



Developing an Islamic Model Based on Sustainable Development of Sports for All in Iran

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to develop an Islamic model based on the sustainable development of sport for all in Iran. This qualitative research employed the systematic grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Participants were 13 academic experts, professors of sport sciences and Islamic studies, and managers of the Sport for All Federation and related organizations, selected through purposive snowball sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding. Seventeen main categories were identified within the six dimensions of the paradigmatic model: causal conditions (motivators, support from others, Islamic convergence), core phenomenon (Islamic sport for all), strategies (promoting sport values, education and culture-building, financial support, emphasizing the Qur'an's positive view of physical activity, structural change and integration), contextual conditions (observing Islamic indicators, infrastructure development, accessibility), intervening conditions (socio-cultural problems, gender hegemony, cognitive barriers), and consequences (social development, community health promotion, social well-being). The proposed model demonstrates that Islamic values serve as the primary motivator, not a barrier, for participation in sport for all. Policymakers are recommended to establish a jurisprudential council for sport for all and redesign infrastructure based on this model to effectively enhance the physical and spiritual health of society.

Introduction

Physical activity and sport are widely recognized as essential components of a healthy lifestyle, contributing to physical, mental, and social well-being. Despite this, global data indicate that more than 27% of adults and 81% of adolescents do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity, with physical inactivity accounting for approximately 5 million premature deaths annually (World Health Organization, 2024). In Iran, the situation is equally concerning, with only 21% of women and 34% of men achieving the recommended daily physical activity (Sadeghi et al., 2024).

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While various models have been proposed for the development of sport for all in Iran, most adopt a secular, functionalist approach and fail to integrate Islamic principles as core motivating factors rather than mere cultural adjustments. Previous models have largely focused on barriers and structural constraints, neglecting the positive, duty-oriented incentives that Islam provides for physical activity. This research gap is significant given that Islam, as the dominant religion in Iran, includes teachings on health, bodily care, and moderation. Therefore, this study aims to develop an Islamic model based on the sustainable development of sport for all in Iran, drawing directly from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the perspectives of academic and executive experts.

Methods and Materials

This qualitative research employed the systematic grounded theory approach of Corbin and Strauss (2008). The study population comprised academic experts, professors of sport sciences and Islamic studies, and managers of the Sport for All Federation and related organizations. A purposive snowball sampling method was used to select 13 participants who met the inclusion criteria: having published works on sport and religious foundations, extensive teaching experience in religious and sport fields, and relevant executive positions in sports federations. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, each lasting 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Reliability was assessed using the test-retest method, yielding a coefficient of 0.78. Data analysis followed the systematic grounded theory procedures: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, leading to the development of a paradigmatic model. The research also incorporated a review of relevant studies and Qur'anic perspectives on sport and physical activity.

Results and Discussion

The analysis identified 17 main categories organized within the six dimensions of the Strauss-Corbin paradigmatic model. Causal conditions included three categories: motivators (e.g., freedom to choose modest sportswear, celebrating group values, building more women-only clubs, family participation in sport events), support from others (e.g., parental encouragement, teacher and peer support, religious leaders' approval), and Islamic convergence (e.g., organizing sport competitions among Islamic nations, encouraging Muslim communities). The core phenomenon was defined as "Islamic sport for all." Strategies comprised five categories: promoting types and values of sport (reviving passion for sport, disseminating educational values, popularizing indigenous and local sports), education and culture-building (positive image promotion, raising awareness about health benefits, media coverage), financial support (investment in sport for all, free access for citizens, securing financial resources), emphasizing the Qur'an's positive view of physical activity, and structural change and integration (organizing women's sports, enhancing sport's share in leisure, flexible regulations, commitment to "sport for all"). Contextual conditions included observance of Islamic indicators (justice, sport as a means, prohibition of fraud and deception, avoiding harm, moderation), infrastructure development (women-specific facilities, disabled-accessible equipment, prayer rooms in sport venues), and accessibility (sanitary facilities in sport environments, night transportation, easy access). Intervening conditions comprised socio-cultural problems (cultural sensitivities, traditional parental attitudes, misconceptions), gender hegemony (patriarchal society, unequal resources, media neglect of women's sports), and cognitive barriers (misinterpretation of physical activity, lack of awareness about sport benefits). Consequences were identified as social development (social interaction, collective feelings, increased participation), community health promotion (disease prevention, sport as a health mechanism), and social well-being (increased vitality, social joy, reduced social problems).

The findings reveal that Islamic values are not barriers but strong motivators for participation in sport for all. This contrasts with the common perception that religious norms constrain physical activity. The model demonstrates that when sport is framed as a divine trust and a prerequisite for

fulfilling religious duties, individuals are more inclined to engage. The emphasis on moderation, justice, and avoidance of harm resonates with Islamic teachings and can enhance both physical and spiritual health. The findings also indicate that socio-cultural factors, particularly gender norms, remain barriers, aligning with previous research (Mukhtar Bichi, 2018; Laar et al., 2025). However, the proposed Islamic model offers a proactive, duty-based framework that addresses these barriers by integrating religious legitimacy and practical guidelines.

Conclusion

This research presents a comprehensive Islamic model for the sustainable development of sport for all in Iran. The model confirms that Islamic teachings—derived from the Qur'an, Hadith, and scholarly interpretations—provide a solid foundation for promoting physical activity among all segments of society, including women and youth. The core innovation lies in shifting the paradigm from a hedonistic, leisure-based approach to a duty-oriented approach, where physical activity is viewed as a religious obligation to preserve the divine gift of health. This perspective not only aligns with Islamic values but also offers a sustainable, culturally resonant solution to the public health crisis of physical inactivity.

The practical implications are significant. Policymakers are recommended to establish a jurisprudential council for sport for all to issue religious decrees and guidelines, redesign sport infrastructure in accordance with Islamic norms (e.g., separate facilities for women, prayer rooms), and launch nationwide culture-building campaigns that highlight Qur'anic and prophetic encouragement of physical activity. Collaboration with religious seminaries and local religious leaders is essential to disseminate the message that sport is compatible with and encouraged by Islam. Additionally, educational curricula should integrate Islamic perspectives on health and physical activity from early childhood.

While the model is context-specific to Iran, its principles can be adapted to other Islamic countries facing similar challenges. Future research could test the model quantitatively, examine its applicability in different cultural settings, and explore the effectiveness of specific interventions based on its components. Ultimately, this study contributes to the theoretical and practical literature by bridging sport management, public health, and Islamic studies, offering a framework that promotes both physical and spiritual well-being.

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Keywords: sport for all, Islamic model, sustainable development, grounded theory