## **Original Article**



# CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO OF MUSLIM WOMEN AND SPORT IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: PATHWAYS TO THE VISION 2021

Abstract – Historically, the global society has viewed females as naturally weak, powerless and dependent on males. False medical myths such as development of masculine and unfeminine bodies, harmful effects on the menstrual cycle and prejudice about women who participate in sport activities have been spread which have discouraged active participation of females in different parts of the world, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries<sup>1</sup>. In this paper, a Scenario Analysis methodology recommended by Spaniol and Rowland<sup>2</sup> was used; a process of analysing possible future events by considering alternative possible outcomes from the society. The UAE Vision 2021 was developed to make the nation among the best countries in the world by the Golden Jubilee of the union. This vision was utilised to provide references to the analysis and application of the methods CATWOE, PESTLE and SWOT; also used to complement the scenario description. The discussion revolved around the overall engagement of women representing the Muslim community in the sports sector with a heavy focus on the United Arab Emirates (UAE) sporting scene. In addition, the outlook of the UAE government on women in sports and the various strategies and reforms adopted by the local government to promote women participation in sports was discussed. The conclusion reflects on the possibilities of a behavioural change in the contemporary local society which could lead to more opportunities for women in sports even after the imposition of barriers.

Keywords: Culture; Physical activity; Islamic society; Females; Social behavior.

# CENÁRIO CONTEMPORÂNEO DAS MULHERES MUÇULMANAS E ESPORTE NOS EMIRADOS ÁRABES UNIDOS: CAMINHOS PARA A VISÃO 2021

Resumo - A sociedade global enxergou as mulheres como naturalmente fracas, impotentes e dependentes dos homens durante muitos anos. Historicamente, falsos mitos médicos, tais como o desenvolvimento de corpos masculinos e não femininos, efeitos nocivos sobre o ciclo menstrual e o prejuízo da gravidez de mulheres que participam de atividades esportivas, se espalharam e desencorajaram a participação ativa do gênero feminino em todas as partes do mundo e de maneira bem impactante, nos países do Golfo<sup>1</sup>. Neste artigo, utilizou-se a metodologia de Análise de Cenário recomendada por Spaniol e Rowland<sup>2</sup>, que se define como a análise do processo em um cenário futuro considerando outros possíveis resultados da sociedade no presente. A Visão 2021 dos Emirados Árabes Unidos (EAU) foi desenvolvida para converter a nação entre os melhores países do mundo em seu Jubileu de Ouro. Esta visão foi utilizada para realizar as análises com os métodos PESTLE, SWOT e CATWOE para complementar a descrição do cenário. A discussão girou em torno do engajamento geral de mulheres representando a comunidade muçulmana no setor esportivo, com grande foco na cena esportiva dos EAU. Além disso, foram discutidas as perspectivas do governo dos Emirados Árabes Unidos sobre as mulheres nos esportes e as diferentes estratégias e reformas adotadas pelas autoridades locais para promover a participação das mulheres no esporte. Como conclusão, é possível encontrar uma mudança de comportamento na sociedade contemporânea local que reflete em mais oportunidades no futuro para as mulheres no esporte, ainda que existam muitas barreiras e pré-conceitos.

Palavras-chave: Cultura; Atividade física; Sociedade islâmica; Feminino; Comportamento social.

# ESCENARIO CONTEMPORÁNEO DE MUJERES Y DEPORTE MUSULMANES EN LOS EMIRATOS ÁRABES UNIDOS: CAMINOS A LA VISIÓN 2021

Resumen - La sociedad global ha visto a las mujeres como naturalmente débiles, impotentes y dependientes de los hombres durante muchos años. Históricamente, falsos mitos médicos, tales como el desarrollo de cuerpos masculinos y no femeninos, efectos nocivos sobre el ciclo menstrual y el perjuicio del embarazo de mujeres que participan en actividades deportivas, se esparcieron y desalentaron la participación del género femenino en todas partes del mundo y de manera muy impactante, en los países del Golfo<sup>1</sup>. En este artículo, se utilizó la metodología de Análisis de Escenario recomendada por Spaniol y Rowland<sup>2</sup>, que se define como el análisis del proceso en un escenario futuro considerando otros posibles resultados de la sociedad en el presente. La Visión 2021 de los Emiratos Árabes Unidos (EAU) fue desarrollada para convertir a la nación entre los mejores países del mundo por el Jubileo de Oro desde su origen. Esta visión fue utilizada para desarrollar análisis con los métodos PESTLE, SWOT y CATWOE para complementar la descripción del escenario. La discusión giró en torno al compromiso general de mujeres representando a la comunidad musulmana en el sector deportivo, con gran foco en la escena deportiva de los EAU. Además, se discutieron las perspectivas del gobierno de los Emiratos Árabes Unidos sobre las mujeres en los deportes y las diferentes estrategias y reformas adoptadas por el gobierno local para promover la participación de las mujeres en el deporte. Como conclusión, es posible encontrar un cambio de comportamiento en la sociedad contemporánea local que refleja en más oportunidades futuras para las mujeres en el deporte, aunque existen muchas barreras y preconceptos.

Palabras-clave: Cultura; Actividad física; Sociedad islámica; Femenino; Comportamiento social.

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#### Introduction

The world of sports is dominated by males who barely compete against the opposite gender. The sporting world is experiencing rapid growth with women participation in sports a key agenda for development. Globally, women are being given a chance along with a platform to showcase their sporting talent. This can be inferred from the participation pattern of global events such as the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) where 50% of the participants were female<sup>3</sup>. The participation of women in sports was limited with no participation in sports involving physical contact<sup>4</sup>. Individual sports or gender-separated sports (aquatics, archery, equestrian, golf, tennis) were practiced by women. History was created in the 2012 London Summer Olympic Games with no only male centric sport event and presence of women athletes in the contingent of every nation<sup>5</sup>.

A policy, adopted by the IPC General Assembly, requires at least 30% of all offices to be held by women in all entities belonging to the Paralympic Movement to promote gender equality and empower the female community<sup>6</sup>.

Across history, many rights were conquered for and by women. Nonetheless, gender equality and opportunities for women should be continuously debated and promoted. Figure 1 lists some of the achievements by the women in developed countries while others are still under process in developing countries which will directly affect the enrolment of women in sport and physical activities. The United Arab Emirates government is working promptly to implement several rights and behavioural changes leading to a positive accelerated growth; sometimes more than the society's expectations.

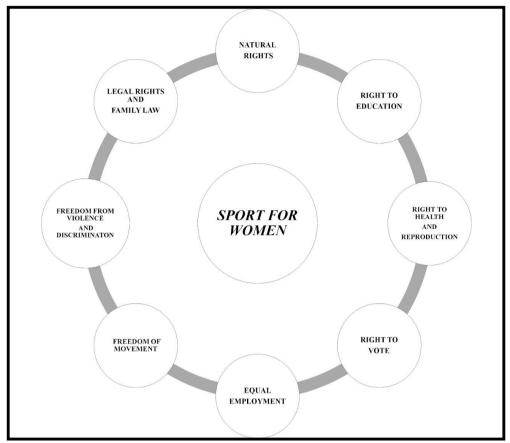


Figure 1. Rights acquired by women around the world in the 20th Century.

Source: Developed by the authors.

The religion of Islam encourages its followers to lead an active and healthy lifestyle. It promotes the practice of physical activity by both the sexes<sup>7</sup>. However, several preconceptions and misunderstandings have had a detrimental effect on the participation of Muslim women in various sport activities<sup>8</sup>. The Islamic community face various challenges while engaging in the sports sector. Notably, the most influencing factors for their non- involvement in sport activities are their religious beliefs, faith and local culture.

The females represent 31% of the 9,304,277 population of the United Arab Emirates<sup>9</sup>. The UAE's Human Development Index (HDI) value is 0.863 which positions it at 34 out of 189 countries and territories while the female HDI value is 0.832<sup>10</sup>. The official religion of the UAE is Islam while the practice of other religions is allowed<sup>11</sup>. In the education sphere, the number of women in higher education - both undergraduate and postgraduate level, has risen remarkably. According to a PricewaterhouseCoopers

report<sup>12</sup> (p. 8), "the UAE is registering the highest rate of females in higher education in the entire world".

Traditionally practised but now regulated sports, falconry, camel and horse racing had the Emiratis engaged as a mode of survival<sup>13</sup>. Out of the mentioned traditional sports, women are found to be more engaged in equestrian sports; not limiting themselves to horse racing but also practising other disciplines such as equestrian dressage and show jumping. The General Authority of Sports, along with local sports councils and regulatory bodies, controls and oversees the development of the sports sector in the UAE<sup>14</sup>). An executive team for Olympic and Paralympic medals indicator in various sports to achieve the National Agenda 2021 has been launched<sup>15</sup>.

#### Dress code for women in Islam

Islam has laid down guidelines to be followed by women who wish to engage in physical activities with the observation of a modest dress code and a strict prohibition from competing in mixed- gender sports<sup>16</sup>.

Each woman belonging to a country, state, locality, tribe and family is able to decide and implement her dress code. Brems<sup>17</sup> states that the Sharia (Islamic law) does not require the observance of determinate clothing such as burqa. Hijab is an Arabic word which means barrier or partition but encompasses the behavioural aspect as well as the dress code to be adhered by a follower of the religion of Islam<sup>18</sup>. According to Vakulenko<sup>19</sup>, 'Awrah refers to the parts of the body that need to be covered in different situations, see Table 1. It is different for males and females. 'Awrah can be followed through the observance of different garments prescribed in Figure 2. The citizens of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), irrespective of their religious beliefs, are required to observe the burqa. The Emirati burqa (see Figure 3B) is different from the burqa (see Figure 2) and is worn by the elderly people.

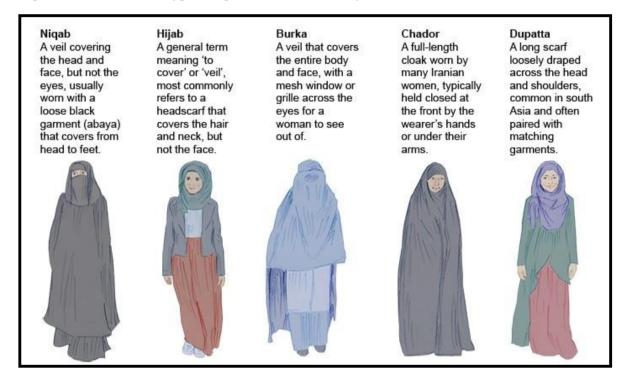
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Table 1. The 'Awrah for women.

WOMEN	In Public	With Same Sex Relatives	With Opposite Sex Relatives	Emergency and Extreme Situations
	Head to toe except hands and face.	Neck to knees.	Head to toe except hands and face.	Open, as necessary for surgery, rescue or a doctor visit (when same sex person is not available).

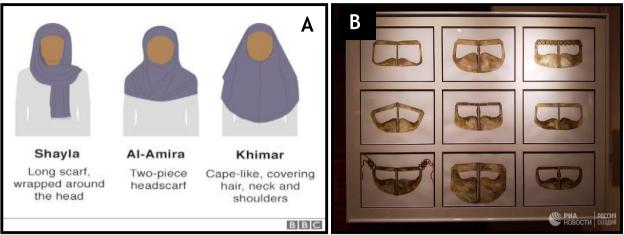
Source: Learning Islam Textbook Level 2<sup>20</sup>

Figure 2. The different types of garments observed by women in Islam.



Source: ABC News<sup>21</sup>

Figure 3. Types of head (A) and face (B) cover observed in the UAE by women in Islam.



Source: (A) BBC<sup>22</sup>; (B) RIA Novosti/Yulia Tropicalmedicine burqa UAE<sup>23</sup>

In 2011, an incident highlighted one of the many challenges posed by the regulatory bodies to the Muslim women athletes competing on the international stage. FIFA, the international football association, disqualified the women's football team of Iran due to their observance of the headscarf which, according to the authorities, violated the dress code guidelines<sup>24</sup>.

Addressing the concerns related to performance due to the Hijab, NIKE launched the PRO HIJAB, a performance headscarf. A number of sporting organisations have voiced their support for the product with the International Boxing Association (AIBA) amending their guidelines for the female athletes to compete in it<sup>25</sup>. The Judoka Wojhan Shaherkani was the first woman representative from KSA, at the Olympic Games. She threatened to withdraw from the Olympic Games due to the International Judo Federation's (IJF) stance on her hijab, but an agreement was reached for her to compete in an acceptable form of headscarf<sup>26</sup>.

Europe is a tourist hotspot for travellers from the Middle East with attractions ranging from Eiffel Tower to the Swiss Alps. Among the local citizens of the UAE (Emiratis), it is also a preferred destination for medical tourism. According to the French law, the observance of a full-face veil in public is prohibited. This law creates a conflict for Muslim women who wish to continue to practice sports and physical activities even during their foreign trip. In 2019, Decathlon decided not to market the Hijab after it received objections and threats from the citizens and politicians claiming it contradicted the nation's secular values<sup>27</sup>. Non-acceptance of garments designed for

Muslim women by the majority public and politicians could act as a major roadblock not only for women travellers, but also for female citizens of Europe practicing Islam.

According to the UAE government's<sup>28</sup> official website, a conservative approach to clothing should be adopted with nudity in any form strictly forbidden. Transparent garments or garments with offensive slogans or pictures are also prohibited. The Emiratis may be offended when people dress inappropriately or not in accordance with Islamic values. Tourists and citizens failing to abide by the dress code in public spaces may face a possible three year jail term and deportation to their country of origin<sup>29</sup>. The observance of hijab, shayla and al-khimar is common among the women citizens (see Figure 2 and 3A). The nation has relaxed rules regarding the dress code for women wishing to practise sports and aims to create more opportunities for women regardless of how they choose to cover themselves up.

#### **Materials and Methods**

In this paper, a Scenario Analysis methodology recommended by Spaniol and Rowland<sup>30</sup> was used taking into consideration the UAE Vision 2021; a process of analysing possible future events by considering alternative possible outcomes from the society. Pararell scenarios of the Islamic world were also used to illustrate possible solutions and opportunities. The analysis is divided into four stages (1) scope of the research - (A) identify a relevant case or issue of concern, (B) identify use(s) or user(s) needs for the scenario; (2) identify the driving forces; (3) frame the scenario and (4) refine the scenario. In this case, the scope of the research is filled by (1) (A) - women and sport in the UAE, (B) - Sport Federations, National Olympic, Special Olympics and Paralympic Committee, Ministry of Education and City Sport Councils; (2) The opportunities for inclusion of women in sport through participation globally and domestically; (3) The numerous tournaments, course preparations, job opportunities and the westernisation of a part of the local culture; (4) The right to practice, participate or compete in the different sport scenarios. This descriptive study used the triangulation of data<sup>31</sup>, applied to the analytical tools such as PESTLE, SWOT and CATWOE analysis to give a comprehensive view of the sporting scenario of the entire nation as utilised by authors<sup>32</sup>.

#### **Results and Discussion**

A research conducted by AbdulRazak, Fauzee and Abd-Latif<sup>33</sup> involving fifteen Muslim women of Arab origin in which a questionnaire was handed out along with a personal interview shed light on the cultural and ethnic barriers faced by the women in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region with the major reason of non-participation in sport activities was discouragement by family and society. The social stigma surrounding the practice of physical activities by women can lead to a health crisis among the population with more than 66% of the women in the UAE reported to be overweight or obese<sup>34</sup>. The women tend to observe a relaxed dress code policy when practising sports at private only spaces for females but fully comply with dress code when exercising at mixed-gender spaces. It was observed from the local scenario that the women are free and extra motivated to exercise at places exclusive for ladies. At such institutions, they are not compelled to cover their hair and can also wear stretch sportswear that reveals their body shape; far away from the prying eyes of men.

The lack of visible role models in the sporting world for the youth females to emulate has led to the adoption of a mundane attitude towards practice of sports. In the 2016 Rio Summer Olympic Games, fourteen Muslim women secured a podium finish which included three gold medals for Kosovo, Russia and USA respectively<sup>35</sup>. The achievements of these Muslim women could inspire fellow women in the Muslim community to participate and compete in various sporting events. The example of positive UAE athletes' example can be observed on the Tables 2, 3 and 4, with female people that attended the Olympic, Paralympic and Special Olympics.

The Islamic Women Games were organised by the Islamic Federation of Women's Sport (IFWS), to provide the Muslim women with a platform to showcase their sporting talent in various sports such as futsal, karate and taekwondo behind closed doors to males and media. According to Amara<sup>36</sup>, the games suffered due to low media attention and poor public female attendance which ultimately led to its downfall. The discontinuation of Islamic Women Games highlights the challenges faced by the different stakeholders in women's sports. The Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs of Iran, Masoud Soltanifar, stated that Iran is planning to revive the Islamic Women Games<sup>37</sup>.

The futsal team of Iran won the AFC Women's Futsal Championship in 2018<sup>38</sup>. The matches were not broadcasted on television leaving the Iranian fans frustrated due to lack of coverage by the media<sup>39</sup>. This serves as an indicator for the reduced visibility of the achievement of the women's team due to non-broadcast on national television.

The eSports can act as a viable medium to promote gender equality and empower women. Women's national teams were introduced in the 2016 edition of the popular football video game FIFA<sup>40</sup>. The game could act as a stepping stone for the recognition of women's football which has long been overshadowed by their male counterparts. No women's national team from the MENA region has ever been featured in the game while the men's Saudi Professional League made its debut in the 2013 edition. The addition of Muslim women athletes and accurate depiction of them adhering to the dress code in-game could be a boon for the Muslim women community.

Table 2. List of Emirati women athletes at the Summer Olympic Games.

NAME OF THE ATHLETE	YEAR OF BIRTH	AGE IN OLYMPIC GAMES	SPORT	EDITION
Ayesha Shahriyar Mohammed Al Balooshi	1992	24	Weightlifting (58 kg)	2016 Rio
Alia Saeed Mohammed	1993	22	Athletics (10,000 m)	2016 Rio
Betlhem Desalegn	1991	20	Athletics (500 m)	2012 London
Khadija Mohammad	1995	17	Weightlifting (75 kg)	2012 London
Nada Al Bedawi	1997	18	Swimming (50 m freestyle)	2016 Rio
Sheikha Latifa Bint Ahmed Maktoum Bin Juma Al Maktoum	1985	22	Equestrian (Show jumping)	2008 Beijing
Sheikha Maitha Bint Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum	1980	28	Taekwondo (67 kg)	2008 Beijing

Source: Developed by the authors based on the IOC records.

Table 3. Performance of Emirati women athletes at the Summer Paralympics.

NAME OF THE ATHLETE	YEAR OF BIRTH	AGE IN PARALYMPIC GAMES	SPORT	EDITION
Haifa Naqbi	1981	35	Powerlifting (86 kg)	2016 Rio
Mariam Matroushi	1986	26/30	Athletics (Javelin throw)	2012 London/ 2016 Rio
Noura Alktebi	1992	24	Athletics (Club throw/Shot put)	2016 Rio
Sakina Al Balooshi	1984	28	Athletics (Club throw)	2012 London
Sara Al Senani	1992	24	Athletics (Shot put)	2016 Rio

Source: Developed by the authors based on the IPC records.

Table 4. Performance of Emirati women athletes at the Special Olympics World Games 2019.

SPORTS	Number of women athletes	AWARDS		
S2 02125	and unified partners in the Special Olympics	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Athletics	8	1	7	6
Badminton	6	2	2	1
Basketball	17	-	8	9
Воссе	4	2	5	-
Bowling	9	7	-	7
Cycling	4	-	-	2
Equestrian	5	2	1	6
Football	20	9	10	-
Golf	1	-	-	-
Gymnastics (artistic)	2	1	1	2
Gymnastics (rhythmic)	2	-	1	2

Judo	2	-	-	-
Powerlifting	4	-	1	3
Roller Skating	1	2	-	1
Sailing	1	1	-	-
Swimming	6	1	5	-
Table Tennis	4	-	1	3
Tennis	1	1	1	-
TOTAL	97	28	43	42

Source: Developed by the authors based on the Special Olympics World Games 2019 records.

#### **United Arab Emirates sporting scenario**

The UAE government aims to promote sports in the nation with participation in competition open to all residents, irrespective of their nationality<sup>41</sup>. At the UAE Government Annual Meeting held in 2018, three initiatives were launched to promote wellbeing of the society<sup>42</sup>. (1) UAE Wellbeing Model for Residential Communities; (2) Community Wellbeing Nutrition Program; and (3) Community Program for Active Lifestyle.

Sports education is a key part of the curriculum implemented in schools<sup>43</sup>. The sport of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu was adopted in the school curriculum through the Jiu Jitsu Schools program which aims to support the emotional, mental, physical and social development of students along with promoting a healthy lifestyle<sup>44</sup>. School Olympics are regularly held to identify young talent in various sports such as athletics, archery, badminton, fencing, judo, swimming and taekwondo<sup>45</sup>).

The world's largest martial arts class (Jiu-Jitsu training session) was conducted in Abu Dhabi on the 25th of November 2015, coinciding with the National Sports Day and marked UAE's 44th National Day. The event was organised by the UAE Jiu-Jitsu Federation (UAEJJF) and the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) in partnership with Palms Sports. The event was attended by the Guinness World Records committee and witnessed a participation of 2,481 jiu-jitsu students from Abu Dhabi schools. The number of female practitioners involved was not noted, however it received a huge participation from female children.

The scorching summer heat in the UAE makes it strenuous for athletes to practice sport activities outdoors. The weather conditions are successfully tackled by the development of indoor sporting facilities such as the Dubai Sports World, the Middle East's largest indoor sporting venue<sup>46</sup>. The Koora dome is a good example of a FIFA-2 star artificial football turf providing football players with an air-conditioned environment to hone their skills<sup>47</sup>.

The Dubai Fitness Challenge 2018 incorporated the Dubai 30x30 program with an aim to encourage and motivate the participants to exercise or carry out any form of physical activity for a duration of 30 minutes for 30 days<sup>48</sup>. A Dubai Fitness App was also released for the participants to track their progress over 30 days<sup>49</sup>. After the success of the Dubai Fitness Challenge 2018, the government of Dubai could launch more initiatives to contribute to an active and healthier society.

UAE has always been at the forefront to lend women a voice in the Middle East region. Dr Amal Al Qubaisi is the first woman to head a parliamentary institution in the Arab world and the Middle East<sup>50</sup>. The UAE has also established a new benchmark for gender empowerment in the region. Under the UAE constitution, women enjoy the same legal status, claim to titles, access to education, healthcare and social welfare<sup>51</sup>.

It was identified that seven institution are responsible for women empowerment in the nation. These sports regulatory bodies in the UAE display more than 43 years of attention dedicated to the female practice:

- Abu Dhabi Ladies Club (Est. 2018).
- Dubai Ladies Club (Est. 2006).
- Fatima Bint Mubarak Ladies Sports Academy (Est. 2010).
- General Women's Union (Est. 1975).
- Sharjah Ladies Club (Est. 1982).
- The National Strategy for Empowerment of Emirati Women (2015-2021).
- The UAE Gender Balance Council (Est. 2015)

An International Conference of Sports for Women (ICSW) was held in the capital city, Abu Dhabi in 2017 with a vision for sports and culture to become a part of the lives of every Emirati woman, and help inspire and connect women of all

backgrounds to further break down barriers<sup>52</sup>. Sheikha Hind Women's Sports Tournament is organised to motivate the women employees from government and non-government sectors to exercise and adopt a healthy lifestyle<sup>53</sup>. Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak Award for Women Athletes rewarded creativity and excellence by Emirati and Arab women in the sports sector<sup>54</sup>. The SWOT, PESTLE and CATWOE analysis helps us to have a partial perception of the scenario.

In order to understand the external scenario that will aggregate values to the local transformation, it is important to mention that IOC approved the Agenda 2020 during the 127th IOC Session in Monaco on the 8th and 9th of December 2014. The document launched shows the Olympic Agenda 2020 indicating elements for changing the future of the Olympic Movement. The document presented 40 recommendations to form a picture that shows the IOC safeguarding the uniqueness of the Olympic Games and strengthening sport in society. The words of Nelson Mandela, the great humanist and social leader should be reminding: "Sport has the power to change the world".

The Olympic Agenda 2020 addressed important directions: (1) Changes to the candidature procedure, with a new philosophy to invite potential candidate cities to present a project that fits their sporting, economic, social and environmental long-term planning needs. (2) Reducing costs for bidding, by decreasing the number of presentations that are allowed and providing a significant financial contribution from the IOC; (3) Move from a sport-based to an event-based programme; (4) Strengthen the 6th Fundamental Principle of Olympism by including non-discrimination of sexual orientation in the Olympic Charter; (5) Launch of an Olympic Channel to provide a platform for sports and athletes beyond the Olympic Games period, 365 days a year; (6) Adapting and further strengthening the principles of good governance and ethics to changing demands; (7) Athletes remain at the centre of all 40 of the proposals, with the protection of the clean athletes being at the heart of the IOC's philosophy.

The gender issue is present in the Recommendation 11, to foster gender equality, when: (1) The IOC to work with the International Federations to achieve 50 per cent female participation in the Olympic Games and to stimulate women's participation and involvement in sport by creating more participation opportunities at the Olympic Games. and (2) The IOC to encourage the inclusion of mixed-gender team events.

In the Recommendation 38, IOC mentioned the targeted recruitment process to foster a gender balance for management positions. During the IOC conference 'Olympism in Action' in Buenos Aires 2018, many debates pointed that the future of the IOC should be drive by women and perhaps the next president of the institution could be a lady. This fact happened, one day before the opening ceremony of the Youth Summer Olympic Games 2018, that for the first time in the history achieved 50% of Girls athletes and 50% of boys' athletes as participants.

Women athletes were a part of the UAE contingent for the first time in 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games while men athletes have been representing the nation since 1984 Summer Olympics<sup>55</sup>. The UAE has won two medals at the Summer Olympic Games with Ahmed Al Maktoum securing a gold medal in double trap shooting at the 2004 Athens games and Sergiu Tuma securing a bronze medal in Judo at the 2016 Rio games<sup>56,57</sup>. Out of the 7 podium finishes secured by the UAE athletes at the 2016 Rio Summer Paralympics, Noura Al Ketbi secured a silver medal while Sara Al Senani secured a bronze medal and, in the process, became the first Arab women medallists<sup>58-60</sup>.

#### **SWOT Analysis**

#### Strengths

- Increased awareness about the importance of physical activity for both sexes resulting in a fit and healthy society.
- Gender equality.
- Women engagement and involvement leading to women.
- Empowerment in the nation.
- Facilities spread out in the most part of the big cities.
- High economic power for investments.
- A positive proactive position to stimulate sport for women from the rulers (Sheikhs), royal families and the government.
- The sport events during the Ramadan time, such as NAS Nad Al Sheba.
- The improvement of opportunities for 'people of determination' (people with disabilities), however should also focus on women.

#### Weaknesses

- Adherence to dress code.
- Prohibition from competing in mixed-gender sports.
- Non-availability of suitable sportswear.
- Few number of athletes can attend international events due to a technical level limitation for participation in international leagues, such as the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), the EuroLeague Women Basketball, the Asian Women's Club Volleyball Championship, etc.
- No national center for high-performance analysis and monitoring training.
- Low visibility of women sports in media communication (social media channels).
- Limited number of women managers in clubs, sport federations and government bodies.
- Reduced number of public parks, playgrounds (in the German *spielplatz* sytle) and sport inside hospitals for rehabilitation and health for general population and people of determination.

Opportunities	Threats
<ul> <li>A good prospect to secure medals and laurels through women athletes in line with the National Agenda 2021.</li> <li>Appointment of women ambassadors to raise awareness and identify sporting talent.</li> <li>Professionalise the women sports in the country and stimulate the clubs to contract experienced coaches for different sports.</li> <li>To accept the offspring of expats born in the country to compose the national sport teams.</li> <li>Open the market and stimulate the sport industry to create specific products designed for muslin women.</li> <li>Development of world-class facilities that could aid UAE's bid to host mega sport events.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Cultural barriers existing in the region.</li> <li>Preconceptions and misconceptions about the status of women in the religion Islam.</li> <li>A conservative image to maintain for the society.</li> <li>No school sport festival, university sport league or national sport league for female athletes in the country, except Jiu-Jitsu at the higher level.</li> <li>To not grant citizenship to permanent residents or people that have lived more than a certain period of time, for example, more than six years, as the system of major European countries.</li> <li>To not have physical activity or sport programs designed for children under 5 years and limited number of activities for girls.</li> <li>The improvement of sport for women in other Arab countries or Islamic societies.</li> </ul>

Source: Developed by the authors.

## **PESTLE Analysis**

P	E	S	T	L	E
Political	Economical	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental
Government backed campaigns for raising awareness about women in sports. Parliament motions fostering healthy discussion on representation of women in the sports sector.	Added revenue and performance bonuses for families of women athletes. Private only spaces such as female gyms.	Acceptance of female athletes in the society.  Resolvement of preconceptions and myths on participation of women in sports.	Mobile application and women gadgets.  Websites and. Social Media.  The above 3 mediums can be used to maintain a database and organise campaigns targeting females.	Law and resolutions passed for women to have more power in the sports industry.	Mixed gender sports clubs  Lack of private only spaces.  Explore more outdoor facilities and create public spaces free of charge.  The weather condition should be used in favour to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Source: Developed by the authors

### **CATWOE Analysis**

Customers	<ul> <li>All women residing in the UAE.</li> <li>Children in general because before the puberty, there are no differences in body composition and sport performance (also beneficial for the Olympic and Paralympic development of male sports).</li> <li>Clubs, Gyms and Sport Federations.</li> <li>The government of the UAE.</li> </ul>
Actors	<ul> <li>Men and women.</li> <li>General Authority of Sports, local sports councils and regulatory bodies.</li> <li>Sport institutions</li> <li>Royal family members.</li> </ul>
Transformation	<ul> <li>Eliminating the cultural barriers, preconceptions and misconceptions existing in the society.</li> <li>Encouragement to practice sports through raising awareness and implementation of suitable reforms.</li> <li>Enhancement of public places (playgrounds) or sport clubs, global sport academies and Centre of Excellence in Sports (CES) for talent identification and performance promotion.</li> <li>Promotion of healthy well-being and transformation of the public policies focusing on sport (rehabilitation, leisure, recreation, participation, education, performance and e-Sports).</li> </ul>
Worldwide	<ul> <li>Achievement of National Agenda 2021.</li> <li>Medals and laurels for the nation.</li> <li>Promotion of an equal society for both the sexes.</li> <li>Elevate the position of the country in relation to Quality of Life, Public Health, Active Society, reduce the obesity index and etc.</li> </ul>
Owners	<ul> <li>Women.</li> <li>Families.</li> <li>Sport Clubs and Federations.</li> <li>The UAE Government.</li> </ul>
Environmental constraints	<ul> <li>Society.</li> <li>Higher temperatures in the country.</li> <li>Accessibility and mobility of people of determination and people with special needs (elderly people, obese, pregnant, temporary injured or people with dwarfism or giantism).</li> <li>Limitations on sport activities for ladies with special cases, such as Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and other rare disorders.</li> </ul>

Source: Developed by the authors

The government of UAE has the distinction of developing a new terminology of 'people of determination' for people with disabilities. The city of Abu Dhabi hosted the Special Olympics World Games 2019 with the Local Organising Committee running a community engagement program to raise awareness and educate the citizens about the

Special Olympic movement<sup>61</sup>. Women athletes constituted 33% of the UAE delegation of 290 athletes who competed in 24 sports at the Games<sup>62</sup>. An exceptional performance by women athletes at the Games resulted in 113 medals for the host nation. This tally represents 62% of the 182 medals secured by the UAE delegation at the Games. The event was considered one of the best in the history for people with intellectual disabilities. The status quo designated by the government and the television coverage was similar or in some moments, superior to the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The women from Islamic countries competed and entered in the opening or closing ceremony without the head coverage (hijab or shayla) to the surprise of the spectators in the stadium and arenas.

Emirati women are making great strides in sports participation. Houriya Al Taheri, an ex- footballer, is the coach of the national football team of UAE. She created history when she became the first woman in the Arab world to achieve a football coaching license and was recently appointed by FIFA as a women's football expert<sup>63</sup>. Zahra Lari, an ice figure skater, was the first woman in the history of figure skating to wear a hijab and compete in the event<sup>64</sup>. Both women have been featured in Nike's Dream Crazier summer campaign. A development program offers training to girls, aged 16 and above, in various sports with an aim to increase participation and encourage young girls to adopt an active and healthy lifestyle<sup>65</sup>. A sports program, "Professional Trainer", is a group fitness certification course that allows women trainers to obtain an international certificate (Les Mills certified) in basic sports training, comprehensive sports training, or health and nutrition training<sup>66,67</sup>. The sport journalist and actress, Nada Alshaibani, was the first woman to act in the sports field in the late 1990's in the UAE. Originally from Bahrain, the pioneer woman communicator in the Gulf region suffered some resistances; well accepted nowadays which has motivated other ladies to follow the same career. She became the first sports journalist in the Gulf to pursue a Master's degree in Sport Management and launched an exclusive sport magazine for women called Noon Sport (see Instagram @noonsportofficial or Facebook https://www.facebook.com/noonsportofficial). Originally in Arabic language, the magazine was launched on the digital platform as an App recently and is a tool for talent promotion and to advertise female productions. The magazine fought for space for females to practise sports, promote gender equality and impart lessons on important

topics related to girls, ladies and women. In the new version, the magazine tries to break some paradigms against preconceptions or myths of women limitations and focuses exclusively on this important population.

A Federal National Council member of the UAE stated that girls should refrain from attending rugby classes at school and instead learn cooking to become the "perfect housewife" (see Figure 4B). This highlights the social challenges the female youth have to face and overcome to indulge in sports. Low social acceptance of women pursuing sports can be inferred from the analysis of the comments section of a post-dated 17 December 2018 on the popular social media platform Instagram by a sports account (@\_dawrena) informing the audience about women undergoing training for the AFC 'C' coaching license in the UAE (see Figure 4A).

The post had garnered 2,230 likes and 45 comments. Out of the 45 comments, only 2 comments were positive; supporting and encouraging the women to pursue sports. Some of the discriminatory comments imposed the women to kitchen and raising kids. One comment also included, "I can't imagine a woman being a coach over here."

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Figure 4. Sample of gender discrimination in public vehicles.

Source: (A) adapted from @\_dawrena<sup>68</sup>; (B) adapted from The National<sup>69</sup>.

#### **Conclusions**

The UAE government is highly supportive of women participating and practicing sports both professionally and recreationally. Many Emirati families are encouraging their daughters to pursue sports. The women athletes are breaking stereotypes while competing in international events such as the Olympic Games. If we take a look at nations like Brazil, during 40 years (from 1941 to 1983) the practise of football and other sports for women was not allowed. In 1941, the British football federation did not allow women in the football factories because the sport started to garner more attention than the men's representation. The first non-European president of FIFA, the Brazilian João Havelanche, mentioned recently that Football for Women is not for gender equality but for a piece of business and marketing gimmick. During the 2019 FRANCE FIFA World Cup, it was observed that it is possible to organise an event with high visibility. It was the first time that the same master sponsors of the male competition are present in the event for females. Many things happened for the first time and required a mention as it was the first time that many countries around the world broadcasted the entire event in real time. Also, the first time that uniforms were designed specifically for the women teams. Unfortunately, the combined salaries of all female players attending the world games cannot achieve the salary of a single player in the male version of the event.

Somethings need to be clarified for all countries and specifically in the UAE; sport for women will never be on par with the male sport because it is a different sport even if the same rules, facilities and organisation are used. The particularities in the event management should be adjusted according to the women performance and to compare with men sports should be avoided, because each sport has their particularities. If you look from the male perspective, it is possible to find different types of footballing events such as beach football, futsal, society football, street football, five-a-side for blind, seven-a-side for cerebral palsy, power football, football for amputee people and many others. Can you imagine all of these kind of event variations applicable also for women? It is possible to develop it soon in the UAE but it is necessary for new managers with a contemporary view and preparations to support the new perspectives for sport, not just for football. The perspective of the war times that women need to generate strong sons and educate them urged in the period of the Second World War;

going down and the Post-war reflection of women empowerment are reflected in the changes and westernisation of the Gulf society. Some countries involved in armed conflicts or war have difficulties to promote or develop sports but the armed forces and auxiliary forces (police and firefighters) can help in the sport promotion using their members during the military physical training or fitness program. An active lifestyle means health and economy in medicine, pharmacologic drugs and public health. If national polices of daily exercises for communities are adopted in schools, leisure streets, public parks, beaches, universities, and shopping malls (elevate number of these places in the country), there is a possibility to achieve success in the number of people adopting a more active and healthy lifestyle for the future generations to be more healthy.

Challenges still continue to plague women's participation in sports, especially the ones where a conflict with religion arises in terms of dress code and mixed-gender participation. Women empowerment can be successfully implemented through sports as the benefits of practicing physical activity include increased self-esteem, improved morale and increased productivity. The Vision 2021 shows the importance of sport for the Emirati society in the following years to achieve one of the six goals of the agenda. The women engagement in sport opportunities and development of high-performance programs will be fundamental to achieve the targets of the agenda.

The implementation of a refined Physical and Health Education curriculum in schools should be developed exclusively for the country, avoiding the westernisation of the education and respect the local culture. A heavy focus on holistic development of females with exercises for female population is required that could benefit the nation to achieve a better index in public health, such as the increasement of quality of life and enhancement of active lifestyle; to maintain the health of the women using physical exercises and sport for a healthy growth and development, preparation for the pregnancy period and rehabilitation, physical activity in the adulthood and an elderly period based on recreational and healthy exercise program. From the long run perspective, leisure opportunities in public spaces (free of cost) and a sport talent identification and development programme can help the society to achieve the National Agenda 2021 and follow the gender opportunity and equality pointed by the IOC<sup>70</sup> in

the Olympic Agenda 2020. As mentioned by Cyndi Lauper<sup>71</sup> in a song written and first recorded in 1979, "Girls just want to have fun".

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