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## CULTURAL BARRIERS AND EXERCISE ADHERENCE: EXPLORING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY MOTIVATION

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### ABSTRACT

Physical activity is essential for maintaining overall health and well-being, offering numerous physical and mental health benefits. However, for Muslim women, particularly Meranao women, engaging in regular physical activity is often constrained by cultural and religious contexts. This study aimed to explore the complex relationship among cultural barriers, exercise adherence, and the mediating role of physical activity motivation among Meranao women aged 18–30, officially enrolled at Mindanao State University–Marawi City during Academic Year 2024–2025.

Using a descriptive-correlational and mediation design, the study investigated how cultural and religious beliefs, gender norms, family and social support, clothing expectations, environmental barriers, and external perceptions impact motivation and adherence. A total of 369 purposively selected respondents answered three adapted survey tools: Cultural Barriers Questionnaire, Adherence to Exercise Rating Scale, and the Motivation for Physical Activity Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 20, employing the estimation-maximization technique to address missing values.

Findings revealed that Meranao women face significant structural and cultural constraints, including the lack of women-only spaces, gender-segregated facilities, modesty norms, and limited role models. Despite these, many women exhibited intrinsic motivation rooted in personal well-being and self-development. Regression analysis showed that motivation significantly predicts exercise adherence, while cultural barriers exert both direct and indirect effects. Environmental barriers emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by clothing norms and family support.

The study emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive interventions that consider both motivational and structural dimensions to effectively promote physical activity among Meranao women.

Keywords: cultural barriers, exercise adherence, motivation, Meranao women, physical activity

**Authors:** Dr NAGBA, Junah (MSU-IIT); OMPOC, HARLYN MAE (MSU-IIT); URBANO, Jane Mae

**Presenters:** OMPOC, HARLYN MAE (MSU-IIT); URBANO, Jane Mae

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