

Physical and Cultural Barriers to Sports Participation for People with Disabilities in Senegal

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Abstract

Differences among people are often sources of inequality and even social exclusion, which international organizations and governments strive to address. Thus, we examined the situation of people with disabilities in Senegal regarding sports participation within the context of promoting sports for all. In this context, data collected through semi-structured interviews with 23 individuals-including 9 with physical disabilities (5), sensory disabilities (3 albinos and 1 visually impaired person), 1 autistic, a general practitioner, and 3 officials (1 from the Ministry of Sports, 2 from the FSAPH)-revealed several obstacles. On the one hand, objective limitations such as reduced mobility, visual impairment, deafness, anesthesia, amnesia, etc., lead to misinterpretations of actions during sports activities. Furthermore, the inadequacy of infrastructure is a lamentable reality. On the other hand, in addition to the fear of rape, assault, and killings of albinos for mystical purposes, people with disabilities in general suffer from fatalistic and/or malevolent social perceptions. Given all these difficulties, people with disabilities in Senegal are excluded from or have excluded themselves from sports participation.

Keywords

Disability, Physical and Sports Activities, Exclusion, Sports Infrastructure, Social Perceptions

1. Introduction

Social groups have always been characterized by economic, political, intellectual, physical, and sociocultural differences that manifest themselves in various forms. Generally, these differences foster hierarchies, inequalities, marginalization, and

even social exclusion. Whereas K. Marx [1] spoke of social polarization (bourgeoisie and proletariat) in relation to the exploitation suffered by poor workers, P. Bourdieu and J.-P. Passeron [2] identified “cultural capital” as a source of social differentiation and categorization, with impacts resembling systematic reproduction in several fields, including education and sports. More recently, UNESCO [3] (Charter of Sport) and in 1990 at the Jomtien Conference, after noting several social inequalities between able-bodied individuals and people with disabilities, advocated for sport and education for all, respectively. Among those excluded, people with disabilities occupy a significant place. By definition, the WHO [4] states: “A person with a disability is anyone whose physical or mental integrity is temporarily or permanently impaired, whether congenitally or as a result of age or an accident, such that their autonomy, their ability to attend school, or their capacity to hold a job is compromised.” The same applies to their participation in physical and sporting activities, which is incomprehensible to certain social groups. Thus, the issue of the relationship between people with disabilities and sports has elicited various reactions grounded in logic and/or culture. In fact, being born with very pronounced differences that limit autonomy or becoming disabled is often viewed as a sign of strangeness to which various beliefs are attributed.

In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, many social groups associate disability with misfortune, with the biological parents of the person facing discrimination viewed as a harmful social element who must be supported for life.

Two observations often characterize their existence within the community. Parents believe that having a child with this disability is a divine punishment. Traditionally, they would consult the deities (oracles, pangols, marabouts, and all other individuals possessing mystical power) to learn what sacrifices must be made to ward off the ill fortune manifested by the spirits through the birth of the disabled baby. The father and mother felt embarrassed. Men attributed responsibility for this birth to the women, linking it to the mother’s lack of devotion and failure to submit to her husband. Moreover, some were even eager to get rid of the child and expressed relief in the event of the child’s death. In 1987, R. Ekéleme [5] wrote: “In African societies, any form of disability is generally linked to supernatural causes, to magical-religious beliefs, or perceived as the result of divine punishment or a family curse. When a child is born with a disability, the family views this as punishment for a sin committed or as the result of a spell cast by enemies. In the past, children with disabilities—‘including albinos’—were killed at birth or simply abandoned in a forest where they died.”

On the other hand, this view can change because, in the event of unexplained family misfortunes, spirits are often invoked and human sacrifices demanded. It is then the death, or the mental, physical, or sensory paralysis of the sacrificed individual (the disabled person)—who may be alive or not yet born—that is sought. This is apparently what led Mr. Coulibaly [6] to say: “(...) the disabled child is perceived by some as a sacrifice, an offering made to the ‘Djinn’s’ to protect

the family. The child is the subject of often unjustified overprotection (...).”

In Senegal in particular, people with disabilities constitute a community of 1,300,000 individuals, according to the National Agency for Statistics and Demography ANSD ([7] 2023). As if to reinforce the international community’s assessment, Moussa Thiaré, president of the FSAPH (Senegalese Federation of Associations of People with Disabilities), notes that “this community is characterized by begging, isolation, illiteracy, lack of education, and underemployment.” The medical certificate required to apply for a civil service job automatically excludes them from being registered in the civil service records. Added to this are “the difficulty of finding a spouse for marriage, mistrust, and the belief that rape can cure AIDS, etc.” A. Blum [8].

Consequently, after ratifying international conventions on rights related to education, health, personal development, etc., the State of Senegal has adhered to the provisions of UNESCO’s [3] Charter on Physical Education and Sport regarding the right of all, without discrimination, to engage in physical education and sport. Thus, the discriminatory nature of physical education and competitive sports—once reserved solely for able-bodied individuals—has been eliminated. The State of Senegal has taken all necessary measures to create an appropriate framework enabling everyone to participate in physical education and the sport of their choice.

However, despite the provisions of Law 84-59 (Sports Charter) promoting physical education and sports for all, we observe the absence of people with disabilities from sports facilities and fields, despite initiatives such as “handisport” and their efforts to organize in defense of their cause. In light of all these aspects of the lives of people with disabilities, we naturally asked ourselves: What are the objective and subjective difficulties that hinder the participation of people with disabilities in sports in Senegal? In other words, we are interested in the objective and subjective causes of the exclusion of people living with disabilities from sports in Senegal. To answer this question with reliable data, the definition of a scientifically sound methodology is essential.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted in Dakar and four other regional capitals of Senegal, namely Saint-Louis, Thiès, Louga, and Kaolack. To understand the challenges in this field, we employed qualitative methods, using semi-structured and then structured interviews as data collection techniques, as is appropriate for this type of research. Respondents were selected without distinction based on the type of disability, depending on opportunity and availability.

Thus, we were able to speak with 9 individuals with motor impairments (including 2 women and 7 men), 5 individuals with sensory impairments (including 1 woman), 3 individuals with albinism (including 1 woman and 2 men), 1 visually impaired individual, and 1 individual with autism—both of whom were men. This brings the total number of individuals with disabilities interviewed to 10. They are

all between the ages of 21 and 28. Their athletic backgrounds vary widely, ranging from sedentary lifestyles to high-level competitive sports, as well as recreational sports

In addition, one official responsible for sports for all at the Ministry of Youth and Sports agreed to be interviewed. The same applies to the two highest-ranking officials of the FSAPH (Senegalese Federation of Associations of People with Disabilities) and one general practitioner who has treated several people with disabilities. For the most part, the discussions centered on the objective and subjective causes of the absence of people with albinism from sports facilities.

To ensure I was better understood, the interview was conducted in a mix of French and Wolof, given the proficiency levels of some of the interviewees.

3. Results

Sports participation among people with disabilities in Senegal is highly problematic. Several objective and subjective factors contribute to their exclusion from sports.

3.1. Objective Reasons¹ for the Absence of People with Disabilities from Sports Participation

The objective causes of the absence of people with disabilities in Senegal from physical education and sports settings are varied and multifaceted. They range from disabling biological conditions to inadequate infrastructure.

3.1.1. Motor Impairment: A Barrier to Sports Participation for People with Disabilities

Humans are part of an environmental ecosystem with which they constantly interact. Any impediment to these interactions constitutes a disability, which is generally caused by medical conditions, accidents, heredity, etc. It is associated with restrictions and limitations, to varying degrees, on the participation of people with disabilities in daily human activities. Among these activities is sports participation. “People with disabilities from birth or as a result of illness or accident are very different from their peers due to reduced mobility and dependence” (Doctor).

To characterize motor disability, the doctor first focused on hand amputation, which causes a serious balance issue. Indeed, the swinging of the arms while walking or running is a balancing factor that enables precision in the movements to be performed. Hands also act as shock absorbers in the event of a fall resulting from an action. Thus, in sports requiring speed, agility, contact, etc., the absence of one or both arms poses a serious challenge in adapting to certain foot-based sports (soccer). Those performed with the hands are virtually impossible. “Even with prosthetics, the natural movement of the arms and skin sensitivity upon contact with sports equipment can never be adequately replicated. This is a certainty (...). Therefore, the impairment of athletic performance is virtually inevitable, if not

¹Real obstacles, independent of each individual’s will and emotions.

among them, that is, among individuals with physical disabilities who have had one or both arms amputated” (Physician).

On the other hand, with one or both legs amputated, mobility is compromised. This is why wheelchairs are used. It is therefore an intermediate solution that can facilitate sports among people with the same type of disability. However, the doctor notes, “the levels of lower limb amputation result in differences in the abilities inherent to the balance required for sports. The absence of one leg is not the same as the absence of both legs. Similarly, a person with a thigh amputation has less balance than someone who has lost only their feet, etc.” (Doctor).

3.1.2. Sensory Impairment: A Barrier to Sports Participation for People with Disabilities

According to the doctor, sensory impairment is a type of disability related to the sense organs. It is more complex in that it encompasses several impairments, including:

visual impairment: Those with this disability are referred to as blind when the impairment is total, or as visually impaired. For each of these, the doctor provided objective explanations.

Indeed, on the one hand, blind people cannot see their surroundings. They are completely blind because their retinas are severely damaged. They live in total darkness and, as a result, cannot see the boundaries of sports fields, the equipment used, etc. For them, participating in sports is very difficult, if not impossible.

On the other hand, the visually impaired are able to perceive bright colors and objects of a certain size. Images are blurry, though they are still perceptible. They therefore retain some residual vision. Thus, participating in sports is limited. It depends on adaptations that allow for the use of other senses, such as hearing and touch. Specialists in adaptive sports emphasize bright colors, shapes, and sounds on sports equipment (such as sound-emitting balls) that these individuals must use.

Deaf-mutism: Young people with deaf-mutism suffer from a dual disability. On the one hand, they cannot hear and cannot speak. According to the doctor, “the second impairment is, in most cases, a result of the first. They do not speak because they cannot hear. Those who become deaf after all language structures have been acquired communicate through speech (...). In most cases, these types of disabilities are caused by accidents, heredity, consanguineous marriages, etc.” They are the most physically complete types of people with disabilities. Their main concern is verbal communication. Indeed, in sports, they experience great difficulty understanding coaches’ instructions and communicating with their teammates in team sports. According to the president of the FSAPH, “Among all the types of disabilities you have identified, these are the most severe and the most capable of competing against able-bodied athletes. However, these impairments do not predestine them for high performance. In para-sports, they have their own competitions at the national and international levels (...).” These assertions are confirmed by the official from the Ministry of Sports, who notes their absence

from sports venues despite the efforts made by the authorities to support para-sports.

Albinism: Albinism is characterized by its complexity, as it can encompass all the impairments mentioned above, to which skin problems must be added. Here, the explanations provided by our respondents are more technical and detailed. Indeed, “oculo-cutaneous albinism is characterized by a lack of melanin pigment in the hair, skin, and eyes. People with this condition have light-colored hair, blue or hazel eyes, and pale skin that is highly sensitive to the harmful effects of the sun. Albinism also affects vision, including involuntary nystagmus, photophobia, poor depth perception, strabismus, poor visual acuity, and refractive errors. In cases of total or near-total absence of melanin, the eyes are red or purplish (or even light blue, light orange, or colorless) and the skin is white. When there is a reduced amount of melanin, the irises and skin are lighter in color. Ocular forms affect only the eyes (...). This explains the complexity.” (Physician). In short, people with albinism have impaired vision and are prone to keratoses if they are not protected from the sun. These purely health-related insights highlight the visual and skin-related limitations of people with these types of disabilities, whereas participating in sports requires good vision and physical contact for many sports.

More clearly and using less technical terms based on the daily experiences of people with albinism, senior officials from the FSAPH and the ministry state: “People with albinism have difficulty tracking moving objects. When the ball, for example, is very far away, they have trouble seeing it clearly, and when it’s moving quickly, they struggle to track it and are unable to control it or make accurate passes. The challenge is identifying their teammates.”

People with albinism confirm: “We know we’re wearing the same jerseys. But the thing is, it’s very hard to make out our teammates’ faces so we can make good passes. That’s why, after we get the ball back, the opponent is already right in front of you, and then you don’t even know who to pass it to. That’s why we hold onto the ball and dribble.”

3.1.3. Autism or Intellectual Disability

People with autism are commonly referred to as crazy. They generally suffer from a severe intellectual disability. Their words and actions are often incomprehensible to most members of society. They violate the rules of social interaction while believing they are acting normally. “This disability is often caused by accidents, heredity, illness, consanguineous marriages, etc. Autism is an early neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by communication difficulties, obsessive interests or activities, repetitive behaviors, sensory hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity, and a strong resistance to change. In some cases, the brain, cerebellum, and/or spinal cord are partially damaged due to a lesion or atrophy. Put simply, the command centers for language, gestures, and movements no longer function normally, leading to a lack of understanding of their attitudes and behaviors by other members of society. It should be noted that autistic individuals are a type of intellectually disabled person” (Doctor). Thus, the question of adherence to sports

rules has arisen. Yet every sport follows established rules. “The standard rules change for autistic individuals. Flexibility is essential. In soccer, for example, the referee penalizes only serious fouls. Offside calls are minimized or even eliminated. We don’t nitpick over the correctness of throw-ins, etc. What matters is that the general action is carried out” (Ministry and FSAPH officials).

Upon closer inspection, the socially incomprehensible behaviors of people with autism reappear on the sports field. They are virtually incapable of following the rules of the game. Consequently, “the only possible option is to adapt to them. However, their participation in sports is compromised because it is extremely rare, if not impossible, for people with intellectual disabilities to get together to play soccer, basketball, track and field, etc. They exclude themselves even before ‘normal’ people exclude them out of mistrust. This is obvious” (Ministry and FSAPH officials).

In short, motor, sensory, and intellectual disabilities cause problems with mobility, vision, hearing, and cognition, respectively. This results in difficulties with physical balance, mobility, communication, visual or auditory discrimination, skin fragility, logical thinking, etc. All these conditions characteristic of people with disabilities constitute objective barriers to their participation in sports. Added to this is the lack of adaptations to equipment, which tends to exclude these members of society from sports fields.

3.1.4. The Lack and Inadequacy of Sports Facilities

The lack of sports facilities that are adapted and accessible to meet their developmental needs contributes to the very low participation of people with disabilities in physical and sports activities. In fact, given the diversity of needs, the issue of ramps adapted for various forms of motor disabilities has arisen. The same applies to the visually impaired, whose participation in sports requires the use of bright colors and audible cues in the design of playing areas. As for people with albinism, in addition to the previous requirements, there is a need for covered facilities to protect them from sunlight. For the latter, the doctor specifies and notes that “this primarily concerns those with skin cancer, as the link between albinism and this skin condition is easily made. Furthermore, physical activity and sports are vital for the human body. Otherwise, a sedentary lifestyle and the onset of cardiovascular diseases follow. Unfortunately, these individuals with disabilities are afraid of sunlight.” The situation for people with intellectual disabilities is far more concerning because “no infrastructure can be adapted to this disability, which is of a psychological nature” (Ministry of Sports official).

Upon closer inspection, people with disabilities are marginalized, and their right to physical education and sports are largely ignored. On this point, all respondents with special sports needs are virtually unanimous: “The facilities were designed without taking people with disabilities into account. Stadium playing fields are open-air. As for access to facilities, ramps are increasingly being installed for people with physical disabilities, while others with disabilities are forgotten. Bright colors are absent from the facilities. On basketball courts, with the excep-

tion of the Marius Ndiaye Stadium and the new Iba Mar Diop Stadium hall in Dakar and in the regions, there is no shade or adequate flooring. It is impossible to play, and the risk of injury is enormous. Moreover, the heat is scorching in the regions. Many localities do not even have the minimum infrastructure for able-bodied people, let alone for people with disabilities.”

In the same vein, and as if to reinforce these statements about deficiencies, the presidents of Handisport and the FSAPH emphasized: “There are no special accommodations for people with disabilities in general, and for albinos who wish to participate in sports in particular. Nevertheless, our athletes who represent Senegal in international competitions have easy access to existing facilities. They do not bar us from them. But it must be acknowledged that these facilities are not designed for them (...). In our observations, people with physical disabilities are the most frequent participants (...).” Given all these factors, people with albinism are calling for shaded areas in physical education and sports facilities and appropriate equipment in bright colors to improve visibility. This is why they opt for jerseys in bright green or very light red.

Overall, the lack of infrastructure and equipment adapted and necessary for sports participation by people with disabilities is a major barrier to “sports for all.” In terms of adaptation, people with disabilities highlight accessibility, the use of bright colors in facilities, and appropriate coverage for people with physical, sensory, and autism-related disabilities, respectively.

In short, the objective reasons for the absence of people with disabilities from sports fields are linked to the specific nature of their disabilities. Motor, sensory, and cognitive disabilities lead to problems with mobility, communication, vision, hearing, skin fragility, cognition, and so on. Thus, sports inclusion (between able-bodied individuals and people with disabilities) is virtually compromised, and in para-sports, people with physical disabilities are more prevalent. Others are scarce. Furthermore, there is the issue of sports facilities that are ill-suited for the practice of sports by people with all types of disabilities. However, these objective limitations do little to hide the discouraging social realities.

3.2. Subjective Reasons² for the Absence of People with Disabilities from Sports Fields

Among the various obstacles to inclusive sports participation for people with disabilities are subjective causes. In the case of Senegal, these include fear and social perceptions regarding people with these types of disabilities.

3.2.1. Challenges in Sports Participation Stemming from Fear among People with Albinism

The fear of going out and participating in sports activities stems from information spread via social media and/or the press. Indeed, “approximately 450 attacks have been reported across 25 African countries. These are only the officially reported cases. It is highly likely that the majority of cases go unreported due to the secrecy

²That falls within the realm of personal feeling or interpretation.

surrounding witchcraft and other harmful practices, which form the context for most of these attacks.” This information provided by civil society is well-known to people with albinism, who often cite it to justify their absence from sports fields. People with albinism reveal that “they are often terrified by these despicable acts that certain people commit against them. As elections approach, fear increases. We no longer feel safe and are afraid of being attacked or killed.”

Furthermore, the discrimination and stigmatization faced by people with albinism, due to myths and beliefs, lead to various violations, including the violation of the right to life. This stigmatization often takes the form of assaults, mutilations, organ trafficking, infanticide, and accusations of witchcraft. In such cases, the majority of them say they live in constant fear, whereas previously, it was only around election time that we heard of these acts of human sacrifice linked to witchcraft targeting members of this community. In fact, “psychologically and morally, we are affected. Under these conditions, how can you expect us to think about playing sports? Sports are for normal people. We, on the other hand, are afraid first and foremost.” These remarks highlight the self-exclusion³ from sports driven by fear. Yet, several of these individuals with albinism acknowledged that they do not know of anyone in their community who has been killed or attacked because they are albino in Senegal. It is therefore a mental construct internalized after hearing or reading about what has happened elsewhere in Africa. To reinforce this point, we note these remarks from one of the oldest among the albino respondents: “I had heard these kinds of things—supposedly they’re going to hunt down albinos, kill them to take their blood or their heads, or to sleep with albino women—that sort of thing, etc. Personally, I have never seen this in our country, nor heard of a confirmed case of such attacks and killings of albinos. Sometimes when I go out, my (non-albino) neighbors suggest I be very careful. If it were to happen to me, I would put my trust in God. But, so far, no member of our association has been a victim of this.” In fact, albinos in Senegal are afraid to go out and participate in sports because they believe these attacks and rapes could spread to Senegal. As a result, they internalize a growing fear of contact with others, especially when it comes to gathering and competing in sports, as is the case with many sports.

Furthermore, in addition to this fear that haunts albinos—and which partly explains their absence from sports fields—there is the fear that non-albinos harbor toward them. Indeed, stigmatization and isolation are also caused by the fear of coming into contact with albinos, which also leads to their social exclusion. “They are certainly afraid of us. We feel that people avoid us or are suspicious of us. Even those we considered our friends and with whom we were supposed to play didn’t want us to touch them. At school and in the neighborhood, it’s the same situation. As a result, our neighbors look at us as if they were seeing aliens. They are suspicious of us as if we weren’t human. So, with whom and where do we play sports?” (The Albinos). However, in addition to this mutual and exclusionary fear, we face societal perceptions of disability in Senegal.

³To deny oneself access.

3.2.2. Challenges in Sports Participation Related to Social Perceptions

Social perceptions surrounding disability are deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness in Africa in general and in Senegal in particular. Indeed, people with disabilities are viewed as abnormal individuals, supernatural beings, and as a result, they are condemned to live apart from “normal” people and from mainstream society. “They look at us as strangers, they distrust us. There aren’t enough of us to be together most of the time. It’s very rare to have two or more young people with disabilities in a neighborhood. So we’re forced to be with those who view us as outsiders. This is a barrier. It’s hard to thrive among these people. You understand that this is a major obstacle to our participation in sports.” In short, this view of people with disabilities as supernatural beings fosters a distance constantly maintained by “normal” people. This distance pushes those with motor, sensory, and intellectual disabilities to resign themselves to it to the point that one might infer a sort of self-exclusion on the part of these individuals. In fact, they no longer feel the need to go out and play or participate in sports with others.

Furthermore, the biological limitations of people with disabilities are culturally interpreted as impairments linked to supernatural powers—often malevolent—which the collective consciousness in sub-Saharan Africa attributes to witchcraft. This is why they are ostracized and feel marginalized and abandoned by society. This is what drives them to begging and a life of precariousness. The presidents of the FSAPH are unequivocal: “Very few of us are treated as normal members of our families or neighborhoods. Many of our members live in virtual isolation within their families and are forced to go out and beg for resources. With several meetings and occasional awareness-raising efforts, we sense that things are shifting a bit, but not enough for them to participate in sports.”

Furthermore, the absence of people with disabilities from sports fields can also be explained by fatalistic views because, on the one hand, “it is a condition of divine will and there is nothing we can do about it. We accept it. God wanted us to be disabled. So we are not meant for sports. Better yet, playing sports means not accepting God’s will, and we are believers (...)” (people with disabilities).

These individuals operate on the principle that “whatever happens to a person is God’s will”, and not accepting divine decision is synonymous with unbelief and defiance. The believer must resign themselves to it. When asked, “Do you think it is possible for people with disabilities to participate in adapted sports?”, they replied, “Yes, but it will be very difficult because the necessary accommodations are expensive and there aren’t many of us. The government cannot adapt all sports facilities to accommodate every type of disability. It is extremely costly, if not impossible. Can you rule out divine will in this situation?” Thus, people with disabilities in Senegal are more resigned than fighting for the right to physical education and sports for all, even though the presidents of their associations advocate for sports inclusion.

In short, the fear experienced by albinos and the negative social perceptions surrounding disability in general are factors that hinder people with disabilities

from participating in sports. Albinos fear the assaults and rapes they suffer as sacrificial victims, and non-disabled people tend to avoid them. Furthermore, Senegalese society generally attaches a supernatural and fatalistic image to people with disabilities—specifically those with white skin stained with blood—and to virtually all other people with disabilities. This situation has encouraged the self-exclusion of these members of society from sports venues.

4. Discussion

The issue of disability is generally addressed from the perspective of dual disability. Health considerations dominate in several scientific publications, notably those by P. Pennamen *et al.* [9], Okamura K, Suzuki T. [10], Grønskov K. *et al.* [11], etc. Others have focused purely on social representations. Indeed, N. Chelala [12] emphasized the white and problematic skin of albinos. D. Tsevi [13] explored the myth surrounding disability in general in his country. A year later, B. Mbushi [14] highlighted the perception of these members of society as objects of protection or good luck, hence their likening to a talisman.

However, it must be noted that while studies on people with disabilities in general are numerous, they very rarely focus on the self-exclusion of this social group from sports in relation to the physiological, psychosocial, and cultural characteristics of people with disabilities. This study contributes to broadening this field of investigation.

Furthermore, from a methodological standpoint, semi-structured interviews were prioritized because they allow for the collection of more detailed information. Unfortunately, we were only able to recruit a small number of people with disabilities across all targeted disability types and only four officials working to promote their well-being in health and sports. This number is considered very small, and the sample size insufficient for a study conducted across multiple regions. It should be noted that Senegal's population with disabilities is estimated at over 1,800,000 people in 2022.

Finally, in this study, we considered only the major trends that emerged from discussions with each participant. However, ideas that contradict or qualify these trends were noted here and there. Taking them into account at the national level could put into perspective the findings that emerged from the analysis of the selected data J. Baudoin [15].

5. Conclusions

The issue of the compatibility between disability and sports participation in Senegal has highlighted several barriers that explain why people with disabilities are absent from sports settings. Indeed, on the one hand and objectively speaking, people with disabilities suffer from motor, sensory, and/or cognitive impairments that significantly limit bodily balance, mobility, communication, and visual, auditory, tactile, and intellectual sensations and perceptions, among others. Aware of their objective limitations, these individuals exclude themselves or are excluded

from sports participation by those considered “normal”. In addition to these biological limitations, the design of sports facilities does not take into account the specific needs of people with disabilities. Indeed, while motor impairments present an accessibility issue, the same is not true for the deaf and hard of hearing, who require auditory aids and bright colors. For people with autism, a high degree of regulatory flexibility is necessary.

Furthermore, these objective limitations do little to conceal the discouraging cultural realities that arise in terms of social representations built around disability. On the one hand, they result in fear for people with albinism, who are often viewed as objects of human sacrifice for the material well-being of those without disabilities. On the other hand, the mysticism and fatalism surrounding disability in general act as barriers to the athletic development of this social group, which is either overprotected if viewed as a sacrifice for the community’s well-being, or excluded if seen as a curse. In all cases, these subjective fears are heavily tinged with fatalism. Consequently, people without disabilities tend to stigmatize them, shun them, and exclude them from sports activities in neighborhoods, schools, and other settings. Aware of this reality, people with disabilities often exclude themselves from participating in sports in various communities across Senegal.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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