

# Girls in Bangladesh

## A study on the effects of a karate program in the Kishorganj district



Name: Suzan Stoffers  
Studentno: 3331172  
University: Universiteit Utrecht – Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen  
Departement: Pedagogische en Onderwijskundige Wetenschappen  
Master: Education, socialization & youth policy  
Specialization: Education, Youth and International Humanitarian Cooperation and Aid  
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. A.E. Knoppers  
ECTS: 22,5  
Date: June 2010

Girls in Bangladesh.

A Study on the Effects of a Karate Program in the Kishoreganj District

Abstract

This research is based on the recognition of the United Nations to achieve the established Millennium Development Goals in 2015 with special attention to MDG no. 3: “Promote gender equality and empower women”. The general purpose of this study is to explore how and if participation in sport programs may add to the empowerment of girls. Data for this study is collected in Bangladesh by interviewing participating girls, parents and teachers. The collected data is ordered into four negotiating themes: participation, access, change and the future. The results reveal the complexity of the concept ‘empowerment’. By including the girls’ social, cultural context empowerment did occur, but more research and long term investment is needed.

Suzan Stoffers

*University of Utrecht. Pedagogische en Onderwijskundige Wetenschappen*

*Education, socialization & youth policy*

*Prof. Dr. A.E. Knoppers*

*June 2010*

*Introduction*

Since early 1959 the international community has recognized sport participation as a fundamental right. In 1959 this right was included in the Declaration on the Rights of the Child. In 1978, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization named sport 'as a fundamental right for all', and in 1990 sport participation was enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 2005). The right to play sports not only has been included in the rights of children; also the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women refers to sport involvement as a right for all women, meaning women should have an equal right to play sports as men (United Nations, 2005). Besides the fact that sport is a fundamental right, many humanitarian aid workers use sport as a tool to improve the lives of victims of conflicts (United Nations, 2005), or as a tool to promote development.

Ever since sport has been recognized as a fundamental right and a tool in humanitarian work, it has been included in several governmental and international goals for development. Most recently are the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), which were proclaimed by the international community on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2000. Sport has been recognized as a tool to achieve these MDG's in 2015 (United Nations, 2005). The most relevant MDG for the current study is goal number three: "To promote gender equality and empower women" (United Nations, 2005). The current study explores if and how sport can play a role in achieving this goal.

In November 2002 the United Nations constituted the Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) to analyze the potential contribution sport can make towards achieving the MDG's in 2015 (United Nations, 2003). In its report (United Nations 2003), the Task Force emphasized the importance of the inclusion of girls in sport for development programs, because:

“The skills and values learned through sport are especially important for girls, given that they have fewer opportunities than boys for social interaction outside the home and beyond family networks. Ensuring that girls receive equitable access to quality education is central to development. Since achieving education for all and reaching girls who are denied access to basic education means expanding the way education is provided, non-formal forms of provision such as sport related programs should be considered” (United Nations, 2003 p. 8).

Saveedra (2005), a critical scholar in the area of gender and sport, agrees that sport can teach women and girls skills and values that are conducive for their empowerment and development. Sport can be used to make them aware of certain health and welfare issues which otherwise would remain unspoken of. In addition, she contends that at the level of society, this type of sport programs can contribute to creating a more egalitarian world, eventually influencing the economic, social as well as the political position of women. From this point of view, sport indeed can serve as a powerful tool in achieving Millennium Goal three: gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

Although there is still little scientific evidence of the claims made by the taskforce on Sport for Development and Peace, the first signs are promising. For example, Pellegrini & Smith (1998); Sport and Development (2009); Fraser-Thomas, Cote & Dakin (2005) found that sport and physical activity contributes to the development of social skills. Meier (2005), however questions the relevance of these findings in the context of the use of sport as a tool for development of disadvantaged communities or groups. Also, she argues that most research that substantiates the positive influence of sport participation on social skills has been conducted in Western countries. Thus, according to Meier (2005) it is necessary for the voices of people at the grassroots level, especially women, to be found, heard and empowered.

If sport is to be used as a tool, more research needs to be done at grassroots level in the South, to get better insight into the developmental effects of sports participation. The specific purpose of this study therefore is to explore in what way participation of girls in Bangladesh in a karate program has contributed to their empowerment.

### *Review of Literature*

This review will include several topics:

- Sport and development
- Gender, empowerment and development
- Sport and gender
- Karate
- Black Feminism

Before entering into these topics, I first will define how to understand sport. This is harder than it looks, not the least because there are many discussions going on about the term sport. Coakley (2007) provides two definitions: the traditional definition and the alternative definition. Explaining the traditional definition, he says sports are “institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal and external rewards” (Coakley, 2007, p. 6). This description, however, excludes physical activities without a competitive component like for example mountain biking with friends. For these to be included, an alternative definition is needed. Trying to provide such a definition, Coakley comes to the conclusion it is not possible to give an encompassing definition, because ultimately it is dependent on the social and cultural contexts in which people form ideas and beliefs about physical activities (Coakley, 2007, p.7). Therefore the alternative definition has to vary according to socio-cultural settings and their peculiarities. Meier (2005, p. 6) writes that sport should include

“play and recreational activities, traditional games, competition, physical education, exercises and less task-orientated structured body movements like dancing”. For the purpose of this study the alternative approach is taken, because programs to empower girls through sport participation may very well include physical activities which are (primarily) not linked to institutionalized and competitive forms of sport.

*Sport and development.* As already mentioned in the introduction, both policy makers and researchers, show growing interest in how sport as a social activity can contribute to the development of the global South. Reviewing recent literature on sport and development, it appears that the different researchers that look into the relationship between sport and development, take a different level of development as entry point. Kidd (2008) starts from the global level, whereas Coalter (2002) and Skinner, Zakus and Cowell (2008) researched the influence of sport participation on the community level. Finally, Green (2008) focused on the effects at the level of the individual.

Kidd (2008) asserts that sport and physical activity can be used as a tool to contribute to the realization of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, if well integrated into programs aiming at strengthening basic education, public health, community safety and social cohesion, and focussed at particular disadvantaged target groups like girls and women, youth-at-risk, persons with HIV/AIDS and persons with disabilities (Kidd, 2008, p.373). He concludes that within these programs sport can be used as a tool for development, if well-coordinated, organized and structured in such a way that needs-based interventions are ensured. Country and region-wide strategies for development must be taken into account and governments must take the lead (Kidd, 2008).

According to Coalter (2002), the main goal of using sport for development is to provide social inclusion at the community level and society as a whole. While in the past

traditional 'sport for development' programs, although being sports centred in nature, could have development as the product, in today's thinking it is commonly felt such programs need to be needs-based and development oriented from the outset. In his view, sport has to be used both as an approach to tackle wider aspects of social inclusion as well as as a means to promote aspects of personal, social and community development (Coalter, 2002, p. 7). Skinner, Zakus and Cowell (2008) focused on the community level too. They have done research into the use of sport as a tool for the development of disadvantaged communities. They found that sport can be a useful tool for building social capital, fostering community development and building sustainability. Although they emphasize the fact that there's no one-size-fits-all approach to use sport in this manner, there are two criteria that have to be met for sport to be effectively used for community development. The first criterion is that existing local assets must be taken into account while developing a program. And secondly, the programs should be based on individual community needs (Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008).

Green (2008) too agrees that sport can be used as a tool for development. He found that participating in sports contributes to the development of positive character traits, assists young people to become better citizens and successful adults and reduces delinquency rates and risky behavior. In essence, sport teaches basic rules of behavior (Green, 2008). According to him, through promoting behavioral change, sport participation ultimately can lead to social change.

Despite the fact that these different researches took a different dimension of development (global, community-level, individual development) as their starting point, they all agree for sports to be useful and effective for development, it is imperative to take the context specific needs and assets of the community in which a certain program is going to be implemented, into account. Hence it is not possible to create a standardized program and expect it to

effectively work in different social, cultural and economical environments as a tool for development. Every single community needs its own program design.

Also when researching the effects of sport and development programs these same differences make it difficult to come up with conclusions that can be generalized. Despite the positive discourse around using sport as a tool for development, it is therefore hard to prove the positive effects of sport on development in general terms (Sherry, 2010). An additional complication is the fact that a sports program is often linked to other support services (Bloyce and Smith, 2009). The strongest evidence is found at the individual level. Sport participation can provide opportunities for people to be active and accepted members of the community (Sherry, 2010).

*Gender, empowerment and development.* Gender is a social construction, formed by the environment people live in, and depending on it. It is the social construction that defines what it means to be male or to be female. The meaning given to gender varies by context. Gender is embedded in everyday life, families, schools and culture. Each culture has different thoughts about gender. Thus, as a person, you learn how to behave as a girl or a woman (Meier, 2005).

Discussions on gender and development often include references to gender equality. At the global level, striving for gender equality is included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), because gender equality is considered to be an essential precondition for reducing poverty and development of humanity as a whole. In other words, in order to achieve the MDG's there has to be gender equality (United Nations Development Program, 2003).

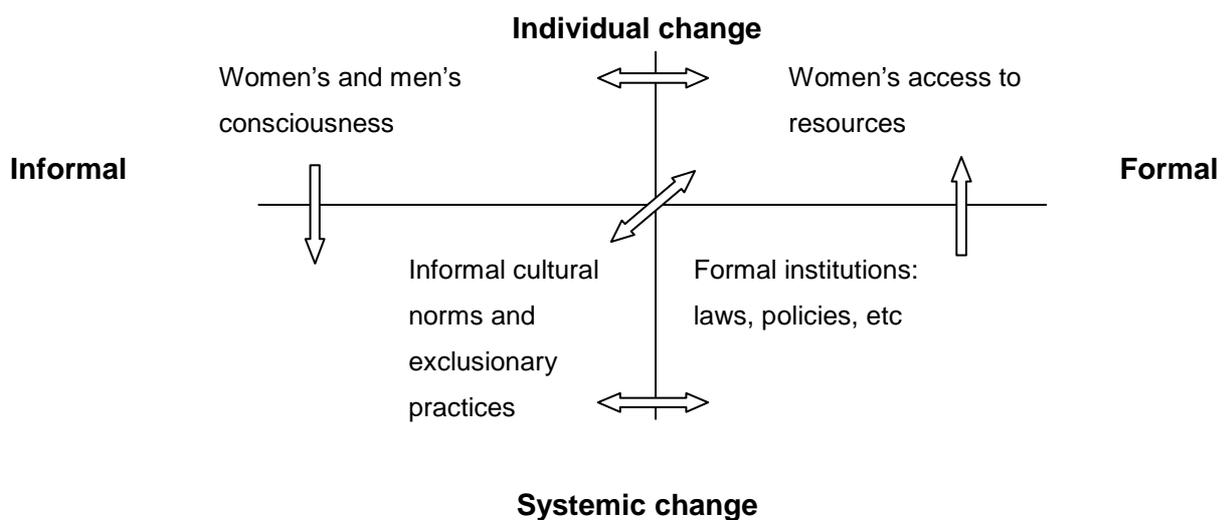
Gender inequality is often deeply rooted in traditional and cultural values, and has influence on several areas, for both men and women, including economical, educational, social and political areas (Schalkwyk, 2000). As a result of gender inequality, the world's vast majority of women is insufficiently involved in economical, educational, social and political

processes and therefore is not able to exert real influence on any of these areas. For this involvement to take place, empowerment of girls and women is needed. Gaining equal access directly affects their educational opportunities, their health and the wellbeing of their children (United Nations, 2009; Klasen, 1999). In order to explain this theory, empowerment needs to be defined. In recent literature, many different definitions of empowerment are developed. For the purpose of this study only the ones relevant for the relationship between empowerment and development are mentioned. Using these different definitions leads to a broad concept of empowerment which will be used to maintain and measure the results of this study. This broad concept not only allows for the inclusion of the girls, but also of their families, their communities and their broader contexts. Empowerment is a broad and complex concept, which is why several definitions are needed to describe the concept as a whole.

At first Thomas' (1985) definition of empowerment is given: being empowered means "(...) owning the capacity to act, rather than to be acted on" (p. 19 – 20). In line with this, Kabeer (1999) states that empowerment is about having the ability to make strategic life choices. Another relatively narrow definition of empowerment comes from Hackl (2009): "To be empowered signifies having the power or the courage to do, to create, to act or to say whatever needs to live" (p. 41). This does not implicate that if one person empowers, it needs to happen to the disadvantage of another: empowerment of one girl occurs in balance with the empowerment of another (Hackl, 2009, p. 41). This definition of empowerment, therefore, makes empowerment a concept of development. "When people start to create and communicate ideas, plans, aims or wishes and when people participate in and implement their goals one can say they have the power or rather they are empowered to act according their will and so, development happens" (Hackl, 2009, p. 50). Rappaport (1987) agrees on this definition by saying that empowerment is having the possibility to make your own decisions about your life. Empowerment concerns active participation in the community.

Empowerment and development of women and girls creates a more equitable world with equal access. Research shows that investment in girls and women has a direct positive effect on the development of family and community around them (Brady, Saluocou & Chong, 2007; MacCormack, 1998; Schultz, 2002). Empowerment, in this context, is a broad and complex concept involving not only the individual, but society as a whole.

Eerdewijk, Evers and Smits (2009) show it is not easy to create gender equality. The sole fact that it is one of the Millenium Development Goals does not mean that true empowerment of women and girls actually take place. To lift gender inequality and empower women and girls, there has to be a change in the formal and informal rules about who gets what, who decides and who does what (Rao & Kelleher, 2005). To clarify this change, Rao and Kelleher (2005) developed a model:



Rao & Kelleher, 2005, p.60

The vertical axe reviews the continuum of change from the individual to systemic change. The horizontal axe shows the distinction between the informal and formal space. The four quadrants show the areas and subjects in which change might take place. The two quadrants at the top show the demand for empowerment and the two quadrants at the bottom show the supply of empowerment. Change in one of the four quadrants does not automatically mean a change in all of the quadrants (Eerderwijk, Evers & Smits, 2009; Rao & Kelleher, 2005). To

summarize: for the creation of gender equality and true empowerment of girls and women there must be changes both at the individual and systemic level as well as in the formal and informal areas. In addition to the model of Rao and Kelleher (2005), Malhotra, Schuler and Boender (2002) have developed a framework that includes six dimensions of empowerment: economical, social-cultural, interpersonal, legal, political and psychological. Important to mention is the fact that all of these dimensions might change in weight and interconnection according to their context (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002; Eerderwijk, Evers & Smits, 2009).

From the above, it can be concluded that –as was the case with the design of programs using sport as a tool for development-, also programs aiming at empowering girls and women, -whether empowerment is narrowly defined at the individual level or seen as a broader and much more complex issue- it is very important to take the local context into account. Programs need to be gender sensitive and build on a thorough gender analysis of this context, including informal and formal areas and dimensions. Priorities or actions may differ according to differences in these contexts. Again, no one size fits all.

To get a clear vision on what aspects of programs do positively or negatively influence women's empowerment, more, especially practical, research is needed.

*Sport and gender.* Sport might be able to fulfill an important role to enhance empowerment. For the purpose of this study only the role of sport as a tool for the empowerment of girls and women will be described. Summarizing what has been described in the introduction it can be said that sport can teach girls skills and values that can help them develop and be empowered (Saveedra, 2005). Participating in sports can teach girls 'social skills' such as how to communicate and how to work together (United Nations, 2003; 2007). Other researchers agree on the fact that sport and physical activity may contribute to the development of socials

skills of women and girls (Fraser-Thomas, Cote & Dakin, 2005; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Sport and Development, 2009).

In addition to the previously mentioned alternative definition of sport (Coakley, 2005), Hardin & Greer (2009) have pointed out that sport has often been dichotomized into two gender-based types: 'masculine' and 'feminine' sports. Team sports and sports that emphasize courage, speed and strength are often described as masculine (Klomsten, Marsh & Skaalvik, 2005). In contrast, sports that are conceived as feminine are usually the types of sports that are framed in terms of grace, flexibility and bodily appearance (Klomsten, Marsh & Skaalvik, 2005). Especially the role assigned to appearance is very important for a sport to be labeled as feminine (Klomsten, Marsh & Skaalvik, 2005). Most of the time, however, sport is seen as a masculine (male) phenomenon. Consequently it is considered as having the potential to be a tool to breakdown and challenge gender stereotypes and gender-based discriminatory attitudes and behavior (United Nations, 2007). Thus, in developing countries, sport and development programs targeting girls and women often use masculine typed sports on the assumption that the participation of women and girls in such sports will empower them through challenging traditional gender stereotypes and break down gender based discriminatory attitudes and behaviors (United Nations, 2007). Saveedra, however, points out that caution is required, because women who participate in so-called masculine type of sports, all over the world have to face allegations of risking their femininity and disturbing the social order (Saveedra, 2005). Besides, equal access to the 'world of sport', if ever reached, does not assure an equal outcome. The social and cultural context must always be considered as the most important influencer of this outcome (Saveedra, 2005). There is however, little research available that explores how girls react to sport lessons and practice forms aiming at countering traditional (historical and local) gender stereotypes. It is important to bear in mind that this kind of research cannot be generalized and applied to different contexts due to contextual influences.

*Karate.* Karate can be defined as a masculine (male), traditional Eastern sport. Karate can also be seen as a self-defense sport. Already, some research has been done to determine the effect of self-defense training on women's lives. Summarized, the researchers found that participation in self-defense training positively influences the daily lives of the participating women, not only as a result of the physical skills they obtained, but also because of the growth in self-confidence and self-efficiency they experienced (Brecklin, 2008; Hollander, 2004; McCaughy, 1998; McDaniel, 1993; Weitlauf, Cervone & Smith, 2000). Although growing self-confidence and self-efficiency can be considered as aspects of empowerment, there's no research that concludes that the participating women are really empowered. Qualitative research is needed to make explicit the feelings and thoughts of the women who participate. Do they feel more able to control their own lives and make their own decisions? Does participating in a karate program make them feel better able to actively participate in their own community?

Especially a masculine, male dominated sport like karate might enhance the empowerment of girls and women. By breaking through gender stereotypes the girls can develop the feeling they can do the same as men can do. So if it is possible in sport, why not in other aspects of life? The girls may start to feel more controlling and active (Saveedra 2005).

*Black feminism.* For this thesis, black feminism will be the 'all-over' view which is used to have a critical review of the data that came out of the interviews of the Bangladeshi girls. To come up with this critical framework, the work of Collins (2009) is used. Collins is a Distinguished Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland.

Black Feminism finds its origin in the female descendants of the vast majority of African-American women who were brought to the United States to work as slaves and who,

for several generations, had to confront race, gender and class oppression, and the fact that they lacked access to most of the resources of society. Black feminism especially shows how important the role and function of knowledge is for the empowerment of oppressed people.

Offering oppressed people knowledge therefore can be empowering. Collins considers the changed consciousness of individuals and the subsequent social transformation of political and economic institutions as essential ingredients for social change (Collins 2009). Black feminism places the experiences of African-American women at the centre, revealing new insights into empowerment. By being unable to think about other forms of family than those the African-American women were used to, these women have created alternative communities which empower. This ability of reconceptualising the environment by the African-American women shows the presence of a power, a power that can be shaped and fostered through creative acts of resistance. This is in contrast to most of the literature, which on the one hand celebrates women's power, but on the other also shows a lack of attention to the importance of power as a means to resist domination. This type of power or influence is at the core of Black feminism and allows women the potential to confront their oppressing environment for their own sake and for the good of the community. By making the community stronger, the women become empowered (Collins, 2009).

Black Feminism describes 'the matrix of domination' which assumes that people experience oppression at three levels: the first level being the level of personal biography, the second one the level of the group or community, which includes the cultural context created by race, class and gender, and the third one the level of social institutions. These social institutions are controlled by the dominant group, and expose individuals to the specific thought representing the dominant group's standpoint and interests. All three levels are at the same time sites of domination and of resistance. The matrix of domination contains few pure victims or oppressors. Each group identifies the oppression, which feels most comfortable as

being fundamental, and classifies all other forms as being of lesser importance. Due to the fact that oppression and domination operates at all three levels, almost each individual at some point experiences both oppression and domination (Collins, 2009).

The Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2009) reveals a new theoretical, feminist, framework which is embedded in the context of Black women's communities. Black feminist thought is produced with reference to a particular set of historical, material and epistemological conditions. Nevertheless, a Black women's standpoint is a result from a situation characterized by domination. The suppression of Black women's ideas has stimulated these women to create knowledge that empowers people to resist domination. That is the reason for choosing this theoretical framework to analyse the data gathered from girls in Bangladesh. These girls do not live like Black women in the United States, but they are suppressed and dominated by the men living in the country. Because of this they have less or no access to community resources. Another similarity with Black women is the fact that the girls grow up in communities which are considered important and which influence their lives. The three levels of the 'matrix of domination' are applicable to the lives of the girls in Bangladesh.

Collins (2009) is important for analysing the data gathered from the Bangladeshi girls using the given three levels of domination. Since it is a small scale research, only the first two levels of the matrix of domination are involved. The level of personal biography is investigated by talking to the girls. The second level, the community level, is involved in this research through the interviews with the parents, the teachers and other community members (mostly family). Including the community level reveals the cultural context of the girls and the shared ideas and experiences of the community which give meaning to the girls' personal biographies. This cultural context contributes to the concepts used in thinking and acting of the girls. The community level also includes informal institutions like family and respected

individuals like trainers and teachers, because they influence the girls' way of thinking and acting. Sports in Bangladesh are mainly social institutions because usually is governed by the dominant (male) group in society. However, in the context of this research, sport is delivered by an initiative initiated and organized by a women's organization. Important to notice is the fact that family life as practiced in Bangladesh creates a certain dependency of the girls. The parents are the main decision makers when it comes to important, life influencing decisions. Using Collins (2009) for analysing the data creates an opportunity to analyse the impact and result of the karate program in Bangladesh because it creates a framework to do research at empowerment. Showing or building resistance towards the oppression empowers girls and women. Therefore when measuring this resistance, we can also measure empowerment.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how girls experience a sport project in Bangladesh, and what the effect is of their participation. The subject of this study is a sport project that uses karate to empower girls. The focus will be on what the girls learn by participating in the karate program and specifically, which skills and knowledge they have acquired.

### *Context*

For the purpose of this study, I take the description of the position of women and girls in Bangladesh as it is perceived by Nari Uddug Kendra, a national woman's support organization fighting for women's rights within the country: Nari Uddug Kendra.

Bangladesh is a Muslim country, in which women's mobility outside home and public places is restricted. Woman and girls in Bangladesh have a subordinated and nurturing position in the family. The sons' preference makes the young girls suffer from a lack of several important and valuable things in live, such as food intake, health, education, property rights and access

into family and social facilities. Early marriage and early motherhood causes high dropout rates from schools. Most of the young girls do not participate in sports or physical education at all. There are little examples from girls participating in sports at primary or secondary school, but after graduating or marriage girls stop practising sports. In the rural areas of Bangladesh most girls are restricted to participate in any kind of sport, even during annual sports day. Many girls are not allowed to go to school that day because even watching is restricted (Nari Uddug Kendra, 2008).

The name of the local program I visited is developed by Nari Uddug Kendra (NUK), which is Bangladeshi for Women's Innovation Centre. NUK was founded by Mashuda Khatun Shefali, in 1991.

NUK is a national women's development support organization, having as a mandate the promotion of gender equality, women's human rights and the fostering of personal and political empowerment of women and girls in Bangladesh. The core values of NUK are: to contribute toward the socio-economic, political and personal empowerment of women and to influence government policy through advocacy, lobbying and networking between and among government, NGO's, private sector organisations and women's groups. NUK strives for gender equality and women's human rights and women's civil rights as means for achieving equal opportunities as well as equal distribution of power in the relationship between men and women. To these ends, NUK promotes gender relations analysis to ensure equilibrium in integration of both sexes into development concepts, theories, policy formulation and implementation (Nari Uddug Kendra, 2008).

The head office of NUK is situated in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. In the district of Kishoreganj, where several projects are implemented, NUK has a Regional Office which is managed by a regional coordinator. A district is an administrative region of several small

villages. The district Kishoreganj includes the village Kishoreganj and thirteen other villages. These villages are named 'upazilla' which is how I will name them from now on. Each upazilla is 'independent' in the sense that it has its own market place and is managed by a Chairman, which is a government position. Also important is that most upzillas are self sufficient. The district is headed by a District Commissioner. For a project to be implemented, be it a governmental or non-governmental project, it has to be endorsed by the District Commissioner. In Kishoreganj district NUK has implemented several projects: a community hospital, an eye-hospital, a microfinance project, gender training for different groups and two karate projects.

The focus of this study is on NUK's karate projects. These projects were implemented in two upazilla's of Kishoreganj district: Kishoreganj and Kotiadi. Both projects had already finished when I visited them. To train the girls, a qualified female karate trainer had been hired from Dhaka. She travelled to the Kishoreganj district for three days a week to conduct the training.

The first training course took place in Kishoreganj from April to June 2009. The lessons were given at NUK's regional office in Kishoreganj. Thirty girls participated in the training course. The curriculum of the course included the following techniques: the basic norms, sixteen physical exercises (Akak), six hand techniques (Hakus Kuer), eleven leg techniques (Hapat), eleven hand techniques (Pog), combination of hand and leg techniques (Anak), advance leg techniques (Dog) and a fighting event (Yaka).

The second training course took place in Katiadi from July to September 2009. The lessons were given at the Government Upazilla Headquarters Auditorium. Like the first training course, a total of thirty girls participated. The same female trainer trained the girls with the same techniques as during the first training.

After finishing the karate training, three girls travelled to Nepal for an international girls championship. They participated in different competitions and won the gold, silver and bronze medals. Future plans were made: NUK is in the process of selecting three girls out of each group to be send to Dhaka for advance courses. In the near future these girls should be able to train other girls in the rural areas (Nari Uddug Kendra, 2009).

### *Method*

As has been mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of this research is “to explore in what way participation of girls in Bangladesh in a karate program has contributed to their empowerment”.

To obtain the data for the research, qualitative research has been done through on-site interviews in the two upzilla’s with three different groups of stakeholders: the girls who participated in the two training courses, the teachers of the different schools the girls attend and the parents. These interviews were held in February 2010 and took the form of group interviews. The Regional Coordinator of NUK arranged for the interviews. During each interview, a translator, the regional coordinator and the gender trainer were present as well. The presence of the Regional Coordinator and the Gender Trainer was necessary because they knew all of the girls, their parents and the teachers. The translator assisted the researcher to translate from English into the local language and vice versa.

The interviews were structured in such a way that the three groups of stakeholders would provide data on what they felt the girls had learned from the participation in the karate project of NUK. This ‘learning’ was divided into two types of learning: the *skills* learning and the *knowledge* learning. The *skills* learning includes all kind of skills the girls would have learned. These could be karate skills (sport skills) or skills like standing up for yourself and tell others what to do (life skills). The *knowledge* learning includes all the knowledge the girls

would have improved because of their participation in the karate project, like, for example, knowledge about menstruation, hygiene or the functioning of the human body.

Before entering into the data that have been collected, the contexts in which the interviews took place will be described, together with a description of the participants.

*Girls.* The interview with the first group of girls was held at the regional office of NUK, a place most of the girls were able to reach by feet or by rickshaw. Besides, the regional office is the location where the training course was given. All the girls live in Sadar Upazilla and were coming from five different rural secondary schools. The girls are in grade nine or ten, aged fourteen to fifteen.

To participate in the karate training, the girls could sign themselves up after the general announcement that was made at the different schools. Participating is their own choice at first, so all the girls were motivated to learn karate skills. To join the karate training, the parents had to agree with their participation. From the outset it was clear that extremely religious or traditional families would not allow their daughter to participate in a karate project. For that reason families having this type of background are not included in the research. In total, twenty girls participated in the interview.

The interview with the second group of girls was held at Kotiadi Pilot Girls High School. This school is one out of two schools in Kotiadi. Similar to the first group of girls, twenty girls were participating in the interview. Fifteen of them are enrolled in the school where the interview was held. The same interview technique as with the first group was used.

Alongside the karate training itself, all sixty girls participating in each of the two courses received a gender training from NUK's gender trainer as part of these courses. This gender training included topics like early marriage, equal human rights and equality. The purpose of this gender training is to discuss those topics with the girls and make them more aware.

*Parents.* The parents were interviewed through visiting them in their houses. In Kishorganj a total of six families were contacted and prepared for a visit. However, they were not aware they were to be interviewed. For a proper understanding it is important to notice, that visiting and interviewing parents inside of their houses means visiting and interviewing an extended family in the presence of neighbours and other community members. It also means that a lot of time has to be spend on courtesies, which meant that the time for the actual interview was under constraint, especially since the parents were not prepared for the interview. As a result, interviews had to be shortened on site. The translator was very helpful by asking questions herself as she was aware of the type of data the researcher was collecting. Under these conditions we managed to visit all six families, but only interviewed five of them.

The six families varied in economic level; from very poor to well educated and high standard, thus allowing for different views and perspectives coming from different economic and social backgrounds to be included. Except for the higher income families, all interviews therefore proceeded with a lot of bystanders, wanting to know what was going on. Despite these bystanders, parents were still willing to proceed with the interview and give answers. It is important to mention that in some cases, not only the parents, but also brothers, uncles and aunts actively participated in the interviews. In two instances the daughter also gave some answers.

Although a field visit to also interview parents in Kotiadi had been planned as well, it appeared time was too limited to do so. However, one of the teachers interviewed in Kotiadi was also a parent of one of the participating girls and some of her answers were given from a mothers' perspective rather than the perspective of a teacher.

*Teachers.* In total, eight teachers participated in the interviews. Teachers from all of the girls' schools were represented. In Kishorganj a total of six teachers participated, and in

Kotiadi two participated. Like the girls, all teachers have participated in NUK's Gender Training Program.

### *Results*

By analyzing the transcripts of the interviews, four themes emerged that reflect the different levels of impact the karate program had on the individual girls and their environment. These four themes are:

- Negotiating participation
- Negotiating access
- Negotiating change
- Negotiating the future

All four themes will be described separately. In order to analyze the data in a clear and meaningful way, some of the themes are divided into sub-themes. In each paragraph the description of the data begins with the data regarding the girls' point of view followed by the data collected from close family, friends, school and community. In order to create a clear all-over view and bigger picture, however, sometimes a different sequence has been used.

#### *1. Negotiating participation.*

Overall, the girls as well as the people in their context were positive about what the participation of the girls would mean for them. Besides these positive reactions, the girls, their parents and the teachers have also experienced resistance to their participation. The strongest positive reactions came mainly from the girls themselves as well as their parents and close family. The girls said that the most important reason for them to participate in the karate training course was to become able to protect themselves as well as others. As stated by one

girl: “First of all I wanted to join to protect myself from the evil teasers when I was traveling to school and other places. And after that also for if any other person needs help, than I can do that.”

The girls are well aware of the difficulties they have to go through when growing up, and they want to be able to protect themselves. “I wanted to save myself from various difficulties.”

Saving themselves wasn't the only reason. The girls also joined the program for them to teach other girls what they have learned:

“Question: So, first of all to be able to protect your selves and also to teach others about it? Answer: Yes, to teach others. But also for if others are going through the same type of difficulties, to protect them also.”

By teaching others, the number of girls who can protect themselves will grow, which is advantageous for all the girls. The girls hope more girls will be able to protect themselves in the near future.

Also parents mentioned self protection as the main reason for allowing their girl to participate: “In our country many girls are insecure because they have no experience how to take defense, how to survive.” One mother told her girl: “If you think you that it is good for you, than you can do. And it will be good, because you can also help others or protect others also.”

Another important reason for the girls to join the karate training course was to realize and experience equality between themselves and their male peers. One girl stated: “It was my inner feeling that if a boy can do this, why can I not do? And it was my strong will to learn, and that I can do.” Another girl said: “The boys are learning this. So if they can do, why can't we?”

It weren't only the girls who saw equality as an important reason to participate. One mother said:

“Usually people think that this is an item for boys. This is fighting, so why do you send your daughter? I said no, there are equal rights for girls and boys. I have only two girls, so they are my boys and girls!”

Another mother responded to the questions about why sending her daughter to a self defense sport in the following way: “So what, this is equal rights. She can learn. I didn't stop her!”

There was a father who mentioned that learning karate skills would make his daughter different in a positive way: “You learn it, so people come to know that you have learned it so it will be a different quality.”

Girls participating in the karate training course did not only express positive views. There were several negative reactions also. The girls experienced resistance to their participation. It were mostly people in the community or neighbors who were negative about them participating in the training course. They got reactions like: “What would be the use of learning karate? Because after marriage you will go to your husbands house, and then all this would not be very useful to you.”

Like the girls, also the parents experienced resistance from mainly family and community members, who didn't think there was any use in a girl learning karate skills. Particularly some female neighbors said to the mothers: “This is for the boys, and what will you do after completing this training? It is not for girls.” Questions were asked to them, such as: “She is a girl, why sending her to such events?”

The teachers mentioned that some of their colleagues were having a negative attitude as well. But, as one of them said: “This is natural, according to our society and sociological context.” This ‘sociological context’ was also mentioned by another teacher in order to explain the

negative reactions: “But according to our sociological context there are always some against training. Like this is a male dominated society, so few parents were not agreed.”

One of the teachers explained that people that were against participation also showed a negative attitude against gender in general: “They spoil the girls by sending them. They did Western things in the name of gender”. “People thought when you talk about gender, you try to change the Bangadeshi society into the Western society.” The teachers mentioned that it were mostly the religious minded people who were against participation: “There were few community people and those were more religious minded and those were against it.” Those teachers stated that these religious minded people have the feeling that: “if you discuss or talk about gender, it means you were doing some kind of sin.” “Some of them even said Allah says that the girls shouldn’t do these boys and sport activities”.

Another strong opinion about why some people are against the participation of the girls in the karate training course was the following one expressed and explained by the translator:

“It came from a religious view also. Because they feel girls should be more soft, and will follow the words or comments that may be told. And if they become equal, to listen or function to the male comments with a soft and polite attitude, it won’t be.”

People were also rejecting participation of the girls, because they thought it would change the girls in a negative way. The teachers said some of their colleagues thought it would be bad for the girls:

“Some were thinking that after the training the appearance of the girls can be a little bit different. They can be more desperate or they will follow the male style in their dress up and stuff, and in their attitudes.”

Thus, it can be said that fear for the expected change of attitude was the most important reason for people to reject the girls' participation. According to both the parents and the teachers interviewed, these negative attitudes were grounded in assumptions that as the girls' physical fitness would improve and they would grow stronger, their attitude would change and they would stand up against the men and boys: "This karate training will make the girls' physical more stronger, more independent." The translator explained to me that some of the teachers' colleagues were against the training, because:

"They believe that girls are physically weaker, so if they are getting such a type of training it means they will gain their physical strength and fitness and they will become equivalent. And that time they can do whatever they want to do, like they can follow the boys' attitude."

Looking into this first theme it appears most of the people close to the girls were positive about their participation before entering the training course; negative reactions usually came from the wider family and community

According to Collins (2009), it are the negative reasons intended to make the girls refrain from participating in the karate training course in combination with the girls' resistance to these negative reactions, which will lead to their empowerment. However, because of the necessary consent of the parents, the girls did not actively confront the negative reactions; it were the parents who did. However, because of the way family life is formed in Bangladesh, this empowerment will be channeled towards the girls.

## 2. *Negotiating access to the program.*

As with the first theme, also the second one preceded the actual enlisting of the girls to the karate training course. To negotiate access to the course, the girls describe different experiences. Regardless of the unique individual circumstances of every girl, the process each

of them went through shows common treats. To start with, it is important to know, that the very first initiative always came from Nari Uddug Kendra with staff members of NUK having spoken with the head misters and mistresses of the seven schools in Kishorganj and Kotiadi. With this fact in mind, three sub-themes of negotiating access can be distinguished: the girls taking initiative, the parents taking initiative and the teachers taking initiative.

### *2.1 The girls taking initiative.*

In some cases, the girls themselves were very interested to join the karate training course.

However, for the girls to actually participate, they needed the consent of their parents.

Knowing this consent would not come automatically, the girls found various ways to get there. One way to negotiate access was to convince their parents. At first the parents did not agree on their daughters' participation: "Initially we did not agree. My daughter is going to school, she gets the education that is necessary. So why are sports and other things required?"

This idea changed because the daughter succeeded in convincing her parents:

"My daughter was interested to do so, and we were watching her. And she is also sharing what she is doing there. My daughter informed us, and she can do a lot! Now we don't have that negative ideas anymore. She is doing good, so we are happy now!"

In some cases the girls chose to only inform their mother, after which the mother came to talk with the father, sometimes even after the girl had signed up: "She informed her mother, not her father! And after informing her mother she filled up the form and a passport-size photo and gave it to her teacher. After that her mother shared with her father." Another girl said: "I want to learn and do, so it will help me and I convinced my mama also. So my mama agreed, and I attended."

A third way for the girls to negotiate access was to not share detailed information at first. A mother said:

“Initially our daughter didn’t share the information that she is going for karate training. So I didn’t have a very clear idea about what it is and what will happen. But because this came through school I agreed. We send our daughter, and after the training had started she told us what it was like. I was like, oh no! This is fighting! I asked my daughter if anything bad could happen. Then I said ok, if there is no possibility for anything bad to happen, something illegal or police maybe, if it is not like that then it is ok.”

The daughter did not tell all of the details initially. Mother said: “If we would have known, maybe we could have protect her from containing the training. Maybe that’s why, initially, she didn’t share the details.”

## 2.2 *The parents taking initiative.*

In two instances the parents came to know about the karate training course before the girls heard about it. In the first of these two cases the parents had a higher socio-economic status and were more educated than the other parents. The father of this family had an influencing job and because of that he was already in contact with Nari Uddug Kendra. This father signed his daughter up because: “In our country so many girls are insecure because they have no experience how to take defense. I believe, if you do karate, it is a defense method.”

In the second case the mother was also the head mistress of one of the schools in Kotiadi. She came to know about the karate program because she participated in a meeting with the District Commissioner who mentioned the karate program. At first not many parents allowed their daughters to participate. The mother / head mistress took initiative to make this change:

“To overcome this and to make it more positive, I enlisted my own girls name for this training. When the others came to know that I was sending my girl for such a training it will be good. Then others also permitted and send their girls.”

### 2.3 *The teachers taking initiative.*

The third and final sub-theme to negotiate access is when the teachers take the initiative. The teachers had one main reason to introduce the karate training course at their schools. They wanted to overcome the evil teasing from the boys in front of the schools: “In front of the school there are some shops where boys used to sit and tease the girls.” “Now the boys are disturbing, they tease the girls, but it will be opposite. Girls will beat them!”

Having looked into the theme of ‘negotiating access’, from the experiences in the two upzilla’s it appears that for the enlistment of each girl –depending on her very individual context- a different strategy was applied. It can be concluded for a local sports and development program to be successful, it is very important that many ways of accessing the program are present and available. This contributes to Skinner, Zakus and Cowell (2008), who state that local assets must be taken into account when developing a program in which sports are used as a tool for development. In the two upzilla’s, to participate in the karate training course, the girls needed permission from their parents. Because of this, girls with conservative or religious parents were excluded from participation. It also meant that adults played a crucial role in determining whether a girl could or could not participate. These adults were first and foremost the parents, but also the teachers were heavily involved. According to Kabeer (1999) the fact that adults have such an influence on the girls’ decision to participate, in the karate program, does not contribute to the empowerment of the girls. She states that “empowerment means the expansions in people’s ability to make strategic life choices where this ability was previously denied to them” (1999, p. 437). Those who were really denied access (daughters of traditional or religious families) fully lacked the means to participate. Once more referring to the theory of Collins (2009), it can be concluded that although both parents and the girls experienced negative reactions to the girls going to participate in the karate training course, the process of getting access to the training course, did not contribute

to the empowerment of the girls themselves, because it were the parents who decided about their participation. It were the parents who resisted the negative reactions by enlisting the girls anyway.

### *3. Negotiating change as a result from the program.*

The third theme that will be described is the theme of ‘negotiating change’. By describing the changes that are a result of participation in the program conclusions can be drawn about the impact of the program. Using the transcripts of the interviews, several sub-themes emerged. All of them identify an area of change that took place as a result of the girls taking part in the karate training course. Most of the changes are about different forms and levels of development. The sub-themes are: developing self-confidence, developing personality, developing skills, developing knowledge and change in interactions.

#### *3.1 Developing self-confidence.*

The growth of self-confidence was something that often surfaced as a topic in the conversations with the girls, their parents, their family, members of the community and the teachers. Most of the time the answers were pretty general, like: “I liked it a lot because it helped me to gain my confidence.” Or: “After completing this training my confidence level raised a lot.” There was one ant who told that: “They have more confidence and self-esteem.” Aside from family members, teachers were also convinced of the grown self confidence of the girls. During the conversations one teacher stated that: “Self-confidence is the center of everything and they got it.” Another teacher explained: “After the training the changes among the girls are big. They become more self-confident and independent also.”

Aside from the general mentioning of the girls’ grown self-confidence, also several more explicit examples were given. Two types can be defined. The first type concerns the fact that the girls no longer suffer from shyness and fear due to their participation in the karate training

course. One of the girls stated that: “That type of shame or insecurity feeling when moving outside or going school to home or home to school, that thing is gone. So we gained that much confidence.” One other example from one of the girls was: “At night, or evening time also, I used to feel insecure to move outside. But now it is not there.” Moving outside during daytime or in darkness was not the only fear the girls had overcome. It used to be the boys of whom the girls were scared, but now this girl isn’t scared anymore: “Before I was afraid of boys, if they were telling something we just shy-out. But now we are glad and we have got this confidence that we can reply.”

The second type more explicit examples of growing self-confidence comes together with the first type about being less shy and overcoming fearfulness. It is about the girls feeling braver and daring to do new things, and about the feeling of capability. Several people describe the girls as being braver. Also the girls themselves feel they are tougher and stronger. As one of them said:

“If there was a group of boys standing somewhere, I was always feeling uneasy or uncomfortable to just cross the street. But now, if there are 100 boys also standing, it is no matter for me. I just go and walk.”

An example about feeling capable was expressed by another girl: “Before joining karate I had some preference for some sports, but now after karate I feel confident to do any type of sport!” This capability makes the girls feel safe: “Now we can save ourselves”. Another girl explained that she has enough confidence to protect herself after completing the training:

“It were my first feelings that I did not do that much good in the training. But I get this much confidence that if any boys come to tease me, then I got that much abilities and strength that I can protect myself. And I would try!”

One other girl confirmed that feeling:

“I gained that much confidence that before it was in my mind that I can’t face a boy physically and I felt weak. But now, after completing this training I gained that confidence that I can face and that I’m able to.”

The following quote is a summarizing example:

“After completing this training my confidence level raised a lot, so I am confident. And if anyone is disturbing me in the roads or any crowded places than instantly I was not replying and not protecting.” The translator explained: “It means they are now raising their voices also. It means that when somebody is teasing or telling something, previously they were just walking or going away. They were not replying or going into interactions and asking things like: ‘Why are you doing like that?’ But after the training they were that confident and brave that they do ask those questions now, and now they protest.”

### 3.2 *Developing personality.*

The second sub-theme of ‘negotiating change’ shows the impact of the training on the girls’ personality. The two main items levels of change concern the social capabilities and the mental strength. The change of social capabilities follows changes taking place in interactions and relationships the girls have with other people. For example, one of the girls mentioned: “I have met many friends at the karate training!” One father describes the change his daughter has gone through as follows: “She used to be introverted, now she is extraverted. She is having more friends now and she is not shy anymore.” There was one older brother who said his sister fights less now she has participated in the karate program. The teachers described the girls like: “They are more open now.”

Some changes took place at the mental level. This mental change describes the way the girls changed their thoughts about their own possibilities. One sister is telling that: “My sister

became more interested to learn more.” A teacher confirmed this by explaining that: “The girls have the ability to take more challenges than previous. And they are more attentive, more sincere, more hard working and whatever hard job or were strength was needed, they were ahead.” There was one girl who told the following:

“I was a little bit confused and thinking that it is a very difficult technique and I didn’t think I would be able to... But then I joined and just get involved, and after that I said it was easy!”

### *3.3 Developing skills.*

As a result of the karate training, the girls have developed different skills. Skills can be defined as ‘acts’. Compared to knowledge, the skills are more about what the girls can do, in stead of about what the girls know. Within the sub-theme ‘developing skills’ several types of skills the girls gained can be identified: protect/self-defense skills, skills to protest and reply, sports skills and school results.

The girls described their feeling of now being able to protect themselves, and stated they have developed their self-defense skills. A few of the many examples are: “If any boys tease me than I can protect myself.” “We learned how to protect.” “When I was learning karate, I was thinking that if any boys tease us or disturb us or follow us, than we can protect ourselves.” “It is helping me how to protect myself and others also.” “This is a play, but it is also helping for the self-defense.” One girl from the very beginning has thought about karate as a means to improve her ability to defense herself: “Before joining this training my aim was to protect myself. And not only myself but also others from the surrounding.” The parents and teachers confirm this feeling: “This is the technique for self-defense.” One father said: “Joining karate would make her able to protect herself.” Next to the skills to protect themselves, the girls have also developed their ability to protest. Now they are able to speak up to those who tease or

disturb them: “They were not replying or going into interactions and asking things like: ‘Why are you doing like that?’ But after the training they were that confident and brave that they do ask those questions now, and now they protest.”

Because of participating in the karate training, the girls have developed the skills that go with practicing karate. They confirm this as they share the following: “I’ve learned the new karate skills, the movements and the techniques.” “We have learned the self-defense technique.” “I have learned the karate techniques, and now it is helping me.” “We have learned the techniques for protecting.” The experience of learning karate skills makes the girls confident about other sport skills they are able to learn: “I’m now able to play. I can also learn sports like cricket, handball and volleyball. It is a development.” “We learned physical exercises and fighting skills.” One girl stated that: “This experience is helping us for the other sports.” One girl even learned how to ride a bicycle.

Due to the physical exercises and their experience with practicing karate, the girls describe their bodies as stronger and physically more fit. One girl said she believed her physical fitness and confidence increased because of her having participated in the training. “When boys are disturbing me I have the strength to protect myself.” Some girls suffered from overweight, and reduced their body weight.

“Before I was attending the training I was overweight and unfit also. And now, after doing this training with lots of exercise and lots of different forms, after that I got back my physical fitness and did loose weight also.”

Another type of skills the girls have developed are skills that also might positively impact on their school results. Teamwork is one of the skills the girls have gained, which can also help them with their school performance. One girl stated that participating in the karate training will help them to “increase our abilities more.” One of the teachers noticed an immediate

change in their attitude at school: “The girls changed a lot. Their class performance has become more and more better than before.”

### *3.4 Developing knowledge.*

The sub-theme ‘developing knowledge’ describes the changes and developments the girls underwent during and after participating in the karate training due to them being more knowledgeable. The knowledge the girls have gained as a result of their participation can be divided into two types of knowledge: knowledge about life and the future and knowledge about their body and health.

Knowledge about life and the future includes knowledge about the dynamics of the environment the girls live in. Some of the girls went to Nepal for a karate competition, and as a result of this trip the girls gained knowledge about the environment in another country, including the language and the cultural differences. The father of one of the girls who participated in the competition in Nepal thought it was a very good learning experience for his daughter:

“She went to Nepal which is a different country with different languages. And all this practical things like procedures and the struggles... I think it was an excellent and practical, real life, true experience about what life really looks like.”

The mother confirmed this feeling: “She became more practical and life oriented. She now knows that life is not always ready, that you can’t always just go and get it.” Not all of the girls participated in the Nepal competition, so not all of them learned this rich lesson. There were some more life valued lessons the girls learned: “There are no sports that are only for men or only for women.” In combination with the gender training the girls learned some more: “We learned about early marriage, human rights and equal rights.” One teacher thought

the girls overall became more aware: “I think the girls are more smart than the others after this.”

In regard to knowledge about the body and health the girls built their knowledge: “We learned about physical fitness and dieting.” “We got knowledge about proper dieting and a balanced diet. We have to maintain according to our height and weight. And we learned about the types of food, of which once we can have extra portions.” “The karate trainer taught us that if you are going somewhere you have to maintain hygiene and maintain the standard get-up”.

### *3.5 Change in interactions.*

Around the girls who were participating in the karate training the interactions changed in a positive way. These changes happened at different ‘levels’: governmental level, within the community and within the schools. What also changed was the way in which the girls communicated towards others.

Below is a good example of change on the governmental level:

“There was a very good publicity in Kishoreganj district about the Nepal event. Because it was an international event and they visited it and got gold and silver and bronze. So, in the entire district, including the government administration level, lots of vibration was there! And there was a very good media coverage in Kishoreganj district, so through that, all people become to know.”

Within the communities where the girls live in there were changes in personal interactions.

One girl stated: “There are lots of people now listening to us and watching also.” These community members are now positive about the girls’ participation: “They enjoyed and they appreciated it also.” The girls used to be teased and disturbed around their schools, but because of the karate training the number of teasing is reduced.” “As soon as the training was

started there was publicity, so from that day the situation was becoming more positive. And nowadays the teasing in front of the college is really reduced a lot.”

At the level of the schools and the teachers the interactions also changed. An important difference which makes a change is the fact that the karate trainer teaches a much more practical curriculum than the teachers are used to. This is why the girls are saying that: “Sharing things with the karate teacher was more easy, because if there is any teasing or other problems we can share it with her.” Because it was more practical oriented, the girls experienced it as ‘more open’. One girl said: “We were sharing our personal experiences and difficulties about moving outside with the karate trainer”.

The way the girls interact towards others did also change. As mentioned in the paragraphs on the sub-theme ‘developing self-confidence’ and ‘developing skills’ the girls now dare to speak up and raise their voice against others. Simply said: “They become more vocalized.” A brother of one of the girls named two major changes his sister has gone through: “She has a better attitude and her speaking skills also improved. She speaks less, but she does it straight and to the point.” One of the teachers is telling that: “The girls are now more interested. Before the training we supposed to give information to them for communicating. But after the training, they were coming and ask us for the information.”

The ‘negotiating change theme’ includes several areas in which change take place. Out of the transcripts only positive changes could be identified. No-one mentioned any negative effect. Again, we must keep in mind that girls with very conservative or religious parents were not allowed to take part in the program at all, so the changes which come out of this study only include those made for girls who had the support of their close family.

The framework of empowerment as developed by Malhotra, Schuler and Boender (2002)

includes the following six dimensions: economical, interpersonal, legal, political and psychological. The sub-elements developing self-confidence, developing personality, developing skills, developing knowledge and change in interactions all describe positive changes which contribute to the six dimensions of this framework. Consequently, according to Malhotra, Schuler and Boender (2002), the girls' participation in the karate program does empower the girls. This same conclusion can be drawn using the definition of empowerment by Hackl (2009), who states that being empowered "signifies having the power or the courage to do, to create, to act or to say whatever needs to live" (p. 41). The changes the girls have gone through demonstrate the girls have become encouraged to do, create act or say whatever is needed. Especially the results described in the sub-themes 'developing self-confidence' and 'change in interactions' show the girls' empowerment according to Hackl (2009). "The girls are now more interested. Before the training we supposed to give information to them for communicating. But after the training, they were coming and ask us for the information" (teacher).

#### *4. Negotiating the future as an output of the training.*

The fourth and final theme that emerged from analyzing the transcripts is the element about 'Negotiating the future'. Also this theme includes several sub-themes: raising awareness and knowledge among others, knowledge about equal rights and the sub-theme concerning the girls' own education.

##### *4.1 Raising awareness and knowledge among others*

The effect of offering the girls this karate training did not only affect the girls themselves. People in their surrounding, were also positively influenced. People came to understand that sports are not only for boys and that also girls are able to train their body and become more strong and independent. The girls shared their knowledge and skills with others. An example

comes from two girls from the same community: “We used to do practices here, so people know a lot about this. When we were practicing, many people were watching us.” The girls who have participated in the karate training have become a very good example to the people around them.

#### 4.2 *Knowledge about equal rights.*

Participating in NUK’s gender training formed part of the karate training. The combination of these two trainings proved to be successful, because of the combination of theory and practice. One girl gave an example of the output of this training:

“Previously it was my idea that, in the society also, they say that there is some differentiation in activities. Like this is for boys and this is for girls. But after getting the training I didn’t find it like that. It was like equal access. If I want to do, then I also can do.”

The girls gained this knowledge and said they will keep it with them for the rest of their lives: “The learning from the trainings will be insight. It will be with us!” By practicing karate they are a living example to others that it is truly possible to live with equal rights and equal opportunities.

#### 4.3 *Own education.*

The girls agree on the fact that they believe this training has helped them to develop themselves and that after the training they now have much more abilities than they had expected. One girl stated: “Well, in the rest of our lives there will be difficulties and we will have struggles. The things we have learned will help us.” The girls have experienced that they are able to learn new things, and they want to learn more: “We just completed the karate

training and it was a new thing. So we want to learn more new things. Maybe any new topic or training so we come to know completely new things.”

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this theme is the fact that the changes as a result from participating the karate program does not stop with the girls. In the future, the changes in the girls will also influence the girls’ families and their communities. Already, the first signs were there when interviewing the families and members of the communities. Also, the teachers will be influenced because of the different approach taken by the training. This is in line with the theory Collins (2009), who states that a stronger community contributes to the empowerment of women.

In the interviews the girls have shown their motivation for their future education as well as their eagerness to learn more new things. This future growth in knowledge and the change in consciousness that goes with it, is an important empowerment tool according to Collins (2009). The matrix of domination developed by Collins (2009) describes the three levels of empowerment; personal, community and social institutions. All three levels are closely connected to each other. Because of this connection, changes occurring at, for example, the personal level influence and might cause some change at the community level as well. The new way of acting by the girls in combination with their thoughts about for example their abilities to react to boys teasing them, influences the thoughts and acts of their parents, sisters and not to forget their brothers. These two levels interact with each other. Though there is some influence, from the research it can not be concluded that the influence exerted by the girls had an effect on the role played by the different members of the family. It still is the parents who have the power to make decisions. Collins’ (2009) matrix of domination reveals the complexity of empowerment; the influence of a certain level might be bigger or smaller in certain situations and is changeable. What probably would make a big change, is a change of

policy of NUK, allowing girls to participate in the karate training course without them needing the formal consent of their parents.

### *Conclusion*

The main question for this study is if the girls' participation in a sport program in Bangladesh contributes to the empowerment of these girls. Essentially, this research is based on the recognition of the United Nations to achieve the established Millennium Development Goals in 2015 with special attention to MDG no. 3: "Promote gender equality and empower women" (United Nations, 2005).

The use of sport as a tool for development and a way to achieve more gender equality and empowerment of women and girls is a growing idea. Still, little research has been done to explore the direct effects of sport participation on girls and women participating in such projects. If sport is to be used as a tool, more research needs to be done to explore the effects of participation. The specific purpose of this study therefore is to explore how and if participation in sport programs may add to the empowerment of girls. The data used for this study are collected in two upzilla's in one of the districts of Bangladesh, through interviewing girls that participated in a karate training course organized by NUK. In addition, some of their parents and teachers were interviewed as well.

The collected data are analyzed and ordered according to four themes. These themes reflect several levels of impact the program could have on the individual girls and their surrounding. These four themes are: negotiating participation, negotiating access, negotiating change and negotiating the future.

The first theme, negotiating participation, describes the positive and negative reactions from the girls and the people around them before entering the course. Thus, this theme describes the reactions and experiences ahead of participation. The initial positive reactions

and the support for the girls' participation came mainly from the girls themselves and close family. The negative reactions were primarily derived from other family members and community members. Also, some of the colleagues of the teachers of the girls who welcomed the training, responded negatively. According to Collins (2009) it is particularly these negative reactions that constitute the resistance the girls have to fight, which contributes to the girls' empowerment.

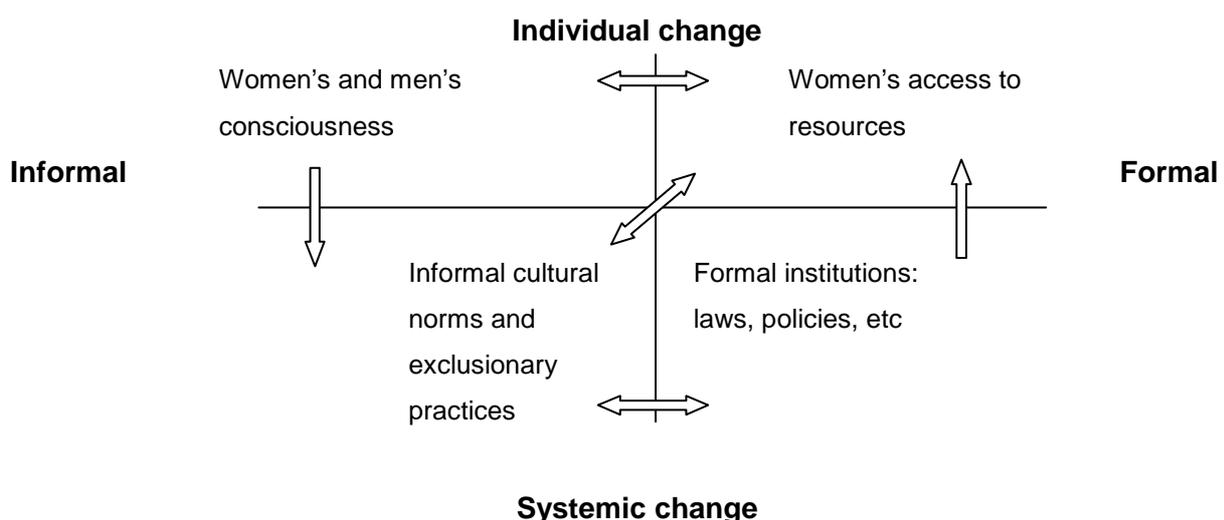
The second theme, negotiating access, shows the different ways in which the girls negotiated access to the program. The variations in negotiating access show the importance for a program to be successful, to ensure many ways of accessing the program are present and available. This is in line with what were identified as basic criteria by Skinner, Zakus and Cowell (2008): the local assets and context of the target group must be taken into account each time a program is designed in which sports is used as a tool for development. In addition to this, Kidd (2008) and Coalter (2002) both apply for a needs-based intervention when using sport as a tool for development. Another result of the second theme concerns the parents' agreement the girls needed for their access to the program. From the Black Feminism point of view (Collins, 2009), this crucial role of the parents doesn't contribute to the girls empowerment at all. To empower, resistance to negative reactions and suppression is needed (Collins, 2009). In this case, it is the parents that agree on their daughters' participation whom show resistance to the suppression of the community, not the girls. The point that the needed agreement from the parents doesn't contribute to the girls empowerment is supported by Kabeer (1999) who states that "empowerment means the expansions in people's ability to make strategic life choices where this ability was previously denied to them" (1999, p. 437). Summarized, this theme includes two main findings. The first one is about the variety in ways of access the girls have, and the second one is about the girls' empowerment. The parents' agreement does not contribute to the girls' empowerment. In order to create a successful

program to empower girls it should not be needed to have the parent's agreement to participate.

The third theme describes the changes for the girls that are a result of participation in the program. These changes took place on several levels (the sub-themes): developing self-confidence, developing personality, developing skills, developing knowledge and change in interactions. The transcripts show only positive examples of changes the girls have been through. This might be influenced by the fact that only the girls whose parents agreed on their participation were allowed to join the program. In this way, girls with very conservative parents or parents with negative thoughts about an empowering sports program for girls are not included in this research. The changes the girls have made, fit into the framework of empowerment (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002), which includes the following dimensions: economical, interpersonal, legal, political and psychological. Positive changes in these dimensions contribute to the empowerment of girls and women (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender 2002). The grown self-confidence of the girls, their developed knowledge and the change in interactions of and towards the girls are all examples of economical, interpersonal, legal, political and (mostly) psychological changes. Using the definition of empowerment according to Hackl (2009), the same conclusion can be drawn. Being empowered "signifies having the power or the courage to do, to create, to act or to say whatever needs to live" (Hackl, 2009, p. 41). Based on the results of this study the girls are more encouraged to say what is needed and to act in the way they want and need to. Like in the review of the literature, several definitions of empowerment are used. Due to the fact that the used definitions do not contradict, but add to each other, a broad description of the complex concept 'empowerment' arose. This new, broad and complex description allows us to measure empowerment in its broadest way including the girls, their families, their communities and their cultural contexts. Including all these areas of empowerment, the results show that empowerment did take place.

The fourth and final theme described the way the program might influence the girls' future. On the first hand this effect seems to be present. The girls' participation doesn't only affect the girls, but also their families and community. In this way more people are influenced and a stronger basis for long term change is created. The knowledge the girls have developed and the awareness raised upon them, will be passed on to the girls' parents, siblings, friends and other community members. A remarkable result within this theme is shown in the sub-theme 'own education'. The girls are more motivated and encouraged to learn new things and to continue attending school. According to Collins this is an important result of participating in the program, because knowledge and consciousness are important tools for empowerment (Collins, 2009)

The general conclusion that can be drawn based on the transcripts used for this study is the fact that the karate program in Bangladesh does contribute to the girls' empowerment. To explain this contribution, the model of Rao and Kelleher (2005), already showed already in the literature review is used:



Rao & Kelleher, 2005, p.60

According to Rao and Kelleher (2005) and Eerderwijk, Evers & Smits (2009) true empowerment takes place when there is a change in all four quadrants presented in their model. The results of this study show changes in three out of four quadrants. First of all, there

is a change in consciousness of both the men and the women. Not only the parents notice that their daughter is capable to learn new things and practice karate, but also the men and women in the community notice this capableness of the participating girls. There is a certain overlap between the change in consciousness and the change at the level of informal cultural norms and exclusionary practices. Based on informal cultural norms, several family and community members disagreed on the girls' participation in the karate program. During the girls' participation, these negative attitudes changed mainly due to a changing consciousness and awareness. Another change took place in the area of women's access to resources. According to the girls a big change took place. As a result of participating in the karate training course, they are tougher, stronger, have more courage and are better able to stand up for themselves. For that reason they dare to be out on the streets, even when they have to pass through a group of boys or when it is dark. This grown freedom of movement enables the girls to reach places and resources.

Based on the results of this study, the three main changes are described above. The fourth area of change according to Rao and Kelleher (2005) is the area of change in formal institutions. The only, little, change that took place in this area is the consciousness and awareness of the district commissioner. This might be a start of the political change for girls' participation in sports.

Rao and Kelleher (2005) and Eerderwijk, Evers & Smits (2009) mention the fact that true empowerment only takes place when there are changes in all four areas. Based on the results of this study the conclusion can be drawn that changes do take place in three areas, and a real impulse for true empowerment is given.

The results show that empowerment did take place in several different ways and on different levels. This result reveals the complexity of the concept 'empowerment'. The interviews that are taken mainly took place at the presence, and sometimes even participation

of several community and family members. This reveals the fact that the community based society in Bangladesh differs from an individual based Western society. Using Collins (2009) and a combination of several definitions of empowerment enabled me to measure empowerment in a community based country. Doing research on only the cause and effect of empowerment excludes all other influences that act upon the girls and contribute or counteract to their empowerment. For example, when using only Kabeer's (1999) definition of empowerment: "having the ability to make strategic life choices" the result of this research would be negative. The girls do not have the ability to make this choice, due to the fact that the parents need to agree on their participation. When using a broader definition of empowerment, because of the combination of several different definitions, the result is positive and reveals the fact that change did occur and the girls do empower. However, this research is only a snap shot case study and longitudinal research is needed to sustain this empowerment and the karate program needs to continue.

In addition to these positive results, there is one issue in the Bangladeshi karate program that doesn't contribute to the girls' empowerment: the required parental agreement on the girls' participation. This idea is supported by the description of empowerment by Rappaport (1987): empowerment is having the possibility to make your own decisions about your life. In this case, the parents are in the position to make decisions about the girls' lives.

In the end, there is one critical question rising what exactly is it in karate that contributes to the empowerment of girls? In other words: is the measured result due to the sports-aspect in this particular program, or to the social aspect? Recent research describes sport as a useful tool for development for various, mainly social, reasons (Coalter, 2002; Green, 2008; Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008), including the empowerment of girls (Saveedra, 2005). Not only can

it be used to develop sport skills and physical capital but sport programs can be used to make participants aware of health and welfare issues. Also, specifically, the use of self-defense sport has shown that participation in such a program results in grown self-confidence and self-efficiency for women (Brecklin, 2008; Hollander, 2004; McCaughy, 1998; McDaniel, 1993; Weitlauf, Cervone & Smith, 2000). Although the results of these studies show positive social, personal and institutional outcomes, the results in the current study do not give a clear answer whether it is sport in particular that is responsible for these results, or that similar results can occur when certain programs offer the girls dance or drama classes, as long as traditional gender stereotypes are challenged and gender based discriminatory attitudes and behaviors are broken down. This may be partially due to the fact that sport programs such as that of Nari Uddug Kendra are often linked with other support systems (Bloyce & Smith, 2009; Sherry, 2010). Similarly, these programs have a beginning and end. According to Kidd (2008) there need to be a certain continuum in this kind of programs in order to contribute to the empowerment of girls. The sport programs also need to be linked to other programs that aim at strengthening basic education, public health, community safety and social cohesion. The current study has shown that sport has potential to be a useful tool for development but, according to Levermore (2008) more research is required to understand its potential. Little is known about the long term effects on girls if there are no follow up courses or opportunities. Other social institutions, definitions and expectations for womanhood may play a grater role when they graduate from school than they do now. Also marriage may play a big role in the girls' future. According to Nari Uddug Kendra's (2008) description of the situation for women in Bangladesh, marriage is a main reason for women and girls' lack of education and participation in, in particular, sport projects. Based on several researches into empowerment of girls, this lack of education and participation in social programs does certainly not

contribute to the girls' empowerment (Saveedra, 2005; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Fraser-Thomas, Cute & Dakin, 2005).

At least now empowerment has occurred, but perhaps more than that one moment of research and long term investment is needed. For follow-up research might be valuable to reconsider the research methods. For this research the open-question technique was used, which enabled the girls to reveal their thoughts and feelings and underlying motives might be appealing. But because there were no individual interviews, not every girl had the opportunity to share all of her thoughts and reveal her (dis)agreement. It cannot be excluded some of the girls and their parents or their teachers gave answers they knew would be acceptable for a young, Western female researcher. From this perspective, one could also wonder why the negative reactions of the traditional and religious families were worded in such a strong language by especially the teachers that did give consent to the participation of the girls.

### *Bibliography*

Bloyce D. & Smith A. (2009). *Sport policy and development: An introduction*. London: Routledge.

Brady, M., Saloucou, L. & Chong, E. (2007). *Girls' adolescence in Burkina Faso: A pivot point for social change*. Population Council, New York.

Brecklin, L.R. (2008). Evaluation outcomes of self-defense training for women: A review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 13*, 60-76.

Coakley, J. (2007). *Sports in society: Issues and controversies* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw Hill Companies.

Coalter, F. (2005). *The social benefits of sport*. Edinburgh: Institute for Sports Research University of Stirling.

Collins, P.H. (2009). *Black feminist thought*. New York: Routledge.

- Eerdewijk, A. van, Evers, A. & Smits, L. (2009). Een stap in de verkeerde richting. MDG3 en de empowerment van vrouwen. *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies*, 40, 30-44.
- Fraser-Thomas, J.L., Cote, J. & Dakin, J. (2005). Youth sport programs: An avenue to foster positive youth development. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 10, 19-40.
- Green, B. C. (2008). Sport as an agent for social and personal change. In Girginov, V. (Ed.) *Management of Sports Development* (pp. 129 - 146). Oxford: Elsevier.
- Hackl, E. (2009). *Sport and empowerment. Potential of sport as an instrument of development*. Vienna: University of Vienna.
- Hall, E. G., Durborow, B. & Progen, J. L. (1986). Self-esteem of female athletes and nonathletes relative to sex role type and sport type. *Sex Roles*, 15, 379-390.
- Hardin, M. & Greer, J. D. (2009). The influence of gender-role socialization, media use and sports participation of gender-appropriate sports. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 32, 207- 227.
- Hollander, J.A. (2004). 'I can take care of myself': The impact of self-defense training on women's lives. *Violence Against Women*, 10, 205-235.
- Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30, 435-464.
- Kidd, B. (2008). A new social movement: Sport for development and peace. *Sport in Society*, 11, 370-380.
- Klasen, S. (1999). *Does gender inequality reduce growth and development? Evidence from cross-country regressions* Washington, DC: World Bank (Policy Research Report Working Paper No. 7).
- Klomsten, A. T., Marsh, H. W. & Skaalvik, E. M. (2005). Adolescents' perceptions of masculine and feminine values in sport and physical education: A study of gender differences. *Sex Roles*, 52, 625-636.

- Koivula, N. (2001). Perceived characteristics of sports categorized as gender-neutral, feminine and masculine. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 24, 377-393.
- McCaughy, M. (1998). The fighting spirit: Women's self-defence training and the discourse of sexed embodiment. *Gender and Society*, 12, 277-300.
- MacCormack, C. P. (1998). Health and the social power of women. *Social Science & Medicine*, 26, 677- 683.
- Malhorta, A., Schuler, S. R. & Boender, C. (2002). *Measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development*. Background Paper Prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- McDaniel, P. (1993). Self-defense training and women's fear of crime. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 16, 37-45.
- Meier, M. (2005). *Gender equity, sport and development* (Working paper). Biel: Swiss Academy for Development.
- Nari Uddug Kendra, (2008). Women Win Fellowship Grant Request Form. Amsterdam: Women Win.
- Nari Uddug Kendra, (2009). Six Monthly Progress Report on Women Win Fellowship Awarded to NUK. Amsterdam: Women Win.
- Pellegrini, A. D. & Smith, P. K. (1998). Physical activity play: The nature and function of a neglected aspect of play. *Child Development*, 69, 577-98.
- Rappaport, J. (1987). Terms of empowerment / exemplars of prevention: Toward a theory for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15, 121-148.
- Rao, A. & Kelleher, D. (2005). Is there life after gender mainstreaming? *Gender and Development*, 13, 57-69.
- Saavedra, M. (2005). Women, Sport and Development.

- [http://assets.sportanddev.org/downloads/56\\_\\_women\\_\\_sport\\_and\\_development.pdf](http://assets.sportanddev.org/downloads/56__women__sport_and_development.pdf)  
(accessed 15 October 2009).
- Schalkwyk, J. (2000). *Culture, gender equality and development cooperation*. Ottawa: Canadian International Development Agency.
- Schultz, T. P. (2002). Why governments should invest more to educate girls. *World Development*, 30, 207-225.
- Sherry, E. (2010). (Re)engaging marginalized groups through sport: The homeless world cup. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 45, 59-71.
- Sport and development. (2009). [http://www.toolkitsportdevelopment.org/html/resources/CB/CBF4244C-3557-46F2-964628D5CBD72957/Sporting\\_toolkit\\_may\\_02\\_part\\_one%20UKsportgov.pdf](http://www.toolkitsportdevelopment.org/html/resources/CB/CBF4244C-3557-46F2-964628D5CBD72957/Sporting_toolkit_may_02_part_one%20UKsportgov.pdf) (accessed 10 December 2009).
- Skinner, J., Zakus, D.H. & Cowell, J. (2008). Development through sport: Building social capital in disadvantaged communities. *Sport Management Review*, 11, 253-275.
- Thomas, T. (1985). Reporting bureaucratic performance: A social learning approach to development in action. In *Public Participation in Development Planning and Management* (pp. 19 – 20). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- United Nations Development Programme (2003). *Millennium Development Goals. National reports: A look through a gender lens*. Retrieved January 2010, from <http://www.undp.org/women/docs/mdgs-genderlens.pdf>.
- United Nations (2003). Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace. *Sport for Development and Peace: Towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals*. Retrieved January 2010, from <http://www.un.org/themes/sport/reportE.pdf>
- United Nations (2005). *Sport for a better world. Report on the International Year of Sport and Physical Education*. Retrieved January 2010, from [http://www.unclef.com/sport2005/a\\_year/IYSPE\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.unclef.com/sport2005/a_year/IYSPE_Report_FINAL.pdf)

United Nations (2007). Division for the Advancement of Women. *Women 2000 and beyond.*

*Women, gender equality and sport.* Retrieved January 2010, from

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/Women%20and%20Sport.pdf>

United Nations (2009). *World survey on the role of Women in development. Women's*

*control over economic Resources and access to financial resources, including*

*microfinance.* Retrieved January 2010, from

<http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/ecw-09-2-e.pdf>

Weitlauf, C. J., Cervone, D. & Smith, R. E. (2000). Generalization effects of coping-skills

training: Influence of self-defense training on women's efficacy beliefs, assertiveness

and aggression. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84, 625-633.