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Article

Empowering Women Through Sports

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Abstract

This paper examines the rise of women in sports as a multifaceted phenomenon marked by significant progress and persistent challenges. It explores the historical exclusion of women from athletic competitions and the evolving societal and legal frameworks that have facilitated their inclusion, such as Title IX and the Women's Tennis Association. Despite increased participation and visibility, female athletes continue to face gender discrimination, unequal pay, limited media coverage, and sexual objectification. The study integrates biomechanical and physiological research to highlight how tailored scientific approaches can enhance female athletic performance, addressing practical barriers like menstruation and stereotypes of physical inferiority. Additionally, it emphasizes the critical role of policy reforms, female role models, and media representation in dismantling institutional and cultural barriers. The paper advocates for a holistic strategy combining science, legislation, and societal shifts to achieve true gender equality in sports, underscoring its broader implications for empowerment and social change.

Keywords: gender equality; sports; female athletes; biomechanics; sports policy; media representation

Introduction

The rise of women in sports is a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by significant progress and persistent challenges. Women have increasingly broken barriers in various sports, challenging traditional gender norms and stereotypes. This progress is evident in the growing participation of women in traditionally male-dominated sports, the increasing visibility of female athletes, and the gradual dismantling of institutional barriers. However, despite these advancements, women in sports continue to face numerous obstacles, including gender discrimination, unequal pay, and limited media coverage. Singh, S. P., & Singh, S. Women are increasingly participating in sports traditionally dominated by men, such as football, baseball, and mixed martial arts. This challenges the notion of women's biological athletic inferiority and broadens the scope of what is considered acceptable for female athletes. In sports like mixed martial arts, women demonstrate their capacity for physical strength and aggression, challenging patriarchal beliefs about gender roles. However, the empowerment potential of such participation is sometimes undermined by the neoliberal-postfeminist culture that maintains gender inequality.

Women in sports face practical, personal, and social barriers, including limited access to facilities, societal expectations, and stereotypes that hinder their participation and progression. Gender-based stereotypes and the "old boys' network" have historically limited women's rise to top management positions in sports organizations. However, recent studies show that women are increasingly overcoming these barriers and achieving success in leadership roles. Singh, S., Singh, S., & Dhadwal. Female athletes often receive less media coverage and are subjected to sexist language, which perpetuates gender stereotypes and limits their visibility and recognition. The commercial success of leagues like the Lingerie Football League, where physical attractiveness is prioritized over athletic talent, highlights the ongoing struggle against sexual objectification in women's sports. Despite these challenges, sports have been a tool for economic empowerment and leadership development for women, as seen in the success stories of athletes like P.V. Sindhu and Mithali Raj in

India. The inclusion and exclusion of women in sports have significant social, legal, health, and economic consequences. Addressing these disparities is crucial for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Initiatives to promote women's participation in sports are essential for challenging existing gender norms and roles, thereby contributing to broader societal development and social change.

While the rise of women in sports is a testament to the progress made in gender equality, it also highlights the ongoing challenges that need to be addressed. The persistence of gender discrimination, unequal pay, and limited media representation underscores the need for continued advocacy and policy changes to support women in sports. Additionally, the commercialization of women's sports, while providing opportunities, also poses challenges related to the sexualization and objectification of female athletes. These complexities suggest that while significant strides have been made, the journey towards true equality in sports is ongoing and requires sustained effort and attention.

The historical milestones in women's athletic inclusion reflect a complex journey marked by societal challenges, institutional barriers, and significant achievements. From the early exclusion in the Olympic Games to the gradual acceptance and success of women in various sports, these milestones highlight the evolving role of women in athletics. This journey is characterized by overcoming gender biases, advocating for equal opportunities, and achieving recognition in the sports world. The following sections outline key historical milestones and their implications for women's inclusion in sports.

The modern Olympic Games, founded by Pierre de Coubertin, initially excluded women, reflecting societal norms that viewed sports as a male domain. Women first participated in the 1900 Olympics, but faced numerous restrictions and were limited to a few sports deemed appropriate for their gender. In the early 20th century, women began participating in sports outside institutional frameworks, engaging in activities like swimming, cycling, and boxing. These early sportswomen often faced societal disapproval but laid the groundwork for future inclusion. Title IX, enacted in the United States in 1972, was a pivotal legal milestone that prohibited gender discrimination in federally funded educational programs, significantly increasing women's participation in sports.

The establishment of the Women's Tennis Association in the 1970s, following the "Battle of the Sexes" match, marked a significant step in professionalizing women's sports and advocating for equal prize money.

Societal and Cultural Shifts

The introduction of products like sports bras and tampons facilitated women's participation in sports by addressing practical barriers, although they also perpetuated certain cultural norms. The rise of female athletes in the Paralympic Games, despite facing dual marginalization due to gender and disability, highlights the intersectional challenges and achievements in women's sports. Women's participation in the Olympics has steadily increased, with recent Games achieving near gender parity in athlete representation. However, disparities in media coverage, compensation, and leadership roles persist. The success of female athletes from socialist states and host countries in the Olympics underscores the influence of broader socioeconomic factors on women's sports participation and performance.

While significant progress has been made in women's athletic inclusion, challenges remain. The historical exclusion of women from sports has left a legacy of gender inequality that continues to affect various aspects of sports today. Despite advancements, women athletes often face disparities in media representation, financial compensation, and leadership opportunities. Additionally, societal attitudes and cultural norms continue to shape the experiences of women in sports, highlighting the need for ongoing advocacy and reform to achieve true equality in athletics. Gender equality in sports remains a significant challenge despite various efforts and advancements in legislation and awareness. The persistence of gender-based discrimination is evident in multiple facets of sports, including representation, opportunities, and financial resources. This issue is deeply rooted in

societal norms and stereotypes that continue to influence the sports industry. The following sections explore the key challenges to gender equality in sports, drawing insights from the provided research papers.

Legal and Institutional Barriers

Despite international and national legal frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality, discrimination persists. Legal guarantees often fail to translate into practical equality due to cultural and institutional resistance. The sports legal system is criticized for not adequately addressing the wage gaps and career progression barriers faced by female athletes. In Canada, despite policies like the Pay Equity Act, disparities in pay and media coverage between male and female athletes remain significant.

Gender stereotypes and biases are deeply entrenched in sports, often dictating which sports are deemed appropriate for each gender. This results in discrimination against women in traditionally male-dominated sports and vice versa. Social and cultural barriers, such as societal expectations and lack of familial support, further hinder women's participation and progression in sports. The media often trivializes women's sports, focusing more on their femininity than their athletic prowess, which perpetuates gender stereotypes. Female athletes face significant disparities in access to resources, facilities, and opportunities compared to their male counterparts. This includes differences in funding, coaching, and leadership positions. In the United States, a notable pay gap exists between male and female athletes across various sports programs, exacerbating gender inequality in the sports industry. European women athletes and sports managers highlight the lack of resources and support as major barriers to achieving gender equity in sports.

Strategies for Promoting Gender Equality

Increasing investment in women's sports, along with awareness and education campaigns, can help address some of the existing disparities. Policies and legislation that promote women's leadership and role modelling in sports are crucial for fostering an inclusive environment. Encouraging mixed and inclusive sports projects can challenge traditional gender roles and promote equality.

While significant challenges to gender equality in sports persist, there are also signs of progress and potential for change. Efforts by international and national bodies to promote gender equality through policies and awareness campaigns are crucial steps forward. However, the pace of change remains slow, and collective action is necessary to dismantle the cultural and institutional barriers that hinder women's full participation and representation in sports. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes legal reforms, societal change, and increased investment in women's sports. Gender equality in sports faces several significant challenges that hinder the progress of female athletes. One major issue is pay equity, where female athletes often earn substantially less than their male counterparts due to systemic inequalities and biases within the sports industry. Additionally, the lack of sponsorship opportunities for women's sports teams limits their visibility and ability to compete at high levels, further exacerbating gender disparities. Sexism in sports media also plays a critical role, as the underrepresentation and objectification of female athletes contribute to their marginalization. Furthermore, inequality in access to sports facilities and resources can negatively impact the performance and safety of female athletes, highlighting the need for equitable treatment. Lastly, gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue, with female athletes often facing harassment and abuse, underscoring the urgent need for a safe and inclusive sports environment. Addressing these challenges is essential for promoting gender equality in sports.

The impact of female role models in athletics is multifaceted, influencing women's participation, motivation, and perception in sports. Female role models in athletics play a crucial role in reducing stereotype threats and increasing women's willingness to compete, particularly among high-performing women who stand to benefit the most from competitive environments. However, the

availability and visibility of such role models remain limited, which can disadvantage women compared to their male counterparts. This overview will explore the influence of female role models on women's participation in sports, the challenges in finding same-gender role models, and the broader implications for female athletes.

Influence on Participation and Motivation

Female role models in competitive environments can significantly reduce stereotype threats and increase women's willingness to compete. This effect is particularly pronounced among high-performing women, who are more likely to benefit from competition. Same-gender athletic role models are particularly motivating for women, as they provide evidence that success is attainable and help counteract negative gender stereotypes. Women are more motivated by role models who share their gender and sport, although they often have fewer such role models available. Sporting role models can inspire behaviour and attitudes, as seen in the influence of Indigenous Australian sportswomen, who serve as powerful role models for women and girls, highlighting the unique platform provided by sports to strengthen voices and influence.

Despite the benefits, women often have fewer same-gender role models in their sports, which can limit their motivation and participation. Studies show that women are less likely than men to nominate same-gender role models, even among high-performing athletes. The lack of evidence supporting the effectiveness of sporting role model-led interventions in increasing physical activity and sport participation among female youth suggests a need for more rigorous and theoretically grounded programs. The visibility of female athletes is crucial for promoting engagement with women's sports, yet there is a notable decline in physical activity levels among adolescent girls, which is more pronounced than in boys.

Broader Implications for Female Athletes

Female athletes often serve as role models not just for their athletic prowess but also for their meritocratic personality traits and interpersonal abilities. This broader conceptualization of role models can influence how female athletes are perceived and the impact they have on others. The influence of gender on the choice of sport role models is significant, with adolescent girls more likely to choose female role models. However, when role models are from the sporting domain, the percentage of female role models decreases, highlighting the ideological contradictions in traditional gender terms. The role of female mentors in sports, such as the legacy of coach Pat Summitt, underscores the importance of same-gender mentoring relationships in overcoming discriminatory barriers and advancing women's careers in sports. While female role models in athletics have a positive impact on women's participation and motivation, challenges remain in terms of availability and visibility. The limited presence of same-gender role models in sports can hinder women's engagement and perpetuate gender disparities. Addressing these challenges requires strategic efforts to increase the visibility of female athletes and develop effective role model-led interventions. Additionally, embracing a broader perspective of role models that includes personality traits and interpersonal abilities can enhance the influence of female athletes beyond their athletic achievements.

Promoting women's sports involves a multifaceted approach that includes policy development, structural changes, and societal shifts. Various countries have implemented initiatives to enhance gender equality in sports, focusing on increasing female participation, representation, and visibility. These efforts are crucial in addressing the historical underrepresentation and discrimination faced by women in sports.

Since the 1990s, Finland has developed legal frameworks and policies to promote gender equality in sports. These include government programs, gender impact assessments, and the introduction of quotas. However, the implementation of these policies has been more developmental than practical, with a slight increase in women in leadership roles within sports organizations.

Canada has enacted several entitlement-based policies, such as the Canada Gender Equality Act and the Pay Equity Act, to ensure equal opportunities and pay for women in sports. Programs like the "Women in Coaching Canada Games Apprenticeship Program" further support these efforts.

The Women in Sport Report (WISR) in Ireland proposed 23 recommendations to improve women's positioning in sports, but only 21.7% have been implemented. This highlights the need for regular and appropriate policy backed by adequate funding.

Structural and Organizational Initiatives

Swiss sports federations have initiated programs to promote women's participation and integration. These efforts include creating specific bodies for women's sports and ensuring they have sufficient resources. However, challenges remain in clarifying responsibilities and redistributing resources. The popularity of women's soccer in Germany is linked to mesolevel gender equality, where policy priorities by sports associations play a crucial role. This suggests that organizational policies can significantly impact the popularity and success of women's sports. Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in women's participation in sports, driven by changing societal attitudes and policies. This shift has been associated with positive health outcomes and improved self-esteem among women.

The United Nations advocates for equal access to sports for girls and women, emphasizing the potential benefits for physical and mental health, social integration, and skill development. Sport for development programs globally aim to leverage these benefits to promote gender equity.

Challenges and Future Directions

Despite these initiatives, challenges persist, such as wage gaps, media visibility, and resource allocation. In Canada, for instance, disparities in pay and media prominence continue to affect female athletes. Similarly, the slow pace of change and cultural barriers remain significant obstacles to achieving full gender equality in sports. Addressing these issues requires collective action and sustained efforts from policymakers, sports organizations, and society at large.

In conclusion, while significant strides have been made in promoting women's sports through various policies and initiatives, ongoing challenges highlight the need for continued advocacy and structural changes. The success of these efforts depends on the commitment of all stakeholders to dismantle barriers and create an inclusive environment for women in sports. The role of media in advancing gender equity is multifaceted, serving as both a catalyst for change and a potential barrier. Media platforms have been instrumental in amplifying feminist voices, exposing systemic injustices, and influencing public discourse and policy. However, they also have the potential to perpetuate stereotypes and biases. This dual role of media in promoting gender equity is evident across various contexts, from traditional media outlets to digital platforms, and across different cultural settings. The following sections explore the diverse ways in which media contributes to gender equity, highlighting both its empowering potential and its limitations.

Amplification of Feminist Movements

Media has played a crucial role in amplifying feminist movements, such as the MeToo movement, by providing a platform for marginalized voices and exposing systemic injustices. Social media, in particular, has enabled youth and advocacy groups to mobilize support and spread messages about gender equality, as seen in Indonesia. The media's role as a watchdog and agenda setter in democratic societies helps raise public consciousness on women's issues and holds governments accountable. The portrayal of women in media has evolved, with increasing representation in journalism and cinema, yet challenges persist in overcoming stereotypes. Media often portrays men as aggressive and women as tools of beauty, reinforcing gender stereotypes and inequality. There is a need for media to challenge these stereotypes and showcase strong female role models to contribute to ending gender inequality. Media has influenced educational curricula by

incorporating feminist themes, inspiring younger generations to challenge societal norms. In Islamic PERSIS educational environments, media narratives have shaped attitudes and perceptions about gender roles, highlighting the need for responsible media content creation. The advent of new media has provided a platform for voicing demands for gender equity, particularly in the workplace, where it has helped tackle long-standing discriminatory issues. However, new media also poses challenges such as online harassment and misinformation, which can hinder efforts to promote gender equality.

Media's Role in Addressing Gender-Based Violence

Media can raise awareness and sensitize people about gender-based violence, but it must avoid sensationalizing sensitive stories and misrepresenting victims. The representation of violence against women in media highlights the importance of social responsibility in problematizing the issue and promoting equality. While media has the potential to advance gender equity significantly, it is essential to recognize its limitations and the need for a nuanced approach. Media can both empower and hinder the feminist movement, depending on how it portrays gender issues and the narratives it chooses to amplify. Therefore, media literacy and advocacy are crucial in addressing gender stereotypes and promoting a more balanced portrayal of women in media stories. This balanced approach can help ensure that media continues to be a powerful tool for social change and inclusivity.

The future directions for gender equality in sports are multifaceted, involving legal, social, and cultural dimensions. Despite progress in legislation and increased participation of women in sports, significant challenges remain, such as wage gaps, media representation, and structural barriers. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes policy reform, awareness campaigns, and the promotion of inclusivity at all levels of sports. The following sections outline key areas for future development in gender equality within sports.

Strengthening international, European, and national legislation to address gender-based discrimination in sports is crucial. This includes closing wage gaps and ensuring equal opportunities for women in sports leadership roles. Policies should focus on dismantling cultural barriers and promoting inclusivity through awareness-raising campaigns and support for women in sports. Singh, S., & Kaur, L.

Addressing the socialization of women and girls into sports is essential. This involves challenging traditional gender norms and promoting diverse representations of femininity and athleticism. Media representation plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of women in sports. Increasing visibility and positive portrayal of female athletes can help shift public attitudes and support gender equality. Future research and practice should adopt intersectional frameworks that consider the diverse identities of women, including race, sexuality, and disability, to better understand and address the unique challenges faced by different groups. The experiences of women in the Global South should be prioritized, recognizing the specific barriers they face and promoting equitable development in sports. Addressing institutional barriers in college sports and beyond is necessary to achieve full gender equality. This includes tackling sex segregation and androcentric cultures that limit women's progress. Encouraging the inclusion of new sports programs, such as women's skateboarding and surfing, can enhance representation and opportunities for female athletes on the global stage.

Health and Well-Being

Promoting the health and well-being of female athletes is critical. This includes addressing issues related to maternity, menstruation, and the Female Athlete Triad, ensuring that women can pursue sports without compromising their health. Encouraging active lifestyles for pregnant and postpartum women can help dispel myths around inactivity during pregnancy and support women's continued participation in sports. While these directions offer a roadmap for advancing gender equality in sports, it is important to recognize the broader societal context in which these changes occur. Singh, S., & Kumar, P. (2013). The persistence of traditional gender roles and the dominance of male-centric

frameworks in many areas of society continue to pose challenges. Efforts to promote gender equality in sports must be part of a larger movement towards social change, involving collaboration across sectors and the engagement of diverse stakeholders to create a more inclusive and equitable sports environment for all genders.

The rise of women in sports, as detailed in the provided manuscript, intersects with biomechanical and physiological research that enhances female athletic performance, as explored in several studies by Singh (2025). Specifically, Singh's work on "Optimizing Performance in Female Discus Throwers: A Holistic Approach to Strength, Technique, and Biological Factors" (2025) aligns with the manuscript's emphasis on addressing practical barriers, such as those related to biological factors like menstruation, to promote women's participation in sports. This study employs a comprehensive methodology, integrating strength training, technical refinements, and considerations of biological variables, to optimize performance outcomes for female athletes. Similarly, Singh's "Biomechanical Foundations of Human Movement: The Role of Running and Jumping Event in Track and Field" (2025) provides a biomechanical analysis that supports the manuscript's discussion of women breaking into traditionally male-dominated sports by highlighting the scientific underpinnings of movement efficiency. Both studies utilize quantitative methods, including performance metrics and biomechanical assessments, to derive findings that underscore the potential for women to excel in high-intensity sports when provided with tailored training regimens. These findings resonate with the manuscript's call for dismantling institutional and societal barriers to foster gender equality in sports, demonstrating how targeted interventions can enhance female athletes' performance and visibility (Singh, 2025; Vasishat, 2024).

Conclusion

The journey toward gender equality in sports reflects both remarkable achievements and ongoing challenges. Legislative milestones like Title IX and international policies have expanded opportunities for women, yet disparities in pay, media visibility, and resource access persist, rooted in entrenched societal norms. Biomechanical and physiological research offers a pathway to optimize female athletic performance, challenging outdated stereotypes and enhancing participation. The influence of female role models and equitable media portrayal further drives motivation and recognition for women in sports. Achieving true equality demands a collaborative, multidisciplinary effort—integrating robust policies, scientific innovation, and cultural transformation—to dismantle barriers and foster an inclusive environment where female athletes can excel and inspire future generations.

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