Exclusion of Muslim sportswomen highlighted

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The limited participation of Muslim sportswomen in international sport is highlighted in a new paper by Birmingham academics.

Researchers from the School of Education addressed the paradox between Olympic ideals for inclusion, and policies by sport's governing bodies that exclude Muslim women

One major barrier noted is how regulations in Olympic sport dress code can often deny Muslim women's religious requirements of modesty in covering the body.

Lead author Professor Tansin Benn explains: 'Such policies are tantamount to excluding Muslim athletes and exacerbating the wider prejudice and discrimination that Muslim sports women can face.

'Political, cultural and religious resistance to participation, as well as the potential threat of vilification and exile, can be reasons for Muslim women's inability to take part in international sports. However sport policies and practice also create unnecessary barriers for many.

'Given that there are also political and religious barriers to Muslim women participating in international sport we would like to see a change in sport policy and practice to foster the wider inclusion agenda of Muslim women in the sporting arena.

The research recognises that participation of Muslim women has improved over recent years, with only Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait sending men-only teams to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Women **from Saudi Arabia, Brunei and Qatar will be competing in the Olympics for the first time during London 2012. (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18813543)**

However, the academics argue that representation of Muslim women is still minimal in a limited number of sports and make recommendations to improve the situation for the future.

Dr Symeon Dagkas, co-author of the article, comments: 'With responsibility for sport policymaking lying predominantly in Western secular countries, it is perhaps not surprising that attention to religion and religious needs has been missing. In a multicultural, multi-faith England, on the eve of the 2012 Olympic Games, we cannot ignore the constant processes of societal and cultural change or the challenges and opportunities these bring.'

The article*The Olympic Movement and Islamic culture: conflict or compromise for Muslim women?* (http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19406940.2012.656677) , is published in the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics,* a special issue on London 2012 and its legacies.

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