



Gender barriers in relation to Sports participation: Specific emphasis on female

¹ Dr. Sonia Kanwar, ² Mandeep Kaur

¹ Assistant Professor SGGGS College, Sector -26, Chandigarh, Punjab, India

² Assistant Professor Khalsa College for Women, Civil Lines, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

Abstract

This study is based on the existing gender bias culture in the sports settings. The gender barriers are not only confined to single gender i.e. female, it has been realized that the male counterparts also face these barriers while selecting an event for them e.g. taking part in synchronized diving and gymnastics etc. as it reflects the feminine image of this gender in society. The present study gives specific emphasis on female gender in relation to sports participation. For the purpose of the study 150 females along with their parents were selected as sample from the northern region. The data was collected by direct interview with female sports person and their parents in order to extract information in relation to sports participation. The study revealed that may be there has been dramatically increase in the number of female participants in sports but, the cultural and societal barriers does not provide them conducive environment and equal opportunities as males in the sports settings. Moreover, it has been observed that media coverage is also confined and limited to the male domain in the sports arena. Further, it was realized that we should incorporate policies and provide infrastructure and female oriented environment in order to increase female participation in sports.

Keywords: sports, society

Introduction

It is evident from the history of sports that not only women, but both genders have confronted with numerous barriers when attempting to enter into sports that are not 'proper' or stereotypical for their gender to participate. Though, as a society we are making efforts towards equality in sports scenario. But, the fact is that as a society we have demarked the sports arena on the basis of our preconceived notions of what is 'normal' for a specific gender. On the basis of tradition such as females to participate in sports such as badminton as oppose to boxing and rugby and men in traditionally male sports such as body building as opposed to rhythmic gymnastics and synchronized swimming. Originally, sports was positively associated with male role and negatively related to female. It was believed that female may face social stigma and would endanger Feminine image if participate in sports. Rao (2010)^[10] the study has brought to light some facts regarding women's non sports participation in games and sports. The result has been lack of encouragement from the parents and family members, traditional way of living was a big hurdle for women, lack of sports orientation of people living in society. It has not become a common phenomenon, had not been a good leadership among physical education personnel and a proper motivating system.

Review of literature

Studies have shown that the main reasons why women don't take part in sports include: time constraints (women generally have less free time because of family commitments), lack of encouragement from the parents and family members (Bhullar *et al.* (2002)^[4] surveyed that 16.66% parents feels that male coaches may take undue advantage of female players and

33.33% parents feel that male coaches may not take undue advantage of female players, whereas 50% parents have given indifferent response.), traditional way of living, lack of orientation of the people living in the society in relation to sports, concerns for personal safety and safe environment.

Czisma *et al.* (1988) were among the first to suggest these phenomena might result in female athletes experiencing a sense of conflict between personal gender values and societal. According to the findings of Maasao (2001) fewer training chances for qualified sports women for leadership and managerial issues and fewer events or types of sports, lack of specific programme to educate public are few factors which contribute to non participation of females in sports. Hassan (2015) examined the situation of women in sports scenario in India. He found that despite of massive increase in the female participation in sports and media coverage, our society still needs constant efforts to change in the massive outlook of the society. The effect of long tradition bias attitude on gender still prevails in the society. He realized those females not only want to work at home but, they also want to excel in the field of sports as a career perspective.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study was to find out the problems and barriers for the women participation in Sports.

Sample and Procedure

In order to study the problem 150 subjects belonging to northern region of India between the age group of 18-25 years were taken as the sample. In order to study the parental influence their parents were also taken as sample for the study.

Barriers to women participating in sport

The other reasons for lack of active participation of female in sports can be:

1. Practical Barriers

- Lack of preferable finance
- Heavy domestic demands (lack of child care etc.)
- Safety concerns
- Lack of accessible transportation
- Inadequate sport and recreation facilities
- Few opportunities for physical education and skill development

2. Personal Barriers

- Body Image
- Clothing and equipment
- Lack of confidence
- Parental and Adult influence

3. Social and cultural Barriers

- Socio-cultural norms and constraints (leaving home unaccompanied, or being seen by men outside their family, male dominating culture of sports)
- Non female environment (attitude about sexuality)
- Timing of competition
- Female invisibility (lack of role model)
- Lack of media representation

A 2007 study by the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) noted that:

- Only 29% of sporting boards and committees were comprised of women members.
- Newspaper coverage of women's sport accounted for 5% of total sporting coverage during 2006;
- 26% of women were never encouraged to play sport; and
- One in five men considered sports women as unfeminine.

Number of participants in Summer Olympics (1984-2016)

No doubt we are trying to equalize the sports environment for both the gender but, there is no way to proclaim women's sports equal to those of men if the scenario and support is so drastically different. Women and girls athletes have yet to reach parity with men in the field of sports. We can make comparison for the difference in number of participants in sports on the basis of number of participants in Olympic Games.

Table 1

Year	City	Total participant	Male	Female
1984	Los Angeles	6829	5263	1566
1988	Seoul	8391	6197	2194
1992	Barcelona	9356	6652	2704
1996	Atlanta	10320	6797	3523
2000	Sydney	10651	6582	4069
2004	Athens	10625	6296	4329
2008	Beijing	10901	6290	4611
2012	London	10768	5992	4776
2016	Rio	11544	6350	5194

During last quarter of twentieth century women participation in Sports rose dramatically, reflecting changes in modern societies that emphasised gender parity. Although the level of participation and performance still varies greatly by country and by sport, women's sports have broad acceptance throughout the world and in few instances for instance figure skating gained more popularity than male counterparts. Carrying out a study on female athletes of swimming, track and field, Belaz (1975) [2] reported a high degree of social adjustment in female athletes.

The relatively recent increase in participation by females in India can be attributed to several factors such as women's movement, the fitness movement and increased public awareness for women sports. These factors have redefined societal, occupational and family roles for women and have given more control over their lives. Moreover, the changing cultural image of women sports has contributed to the growth of women's sports where women sports were once perceived by many as unfeminine or were stigmatised for engaging in high levels of competitions, sports participation by women is now regarded as acceptable. Furthermore, sports are often social activities occurring among friends. If a woman's friends do not have resources enabling them to participate, she will have even fewer opportunities and less motivation for involvement (Gems, 1993). Of course, this is also true for men, but women from middle-and lower income families are more likely than their male counterparts to lack the network of relationships out of which sport interests and activities emerge

Role of Society to Increase Women participation in Sports

- **Female friendly environment:** It is important to provide females positive first experience from the social environment, in order to return for the participation in sports. This may include surroundings such as female companions, teachers, coaches and positive attitude of the male coaches, teachers and administrators.
- **Increase the publicity of successful female athletes:** It has been observed that some of outstanding athletes like M.C. Marry Com, Anju Bobby George, Siana Nehwal, Sania Mirza, P.V. Sindhu and Sakshi Malik, Krishna Poonia, Dipa Karmakar have served as a role model to the other female sportsperson and their family members. So, their life stories and events should be publicize in order to motivate others in this direction.
- **Equal Opportunities as males:** Females are equally important for the society as males. So, it is important to provide same opportunities available to females as males like availability of equipment, resources and funds.
- **Parental attitude towards participation of their daughter:** It must be understand by the parents that the social scenario has been changing fast. So, girls should not be considered as home maker only. She should be given equal opportunity with the male child to come forward and take part in sports.
- **Understand the limitations of females:** The teachers and coaches must consider the social and cultural limitations of girl child while dealing with them. They should have positive expectations that girls can do as hard as boys.

- **Handling women athletes:** While dealing with the women athletes it must be borne in mind that biologically they are emotionally weaker and sensitive in comparison to men. The caches and teachers should consider the cultural barriers she has to face to come forward for sports. They must be dealt sympathetically while training and competitions.
- **Female's aggression in Indian context:** It has been observed that females in India have lots of hidden aggression due to social and environmental impact and sports is the best medium to express this in a constructive way.
- **Career opportunities for female sports person:** Mostly parents believe that sports participation of their daughters will not help them in future independent life. But, if they

are given equal opportunities as males in the field of sports, they may allow their daughters to come forward for the sports participation as this would make them financially independent and will serve as financial support system to the family.

Role of media coverage of women’s sport and women in sport

A total number of 150 subjects from northern region were surveyed and it was found that media coverage of women in sport today was mostly rated by the respondents as poor (43%). This is congruent with the respondents rating of the media coverage of female sport as also poor (38%). Only 1% and 3% sample believe that media played an excellent role in coverage of female in sports and female sports respectively.

Table 2

	Excellent	Good	Undecided	Satisfactory	Poor
Media coverage of women in sport	1	14	11	31	43
Media coverage in female sports	3	17	13	29	38

Ideology in relation to female sports participation

- Although, the participation of women in sports and physical activity has increased dramatically. But, many girls in the country are not still able to take advantage of the benefits of regular sports and physical activities due to inequitable access and opportunities. Therefore, a central challenge facing government, educational institutions, sports bodies and communities is to develop forms of physical activity that are sensitive to girl's needs and interests. We should be looking for the ways to make sports and other physical activities more 'child friendly' and 'youth friendly' and most importantly 'female friendly'. The following guidelines will assist in decision making regarding participation in sports by females. Strategies should be implemented which build upon the enjoyment, and allow them to participate as fully as possible, in forms that offer them satisfaction and opportunities for achievements.
- There is no reason to separate pre-pubescent children by gender in sports and games and in other physical education programme.
- Females can achieve higher levels of physical fitness through strenuous physical activities to improve their physical and motor fitness. The methods of developing such components have no unfavourable influence on their physiological functions such as menstruation, pregnancy and child birth.
- Strength training is extremely valuable. There should not be any bar to their participation in strength demanding events such as pole vault, hammer throw, wrestling and boxing etc.
- Sports programme should reflect local cultural needs if they are to engage and sustain girl’s participation.
- The organisation of sports groups and programmes should include women in key roles, such as coach, mentor and role models drawn from the local community and schools
- Practices should be established which recognise the importance of fun, health and social interaction in sports

participation.

- Few girls regularly engage in sports and physical activities, as an integral part of their lifestyle. Any strategies concerned with raising participation among youth need to remember that neither girls nor boys are ‘the problem’, rather the difficulty lies with the ways in which these activities are constructed and presented.
- The more opportunities that are available for girls to be physically active, the more they are active. Strategies need to be put in place that ensures activities, settings, and facilities are easily accessible and safe.

Strategies (Suggestions) and future recommendation to encourage female participation in sports

The policies and measures for the encouragement of female sports participation can be categorized into six major categories:

- Promotion
- Trials
- Women programs
- Education/support
- Organization/scheduling and
- Grants/Funding
- Promotion -advertising in private schools, using a sports development officer to and coach to visit schools, use of top female athletes as role models to young females updating local website to bring awareness of the possibilities made for women
- Trials -the use of free day trials (‘women only, come and try days),learn to coach days free education for female coaches
- Women specific sport creation of new programs/games targeted at females (e.g. extensions such as non-contact rugby schedules/activities targeted to the needs of working, having a female coordinator and ladies representatives, encourage female peers to support each other and retaining women referees.

- Organization/Scheduling focus organization goals on achieving greater involvement, formation of a women's committee offering competition at all levels from grass roots to elite, for juniors through to seniors international level competitions
- Grants/Funding accessing grants to encourage/reward women working with the government on facility grants gaining of a special imitative grant from the state government aimed to expose women participants to the governance elements of the sport (allowed for modification of playing environment).

Conclusion

This attempt highlights though, there are major barriers for women participation in sports. One of the biggest barriers associated with levels of activity is the perception that physical activity is unfeminine. This is apparent in the gender imbalance evident across the higher levels of the sporting industry, the media portrayal of sporting activity and the formative experiences of many women. The existence of cultural discourses which promote the notion that sport is not for women and women are not for sport. In addition to the above, women may also find it necessary to compete with traditional cultural stereotypes, that of the 'home-maker' and 'care-giver' for example, woman's self perception and the perception of others, as well as practical limits upon a woman's free time.

References

1. Active Women National policy on women and Girls in Sports, Recreation and Physical activity, Canberra: Australia Sports Commission, 1992-2002.
2. Belaz EK. Psycho-socio study of outstanding female athletes. *The Research Quarterly*, 1975.
3. Bhalerao. Analysis of problems faced by women players who participate in inter-university sport competitions, Ph.D. thesis, Nagpur University, 2002.
4. Bhullar *et al.* Parental influence on sports participation of their daughters, *HPE-FORUM*, 2002, 2.
5. Greendorfer S. The media's role in accommodating and resisting stereotyped images of women in sport, Sage Publications, 1994; 28-44.
6. Gupta SK. Parents and Teachers attitude and Recreation towards participation in sports by Young athletes of a University in an Indian State. *PU Chd*, 1997.
7. Husan H. A Study on Female and Sports condition in India An Article *Banasthali Vidyapith*, Rajasthan, 2015.
8. Massao P, Kari Fasting. Sports and Women Social Issues in International perspective, *ISCPEs*, 2003.
9. National women sports and recreation survey. Executive summary, submitted to Australian Women sports and Recreation Association *AWRA*, 2007.
10. Rao NS. Constraint of Indian Women participation in games and sports. *Br. J Sports Med*, 2010, 44.