



Lulu Sabbiti
Diaconia University of Applied Sciences
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CHALLENGES FACED BY MIGRANT WOMEN IN SPORTS IN FINLAND



ABSTRACT

Lulu Sabbiti

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The aim of this research-oriented study was to examine the challenges that migrant women face in sports in Finland.

It also discussed the factors that might improve their active participation in sports and recreation.

The research was conducted using a qualitative research approach, and the data and information were obtained by conducting semi-structured interviews due to their open-ended questions that allowed discussion with the interviewees. I interviewed four participants.

The thematic approach of evaluating qualitative data was used for the data analysis to define common themes or similarities in patterns, emotions, perceptions, insights and topics.

Research results found that the challenges were based on three themes, and these were structural constraints consisting of lack of transport, insufficient funds and access to the resources available. Socio-structural constraints consisting of social or cultural pressures that hinder their active participation in sport and lastly personal constraints consisting of family responsibilities, language barriers, lack of time to participate, no previous expertise or experience in sport and knowledge of available sporting opportunities or services.

Keywords: Sport, Migrant women, Inclusion

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1 INTRODUCTION

When cultures across Europe are becoming more diverse, and integration issues are becoming more difficult, the sport industry is also facing complex equality issues. The need to open up the benefits of exercise and recreational physical activity (PA) to all sectors of society within the European Union is widely recognized as an important issue. Ensuring equal opportunities for all groups in society in the area of sport and physical recreation has to be a guideline for sport stakeholder policies and practice.

Migrant women are women moving from one place or country to another for jobs or family ties among other personal motivations. Women and girls are often affected by double or multiple prejudice, they are nearly invisible in the public sphere and data suggests that women are at the bottom of the pile on many indicators of migrants and ethnic minorities. Research in various EU countries clearly shows that participation in sport varies greatly depending on gender, ethnic group and religion. Females of ethnic minority or migrant heritage are among the groups with lowest sports participation rates. The UK's Active People Survey (2012) for example shows that 31 percent of white women play sport once a week, but only 21 percent of all Asian women. Although 36% of all women without religion are interested in sport, Muslim women's participation rate is only 18%. Such numbers make it even more important to tackle this significant under-representation of women from migrants and ethnic minorities in sports. (Active People Survey, 2012)

Sport has been used as a tool for intergration of migrant women by multicultural organisations and sports clubs in Finland with examples like Liikkukaa- Sports For All Ry and Monaliiku Ry among others but these women face challenges that I intended to explore. By conducting this research I wanted to show that migrant women have a voice and that it should be heard because they are a part of this community and even with their different backgrounds and cultures they want to be a part of and have alot to contribute to the Finnish society in which they live but in order to do that their well-being must be taken into consideration. My thesis was in collaboration with Liikkukaa- Sports For All Ry a multicultural organisation which aims at promoting equality, mental and physical wellbeing and diversity through sports and recreational activities.

Their SPINWomen project is aimed at promoting participation and leadership capacities of migrant and minority women in sports.

At the end of November 2019, I attended a multiplier training event in Berlin that was organised by the SPINWomen project of which Liikkukaa Sports for All ry is one of the partner countries and is also my work life partner organisation for my thesis research. The event was aimed at training trainers or sport educators and sport instructors that were involved with migrant and ethnic minority women in their respective organisations and countries. Several partner countries attended the event with two participants from their respective countries and during the workshops and activities that had been organised we discussed the barriers that hinder active sport participation of migrant and ethnic minority women and the various ways that these hinderances can be reduced or dealt with. This training was relevant for my thesis because the topics of discussion were directly related to my thesis topic and helped me understand some of the challenges faced by the target group in sports and successful strategies or recommendations. In addition to that, this knowledge and my findings could be used by my worklife partner in tailoring, developing or rather providing better services for migrant women in sports in Finland.

During the event mentioned above, there was a presentation of the SPINWomen project overview and one of the workstreams was about carrying out research on successful strategies and one strategy stood out for me even though the rest were just as important. This was the empowerment action research where an active participant or migrant woman is selected to carry out the research herself and get an inside view from the migrant women and girls themselves about their experiences, challenges, needs, interests and possible solutions to the barriers they faced in the field of sport. “Simply asking women to participate is not enough: asking the women for their experiences and expectations makes clear that their opinions are being taken seriously.” (Wagemakers et al 2008, 22)

1.1 Aim of the research

The aim of this research was to explore the challenges that migrant women are facing in Finland in regards to their involvement in sport and to find out what measures can be taken to improve active sports participation of the target group. This topic was important because sport is a universal language, it is a learning ground and empowers all genders in terms of leadership, perseverance, teamwork, well-being, self-esteem among other benefits.

Research questions are as follows:

1. What factors affect migrant women's active participation in sports?
2. What can improve their inclusion in sports?

2 BACKGROUND

Finland has several multicultural organisations and clubs such as Liikkukaa Sports For All Ry, Monaliiku Ry to mention but a few whose members come from diverse cultures and backgrounds. For them to cater for the needs of their members, they have to first understand the barriers/challenges that are hindering their participation in sports and use the best applicable practices in order to create an inclusive environment for migrant women and in so doing promote better sport opportunities.

This research was carried out in cooperation with Liikkukaa - Sports For All Ry an umbrella organization for multicultural sports clubs, which has 80 member organisations and clubs in different parts of Finland. Their aim is to promote equality, participation in social activities and mental and physical well-being in recreational activities.

Liikkukaa ry is currently one of seven countries including Finland, Austria, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Ireland and Hungary which are members of the SPIN Women initiative which is part of the ERASMUS+ Sport Programme. SPIN Women in its essence is

Sport Inclusion of Migrant and Minority Women which seeks to encourage the active participation and leadership capacities of migrant and minority women in sport by breaking down the barriers. That's why I chose Liikkukaa as my work life partner organization for this research as it could also be used as a guide in their work as well.

Figure 1: Stakeholders in the field of social inclusion in and through sport



Source: ENGSO

Figure 1 shows the different players in the area of migrant and minority social inclusion within and through sport. In order to understand the nature of the sport's social environment and the social inclusion of migrants and minorities, it is important to consider all the different stakeholders who 'share' responsibility among themselves. To make progress in establishing a 'level playing field,' all the actors in the figure below have a part to contribute by sharing knowledge, implementing regulations and policies, providing financial and moral support, experience, support activities and services, to provide training programs and, most importantly, to create trusted networks. (ENGSO, 2012)

3 LITERATURE REVIEW AND KEY CONCEPTS

3.1 Literature review

We all have different reasons to either engage in sport or not be able to do so and that depends on the intimate, cultural, socio-structural and interpersonal roles of very individuals at a given time. If you were to ask a kid why he or she liked playing sports, that kid would probably say "Because it is fun!" We got answers like, "It's a challenge," "I like social interaction," "For fitness," "I like competition," and/or "It's stress relief" when we asked adults the same question. While the benefits of participation in sport can vary between age groups, genders and competitive levels, there is always something for everyone to gain from playing and participating in sport throughout their lives. Participation in sport will reap physical, mental and social benefits in particular. (Rober 2013, 2.)

“Commitment to and action toward diversity almost invariably begins with an individual or small group of individuals taking on the role of diversity champion who exhibits extra-role behaviours aimed at ensuring the success of diversity initiatives. Diversity work in sports clubs often emerges by chance, typically through an individual member with certain standing within the club, such as a committee member or experienced volunteer, who is committed to diversity based on personal values.” (Spaaij et al., 2018)

There are other ways to engage in physical activity without breaching their social, cultural or religious codes of conduct in some cases where migrant and ethnic minority women are unable or not allowed to participate in sports due to culture or religious affiliations among other factors. Some societal norms control even the spontaneous play. After all, we have to learn somewhere, from someone or some organization, how to play games. Some people regard highly organized sport as a form of play that remains a broad expression of freedom and innovation, given the limits imposed on individual freedom. One reason for this view is that people more often choose to participate in sport, rather than being forced to partake in social tasks such as work. It is of no small significance that individuals also derive great joy from their participation in

sport as players and fans. Sport can indeed be one of the few places left where this form of intense emotion or commitment is still normal. (Poulson, S. C. 2016, 13)

Creating awareness and raising awareness among the people about the value of sport as an instrument for inclusion, the road to inclusiveness and social change is of great benefit to both migrant and ethnic minority women and the societies they live in. While sport offered incentives, it also reinforced harmful and dangerous social patterns such as sexism, gender inequity, homophobia and excessive violence. Sport studies have exposed how sport reinforces existing structures that often lead to discrimination, as well as challenges them. It is through this critical lens that sport will begin to act as a powerful instrument of social change that questions our traditional ways of thinking. (Rober, E. A. 2013, 1).

The Nordic countries have traditionally had restrictive policies for fighting sports. For example, while professional boxing is legal today in all the Nordic countries, both Sweden and Norway have a history of banning professional boxing and other combat sports competitions. Professional MMA competitions are now legal in Sweden as well, but still illegal in Norway. Historically, Finland and Denmark have been the most liberal in the Nordic countries in terms of governing participation and competition in combat sports. Because MMA is illegal in Norway at a professional level, we have chosen to gather qualitative data from the neighboring country of Sweden (following the quantitative data collection). Although the number of Swedish, female practitioners is poor, their experiences are considered valuable as it can be said that these women represent a small (minority) group in the sport's professional practice. That is, women who make a living from professional MMA fights. The combination of traditionally conservative anti-sport policies, the nature of the Nordic welfare model and culture and the high level of gender equality in Nordic sports and sport leadership compared to other Western countries makes the Nordic countries an important backdrop for researching the participation and exclusion of girls and women in combat sports such as MMA. (Alsarve & Tjønnedal, 2019).

MMA women have the ability to serve as role models for women through their counter-hegemonic negotiation of ' traditional ' femininity expectations and beliefs and, more importantly, the conception of femininity as something frail and passive. (Gill, 2007)

Historically, martial arts and combat sports were associated with masculinity, and the presence and attitudes of women were connected to a number of conflicting interpretations. The present study builds upon cultural praxis and post-structuralist feminist frameworks to explore female martial artists' subjection to dominant cultural discourses on fighting and competition. In Finland interviews with nine female judokas (judo athletes) were collected and analyzed using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). The FDA revealed that judo was designed as a sport for all in female judoka talk, but also as a male domain and a manly sport with combat and competitiveness as inherent, unlearned masculine qualities. Two sets of larger, conflicting discourses formed the dominant basis for the judo constructions of the participants: (a) a mass sport discourse versus an elite sport discourse and (b) a gender equality discourse versus a female biological discourse of inferiority. Building on this discursive context and trying to make sense of their experiences, participants developed an image of "naturally born fighter". While this may be an empowering identity for female judoka, it does not advance the martial arts gender equity agenda because it portrays "average" women as biologically unable to practice judo. Our results show that even in Finland's fairly egalitarian society, gender hierarchies exist in judo, and that progress towards gender equity can only be made through undermining dominant conceptions of fighting and competition as masculine. (Kavoura, Kokkonen, Chroni, Ryba 2018)

Helsinki Sports International (HSI) is a non-profit organization in the Helsinki area aiming to improve the situation of newly arrived refugees and migrants by involving them in sports. Sporting activities take place in Helsinki and other cities as well and to get in touch with its target group the project has several outreach approaches which include promotions, open days, refugee and community center guided tours, direct contact with refugee centers and, last but not least, social networks offering free sports such as football, futsal, floor ball and cultural activities. HSI bears in mind that each person has different interests and different needs therefore integrity and respect for each person's individual cultural background is important. Both activities aim to inspire the newly arrived refugees and/or migrants. Their funding is from the Government, private donations and EU support but HSI also works jointly with Finnish Red Cross, Liikkukaa Sports for All-Ry, Monaliiku, Central Finland's African Community and the City of Helsinki. (SPIN 2018, 19)

“Fit4Life embodies a groundbreaking approach to helping refugee and migrant women change their lifestyle and take care of their health through physical exercise and group learning on related subjects. To reach the target groups, Fit4Life uses social media as well as community agencies, social and employment services and word of mouth. The programs offered include physical exercise, health check-ups, mental health and nutrition discussions, group cooking classes and all of these weekly group activities which are held mostly in the Helsinki area, but also in other Finnish municipalities are free. Sport events and discussions on different project-related topics are incorporated during the three-hour sessions, and the participants get help with translation and childcare. Participants strengthened their wellness and awareness on health-related issues, integrated sporting activities into their daily routine and expanded their personal networks. It remains a challenge to find appropriate places for closed group sessions, as is contact through cultural barriers.” (SPIN 2018, 24)

“We believe that it is important to focus on female coaches when talking about equal access and participation in football. Coaches influence the development of girls in sports and in life. Some girls and women feel safer when they are trained by women, and parents in many parts of the world often prefer when their daughters are instructed by female coaches. At the same time, female coaches are important role models for girls and can motivate them to become coaches themselves. Leadership positions as coaches are tied to social prestige and acknowledgement and female coaches contribute to challenging gender roles and making women in sports more visible.” (DISCOVER FOOTBALL)

“The fact that women are having a hard time in the world of football is embedded in deep-seated societal structures and cultural beliefs nearly all over the world. Football can be regarded as a mirror image of society, in so far as women are entering an arena that for a long time was closed off to them. It is a world that has always been considered as masculine and its discourse has been dominated by characteristics regarded as specifically male. By entering this arena, by claiming the football pitch, women are challenging a well-established social order all over the world.” (DISCOVER FOOTBALL)

A good foundation is very important and when we talk about migrant women we cannot exclude migrant girls because they are one and the same in the long run. “Adult

sport gatekeepers were sometimes less attentive to the affective and social aspects of girls' participation. Such adults need to remain reflexive about their own investments in sporting success and failure as well as keeping in mind the social and friendship contexts of girls' participation. Encouraging girls to continue to take part in sport will require remaining sensitive to the social aspects of girls' activities while prioritizing young people's physical enjoyment in a spirit of equity and participation." (Clark, 2012)

According to Kicking Girls, a project in Germany aimed at integrating girls through sport, sport can be a good forum for gender activism and awareness-raising and can help to end discrimination against girls and women. Human rights-adapted game rules will help to replace oppressive cultural norms that exclude women and girls from sport. A significant contribution to achieving this goal will be made by bearing in mind the current gender differences in terms of participation, outcomes and management positions in sport. (Kicking Girls)

The Mamanet Austria association was founded in 2015 as a sport association for mothers and all women over the age of 30. Training sessions for cachibol are held regularly for women who have no prior sporting experience. The initiative is for women refugees and migrants, which partners with Caritas and numerous youth centers. Childcare services are available at all events. The organizers support women in forming their own teams to play in an amateur league. It is also intended to reach certain groups which appear to be excluded from sport. There were 23 weekly courses in Austria in autumn 2017 and Mamanet won several awards. (SPIN 2018, 24)

At the end of 2015, the Welsh Refugee Council launched the Women Get Active initiative which was to be a pilot program for 12 months. The participants' list of the Women Get Active sport class at YMCA Cardiff rose gradually from 15 to more than 60 women and many of them had been survivors in extremely difficult circumstances. The class presented them with an escape, in that way, they could get back in touch with sport and make new friends. The project helped the refugees tackle mental health issues such as depression among others. Sessions were later opened to local women but they were charged money for the course, and that fee returned as a donation to the project. The other positive effect was that in a social setting, it helped the participants to mix and mingle." (SPIN 2018, 25)

In Austria, Sport Union Tirol's "Women from all countries" club aims at promoting healthy movement, mediating pleasure and awareness of health through movement and achieving prosperity through independent action. The programme's selection incorporates regular exercise activities and individual sports taster sessions with wellness presentations through exercise and nutrition. The curriculum is produced with the girls / women and tailored for the performance levels (women: gymnastics, running, pilates, yoga, dancing; girls: hip hop, modern dance, tummy-leg-bottom, swimming, skating, volleyball). In addition, participants can be qualified to become personal coaches or trainers in the sense of encouraging people to help themselves. (Bertram et al., 2016)

According to the 2017 FIFPRO global report on women's football, based on a survey of 3,500 players only 9.4 per cent of female players worldwide are aged 29 and over, hundreds of female footballers are leaving the game in their 20s before achieving their potential. "Of those still playing, 90 per cent have considered ending their career earlier, among other reasons, to find a better-paid job or to start a family. FIFPRO surveyed players in their national team or in the national championships' first division, including those in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden and the United States." Also included in the study and research conducted with the University of Manchester was wages, tournament prize money, jobs, health care, discrimination and match-fixing. (FIFPRO, 2017)

"International institutions governing on sports are mandating policies for equality. Women who migrate also play a future in the changing world of sports. Sports can promote integration and people are aware of the benefits that sports provide. However, if sports are to be used for integration, agency plays a big factor. This can be agency in the part of the individual, or a praxis on the part of a team. Sports are not a sole factor affecting integration, but in the correct circumstances sports can affect integration in a positive sense." (Grochowski 2014, 81)

"Generally speaking, please tell me if you are very satisfied, rather satisfied, rather unsatisfied, or not at all satisfied with the sports facilities in your city, such as sport fields and indoor sport halls?" This was the question asked to the inhabitants of 109 European cities in 2015. Among the cities surveyed, Münster in Germany and Oulu in Finland came on top with 85% of their inhabitants responding that they were very or

rather satisfied with their city's sports facilities. They were followed by three other EU cities where the satisfaction rate was 84% – Antwerp (Belgium), Luxembourg (Luxembourg) and Helsinki (Finland). Iceland's capital, Reykjavík, also scored 84%. The information for this news item is based on perception survey indicators produced by the European Commission. (Eurostat 2018)

The figures 2 and 3 below show the European Union inhabitants' satisfaction with sports facilities in their cities and satisfaction with sports facilities in European Union capital cities in 2015 while figure 4 shows those practising sport, fitness, recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by sex in 2014.

Figure 2: Satisfaction with sports facilities in EU inhabitants' own city, 2015

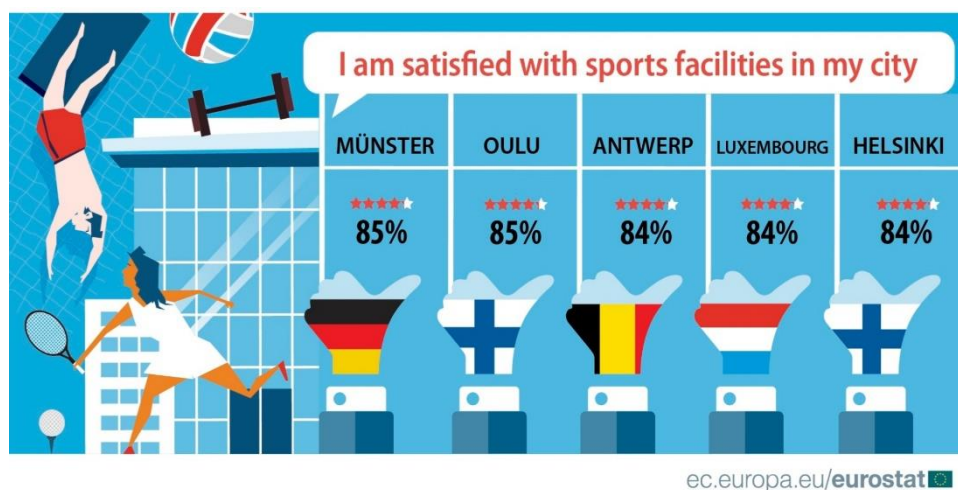
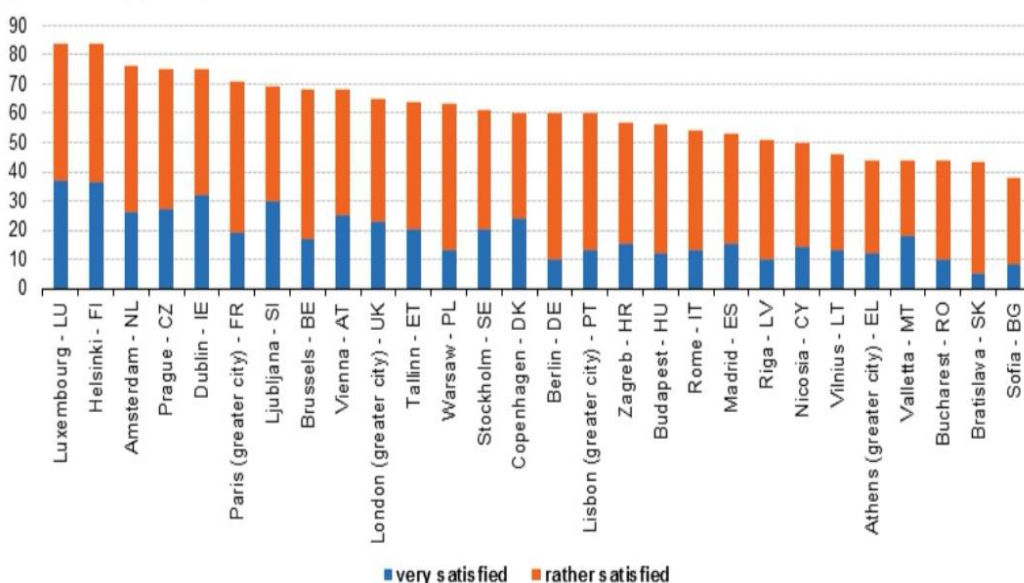


Figure 3

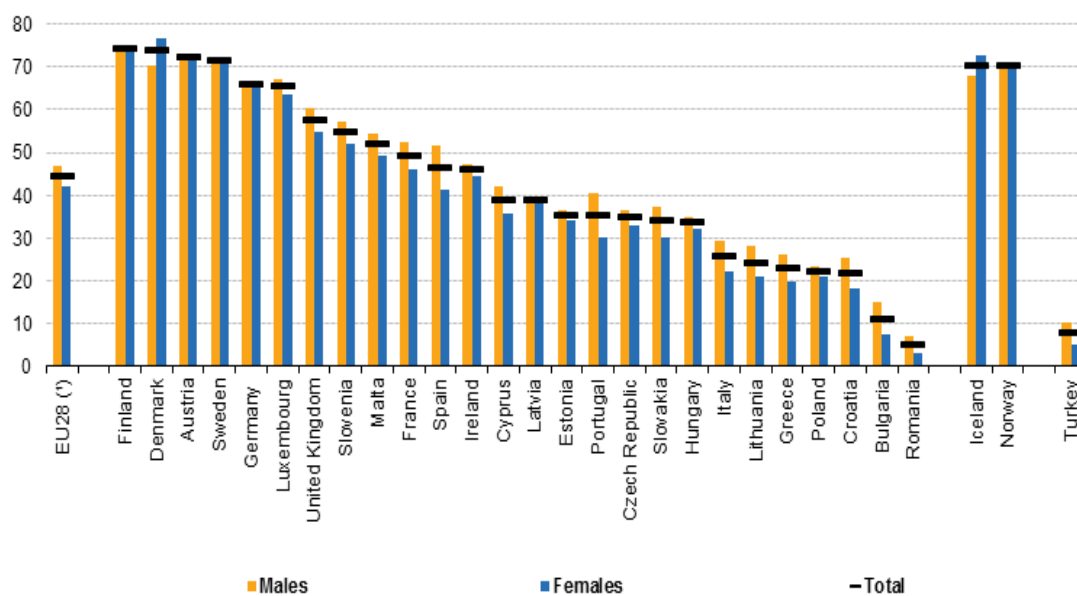
Satisfaction with sports facilities in EU capital cities, 2015
(% of resident population)



Source: Eurostat

Figure 4:

Practising sport, fitness or recreational (leisure) physical activities at least once a week, by sex, 2014
(% of population aged 15 and more)



(*) EU-28 figures are estimated. Data for Belgium and the Netherlands are not available
Source: Eurostat (online data code: hlth_ehis_pe3i)

eurostat 

This data on sports and non-work related physical activities, such as sport fitness or leisure activities, muscle building, walking or cycling, is based on the European Health Interview Survey conducted in the EU countries in 2014, the reference duration being a standard 7-day week and the target group aged 15 and above.

3.2 Key concepts

The key concepts used in my thesis research are sport, migrant women and inclusion and they are explained below.

3.2.1 Sport

According to the Council of Europe, sport “means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.” (ENGSO 2012, 8-9)

Through creating a sense of community / belonging, sports plays an important role in the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. Sport is not always the solution, but it should become part and parcel of social cohesion. Where incentives and resources are provided to socially disadvantaged individuals, it can be of great benefit to both the targeted population and societies. Sport allows individuals to socialise and emancipate themselves. (ENGSO 2010, 3)

Physical activity or sport can be done in different settings: in school, as a mandatory activity or as an option; in a community sports club; in a commercial sports facility; or as a self-organized activity (in a public space or in the home). Such various organizational modes cover a whole range of actual arrangements which vary depending on the participants ' age and gender. (Talleu 2011, 11)

3.2.2 Migrant women

According to Valtonen, the word ' migrant ' may apply to a person moving across a national border or to one moving within national territory and therefore includes both foreign and internal migrants. Nevertheless, in foreign migration circles the word ' migrants ' is very often used for people who cross national borders in moving to settle in another country from their country of origin or habitual residence. (Valtonen 2009, 4) Migrant women are women who have moved from one country to another due to family ties, work, seeking international protection among a range of reasons for moving.

Finland is an ethnically diverse country and has witnessed women migrants and ethnic minorities constantly moving to Finland from other countries. “The major conflicts of recent years are creating new forms of strain on migration in Europe. That is felt in

Finland too. The main reasons for moving to Finland for an extended period were family ties, work, and studies. Nevertheless, this situation changed in 2015, as the annual number of asylum seekers rose from about 3,000 to over 32,000. The transition has prompted a re-evaluation of Finnish integration strategy, integration legislation and its implementation procedures, as well as resource allocations and official processes.” (Oivo & Bruun, 2016)

“Finland’s integration programme 2016-2019 mentions the importance of sports in integration. An integration policy is developed to facilitate and encourage immigrant integration. The program includes a roadmap for the initiatives, programs, coordination and obligations involved in promoting and facilitating integration, and recognition of the interests of immigrants in preparing and coordinating other public services and acts. It also involves fostering ethnic equality and healthy ethnic relations, as well as avoiding discrimination.” (Oivo & Bruun, 2016)

3.2.3 Inclusion

“Inclusion, overcoming the feeling of impotence: if various migrant groups have one thing in common, their shared experiences of social exclusion and prejudice are often the same. That's why they have so much more to benefit from getting recognition and respect, which in turn affects their view of themselves. In other social contexts, it is a possibility they still miss.” (SPIN 2016, 40)

“Inclusion into sport focuses primarily on the introduction of migrants, ethnic minorities or other under-represented groups to sport and facilitation of the capacity to act within sport. It calls for regular, long-term participation in sports and an improvement of athletic skills and achievements. It is based on the premise that involvement in areas of sport already represents an instance of inclusion. In doing so, the involvement in a sport club can create particularly favorable conditions for further inclusion processes since sport associations are characterized by the fact that training and practice sessions take place regularly and almost without exception in groups, and that sporting activities often take place within the framework of other social activities that provide additional opportunities for intercultural communication.” (youthREPORTER, 2018)

4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains what approach I used for my research, the data collection method and data analysis. It also addresses the limitations or rather challenges I encountered while carrying out the thesis research.

4.1 Qualitative research

This was a qualitative research and I chose it because of the reliance on real life experiences and the fact that it aims to explore in-depth understanding of social phenomena. I also used semi-structured interviews because of their open structure whereby during the interviews I was able to get new ideas from the views and perceptions of the participants that were vital in my research. While I was able to gather information from books, journals, articles and websites among other sources, I also needed to hear what the migrant women who were the target group thought or had to say face to face because it was more personal and made it easier to get firsthand information.

According to Sandelowski, qualitative research includes grounded hypotheses, ethnographies, phenomenologies, and other comprehensive definitions or explanations generated by analyzing the data gathered from interviews, observations, records, and objects. Researchers must be able to demonstrate that their conclusions are based on the data gathered in those studies. (Sandelowski 2004, 1374)

Figure 5: Thesis process schedule as guided by Diak guidelines

	Time	Activity
1	June 2019 – September 2019	Thesis plan proposal and development
2	September 2019 – January 2020	Supervision by school and work life partner
3	August 2019 – November 2019	Interviews and Literature review (Data collection and processing)
4	September 2019- November 2019	Draft thesis writing
5	December 2019 –May 2020	Preliminary and Final thesis writing

4.2 Data collection

To test my interview questions, I attended a focus group discussion organised by my worklife partner organisation with some migrant women sport educators and sport instructors. Thereafter, I went ahead and implemented my thesis research by conducting four semi-structured interviews with migrant women between the age of 30-45 living in Finland and these interviews were recorded with the written consent of the participants.

I chose to allocate 45minutes for each interview because I did not want the interviews to take so long and run the risk of participants getting tired or losing concentration but one of the interviews took only 30 minutes because the participant had limited time and prior commitments so we had to make sure all the questions were answered within that available time. The time frame for conducting the interviews was six to eight weeks during which I was coordinating schedules with the participants and meeting them, and then it took me two months to analyze the content and finally put into written form the results of the research attained from the interviews and other data sources. The research environment for this thesis research was Finland and the target group were migrant women living in Finland. Three of the women I interviewed were old acquaintances who I contacted both through email and phone calls then one of them introduced me to the fourth participant.

I interviewed one of the participants on one morning at a café where she was about to give a talk at a workshop held for women in sports about her challenges as a migrant woman in sports in Finland. Even if I was going to attend the workshop I still wanted the interview for my data collection purposes and I wanted also to combine the results of our interview with her talk about the same topic because sometimes information that is left out or forgotten in one conversation can be revealed in another setting.

Galletta notes that when a semi-structured interview is the method of data collection, the position of the interviewer and the essence of the conversation should be given the utmost attention as they can prompt the participant, rephrase questions and make changes depending on the situation of the interview. (Galletta, 2012)

The other interviews were also conducted in the same café at different times according to each participant's schedule because of its ambience and location in the city centre of Helsinki with close proximity to the central railway station. This way the participants could easily find their way to the café after work or from home and we could talk without distractions because I was recording the interviews while taking notes but also wanted to make sure they were comfortable enough to talk.

4.3 Data Analysis

I applied thematic analysis and collected all the findings from interviews with my study interviewees and personal experiences and then synthesized those results through critical thinking and evaluation to recognize the similarities and themes. This data was then correlated with the analysis from other sources of data, such as books, journals and papers.

Braun & Clarke (2006) notes that thematic analysis is the first qualitative analytical approach to be studied by researchers because it offers core skills that will be useful for many other forms of qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis (TA) is a popular method of evaluating qualitative data in many disciplines and fields, and can be applied in many different ways, to many different datasets, addressing many different research issues. It is one of a cluster of approaches that focuses on the detection of patterned meaning across a data set. TA is best understood as a parasol term for a group of qualitative data analysis methods that share an emphasis on the detection of trends (significance patterns) in qualitative data. The various versions of TA tend to share a degree of theoretical consistency, but they can vary greatly in terms of both the underlying philosophy and the thematic development procedures. (Braun & Clarke, 2019)

I attended a focus group organised by Liikkukaa Sports for All ry in which sports instructors and sport educators working with migrant and ethnic minority women took part to discuss the barriers and challenges faced by migrant and ethnic minority women in sport in Finland and the successful strategies that could be applied to reach the target group. Through the focus group, I was able to test my interview questions with the participants and during the discussions I got more knowledge about my thesis topic

that helped me during my individual interviews to understand and relate with the interviewees.

4.4 Limitations

The limitations during the thesis process included readiness or willingness of the interviewees to participate in the research. I contacted eight prospective interviewees and out of those eight only managed to get a positive response from four who were willing to take part in the research.

Another challenge was time in regards to scheduling appointments with the participants because three of the participants had very busy work schedules and two of them cancelled our appointments twice before we finally had the interviews.

Language barrier was also a limitation in one of my interviews with participant with whom we had no common language even if she understood the basic communication in English. But to ensure that she understood the topic, reasons for research, questions being asked and that I got her answers to my questions right, I had managed to find a close friend to help me translate the interview with the consent of the interviewee.

5 RESEARCH ETHICS

Before I began my research, I had to identify who would be my working life partner organisation. I chose Liikkukaa - Sports for All Ry and I contacted them through email then went ahead to meet with my working life supervisor, explain to them what my thesis topic was, go through my thesis plan with them and clarify what I hoped to achieve with this thesis research. They agreed to partner with me and help me with the research because it was connected to their work with the SPINWomen project and would benefit their organisation as well in terms of identifying the challenges faced by migrant women in sports and what could be done to improve their active participation in sports. After the discussion, we went ahead to sign the thesis agreement form which

also had to be signed by my school thesis supervisor who then gave me the go-ahead to start carrying out my research.

Before the interviews, the participants also had to sign a written consent form in addition to letting them know it was free will and that they could withdraw from the research if they wanted to at any one point. We also agreed that all the recorded interviews will be deleted or destroyed after carrying out the thesis research and that their identities will remain anonymous.

“People participating in research have the right to receive an understandable and truthful view of the aims of the research and any potential harm and risks. The research participant must be given an accurate account of the effects and potential benefits of the research.” (TENK, 2019)

6 RESULTS

I interviewed four migrant women all living in the Helsinki region and this was because they were the only ones available or that could find time for an interview out of the eight women I contacted. The aim of the research was to find out the challenges that they face in sport or rather what factors hinder their active participation in sport and what can be done to help remove or reduce these hinderances. Three of the participants were fluent in English because that was the language that I used for the interview but I had to get a translator who spoke both English and Finnish fluently to help me carry out the interview with one of the participants of Somali origin who spoke only Finnish and Somali language.

During my research I observed that there were mainly three themes around the lack of active participation in sports of migrant and ethnic minority women in Finland and these were structural constraints which consisted of lack of transport, inadequate funds and access to available resources. Socio-structural constraints which consisted of societal or community influences that hinder active participation of migrant women in

sports and lastly personal constraints consisting of family responsibilities, language barrier, lack of time to participate, no prior skills or experience in sports and knowledge about existing sport opportunities or services.

6.1 Structural constraints

These are social, economic, physical or environmental factors that influence the interviewees' ability to actively participate in sports activities. An example of this according to my findings was that transportation to and from the available sport groups or activities was a challenge for example for asylum seekers at reception centres who have did not have enough resources or could not afford to buy a bus card and maybe did not yet even know their way around the city.

According to respondent A, when they had just come to Finland and were living at one of the reception centres, they had too much time on their hands while waiting for either an appointment for an interview with the immigration office and even after their interview they had to wait for the decision to be made on whether they were going to stay in the country or be deported. During this time, they were really stressed and wanted to find a sport or activity that would distract them from the boredom and loneliness but they did not have the resources or know where to go and what opportunities were available for them in their situation.

“I was living in that reception centre just watching television, going to the Finnish language classes, eating and sleeping because I did not want to think about if the decision was going to be negative and I would have to be deported. I like exercising and doing things like playing basketball but because I was in a foreign country with no friends and I did not know where to go to do this. I wish I had known that there were organisations with such activities for people like me, that would have helped with the distraction because when I am exercising I forget about everything going on in my life at least in that moment.” (Respondent A)

For the professional female migrant athletes there was also the challenge of low pay of female athletes in Finland compared to their male counterparts. In a bid to sustain

their everyday lives and livelihood, they chose to give up the sport and earn a living elsewhere even if they loved being actively involved in sports.

6.2 Socio-cultural constraints

These refer to society and community values, norms or attitudes that influence the interviewees' ability to actively participate in sports activities. During my research I also discovered that there were limited inclusive sport opportunities, for example muslim women and girls who face the challenge of islamophobic and gender stereotyping both from their communities and the society in general. This discrimination was a hindrance and affected their active participation because while sport is a tool for integration and social inclusion it can also be a gateway for racism and religious discrimination.

According to respondent B, because of parents with strong religious beliefs, girls are discouraged from attending sport activities and this is also the case with women who are discouraged by their husbands to participate in sport, leisure activities or events because of the strong social constraint.

Respondent B and D found it hard to play sports without being judged and condemned by their communities, families or parents because some sports are seen as only suitable for their male counterparts. They also felt that they could not take part in certain sporting activities without running the risk of violating their religious dresscodes and finding sport groups that allowed them to wear the hijab (this is a headscarf or veil for muslim women to cover their hair and part of their faces) which is a very important part of their religious dresscode was a challenge. A case in point was finding swimming halls where they could be allowed to wear their veils, appropriate swimming costumes, have safe changing rooms and swim in a pool reserved for only women and no risk of men walking in either as clients or workers of the swimming hall.

“There is hijab swimwear online and you will not find them in the Finnish shops but now if I order them online where will I wear them to? People will look at me very weird if I go to the swimming hall and am wearing my hijab swimwear which looks like leggings, a top dress and hijab.” (Respondent D)

6.3 Personal constraints

These are influenced by the interviewees' individual abilities, perceptions, responsibilities, interaction or affiliations with family, friends and the communities in which they live. Respondent B, who moved to Finland to play professional football stated that the first challenge that she faced as a professional footballer in Finland was the language because she found it difficult to communicate with her team mates on and off the football pitch and the only word she understood was “pallo” which means ball in Finnish. Because she could not communicate with her team, it was difficult for her to make friends because she could not even pronounce their names and at one point all her teammates looked the same to her.

“Good enough that football itself does not even need a lot of communication to get a connection with your teammates, because the ball itself does the talking, you just have to go to the right places and make some right skills and make some right passes” (Respondent B)

Because of the language, she felt a little bit low but she just had to do what she knew how to do best and that was play football. This gave her teammates the confidence that whenever they passed the ball to her, she was going to do something different from what they were doing and that is how she dealt with it in the team.

Another challenge respondent B faced was the loneliness in a foreign country where she did not know anyone, could not talk to anyone, she just went to the training, back to her apartment, on weekends she had to go and play matches and then go back to her apartment. Sometimes it became too much and she would just go to the city and move around aimlessly just to avoid being alone at home, seeing other people moving around doing their shopping or going about their life gave her some comfort other than being alone in an empty house. She stated that,

“Giving up was not an option for me because I know what brought me here and I really want to make an impact in the country. So, I kept facing this and it was really

challenging but I had to do something to just make me to be able to connect with the country” (Respondent B)

The other challenge according to respondent C who was also another former professional footballer was family responsibilities and the lack of time that led to her giving up the sport and going to look for a well-paying job. She moved to Finland to play professional football and provide for her family back home but her hopes were crushed when it turned out not to be the case because female footballers in Finland are not paid that much and many of her teammates had to do other jobs to support themselves and pay their bills. She resolved to finding a full-time better paying job and eventually could not find the time to play football anymore even if she loved the sport.

“Football is in my blood and I miss it because that is all I have known from the age of 15 but I have responsibilities and my bills will not pay themselves”. (Respondent C)

This was a recurring challenge because respondent B also mentioned that even though she came to Finland to play football professionally, she had to quit the sport and find a better means of income. She signed up for a sports instructor course and made an effort to learn the language as well. This paid off in the long run in a way that even though she could no longer play football professionally, she became a sports instructor for a multicultural organisation and football was one of the activities the organisation organised for its members and participants among other sporting activities.

The challenge of the language barrier resurfaced in the interview with respondent C who quit playing football professionally because of the low pay that could not support her family responsibilities. In her search for another job, she applied to several sports clubs and fitness centres for several jobs as a sports instructor, fitness instructor, children’s sports instructor but all the employers who excitedly contacted her after looking at her curriculum vitae (CV) changed their tune as soon as she told them that her Finnish language skills were poor. This negatively affected her self-esteem in a way that after all her achievements and skills in the sport of football, she still was not good enough for the employers just because of the language. She stated that,

“Am a very good footballer and I know the techniques and skills, I have so much to teach the youngsters and adults who want to either play football or just keep physically

fit because I have done this for almost half my life that is why I achieved all that I achieved as a female footballer. But because I do not speak Finnish am reduced to nothing, my accolades do not matter.” (Respondent C)

In relation to the above, respondent A who works in the healthcare field also mentioned that she jogs to keep physically fit and it gives her time to reflect on her day but her favourite sport is basketball which she enjoys watching on the TV when there are games and she has free time but she has not played it herself since she moved to Finland more than 15 years ago. She stated that,

“I grew up playing street basketball with my brothers and I really loved it but since I moved to Finland my life has changed so much because I have two children and I work too much to be able to take care of them and provide for my family too back home whilst paying my bills but I miss playing basketball and even when I find the time I have no idea where to go and find people who play basketball for fun or exercise.” (Respondent A)

Respondent D who only spoke Finnish and Somali language also said she has always wanted to join group aerobics to lose weight and stay physically fit but finding time for it while looking after her three children all below the age of six was hard. In addition to that, not knowing where to go or how to find the available places where she could do this was a challenge for her so she had resorted to watching YouTube videos and doing aerobics at home in her living room. There are multicultural organisations like Monaliikury that provide childcare for their participants but the lack of knowledge about the availability of these services becomes a challenge for some mothers who want to take part in sports.

The repeated challenge of women with families being expected to look after their families and barely having time for themselves or to do the things they love was something that I noticed in my research. Respondent B lived with her husband and two children and even though she was a sports instructor with a very busy schedule, she still had to go back home and cook, clean, do laundry and make sure everyone in the family was well taken care of before retiring for the night and in her words she said ,

“At the end of the day am very tired but although it is a challenge it is also my responsibility as a wife and as a mother so I have to do it.” (Respondent B)

Trying to make ends meet by working to pay the bills and at the same time be there for your family by taking care of all their needs at home at the end of the day can be really exhausting because there is barely time to take a break and find time to take care of oneself mentally, physically and emotionally.

There was also the challenge of some of the migrant women having no prior experience or skills in some sports and not knowing how or where to start from in their adulthood. Respondent B and C said they did not have the opportunity to learn how to swim when they were growing up, firstly because of the family situations where they had more household chores to do and swimming was not on their parents’ list of things to teach them as young girls growing up in Nigeria. Secondly it was the fear of drowning which respondent C had because while she wanted to learn how to swim as a child, she had no one to teach her.

“I feel bad when I see other people swimming and enjoying themselves in the water, even kids here can swim and me an adult I cannot, I almost drowned in the river when I was a child that’s maybe also why even today am scared but I want to learn.” (Respondent C)

Monaliikury also provides swimming sessions with a female swimming instructor so I advised her to contact them and sign up for their swimming group sessions because these services and opportunities are available and it is never too late to learn.

7 CONCLUSION

Migrant women in sports in Finland face challenges that mainly consist of structural, sociocultural and personal constraints. Several multicultural organisations are trying to create awareness and counter these challenges by tailoring and providing free sport opportunities and services in order to improve their active participation, integration,

social inclusion and generally promote their mental and physical health and well-being.

Childcare is provided at some sport activities for mothers who find it difficult to be active in sports while taking care of their children. This is a solution that is much needed and not available in the public gyms and sport centers or sport facilities. The children are engaged in games, drawing among other activities while their mothers exercise or take part in whatever activity has been organised free of distractions.

The sport activities are also organised in easily accessible areas to ensure that the participants do not find it difficult to take part in sports because of having to travel long distances to access them. In some cases, transport is organised for certain groups with little or no resources for example asylum seekers at reception centres who cannot afford to pay for the mainstream gyms and sport centres.

Parents and spouses play a big role in the active participation of migrant women in sports so creating awareness about the importance of sports not only as an activity but also for better health, general wellbeing and learning some important life skills is vital. Via sport, women are defying gender roles and social norms, providing positive role models and portraying men and women as equals. (UN Women, 2019)

“Providers of sport and physical activity need to accept different religions. This is particularly important for Muslim women, as providers sometimes ignore them and discriminate against them on grounds of religion and belief. Religious and cultural differences make it difficult for Muslim women to take part in sport, as people still lack knowledge or understanding about their need for clothes, privacy and single sex provision.” (Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation and Sporting Equals, 2010)

About the language barrier, migrant women are encouraged to take up Finnish language classes and try as much as they can to learn the language of their host society because it makes communication easier and in the long run can also help with job searches or lessen the related challenges as seen with Participant C who was qualified for the jobs she applied to but could not be hired because she did not speak the language.

8 DISCUSSION

The findings of this research show that in order to improve the active participation in sports of migrant and ethnic minority women, not only do we have to find out the barriers or challenges faced by these women but we also have to find ways to counter the factors leading to their low participation. All the stakeholders, sports clubs, sport educators, sport instructors, multicultural organisations and the migrant women themselves among other actors in the field of sport and physical activity play a big role in identifying the problems and finding solutions as a team.

More role models are needed, “...the woman trainer represents a model with which many girls identify when they take up organised sports such as football, basketball or rugby. As a result, the over-representation of men among trainers may prevent girls from starting such activities.” (Talleu 2011, 15).

Employing more female sport instructors and sport educators to reach the migrant and ethnic minority women makes it more encouraging or rather creates a sense of safety for the participants and they also serve as role models to the women taking part in the sporting activities. By participating in sports, the mothers also serve as role models to their children and this might result in early involvement and active participation in sports for young girls.

By offering childcare services for women with children during the sporting activities, it gives the women a chance to be more active, exercise without distractions and gives them more well-deserved time to spare for themselves away from their motherly duties. One example of a multicultural organisation that has taken this into consideration is Monaliiku ry and non-governmental organisation in Finland. In their Fit4Life project, Monaliiku provides childcare for its participants and engages the children in games, playing with toys, drawing and watching educational cartoons while the mothers take part in the organised activity.

Fit4Life's main objective is “health education, prejudice reduction, social well-being and the enhancement of multicultural women's quality of life. Based on the defined needs, the project aims to identify and incorporate scalable solutions for improving immigrant women's health and their participation in various sport hobbies, thus promoting the above-mentioned target. The process takes into consideration a number of important aspects which affect health and well-being, such as physical exercises, nutrition and social participation.” At the moment there are six groups in Helsinki, Vantaa and Espoo under the programme. (Fit4Life, 2014)

In relation to the issue of religious dress codes, norms and culture being respected and taken into account among other practices that are important to them, there has to be very open and clear communication between sport clubs and sport programmes and the migrant women. The task is to create an interaction forum to communicate about the different traditions, religions, activities, cultural symbols, etc. of both the majority mainstream member as well as the migrants and ethnic minorities. It is important to share knowledge to provide more insight into different cultural customs and living conditions, including gender sensitivities (e.g., enabling gender separation in sports), and/or religious practices (e.g., prayer) (ENGSO 2012, 23)

Meeting future youth and youngsters ' parents to participate in sport is often a key strategy for further development. Informing both the child and the parent(s) about the different sport choices is relevant and promoting their participation. This can positively reduce any resistance among potential new youth athletes, particularly among migrants and ethnic minorities. The reasoning behind this is that if these youth's parents are persuaded of the value of sport, then it makes it easier for the youth to engage in the sporting activities and at the sporting club. (ENGSO 2012, 33)

This strategy can also be applied when it comes to women who are not active in sports because of lack of support from their families or spouses. By sensitizing their spouses about the benefits of an active sports lifestyle for example better health, improved physical fitness, nutrition and mental health education sessions held at some of the group sessions to mention but a few, it creates awareness and a higher chance of reducing gender stereotyping and the belief that women have no place in the field of sports.

In response to the earlier mentioned challenge of communication and the lack of knowledge thereof, establishing contacts in reception centres, migrant communities and other related support networks would be very vital to ensure that information about the available sporting options/activities and the organisations that provide these services reaches the target group.

Developing a communication strategy to reach those people, including one that targets migrants and ethnic minorities, would be significant. Details on the local sport opportunities and participation incentives should be an integral part of this communication strategy. For example, this can be achieved by disseminating informative flyers and packages to all refugees, including migrants and minorities at reception centres, information and immigration centres, as well as through sports clubs and other related organizations and partners, such as community activities, neighborhood networks, youth development departments, and social clubs and houses. (ENGSO 2012, 24-25)

Communication with and among all potential partners is essential to the social inclusion of migrants and ethnic minorities in sports clubs and programs. Not only does this entail sensitizing all participants to raise awareness of diversity management or athletic possibilities (of mainstream society and refugees and ethnic minorities, respectively). Communication often includes educating people with the intention of improving the qualifications and skills (e.g. diversity training courses or instructor courses) of those individuals (willing to) work in sport. (ENGSO 2012, 22)

The views of the participants in this research do not necessarily represent the views of all migrant women living in Finland because they are only but a tiny speck of the community. There might be other/different views and perspectives from other people of the situation regarding migrant women living in Finland that have not been reflected in my research.

I hope the content in this thesis gives an overview about the challenges faced by the target group in sports in Finland and possible successful strategies or recommendations to rectify or improve the situation that maybe Diak students or students from other Universities, sport organisations and sport clubs among other entities can relate to or use in their work with migrant women in sports or life in general. The professionals in the field of sport or social work and researchers need to explore and address these

challenges faced by migrant women in sports because the role of social work is to ensure that everyone in the community is catered for in terms of rights, health and their well-being.

9 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Writing this thesis has given a lot of insight into the challenges faced by migrant women in Finland, not only in sport but in other areas of their lives. I got the idea for my thesis topic while on my last diak study placement with one multicultural organisation that aimed at promoting the physical and cultural activities of multicultural women, increasing their participation in sports and also enhancing their mental and physical health.

Studying at Diak has taught me about the many benefits of living in a culturally diverse country and studying in a University that had a rich, multicultural array of students some of who I studied with. I learnt to ask and be enlightened about cultures and religions that were different from my own instead of dismissing or making assumptions from what I heard from various sources on the go or from the media. Every day we learn through communication, observation and practice.

I have not done this kind of extensive research in a topic that am really interested in before and I learnt how to do participatory research, qualitative research and apply a thematic analysis. In addition, this thesis research taught me how to compile, analyse and transcribe data collected through my interviews and literature review. Having rules about the research ethics and need for consent was also eye-opening because it is vital during the carrying out of research to make sure the participants give their consent and that you are allowed to use certain materials without risking the abuse of copyright or violation of privacy.

The curriculum and course modules that I have been taught have been of great benefit to me because I had the opportunity to learn about three areas in the social work field that is, “Professional Practice in Community Development and Social Services,

Diversity in Communities and Participatory Work, Participatory Development and Innovation” through blended learning which I highly approve of because it encourages self-initiative and a hands-on approach to learning and studying.

In terms of what I want to do professionally, this thesis and all the studies on marginalised groups have given me direction and that means that my area of interest is, working with women and girls in (but not limited to) the field of sport, with a focus on mental health and wellbeing.

“Professional judgement involves making decisions about complex and often competing agendas associated with safety, risk, need and availability of resources. Social workers lead a precarious existence as they try to balance compliance with the rules of their organisation, the values of their profession and the variability of human nature.” (Halton et al., 2014, 126)

“Social work is a career focused on experience and an academic discipline that promotes social change and growth, social cohesion and people empowerment and liberation. Social justice values, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are fundamental to the social work. Underpinned by social work, social sciences, humanities and cultural information theories, social work involves people and systems to tackle the challenges of life and promote health. The definition above may be broadened at national and/or regional level.” (IFSW, 2014)

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APPENDIX 1. Questionnaire

1. What kind of sports do you participate in?
2. What makes you want to participate in sports?
3. How do you see the situation regarding migrant women in sports in Finland?
4. What challenges have you faced that have prevented you from participating in sports?
5. What concrete challenges and difficulties can arise when it comes to the inclusion of migrant women through sports and or in sports?
6. What do you think can be done to reach more migrant women and make them more actively involved in sports?
7. Would you like to add something important we missed to mention or to discuss?