



Sociology of Sports with focus on gender

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Abstract

Sport is an important social institution that reflects cultural values, social norms, and power relations in society. The sociology of sport studies how sports connect with issues such as gender, race, class, media influence, and economic inequality. This paper examines gender inequality in sports, focusing on football (soccer). Although women's participation in sports has increased in recent years, inequalities still exist in salaries, media coverage, leadership roles, and recognition. The study explores historical barriers, structural inequalities in sports organizations, and the role of media in shaping gender perceptions. It argues that despite growing awareness of gender equality, structural inequalities in football continue to limit opportunities for women. Real progress requires stronger policies, greater investment in women's football, and changes in societal attitudes toward female athletes.

Keywords: Sociology of sport, gender inequality in sports, women's football, gender equality, sports and society

Introduction

Sport plays an important role in shaping society and culture. It influences social identity, cultural values, and economic systems, and sociologists study sport as a social institution that can reflect and reinforce social inequalities. Historically, sports were dominated by men, as qualities like strength and competition were associated with masculinity. Women were often discouraged or restricted from participating in sports due to social beliefs about their abilities. Although women's participation in sports has increased in recent decades, gender inequality still exists. Football, the world's most popular sport, highlights these differences, as men's football receives far more revenue, investment, and media attention than women's football. This paper examines gender inequality in sports by analyzing participation, economic gaps, media representation, and leadership opportunities, with a focus on football.

Meaning of Sociology of Sports

Sociology of sports refers to the study of how sports interact with society and social institutions. It examines the way sports influence behavior, relationships, and power structures in communities.

Researchers in sports sociology analyze issues such as:

- Gender inequality
- Class and access to sports facilities
- Race and representation
- Commercialization and media influence
- National identity and global competition

Sports provide an important lens through which society can be understood. For example, participation in sports may depend on economic status, educational opportunities, or cultural expectations. Similarly, sporting events can strengthen national identity and social unity during international competitions.

Historical Development of Women in Sports

Women's involvement in sports has changed greatly over the past century. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries, women were often excluded from competitive sports because many societies believed intense physical activity was harmful to them.

A major step toward inclusion occurred when women first participated in the Summer Olympics, though only in a few events like tennis and golf. Over time, schools and universities also helped expand women's participation through physical education and sports programs.

In football, resistance was strong. The the Football Association banned women from playing in official stadiums in 1921, delaying the development of the sport for nearly fifty years.

Despite these barriers, women continued forming teams and competitions. A major breakthrough came with the creation of the FIFA Women's World Cup in 1991, which greatly increased the popularity and global recognition of women's football.

Gender Inequality in Sports

Despite progress, gender inequality still exists in sports. Female athletes often face barriers related to funding, media representation, and leadership opportunities. Media coverage of women's sports remains significantly lower compared to men's sports. Research studies indicate that women's sports receive a small percentage of total sports broadcasting time. Another issue is the gender pays gap. In many professional sports leagues, male athletes earn significantly higher salaries than female athletes. Sponsorship opportunities are also uneven, as companies often invest more in men's competitions due to higher media exposure. Leadership positions in sports organizations are also dominated by men. Coaching, management, and administrative roles in professional sports are often held by male professionals, limiting women's representation in decision-making roles. Addressing these inequalities requires institutional reforms, investment in women's sports programs, and greater media representation of female athletes.

Salary Comparison in Professional Football

Category	Men's Football	Women's Football
Average Top League Salary	\$3–5 million per year	\$50,000–\$120,000 per year
Sponsorship Revenue	Very high	Growing but limited
Transfer Market Value	Extremely high	Much lower
League Investment	Billions globally	Increasing but limited

Participation Trends in Women's Sports

Despite existing challenges, participation rates among women in sports have grown significantly over the past few decades. Educational programs, government initiatives, and international sports organizations have all contributed to this growth.

Youth development programs have been especially important in increasing participation among girls. Schools and universities now offer more opportunities for female students to engage in sports.

Global Participation in Women's Football

Year	Estimated Female Players Worldwide
2000	~15 million
2010	~26 million
2020	~35 million
2024	Over 40 million

Social Impact of Women's Sports

Women's sports have played an important role in challenging traditional gender norms. Successful female athletes demonstrate that women can achieve excellence in

strength, endurance, leadership, and strategy.

Participation in sports also improves confidence, physical health, and leadership skills among girls and young women. Sports programs have been used globally to empower women and encourage education.

Female athletes often serve as role models who inspire the next generation. Their achievements demonstrate that sports can be a platform for social change, equality, and empowerment.

Sports and Media Representation

Media plays a powerful role in shaping public perception of sports. Television, newspapers, and digital platforms determine which sports receive attention and how athletes are portrayed.

Men's sports dominate broadcasting schedules and sports journalism. Women's competitions often receive limited coverage or are presented in ways that focus on appearance rather than athletic achievement.

However, social media has started to change this pattern. Female athletes can now communicate directly with fans and promote their achievements without relying solely on traditional media organizations.

Media Coverage Distribution

Type of Coverage	Men's Sports	Women's Sports
Television Broadcast	80–90%	10–20%
Sports News Articles	75–85%	15–25%
Sponsorship Advertising	Very high	Moderate

Case Example: Gender and Sports in India

India provides an interesting example of the relationship between gender and sports participation. Traditionally, cultural expectations limited women's involvement in competitive sports. However, over the last two decades, female athletes have achieved remarkable success in international competitions. Their achievements have inspired young girls across the country to pursue sports careers. Government initiatives, scholarships, and sports academies have helped increase opportunities for women athletes. Although challenges remain, the visibility of successful female athletes has helped change public attitudes toward women in sports.

Challenges in Modern Sports

Modern sports face several challenges related to gender equality. These include unequal pay, limited sponsorship opportunities, and social stereotypes that discourage female participation in certain sports.

Another issue is the lack of female representation in sports leadership. Increasing the number of women in coaching and administrative roles can help create more inclusive sports organizations.

Addressing these challenges requires collaboration between governments, sports federations, educational institutions, and media organizations.

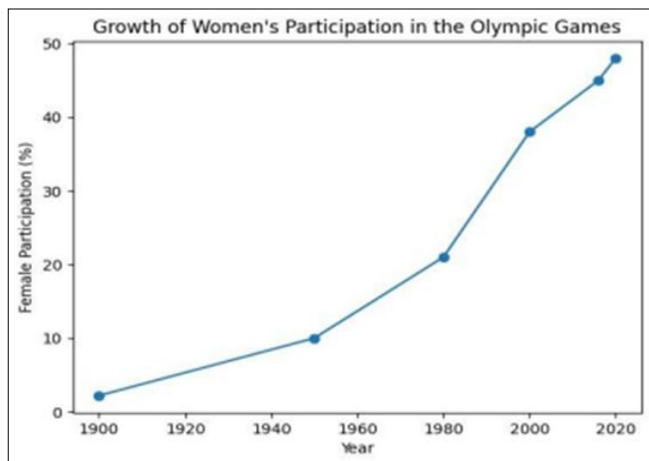
Gender Differences in Sports Opportunities

Area	Men	Women
Media Coverage	Extensive broadcasting and promotion	Limited coverage in many sports
Professional Salaries	Higher salaries and prize money	Lower average earnings
Leadership Roles	Majority of coaches and administrators	Fewer leadership opportunities
Sponsorship	More corporate sponsorship deals	Less sponsorship investment

Female Participation in Olympic Games

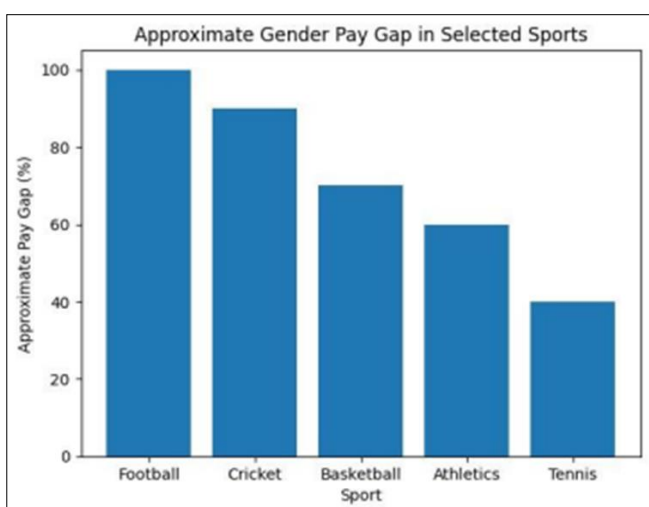
Year	Female Participation (%)
1900	2.2
1950	10
1980	21
2000	38
2016	45
2020	48

Growth of Women's Participation in the Olympics



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Gender Pay Gap in Selected Sports



Conclusion

The sociology of sports provides valuable insight into how gender inequalities operate within athletic institutions. Although women have made significant progress in gaining access to sports, disparities continue to exist in areas such as salaries, media coverage, and leadership roles.

Football illustrates both the challenges and possibilities associated with gender equality in sports. While women's football has grown rapidly in popularity and participation, it still receives less financial and institutional support compared to men's football.

Achieving gender equality in sports requires long-term commitment from governments, sports organizations, media institutions, and society as a whole. By promoting equal opportunities and challenging traditional gender stereotypes, sports can become a powerful platform for social change.

Ultimately, creating an equitable sporting environment benefits not only female athletes but also the broader development of sports and society.

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