEVELOP | WE EMPOWER

It is important to recognize that Muslim and Racially Diverse women are not a homogeneous group. They have different interpretations of their religious beliefs, and it is up to each individual to determine how they balance their religious and cultural values with their desire to participate in sport.

Women only spaces and facilities

- Consider the extent of women only facilities and activities to encourage participation. Women only sessions are a predominant and recurring theme in our experience at MSA and our research
- However these are not a solution in of itself as highlighted by some of the quotes around male lifeguards at women only swimming sessions



Encourage inclusivity through sporting attire

- Modest attire to support Muslim women's access to sports
- Support Muslim Women to participate in fitness and sporting activities without compromising their beliefs towards modest attire
- They may not even show up at activities if they feel that dress codes exclude them by default



Raising Awareness of activities that are targeting this group

- We found in our research that there was low awareness of women only activities amongst Muslim women
- Although opportunities to engage and participate may be available we need to ensure that these are known
- In our experience we have found that engaging with local communities and taking a long term approach to build trust and communicate our activities has worked well



Communicate the benefits of an active lifestyle

- In our research we found that most Muslim women are motivated to take part in sports for health and fitness reasons
- This demographic of ethnically diverse women are also more likely to develop certain health conditions with age and keeping active can help to prevent these
- Their levels of activity and fitness have also been disproportionately impacted by Covid



Engaging further with local communities and building trust

- In our experience we have found that engaging with local communities and taking a long term approach to build trust and communicate our activities has worked well
- Continuous engagement and discussions around understanding what 'comfortable environments' mean and look like for your local demographic – there may be differing needs for different groups



Building empathy and contextual understanding

- Some Muslim and ethnically diverse women are having to make sacrifices at home and with family to prioritise their health and fitness
- Taking part in sports can be a massive time commitment
- Important to create safe and welcoming spaces and first impressions matter – if the venue isn't right, the coach isn't right then we may lose them



<https://mailchi.mp/muslimahsports/msa-muslim-women-in-sports-research-report>



|

www.muslimahsports.org.uk

Email: info@muslimahsports.org.uk

Facebook: [MuslimahSportsAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/MuslimahSportsAssociation)

Twitter: [@MuslimahAsso](https://twitter.com/MuslimahAsso)

Instagram: [muslimah_sports_assoc](https://www.instagram.com/muslimah_sports_assoc)

Registered Charity in England & Wales: 1182763