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## A Study on Barriers to Women and Girls' Participation in Sports: A Case Study of Haryana

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### ABSTRACT

*Historically women and feminity have been defined in relation and contrast to men and masculinity. Sports and the sports world have been tied with the masculine domain and there has been a legacy of biasness against the female athlete. In the past few decades this trend has been confronted and challenged. The ability to challenge restrictive notions about women's physical appearance, athletic ability and participation in sports, is evident through their increased involvement in sports. Traditional stereotypes for females have slowly been changing but there is still a long way to go. Despite these positive strides, female sports persons still face multiple challenges when pursuing their sports desires, which are largely due to long- standing gender norms. Only the face of the problem has changed from ancient to modern times. So keeping in view the challenges before women sports persons in the traditional society the study has been developed to analyze the status of women sports persons in Haryana.*

*The objectives of this research project are to know the socio-economic profile of women sports persons, their personal achievements, motivational factors, societal perceptions, barriers and future prospects of female sportspersons. In this study both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used to know the status of women in sports in Haryana. Case study method has been applied and three districts namely Kurukshetra, Sonapat and Rohtak were selected to collect the data. Sports persons, who have played at state, national or international level from schools and colleges or universities - both the girls as well as coeducational, of the above districts have been included in the study. A total of 55 case studies have been gathered personally with the help of purposive sampling technique. Some coaches male and female both were also interviewed. All the case studies have been analyzed below to know the present status of women sports persons.*

**Keywords:** *Women sports persons, Masculine, Gender stereotypes, Traditional, Patriarchal society.*

### INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that in every society girls and women are less likely than boys and men to participate in sports and sport continues to be dominated by males. It is because society has been trained to think of sports in terms of genderedness. Males are expected to demonstrate certain characteristics and behaviours that are masculine, while females are held accountable for being feminine. Traditionally, females have been expected to maintain a beautiful and delicate body, remain passive and nurturing. Femininity is a issue of appearance and behaviour and assigning specific gender roles. The expectation of femininity often results in women being dissuaded from

lifting weights, sweating, grunting, being aggressive, participating and competing in sports and physical activities. Sometimes negative consequences are attached to it like physical problems endangering their ability to have children, thereby limiting women's participation in sports.

Men are encouraged and taught to participate in strenuous, aggressive, competitive team sports while women are commonly steered toward individual aesthetically pleasing activities like gymnastics, synchronized swimming etc. Existing social constructs of masculinity and femininity or socially accepted ways of expressing what it means to be a man or woman in a particular socio-cultural context play a key role in determining access, level of participation and benefits from sport (Hannan, 2006). Dividing sports along masculine and feminine lines encourages and allows women to accept physical limits that have been placed on them. For generations it has been maintained that women are weaker sex. It has been an enduring myth – insidious and difficult. Socially and culturally imposed restrictions on women have tended to cloud biological fact. Sexist dogma has in a sense buried the true physical potential of women.

The traditional gender stereotypes with respect to sports and physical activity have been challenged and confronted by many feminists. Comparing traditional female gender stereotypes with those of the 21<sup>st</sup> century women in sports it is clear that female sports persons have established themselves in the sports world. Their ability to challenge sexist barriers and restrictions, notions about women's physical appearance, athletic ability and participation in sports is evident through their increased involvement in sports.

The experience of many women athletes suggests a need to develop additional definitions of femininity. Because many girls still do not receive the same kind of encouragement as their brothers, to be socially independent and physically active. However after the feminist movements of 1970, women's roles expanded into many areas which were occupied by men like the competitive women's body building. This sport is totally in contradiction with the definition of femininity. Women body builders have provided new image and challenged the traditional notion of female frailty. They raised question about the biology of gender difference by showing hardness and strength which are exclusively male attributes. Women participating in sports demonstrated that notions of female frailty were grounded in ideology rather than nature.

Since 1970s there has been noticed a radical increase in the number of sport participation opportunities for girls and women. Not only the number of girls participating in sports has increased but the area of variety of sport participation is also widened. Sports by challenging gender norms reduce restrictions and offer girls greater mobility, access to public spaces and more opportunities for their physical, intellectual and social development.

## **RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

The society expects males and females to adopt, believe in and fulfill specific gender roles and stereotypes. Society demands compliance to the enforced gender order. When these gender norms are violated by any member of the society, he or she is looked upon from a different perspective. Sports and physical activity is one of the specific areas in which traditional gender stereotypes have been evaluated and analyzed. However, it is also true that traditional female stereotypes continue to prevail in somewhat manner forcing women to leave their involvement in sports.

Haryana can be a role model for other states for a number of girls coming up in sports. Despite the defame that Haryana has gained in recent times for a variety of cases showing strong patriarchal roots like highly skewed sex ratio, dictate of caste panchayats in the form of orders of Honour Killing, increased rate of crime against women, extreme burden of work on women and many more instances of gender discrimination in the state, there are several girls who have shown great potential in sports. With a patriarchal structure of the Haryanavi society, there is a very little scope for women's recreational and physical activities. In the traditional way of living women still need to live under the veil. Very young girls are put into the household chores and farm activities and common problems like child marriage, trafficking of women, low educational level of girls have attributed to low status of women. The state is known for its sporting culture and men have always been taking part in it. But now women are also participating in various physical activities that were earlier male dominated. They are trying to create space for themselves and prove their potential in the male world. However, in a society which does not allow a daughter to have her basic education, to let her take part in sports is not hurdleless. They are facing hurdles not only on the part of family, trainers, female coaches, and institutional encouragement for them; their personal achievements are overshadowed by their gender identity, gender roles, social acceptance and gender discrimination including harassment at various levels.

Thus, in the light of the Haryanavi social fabric having different environment for girls and boys and the importance of sport for girls in coming out of that biased environment, the study aims to investigate the present status of women sport persons in Haryana.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The study has the following objectives:

1. To know the socio-economic profile of women sport persons.
2. To know the personal achievements of women sport persons.
3. To study the motivational factors associated with developing interest in sports.
4. To assess the perception of self, family, society and male-female coaches, colleagues and other sports related persons towards women in sports.
5. To analyze the barriers responsible for discouraging women in sports.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Both the qualitative and quantitative methods have been applied in the present study.

### **Sample:**

The study has been undertaken in three districts of Haryana namely Kurukshetra, Rohtak and Sonapat keeping in mind that being one of the important educational hubs of Haryana there would be numerous girls available in these three districts who are aspiring to reach at or already reached at any level of sports. The unit of the study is girls who have played any sport either at the state, national or international level. These girls are divided into two categories i.e. girls playing at the school level and girls playing at the college or university level. Purposive sampling method is applied to collect the sample. Sample from the university or college is collected from the three universities in the above mentioned three districts i.e. Kurukshetra University from

district Kurukshetra, Maharishi Dayanand University from Rohtak and BhagatPhool Singh Mahila Vishwavidyalya from Khanpur, Sonapat and some affiliated colleges of these universities. From schools it is collected from 2-3 schools surrounding these universities. One girl sports school i.e. Bhai SurenderMalik Memorial Sports School (Girls) Khelgaon, Nidani is also covered. It is kept in mind while selecting the schools, universities and colleges that both the girls and co-educational institutes should be covered to get an equal representation of conditions, facilities, opportunities and problems of women sports persons in both the educational institutes at school, college and university level. Thus a total of 55 woman sports persons were interviewed. Besides women sport persons some coaches i.e.03 male and 01 female have also been contacted to gather relevant information.

### Tool and Method Of Data Collection

Case study method is used for the collection of data. To apply this method an unstructured questionnaire is designed keeping in view the objectives of the study. Thus the questionnaire consists of questions regarding background information of the respondents, their personal achievements, motivational factors, barriers and gender discrimination and scope of sports for girls etc. Respondents from the schools as well as from the universities have been contacted personally and their detailed case study related to their entry into the sport etc. has been recorded by the investigators. In most of the cases the respondents have been contacted in the playgrounds. Besides women sport persons, some of the coaches are also interviewed and necessary information is gathered to arrive at a conclusion.

### Analysis of Results

Personal case studies have been analyzed as per the objectives of the study.

### Major Findings and Conclusion

#### 1. Personal Profile of the Respondents

**Table I: Age of the Respondents**

Age Group (Years)	No.	Percentage
14 – 17	22	40.00
18 – 21	28	50.00
22 & above	5	10.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

Girls included in the study belong to three age groups viz. 14-17, 18-21 and 22-above 22 years of age. All these respondents were from different schools and universities. 50% i. e. majority of the respondents were from 18-21 years age group.

**Table II: Area of the Respondents**

Area	No.	Percentage
Urban	17	30.00
Rural	38	70.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

The respondents of the study belong to both urban and rural areas, 30% respondents were from urban areas and 70% from rural areas.

**Table III: Caste of the Respondents**

Caste	No.	Percentage
General	40	73.00
Scheduled Caste	6	11.00
Backward Caste	9	16.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

As far as caste is concerned majority of the respondents from all age-groups were from general category i.e. 73%, 11% respondents were from scheduled caste and 16% from backward caste.

**Table IV: Educational Level of the Respondents**

Educational Level	No.	Percentage
Below Matric	2	4.00
Matric	6	11.00
Senior Secondary	19	34.00
Graduation	23	42.00
Post Graduation	5	9.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

Respondents in the study were of different educational levels. 42% respondents were graduates, 9% were post graduates, 34% of the respondents were studying in Senior Secondary and 11% were educated up to the matric level. All the respondents were pursuing their further studies.

**Table V: School & College of the Respondents**

	No.	Percentage
School	28	51.00
College	27	49.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

In this study 51% respondents were from schools and 49% respondents were from college/universities.

**Table VI: Type of Game**

Game	No.
Judo	6
Football	5
Hockey	8
Kabbadi	3
Wrestling	5
Boxing	3
Kick-Boxing	2
Kho-Kho	5
Yoga	3
Handball	2



Netball	1
Volleyball	6
Taekwando	3
Shooting	1
Chess	1
Rowing	1
Busho	1
Ball Badminton	3
Basketball	2
Throw-ball	1
Badminton	1

It is clearly evident that out of 55 women players 20 players were from combat games for e.g. 6 from judo, 5 from boxing. Mostly all these 20 girls faced familial and societal opposition on the selection of combat sport in the beginning of their career because of the myth that girls become masculine if they participate in these so called manly sports. It is also presumed that some sports are for girls and some are not. On the other hand girls who are associated with other sports like football, ball badminton, basketball etc. also faced problems but those problems were of other type i.e. poverty, unavailability of coach, unavailability of ground etc. Thus it is evident that girls associated with combat games faced more restrictive normative boundaries while selecting the sport.

**1. Achievements and Scholarships:**

**Table VII: Level of Participation**

Level	No.	Percentage
District	8	14.00
State	17	31.00
National	28	51.00
International	2	4.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

As far as achievements and scholarships are concerned out of the total sample there were 2 international level players, 28 national, 17 state and 8 district level players.

During the study it was found that out of 55 respondents only 30 got scholarships. Rest of the girls were either not aware about the procedure for applying for scholarship or they have not received the scholarship yet because of their own ignorance. Even some of the university girls were also not aware about the procedure of application so never availed the benefit of scholarship upto now.

It was also observed that in comparison to other schools, girls of sports schools were more aware about the scholarship procedure and have received more scholarships.

**2. Motivation:**

The data revealed that there were a number of significant motivational factors that influenced the girls' attitude towards sports participation.

The main factor that motivated girls for sports participation was their self interest and support of the family. They had their self-interest in sports because they wanted to prove their physical strength and at the same time to enjoy health benefits of physical activity. Family (50%) also plays a crucial role in girls' lives and has a significant impact on various aspects of their development (i.e. their tastes, interests, actions) as well as their access to opportunities and resources. Respondents whose parents motivated them for sports participation have shown good results and achieved a certain level and the respondents whose parents did not place any importance to sports viewed sports and physical activity in a different way.

Friends were also identified by some respondents for encouraging participation in sports.

The role of the coach of school/college in encouraging girls to participate in sports was also acknowledged by respondents (50%). Few respondents reported that they got motivation from their elder sister/brother when their whole family was against their sports participation.

Some girls also got motivated from their role models.

### 3. Barriers:

- **Personal Barriers:** Only one respondent faced rejection due to her height. She said that she was a good player of volleyball but due to her short height her coach and members of selection committee showed biasness against her. So she left volleyball. Though later on everybody said her that being short does not mean that a player cannot play professional volleyball. Usually the only distinction for height in volleyball is for position. Players in the backrow do not need to be tall. Ignorance of her coach towards her height and biasness of the selection committee members forced her to leave the game in which she wanted to make a career. Girls are relatively more self conscious than males. More self conscious they feel about their bodies, the less likely they are to take part in sport. As a sportsperson a girl is bound to do ground practice, they think that this will affect their skin and regular exercise will make them appear manly.

It was also observed that girls, on an average, have less self confidence than boys and rate their performance or ability more negatively than boys do. So in spite of their interest in sports they hesitate to participate.

- **Financial Barriers:** As in this study most of the girls were from rural background and from lower middle class families, so all of them faced financial problems. In some cases coaches helped financially where respondents were not even able to buy sports kit, shoes etc. Even sometimes they were not having money to pay the entrance fee and in this condition also their coaches helped them out.
- **Familial Barriers:** Education of parents has played an important role in sport participation of a girl. More educated parents opposed less and less educated parents opposed more. Most of the respondents from lower middle class families faced family resistance towards their sport participation as their parents were not educated. The post graduate or graduate parents were aware of the sports benefit for girls, like better health, better grades and better career.

In case of school girls it was noticed that parents did not want their daughters' studies to be neglected, so they opposed sport participation. They were of the opinion that minimum level of schooling is compulsory along with a child's participation in sports. But this was not true

for every parent. Some parents were of the opinion that if a child is active in sports then he/she can do well in studies also because physical activity improves concentration, coordination, health etc. Respondents whose parents were highly educated were of the opinion that studies and sports both are equally important. They believed that a child active in sports will also give good results in academics.

Moreover mothers of some respondents were opposed because of the myth that sport participation can affect a girls menstrual cycle.

Thus it was observed in the study that upper class families from urban areas were not as resistant to the idea of girls sport participation as the lower class families from rural area were.

Besides education, self interest of the parents also played an important role in allowing their children for sports but some parents amongst these due to social pressure opposed the girls for their involvement in sport. It was also noticed that some parents in the beginning stopped their girls for sport participation but later on supported them a little for the sake of happiness of their daughters.

The results showed that the families who give more preference and special care to sons discriminate against girls and overburden them with household chores. Girls belonging to such families faced more opposition for sport participation. Mostly in rural areas girls are overloaded with domestic work. As a girl they are expected to help her mother in household chores, regardless of whether she is studying or not. Girls are taught to cook, clean, grow vegetables and work in fields. They are not encouraged for education and sport participation. So girls of rural areas due to such domestic overload reported of lack of time. They said that sometimes they felt very exhausted and thought of leaving their game.

Due to restricted mobility most of the respondents were barred from sport participation. Both, in rural and urban areas parents do not allow their daughters to go to distant places alone for taking sports coaching because of security issues. Whereas sons are allowed to go anywhere alone. Girls are often targeted more in crimes such as rape, sexual attacks etc. So, parents feel more worried about their daughters.

It was also observed that girls whose parents were inactive in sports resisted whereas parents who were involved in sports were more likely to encourage their daughters to continue their involvement in sport.

- **Societal Barrier:** Due to social and religious pressure a girl in our society is expected to marry in her early 20's. Parents do not want to educate them beyond a basic level as well as they do not allow girls for sport participation after marriage. In our patriarchal society after marriage a woman spends significantly more time on household chores and caring work, such as child rearing or caring of sick than their male counterparts. This is determined in large part by traditional gender roles that have been accepted by society and thus many respondents in the study said that they are aware that they cannot pursue their career in sports after marriage. Their in-laws won't allow them for sport participation. So, why should they waste time and energy on sport.



Since girls are considered to be members of their future husband's family, many refuse to "waste" money educating a daughter who will not be able to use her education for the benefit of her natal family. All these factors act as a barrier in girls' education and sports participation also.

## CONCLUSION

Women in sports in the last few years have made tremendous inroads. Today women can compete in sports, once a vestige of male domination; there is now room for women in that portrayed in the same light as their male counter parts. This project was developed to analyze the status, achievements and problems of the women players during their sports career.

For this study many women sports persons of different levels were interviewed. Most of them were national level players associated with different games. On the basis of interviews of all those women sports persons it can be concluded that:-

1. The study revealed that overcoming all odds most of the girls in sports were from lower middle class and middle class families.
2. Parent's interest, support and motivation from coaches were the most important motivational factors associated with developing interest of girls in sports. Other factors were motivation from friends, relatives and seniors.
3. It was also observed that a girl as a sports person faced gender inequality in all the areas i.e. home, society, school and college.
4. The results revealed that there were many barriers that discouraged participation of girls in sports and the main barrier responsible for discouragement was societal perception regarding girls that they are "weaker sex" in terms of physical strength and emotionally too, so they cannot excel in sports.
5. The study has showed that women sports persons of school level were facing more institutional and infrastructural problems in comparison to college/university level sports persons. They are not given enough opportunities in schools.
6. Mostly women sports persons were found interested in government jobs like in railways, police, army etc. Some wanted to become coaches while some sports girls were unaware about the future prospects in sports.
7. Women are perceived as being too weak for sports, particularly endurance sports, such as weight lifting, boxing and cycling as it is believed that these sports are harmful for women's health so girls related to endurance sports faced a lot of resistance.

## SUGGESTIONS

A number of initiatives are being implemented to encourage more and more girls for sports participation, because if more and more women and girls serve in leadership and decision making positions their influence as role models and mentors will encourage other women and

girls to participate at all levels of sports. Here are some suggestions to raise the awareness and providing encouragement and support to the women sportspersons:-

1. All types of sports facilities should be provided to girls in schools so that they may not look anywhere else for sports- which may not exist on cost or require money to pay for it.
2. It should be the responsibilities of schools and colleges to make aware the sports persons regarding scholarship application information and instructions.
3. Efforts should be made to promoting girls sports in villages.
4. Awareness regarding relationship between sports and women's health in schools/colleges should be raised.
5. Inclusion of physical education in formal curriculum of school should be made.
6. Schools should bring more equality to the sports programs.
7. Girls should be provided better security when they are traveling for competitions.
8. Media should give more and more coverage to women sports so that people become more aware about it.
9. Institutional and infrastructural facilities need to be improved.
10. Need of more hostels for sports girls at university level should be met.
11. All games should be given proper media coverage.
12. Attention should be given to Indian games also like hockey, kho-kho and kabbadi.
13. Girls should be ensured that they have privacy in changing rooms and in other facilities like rest rooms.
14. Counseling should be provided in schools regarding future prospects of women in sports.
15. Girls should be provided good accommodation and diet at the place of tournament because this directly affects their performance.
16. Girls should be allowed to select game of their own choice, not on the basis of availability of a particular coach in the schools/colleges.

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