

**A Snapshot of Girls' Perspectives on Sports, Health, and Empowerment:
A Descriptive Study of Women Win Programme Partners
in Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda**

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Executive Summary

Adolescence is a time for acquiring the capabilities and resources necessary for a successful transition to adulthood. Experiences in adolescence -whether for good or ill- powerfully affect girls' adult lives. Interventions during the second decade of life (between ages 10-19) have the potential to improve the health and well-being of girls, as well as their social and economic status. (Lloyd, 2005) Understanding the lived realities of girls is an important step in designing appropriate and meaningful interventions. Gathering information directly from girls and women about their opinions, attitudes, and aspirations is essential for developing and delivering high quality programs that meet their needs. Women Win recognizes the need to learn more about and from young women in order to effectively design and support successful programs. Further, Women Win appreciates the need for data - of high quality and conducted in a systematic process - to inform program design. With this in mind, Women Win commissioned a small-scale study of a select number of its partner programs to test the feasibility of gathering data from program participants through an inclusive and field-based process. The ultimate goal of this research is to inform the development of programs that better serve girls and women in sports.

Four programs from Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda were selected for inclusion in this study. A cross-sectional survey of 556 girls across the four programs was conducted. The survey was designed to capture basic demographic information as well as attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs around a range of sport, health, gender and development issues. Girls ranging in age from 10-19 participated in this study. The vast majority of girls were in school, with the majority in primary school. All girls in the study had participated in their respective program for at least 6 months; the majority had participated for 12 months or longer.

Overall, girls held positive attitudes about a range of issues related to sport, gender, and health. For example, the vast majority of respondents believe that girls should be able to become leaders in their communities, that they should be able to have careers in sport, and that they would like to continue with their education.

Some highlights:

- **Learning to Lead.** When asked about roles of boys and girls in leadership, 94% of girls overall agree that both boys and girls should have opportunities to become leaders. Not only do girls believe that they should have opportunities for leadership, the data indicate their willingness to lead. Programs should capitalize on this interest by building up girls' leadership skills and capacities.
- **Friends, Mentors, Safe Space.** Support networks, friends, and connectedness to people and community are considered important protective factors for girls. Girls who do not have friends in their neighborhood or do not have someone to turn to in case of emergency, are often vulnerable. When asked if they have made at least 5 new friends, the majority (83%) agreed that they had done so. Further, 89% reported having a female mentor or counselor that she could turn to with a problem. Taken together, this suggests that girls in these programs have a reasonably robust social support network. In addition, the vast majority of girls (89%) reported feeling safe in the place where they play sports. This is a testament to the programs described which appear to offer girls these safe spaces and provide them with female mentors, adding further to the overall safety of the environment in which they are playing sports.

- **Health and Well-Being.** Almost all girls (96%) felt that doing sports makes them feel strong and healthy. Regarding menstruation, over half of girls felt that it is ok to play sports while menstruating, while about one third felt that is not good to do so, and 10% of girls report being unsure about this. This somewhat mixed response suggests that work is needed to help girls understand basic reproductive health issues, particularly menstruation and menstrual hygiene, and also to explore the cultural practices related to menstruation. In settings where affordable sanitary napkins/menstrual management supplies are not available, menstruation poses financial and practical challenges for girls. Programs working with girls at or around the time of puberty would be well advised to include activities to help girls understand and manage their menstrual periods with greater confidence.
- **Gender-Based Violence.** Millions of women suffer every year from sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. 33% of women around the world have been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetime (WHO 2005). Given the overall prevalence of the problem, it was not surprising to find that a large majority (76%) of girls believe that violence against girls and women is a problem in their community. While we cannot comment on the extent of the problem in these communities, nor does this data suggest that girls themselves are victims of violence per se, we can say that girls perceive this to be a problem, and they are able to identify it as such.
- **Future aspirations.** Girls' perception of their future is important. Almost all girls (96%) believe that they have opportunities in life; a full 94% said they plan to continue with their education, and 93% of girls said they would be willing to lead a community activity – all positive indicators. Those working with and on behalf of girls must step up and build the platform to help launch safe and productive transitions to adulthood.

This research has helped elucidate girls' perceptions and attitudes about sport, gender and rights. This study reveals the overwhelmingly positive attitudes these young women hold in programs that place them in the forefront. Further, it suggests that girls appear to be receiving the intended messages of the programs. Although the extent to which participation in these programs is directly responsible for girls' positive attitudes cannot be claimed per se, the data do point in an overall healthy direction. There is a growing consensus that sport can play a meaningful role in girls' lives. Beyond the clear physical and health benefits of sport, participation in well-designed sport programs provides girls with the opportunity to develop new and valued skills, to learn and to lead, and to expand and deepen social support networks.

Introduction

At the start of the twenty-first century, social and technological change has broadened the opportunities for healthier, more positive lives for people around the world. However, in a rapidly globalizing world, adolescents who miss out on basic resources and opportunities will be left behind. Many girls and young women are deprived of the chance to form friendships with their peers, to participate in the activities of their communities, and to experience the sheer joy of physical activity and sport. Women Win is dedicated to supporting grassroots organizations delivering quality sport programs to girls and women around the globe. As a learning sport organization, Women Win actively seeks opportunities to build the evidence for sport as an effective strategy for the empowerment of girls and women, and to use data to improve and strengthen sport programs. This study is a step in the process.

Study Objectives

The overarching goal of this research was to explore adolescent girls' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs around a range of sport, gender, health, and development issues. The study also sought to gather key socio-demographic information on program participants.

Study Design

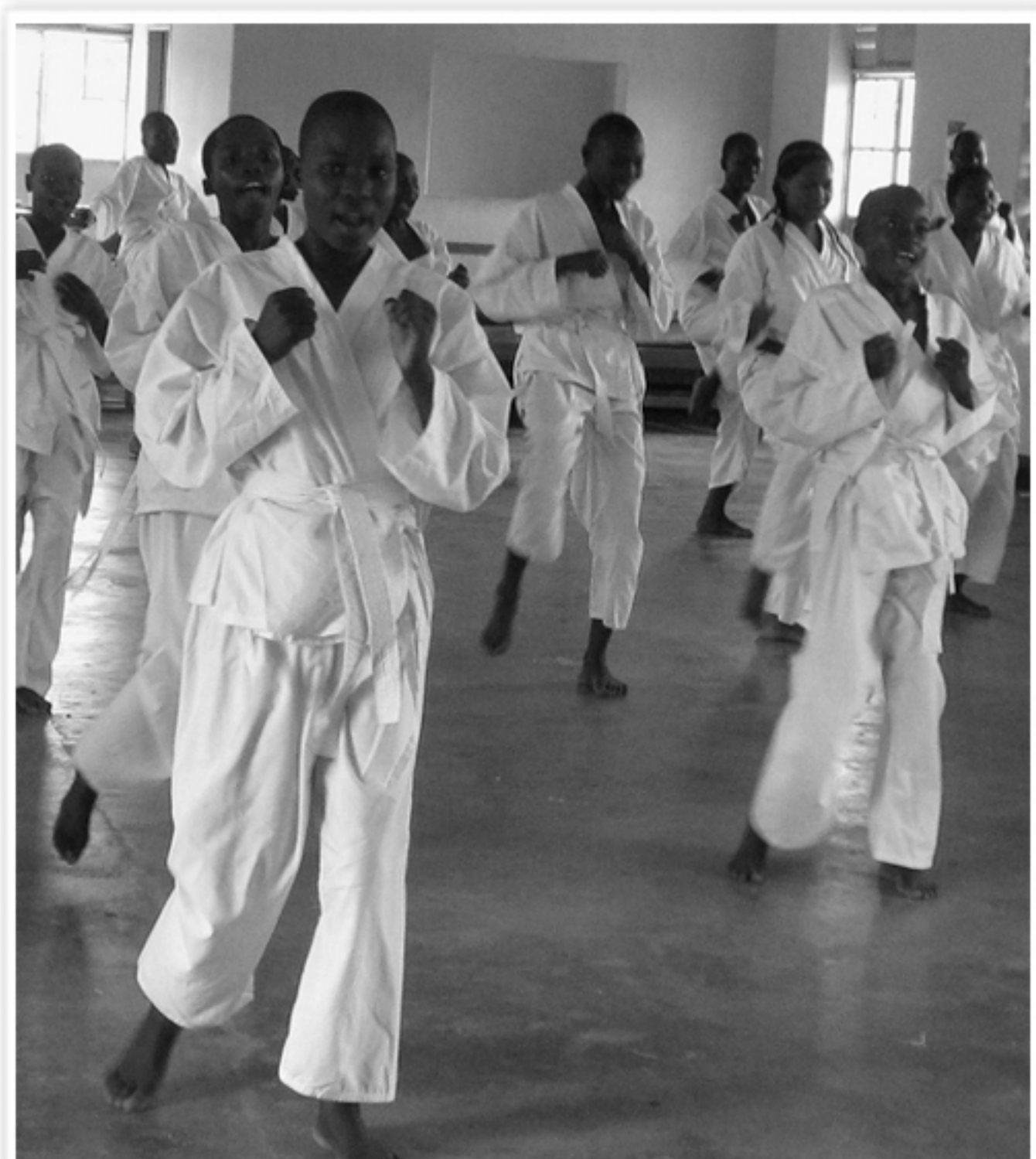
A cross-sectional survey of 556 girls and young women aged between 10-19 from four programs in Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda was conducted between June and August, 2010. This was a descriptive study intended to provide a snapshot of girls' perspectives on key issues; it was not intended to measure change over time.

Study Tool

A standardized 14 item questionnaire was developed, based on literature review of the barriers and challenges to girls' sport participation, and the myths and misconceptions frequently expressed by communities (and sometimes girls themselves) about the role of sport in girls' lives. The tool captured attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about a range of sport, gender and development issues. Specifically, questions about gender roles, notions of physical strength and health, knowledge of menstruation, sense of connectedness to friends and mentors, and future aspirations were included. Statements were phrased in both the affirmative and negative so as to reduce the chance of rote responses. For simplicity in fielding and interpreting the questionnaire, all items were worded simply, and response categories were "Agree" "Disagree" or "Not Sure". Experience with surveys in similar settings and populations suggests that the use of more complex Leichardt scales have been challenging for respondents to comprehend, thus bringing into question the validity of the data.

Study Setting and Program Partners

Four dynamic and unique programs in Egypt, Uganda, and Kenya were selected for participation in this study. While each program is necessarily different based on context and needs of the communities which they serve, they share an interest in improving the health and well being of young women. The programs range in size, location, scope, and organizational history, yet all programs are actively engaged in using sport as vehicle for the social, health, and educational empowerment of girls and young women. A brief description of the selected programs follows.



Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW) - Caïro, Egypt

ADEW was founded in 1987, and its mission is to empower (economically, socially, and politically) marginalized female heads of household (FHH). It combines grassroots programs with advocacy, and promotes gender-sensitive approaches to development and public policy issues in Egypt and the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region. ADEW's Girls' Dream program is a relatively new initiative designed to acquaint girls with their peers, improve self-image, and provide life skills training. The Girls' Dream program follows a 9 month curriculum intended to build knowledge and capacities in four key areas: self-esteem, health, legal rights, and technical skills. To date, ADEW has served over 4,000 girls through the Girls' Dream program. ADEW believes that sport can be a tool to promote girls' mental and physical well-being, while at the same time allowing girls to enjoy freedom of expression and access to public spaces. By adding sports to the Girls' Dream program, girls are able to enhance their communication and negotiation skills as well as leadership and team building spirit. Girls enrolled in the sports project are engaged in a variety of sports (e.g., volleyball, basketball, and gymnastics). ADEW targeted 100 adolescent girls for participation in the Girls' Dream sports project, which operates in the district of Masr el Qadima, specifically in Khom Ghourab, Batn El Bakara, and Ezbat Khairallah.



Sadili Oval – Nairobi, Kenya

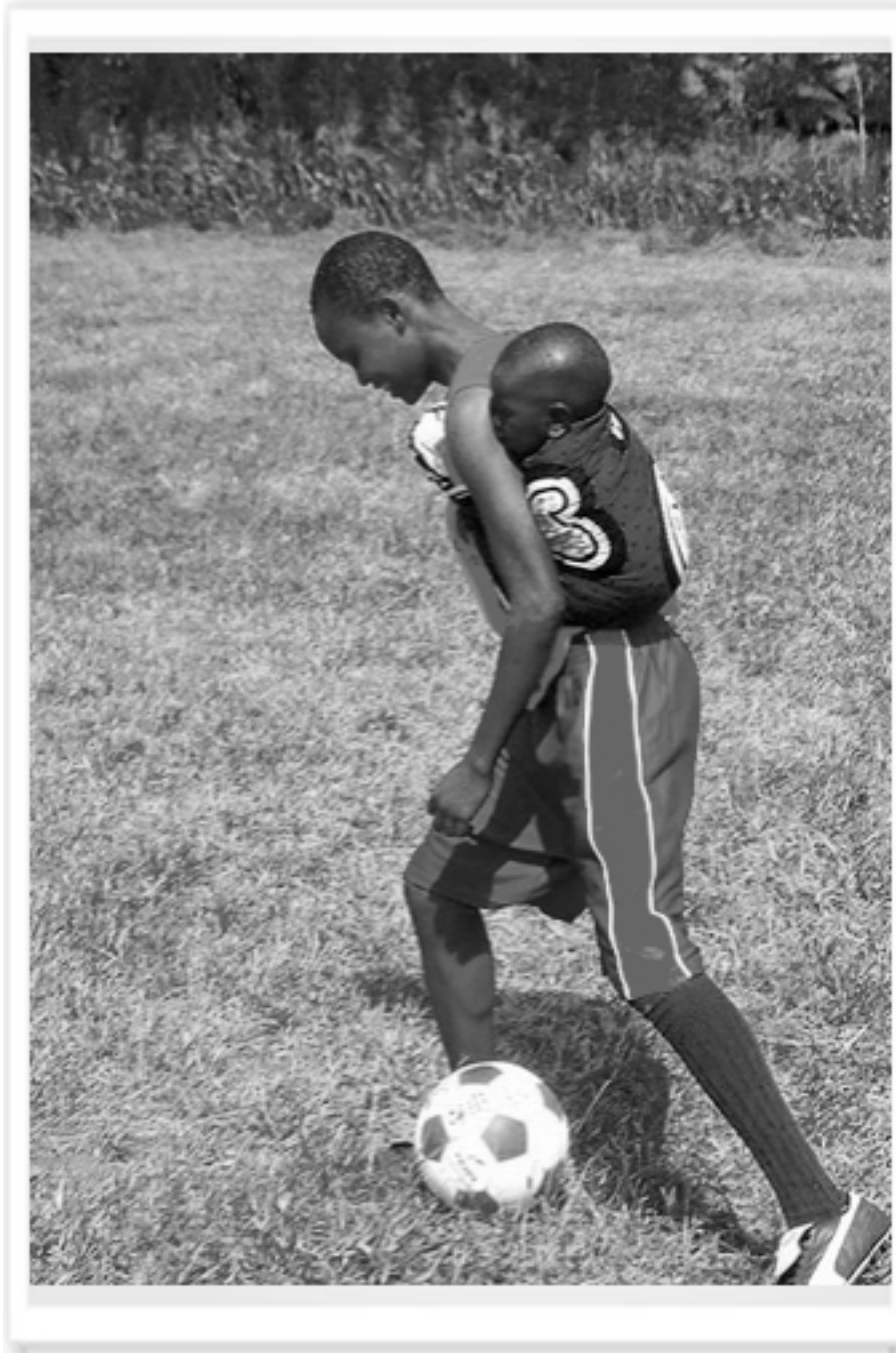
Located on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya, Sadili Oval Sports Academy is an indigenous, nonprofit, community-driven sports center- one of the few of its kind in eastern and central Africa. The Sadili Oval “Sports for Life” program offers weekly training for up to 3,000 children (42% of whom are girls) in football, netball, tennis, basketball, and swimming, and provides life skills training. Within Sadili Oval, Girl Power Clubs began its work in February 2008, aimed at rolling out Girl Power Clubs in up to 20 schools reaching upwards of 1440 girls. Girl Power Clubs use sport to: take action against violence, develop healthy lifestyles, build self-esteem, create role models, and encourage girls to take leadership roles in their communities.

To date, out of a total of 1680 girls who participate in Sadili Oval programs, 440 girls are participating in the Girl Power Clubs. Girl Power is fundamentally a leadership program which combines sports and life skills. In addition to playing sports, various topics are discussed including: establishing healthy relationships, sexual abuse, rape and what actions to take, bullying in school, alcohol and drugs, how to plan your studies, and importance of teamwork.



Moving the Goalposts (MTG) - Kilifi, Kenya

Moving the Goalposts (MTG), a community-based organization located in rural Kilifi district of Coast province in Kenya, mobilizes girls and young women to play football and uses sport to address various social issues affecting them. Starting with a football project with less than 100 Girls in 2001, MTG has grown to include thousands of adolescent girls participating in weekly practices, tournaments, and a broad array of education and life skills activities.



Girls are encouraged to take on leadership roles such as committee membership, coaching and refereeing, first aid, and peer education and counseling. Girls participate in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all project activities. In addition, there is a community mobilization department geared towards establishing and strengthening partnership with the community. To date, a total of 361 girls' football teams have been registered, and 6,498 girls are involved in various activities of MTG.

Mifumi - Tororo, Uganda

Mifumi is a Ugandan-based women-led organization working to end domestic violence. Mifumi works with grassroots organizations to support and enable them to become effective and skillful in promoting women's rights, and works with rape survivors and other victims of gender-based violence. Mifumi is a multi-faceted organization providing direct services – 22 advice centers across 19 counties in Tororo district - where women and girls may go for advice and support for problems of domestic violence and child abuse. Mifumi operates several programs, of which Sure Start is one.

Sure start uses sports (Karate and Tae-kwondo) to improve the status of girls while improving gender relations in the communities. Mifumi combines karate and tae-kwondo with their "Feel Free" domestic violence training to empower adolescent girls in primary schools. Through participation in Karate / Tae- kwondo, girls gain confidence and serve as role models for others, leading to a change in self image. Sure Start aims to change individual and community attitudes about the status and roles of girls and women, and seeks to change individual and community behaviors towards girls' participation in sports. From inception, 1,073 girls have registered with Sure Start. To date, 600 have completed gender training and the first phase of karate training, and an additional 473 new members are currently undergoing training.



Methodology

Data Collection Procedure and Process

Although they varied by program, each of the four programs had a monitoring and information system in place. A guide for recruiting study participants was prepared and discussed with each of the programs.

Training of Study staff

Each program identified a key person responsible for study implementation. He/she received training on the study objectives, survey instrument, informed consent, data collection procedures, and data entry from Women Win staff. This training was done remotely via email and web-based training. In addition, guides were prepared and distributed.

Respondent selection: What girls were “eligible” to participate in the survey?

We wanted to capture information on as many girls from each of the four selected programs as possible, yet wanted to ensure that the respondents had ample time (6 months or more) participating in the program in order to have formed opinions. Eligibility criteria for participation in the study included:

- Age 10 years or older
- Must have been in program for 6 months or longer

All girls who met the criteria were eligible to participate in the survey. In the case of the MTG/Kilifi program, the largest of all programs, we devised a representative sample of girls to participate in the study. For example, a total of 1,041 girls met the criteria, however due to logistical and cost considerations we sought to interview 20% of the total, drawing from the range of program sites. We “recruited” a total of 224 eligible girls from 17 of the 27 playing fields across all four of the divisions in which MTG operates. In the other three programs, all girls who met the criteria were interviewed.

Ethical Considerations

A fundamental principle of conducting any type of research is to ensure that the participants are aware of the purpose of the research, how it will benefit them, and that they are free to participate or not, without jeopardizing their participation in the program. To do this, Women Win endeavored to develop an Informed Consent process and prepared a statement which was read to all girls prior to administering the survey. Any girl who did not want to participate in the survey was free to decline. In addition, confidentiality was maintained by not having any individual identifiers and by not linking data to individuals.

Questionnaire Translation

The questionnaire was translated into Arabic and Kiswahili for use in Egypt and one of the Kenya sites. English was used in two of the sites.

Questionnaire Administration

Because of the large number of girls and the lack of enough staff available to conduct one-on one interview, the questionnaire was administered to girls in groups of about 20, with the exception of ADEW who carried out one-on-one interviews. In all cases the survey was administered by trained interviewers who worked in teams of at least two to handle the logistics and to ensure confidentiality during survey administration. In the case of MTG/Kilifi program, 11 administrators were trained to administer the questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered either at the playing field, classroom, or other suitable locale determined by logistical considerations and context. While the questionnaire was simply phrased, at the appropriate level and language, so that the majority of girls could read and understand it own their own, in an effort to ensure comprehension, the questionnaire was read aloud by the administrator in the appropriate local language. Questions were reviewed one by one; girls were asked to mark their responses on their individual questionnaires.

Data Analysis

Completed questionnaires were assigned unique subject ID numbers and data were entered directly into an Excel database customized for this purpose by the Population Council. All data were entered into English data entry screens by the interview team and/or other staff at each of the program sites.

A data analysis plan was developed through a consultative process, and data analysis was carried out by an external research organization, the Mulier Institute, using SPSS. Frequency distributions were run of all items as well as Chi-square and Spearman's correlation coefficients. In an effort to determine whether age, educational status, or length of time in program were correlated with any of the survey items, Chi square tests and Spearman's correlation coefficients were run. There was no relationship found between these variables and the responses to individual items on the survey.

The following three tables illustrate key findings from the study.

Table 1: Response rate

	Total	ADEW Cairo, Egypt	MTG Kilifi Kenya	Mifumi, Tororo Uganda	Sadili Oval Nairobi Kenya
Number of 'eligible' girls 'recruited' to participate in the survey	708	88	224	250	146
Number of successfully completed surveys	556	88	224	147	97
Response rate	77%	100%	100%	59%	66%

A fairly high response rate was reported overall, with both the ADEW and MTG reporting 100% , skewing the response rate upward. The two other sites (Mifumi and Sadili Oval), response rates of 59% and 66% respectively, are within what is acceptable for this population and setting. The total number of girls eligible to participate across the four sites was 708. A total of 556 girls completed the survey, of which 40% of respondents were from the MTG program in Kilifi, Kenya. As MTG is the largest and most established sports-based program, a high percentage of girls participating in the study are drawn from that program. (see methodology section for description of the sampling strategy for MTG).

Table 2: Selected socio-demographic characteristics of program participants

	Total	ADEW Egypt	MTG Kenya	Mifumi Uganda	Sadili Kenya
Age	(n=556)	(n=88)	(n=224)	(n=147)	(n=97)
10-12 years	17%	10%	11%	37%	8%
13-14 years	39%	38%	46%	40%	24%
15-16 years	30%	16%	37%	22%	39%
17-18 years	8%	16%	4%	1%	21%
19 years and above	5%	20%	1%	0%	8%
Schooling Status	(n=556)	(n=88)	(n=224)	(n=147)	(n=97)
Currently in school	90%	39%	99%	100%	100%
Currently not in school	10%	61%	1%	0%	0%
Current grade*	(n=499)	(n=34)	(n=221)	(n=147)	(n=97)
Primary	83%	29%	100%	96%	44%
Secondary	17%	71%	0%	4%	56%
Residence	(n=556)	(n=88)	(n=224)	(n=147)	(n=97)
Rural	56%	0%	96%	66%	0%
Urban	44%	100%	4%	34%	100%
Number of months in program	(n=556)	(n=88)	(n=224)	(n=147)	(n=97)
6 months	20%	44%	7%	11%	42%
7-9 months	15%	52%	3%	7%	19%
10-12 months	7%	0%	7%	14%	5%
More than 12 months	58%	3%	83%	69%	34%

*: current grade of those who are currently in school

Age Structure of program participants

Participants in this study ranged in age from 10-19, with 69% of the girls falling between 13-16 years of age. Many fewer girls are found at the older age groups (only 8% between 17-18, and only 5% at 19 or above), which is consistent with findings elsewhere in developing countries indicating that girls tend to “age out” of school programs as other socially-dictated responsibilities set in. (Brady, 2002, Simbaya and Brady, 2010). Interestingly, the Egypt program has a somewhat different age structure in that it includes a large portion of older girls in the program. This is in part a function of the ADEW program overall, which addresses social and economic issues of female-headed households which is geared to somewhat older young women.

Schooling Status

In terms of schooling status, overall the vast majority (90%) of girls were currently in school, with the exception of the ADEW program Egypt, where well over half (61%) were not in school. This again is correlated with the age structure of the program, with somewhat older girls being in the ADEW program more likely to have missed out on schooling opportunities. Of those girls who were currently in school (n=499), the majority (83%) were in primary school, with the exception of ADEW in which the majority of girls (albeit a much smaller number) were in secondary school. Also, the Sadili Oval program had slightly more girls at secondary school than in primary – likely a function of the age structure of program participants.

Residence

Two of the programs are urban-based and two are rural programs. The Sadili Oval program operates in the center of urban Nairobi and the ADEW program is based in Cairo. Mifumi operates in Tororo, rural Eastern Uganda, and MTG is based in rural coastal area of Kenya. In all four settings, girls resided within the catchment area of their program.

Duration of program participation at time of interview

As described in the eligibility criteria for study participation, all of the girls had been in their respective program for a minimum of 6 months. Slightly more than half of the study participants, had been in the program for 12 months or more. Both MTG/Kilifi and the Mifumi/Uganda programs had a significantly larger portion of study participants (83% and 69% respectively) having been in the program for 12 months or more. This is in part due to that fact the both are long-established programs in their communities and therefore had many more girls that have been involved in the program for a longer period of time. The majority (61% and 96% respectively) of Sadili Oval and ADEW of study participants had been in the program for between 6 and 9 months.

Table 3: Survey items by program (in%)

		Total	ADEW Cairo, Egypt	MTG Kilifi Kenya	Mifumi, Uganda	Sadili Oval Kenya
		(n=556)	(n=88)	(n=224)	(n=147)	(n=97)
Both boys and girls should have opportunities to become leaders in their communities	Agree	94	85	96	93	97
	Disagree	4	6	4	5	1
	Not sure	3	9	0	2	2
Females should not get too strong or too athletic	Agree	30	20	19	57	26
	Disagree	65	66	79	42	63
	Not sure	5	14	2	1	11
It is not good for girls to play sports when menstruating	Agree	31	25	33	35	27
	Disagree	58	55	59	62	54
	Not sure	11	20	8	3	20
Violence against girls and women is a problem in my community	Agree	76	83	75	86	58
	Disagree	16	3	22	12	18
	Not sure	8	14	3	1	25
I have a female mentor/ counselor that I can turn to for help with a problem	Agree	89	77	96	93	79
	Disagree	6	6	2	5	14
	Not sure	5	17	2	2	6
I have made at least 5 new friends	Agree	83	59	88	89	88
	Disagree	11	18	9	10	9
	Not sure	6	23	4	1	3
I know where a health facility in my community is located	Agree	91	78	92	99	90
	Disagree	3	1	5	1	3
	Not sure	6	20	3	1	7
I feel safe in the space/place where I do sports	Agree	89	92	90	95	75
	Disagree	5	2	4	4	10
	Not sure	6	6	6	1	14
I am able to cope with stress and difficult situations	Agree	75	78	80	77	58
	Disagree	16	7	13	22	24
	Not sure	9	15	7	1	19
Doing sports makes me feel strong and healthy	Agree	96	97	95	98	95
	Disagree	3	2	3	1	4
	Not sure	1	1	2	1	1
Having a career in sports is possible for women	Agree	90	70	94	96	88
	Disagree	3	6	2	3	5
	Not sure	7	24	4	1	7
I plan to continue with my education	Agree	94	75	95	100	98
	Disagree	3	9	3		
	Not sure	4	16	2		2
I would be willing to lead a community activity/event	Agree	93	91	96	94	86
	Disagree	3	3	2	4	1
	Not sure	4	6	2	2	13
I believe I have many opportunities in my life	Agree	96	83	99	96	100
	Disagree	2	6	0	2	
	Not sure	3	11	0	2	

Table 3 illustrates the responses to each question broken down by program. We report the findings of the survey based around a few key themes. Overall, the majority of girls from all programs held positive attitudes to the issues and topics covered. Key themes are described below.

Learning to Lead: What girls think about Leadership

Despite the global proliferation of development activities targeting “youth”, relatively few focus specifically on girls’ leadership. (Salem, Ibrahim, and Brady, 2003). Elevating girls into leadership positions can build skills and self-confidence while simultaneously providing younger girls with positive role models. Building leadership in this way begins to transform girls’ roles and status in society (Catino et al, 2009, Brady et al, 2007). Are girls being prepared for leadership roles? Do they have opportunities to “practice leadership” in their communities?

When asked about roles of boys and girls in leadership, 94% of girls overall agree that both boys and girls should have opportunities to become leaders. Both of the Kenya programs - MTG/Kilifi and Sadili Oval, Nairobi, reported even higher levels of agreement (95% and 97% respectively). Further, when asked whether they would be willing to lead a community activity or event, the vast majority of girls (93%) said they would. Not only do girls believe that they should have opportunities for leadership (a rights perspective), the data indicates their willingness to lead. Programs should capitalize on this interest by building up girls’ leadership skills and capacities. Sport can provide an excellent venue through which to develop leadership capacities.

Gender Based Violence: An-ever present concern

Millions of women suffer every year from sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. In fact, 33% of women around the world who have been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetime (WHO 2005. Multi-country Study on Women, Health and Domestic Violence). Poor, uneducated and young women are especially vulnerable. Given the overall prevalence of the problem globally, we felt it important to ascertain whether girls felt that violence against women was a problem in their community. It was not surprising to find that a large majority (76%) of girls believe that violence against girls and women is a problem in their community. Even higher levels of agreement were found among respondents in the Egypt and Uganda programs (83% and 86% respectively). In the absence of community-specific GBV prevalence data, we cannot comment on the extent of the problem in these communities, nor does this data suggest that girls themselves are victims of violence per se, however, we can say that girls perceive this to be a problem, and they are able to identify it as such. More in-depth and careful exploration of this theme in future program-related work is warranted.

Support Networks, Friends, Mentors important for Girls and Young Women

Social capital, support networks, friends, and connectedness to people and community are considered important protective factors for girls. Girls who do not have friends in their neighborhood or do not have someone to turn to in case of emergency, are often isolated and vulnerable (Hallman, 2007, Erulkar, 2007). When asked if they have made at least 5 new friends, the majority (83%) agreed that they had done so. “Having friends” is gaining traction as a potentially important indicator of the density of girls support network (Bruce and Hallman, 2008). Perhaps an even more important protective asset is access to female mentors, role models, and/or counselors. Role models may function to encourage and sustain female involvement, as well as to contribute to altering gender roles and expectations (Meier and Saavedra, 2009). In this study 89% of girls reported that they had a female mentor or counselor that they could turn to with a problem. Taken together, these two variables suggest that girls in these programs have a reasonably robust social support network.

On a related matter, the Population Council has been exploring the role of “group affiliation” or “membership” in girls’ lives. In particular, researchers are looking at the links between community social cohesion, group membership and sexual experiences among adolescents. In a recent study conducted by the Population Council and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa of adolescents and young women aged between 14-24, found that membership in sports, study and religious groups maps to higher age at sexual debut for young women. In fact, young women who were members of sports groups were significantly less likely to experience non-consensual sex, and over 11 times more likely to have used a condom during their last sexual encounter than young women who are not members of sports groups (Hallman, 2010). Group affiliation and sense of belonging can be extremely powerful for girls, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances. More explicit work on group formation and cohesive should be considered.

Safety and Safe Spaces: Critical issues for girls’ health and well-being

The importance of girl’s safety – physical, emotional, sexual - within schools, at home, and in communities is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in girls’ overall health. The lack of safety leaves many girls and women vulnerable, and curtails their engagement in programs and in the public sphere more generally (Brady et al, 2007, Simbaya and Brady, 2010). Access to “safe spaces” is a critical issue for girls and women, and recently programs of diverse content have begun to design with the “safe spaces” concept in mind (Brady, 2005). Any program (regardless of content) that hopes to recruit and maintain girls and women, must assure the physical, emotional and sexual safety of its participants. This should be a guiding principle when designing programs for young women. In this study, we wanted to know how girls perceive of the safety of their program. The vast majority of girls (89%) reported feeling safe in the place where they play sports. This is a testament to the programs described here which appear to offer girls these safe spaces to do sports and provide them with female mentor, adding further to the overall safety of the environment in which they are playing sports.

Health, Menstruation and Body Image

One of the well known benefits of sport is its positive effect on physical and mental health (Presidents Council on Fitness). This study confirmed that girls associate doing sports with feeling healthy. Almost all girls (96% overall) felt that doing sports makes them feel strong and healthy. Myths and taboos around menstruation and menstrual blood itself have long existing in most cultures around the globe. Proscriptions regarding diet, dress, physical activity, hygiene practices are dictated by culture. Negative ideas of menstruation are often perpetuated through popular culture. Many of the ideas which also form what has been called the “menstrual politics of sport” (DeLaney et al, 1988) are based on preconceived notions of the negative effect of menstruation on athletic performance, and the effect of athletic performance on menstruation, reproduction, and fertility (Moreno-Black, G. and H. Valliananatos, 2005). Given the valance that menstruation holds in the lives of women, we sought to learn what girls in these programs thought about menstruation and sport. Over half of girls felt that is “ok” to play sports while menstruating, while about one third felt that is not good to do so, and 10% of girls reported being unsure about this. This somewhat mixed response suggests that work is needed to help girls understand basic reproductive health issues, particularly menstruation and menstrual hygiene, and also to explore the cultural practices related to menstruation. In settings where affordable sanitary napkins/menstrual management supplies are not available, menstruation poses financial and practical challenges for girls. Programs working with girls at or around the time of puberty would be well advised to include activities to help girls understand and manage their menstrual periods with greater confidence.

Traditional views of femininity and notions of a culturally “acceptable” female physique and musculature, shapes the way girls and women view their bodies. It is not surprising that a mixed picture emerges from the data when girls were queried about the notion of females becoming “too strong” . Thirty percent of girls agreed with the statement “Females should not get too strong or too athletic”. Slightly more than 50% disagreed with this statement, and 11% were unsure. Working with girls to interpret and analyze the various cultural messages being given about the female body could help in re-shaping the ways girls internalize these messages.

Coping with Stress: The Power of Resiliency

Sports and physical activity have been shown to boost mental health by reducing symptoms of stress and depression (President’s Council, 1997). Sport also appears to play a role in bolstering resiliency and one’s ability to handle various stresses (Women Sports Foundation, 2009, Peacock- Villada, 2007). In the current study, findings indicated that the majority of girls (75%) reported being able to cope with stress and difficult situations. However, in the case of the Sadili Oval program, only 58% of girls claimed to be able to cope with stressful situations. Sadili Oval operates in the urban slums of Nairobi which may present more threatening and difficult circumstances for young people, and girls in particular, who must learn to avoid or navigate the threats in their environment on a daily basis.

Positive Outlook and Future aspirations

Girls’ perception of their future is important. Almost all girls (96%) believe that they have opportunities in life, and a full 94% said they plan to continue with their education, and 93% of girls said they would be willing to lead a community activity – all positive indicators. Whether girls are able to effectively navigate the turbulent water of adolescence remains to be seen, however they appear to have positive attitudes and aspirations to do so. The onus now is on programs. Those working with and on behalf of girls must step up and build the platform to help launch safe and productive transitions to adulthood.

Conclusion

There is a growing consensus that sport can play a meaningful role in girls' lives. Beyond the clear physical and health benefits of sport, participation in well-designed sport programs provides girls with the opportunity to develop new and valued skills, to learn and to lead, and to expand and deepen social support networks. This research has helped elucidate girls' perceptions and attitudes about sport, gender and rights. This report highlights the overwhelming positive attitudes these young women hold. It appears that girls are in fact receiving the intended message of the programs. While we cannot be sure how long lasting this may be, it does indicate that messages are being received. In order to fully understand program effects on a number of outcomes, it will be useful to have further evaluation of these and other programs using pre-post comparison groups. In the meantime, programs should continue to build capacity and strengthen efforts to address issues around gender based violence, reproductive health, and social and economic asset building. Sport programs that can effectively and sensitively incorporate these topics into their mission and mandate, can provide a critical link to girls' overall wealth and well-being.



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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Interview agreement or consent letter

My name is _____ and I am working with **X program**. We are gathering information from girls like you about sports, health and other important issues. Your opinions about these topics matter to us, and we know that you have great ideas to share. The information you provide will help us build stronger sport programs for girls.

Everything you write or say will be kept confidential. Your name will not in any way be associated with your responses.

If you do not want to participate in this survey, or if you do not want to answer certain questions, you may decline to do so. If you choose not to participate in this survey, it will not affect your being in the program.

Are you willing to participate in survey? **Please Circle YES or NO**

NOTE: If participant says no, stop! Some girls/women may not wish to complete the survey. They do not have to do the survey, to be in the program.

DATE OF ADMINISTRATION OF SURVEY _____

SITE/COUNTRY: _____

NAME: _____

SUBJECT ID: (Assigned by interviewer)

MARITAL STATUS: 1= MARRIED 2= NOT MARRIED

SCHOOL STATUS: 1= IN 2=OUT

CURRENT GRADE LEVEL: 1= PRIMARY 2=SECONDARY

RESIDENCE: 1= RURAL 2=URBAN 3=PERI-URBAN

#MONTHS IN PROGRAM: 6 7 8 9 10 11 12+

AGE: 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

NOTE TO THOSE ADMINISTERING THE SURVEY: Questions should be asked of girls/women who have been in the program for at least 6 months.

Ask respondents: **Since JOINING the program, please tell us whether you AGREE, DISAGREE, or are NOT SURE about the following statements:**

EXAMPLE: A soccer ball is round 1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3=NOT SURE

1. Both boys and girls should have opportunities to become leaders in their communities.

1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3=NOT SURE

2. Females should not get too strong or too athletic.

1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3= NOT SURE

3. It is not good for girls to play sports when menstruating.

1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3=NOT SURE

4. Violence against girls and women is a problem in my community.

1= AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3=NOT SURE

5. I have a female mentor/ counselor that I can turn to for help with a problem.

1= AGREE 2= DISAGREE 3=NOT SURE

6. I have made at least 5 new friends.

1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3=NOT SURE

7. I know where a health facility in my community is located.

1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3=NOT SURE

8. I feel safe in the space/place where I do sports.

1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3=NOTSURE

9. I am able to cope with stress and difficult situations.

1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3= NOT SURE

10. Doing sports makes me feel strong and healthy.

1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3= NOT SURE

11. Having a career in sports is possible for women.

1= AGREE 2= AGREE 3= NOT SURE

12. I plan to continue with my education.

1= AGREE 2= DISAGREE 3= NOT SURE

13. I would be willing to lead a community activity/event.

1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3= NOT SURE

14. I believe I have many opportunities in my life.

1=AGREE 2=DISAGREE 3= NOT SURE

THANK YOU!

Appendix 2. Partner Web Sites

Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW) - Cairo, Egypt
<http://www.adew.org>

Sadili Oval – Nairobi, Kenya
<http://www.sadili.com/>

Moving the Goalpost (MTG) – Kilifi, Kenya
<http://www.mtgk.org/>

Mifumi – Tororo, Uganda
<http://www.mifumi.org/>