

## GENDER INEQUALITY IN SPORTS: WOMEN < MEN

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### ABSTRACT

Women have been fighting for equality all throughout history. Gender inequality in the sports industry has been a debatable topic since the beginning of time. There are many instances where women have faced discrimination in relationships, at work places, education, athletic opportunities, etc. Despite these hurdles faced by women in athletics, they have led and are leading way to gender equality. This paper presents an overview of gender inequality in sports industry and discusses about the gender equality, and relevant social, ethical concerns.

**Keywords:** *sports industry, female athletes, gender discrimination, gender equality*

### INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination in the athletics industry has long been a debateable subject. Even the founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, said in 1896, "No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks." Gender equality has come a long way. UNESCO also recognised sports and physical activity as a human right in 1978. Participation in sports and physical activities benefits women just like it benefits men. It helps in developing leadership skills, self esteem, grades, good health etc. Women who participate in sports or any kind of physical activity tend to be more confident and good in academics. We need to develop an environment where sports are for all and not just for few, in which every individual is given an opportunity to flourish equally.

Women in India are still seen as home-making and childrearing machines. In some cities, women have also started earning their own living but participation in sports is still low-spirited. Major problems are social, psychological, financial and family issues. Sexual harassment done by coaches is nothing new.

The media and the people are also at fault as they show an "extra interest" in the personal lives on women athletes, creating controversies like the sports costume they wear, etc. At some point of the other, even the best of sportswomen in India have faced discrimination in

their sports career, be it at the hands of authorities, selection teams, coaches, governments, or even their own families. The situation is better as of now, as we are heading towards betterment as so many talented women in India reaching the peaks.

## **SOCIAL- CULTURAL ISSUES**

The issue of gender equality in sports is as old as sports itself. Sports industry is one area where the discrimination is highly evident. The problem is more socio- physiological than anything else. Women in the world make up 50% of the population, but still they are not treated equal. Men are still considered as the better sex. Women are still trying to establish their identity and make a space for themselves.

Historically, women and girls have not been provided equal opportunities in sport because of (a) perceptions relative to physiological differences between the sexes, (b) societal norms and attitudes, and (c) organizational rules and support. In the early 1900's, the doctors and female physical educators thought that doing such rigorous activities like men, would damage the reproductive capacity in women. As a result, early sports activities for women, were limited to dance, archery, swimming, tennis etc. More recent and on-going research has shown that there are no medical, mental, or emotional reasons that support the restriction of women/girls from participating and competing in sport.

It was only after 1947, when we achieved independence that we started developing as a modern nation, with special rights to half of its citizens namely women. Pandit Nehru has said that "to awaken the people, it is the woman who must be awakened, once she is on the move, the family moves, the nation moves"

## **GENDER DISCRIMINATION**

As previously mentioned, women face gender equality issues in sports governance and as female athletes. Women lack leadership positions in sports industry as they are still considered a weaker sex and that, all processes operate within a hegemonic masculine norm.<sup>(1)</sup> Gender inequality has become an institutionalized practice within sport organizations.

All female athletes, who are in the hope of pursuing their careers in the field of sports, male dominance in sports have become a nightmare for them. Women are often perceived as being too weak for sport, particularly endurance sports like marathons and weightlifting.

Most people still hold the belief that sports are harmful to women's health, particularly to their reproductive health.

### **TITLE IX**

Title IX was a landmark piece of legislations that banned sexual discrimination in all schools, including in athletics. The Title IX Statute states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance".<sup>(2)</sup> The US Congress passed Title IX of the Omnibus Education Act of 1972, and, mandated equal federal funding opportunities towards male and female students in higher education<sup>(3)</sup> which encouraged more girls and women to participate in sports.

This increased accessibility to sports sparked a change of less than 32,000 intercollegiate women and 300,000 high school girls that participated in sports prior to 'Title IX' to 200,000 intercollegiate women and three million girls that participated in sports in 2010.<sup>(4)</sup> Title IX has made possible for women and girls to be more involved in sports.

### **WOMEN AND SPORTS**

Sport has the power to change lives. By teaching women and girls' teamwork, self-reliance, resilience and confidence, sport is one of the great drivers of gender equality. Women in sport defy gender stereotypes and social norms, make inspiring role models, and show men and women as equals.

The International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport, adopted by UNESCO's 38th General Conference, affirms that 'equal opportunity to participate and be involved at all supervision and decision-making levels in physical education, physical activity and sport, whether for the purpose of recreation, health promotion or high performance, is the right of every girl and every woman that must be actively enforced'.<sup>(5)</sup>

The first Indian woman to participate in the Olympics was in 1952. In 1975, the Government of India inaugurated the National Sports festival for women with a view to encourage women sports. The National festival is preceded by competitions at the local and the district level.

### **MEDIA EXPOSURE OF WOMEN SPORTS**

Gender inequality, as noted, has many negative consequences for female athletes. In addition to the unequal type of coverage that female athletes receive, they also receive less overall coverage.<sup>(6)</sup> Women's sports are also looked upon as less exciting and slower than men's sports.<sup>(7)</sup> In a study conducted, participants reported that they had minimal experience with women's sports and only watched women's sports if that is what was on television.

The media, though, does not give women's sports much coverage, minimizing the frequency of which sports fans view women's sports. In fact, less than 10% of sports media covers women's sports. Such misrepresentation of women's sports is responsible for the lack of interest in women's sports<sup>(8)</sup> and reinforces the public's general negative attitudes towards women. This lack of coverage of women's sports may be holding sports fans back from developing interest in women's sports. The media, however, may play an important role in changing the inequalities women face in sports.

## **BENEFITS OF SPORTS**

Many studies have shown the importance of exercise in increasing cardiovascular endurance and strength, and decreasing the chances of heart attacks, strokes, back problems, osteoporosis, and other health problems. A recent study shows that women who exercise regularly from menarche throughout their childbearing years can significantly reduce their risk of contracting premenopausal breast cancer. Women who exercised at least 4 hours/week reduced their risk by over 50%, and women who exercised 1-3 hours/week reduced their risk by 30%. Some of the benefits of sports are :

- a) Confidence building
- b) Peace of mind
- c) Discipline
- d) All round development
- e) Extra credit in exam
- f) Job and career opportunities
- g) Academic and leadership benefits and many more.

## **NEED FOR SOCIAL AWARENESS**

Social awareness needs to be created in order to provide equal opportunities to both girls and boys in sports industry. Parents need to play a crucial role. They can insist the schools to provide equal opportunities of physical activities to both their sons and daughters. Children of parents who had played or play any sport, tend to be more involved in sports activities in comparison to children whose parents are not involved in any sports activities. Parents and educational institutions, together can work on challenging the myths, spread general awareness about the benefit of sports and support girl child in engaging in sports activities as it does more good than causing any harm. It teaches mental toughness, how to overcome challenges and keeps us mentally and physically in shape.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sports and the sports world have been tied with the masculine domain, and there has been a legacy of biasness against the female athletes. It is important to give women equal opportunity in sport governance because gender diverse sport organizations are found to be more successful than those that are all male. Girls and women have “tackled” narrow, negative, and limiting concepts and ideas that they should not participate in sports, sweat, show aggression, or compete, and begun to include physical strength and athletic competence in the definition of femininity.

Further, in order for women to have true equality in sport, the media will need to begin to recognize women for their athletic ability and not their looks or personal life alone. Society needs to move away from the social conditioning of women into gender stereotyped roles and allow for young girls to choose their own path, especially sports.

It may seem as if we have a lot we can complain about sports, but the truth is that, sport is simply beautiful. Sports have changed and helps change humanity. It teaches us mental toughness, helps to overcome challenges, introduces us to team work, teaches responsibility, and keeps us mentally and physically in shape. Sport creates amazing character and teaches true attributes to be a good person.

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