



Sport for Development and Peace: Transforming Gender Relations

Sarah Oxford

Victoria University

In Colombian society football is an important cultural phenomenon traditionally regarded as a game for boys and men. In the early 2000s a network of NGOs launched the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) movement, using sport as a tool to reach vulnerable communities. A provocative and significant aspect of this movement is the social inclusion of young women in youth sports. Based on six months of fieldwork, this paper draws on a qualitative framework to explore the inclusion of young women in SDP programs operating in two Colombian communities, Ciudad Bolivar and Cartagena, where cultural norms are influenced by machismo or hegemonic masculinity. I investigated the mechanisms and processes underpinning/assumed to be influencing gender relations within SDP-active communities. Initial findings from Ciudad Bolivar reveal that participants and community members who regularly interact with the NGO believe that girls' participation has positively influenced gender relations. Indicators of slight change include the language choice used to reference female athletes and the normalization of young women as football players. However, responses and observations also reveal that the extent of the organization's reach is limited and that gender equity was not a priority at the time of my investigations.