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## GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN SPORTS

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### Abstract-

Gender discrimination in sports has been a long-standing issue, affecting athletes worldwide. Despite the progress made toward equality, disparities persist in areas such as pay, media representation, sponsorships, leadership roles, and access to resources. This research paper explores the historical context of gender discrimination in sports, examines current challenges, and discusses efforts to bridge the gap. By analyzing case studies, policies, and advocacy efforts, this paper aims to highlight the progress made and the work that remains to be done in achieving gender equity in sport.

### Introduction

Sports play a crucial role in shaping societal values and providing opportunities for individuals to showcase talent, develop teamwork, and promote physical fitness. However, gender discrimination continues to limit opportunities for many athletes, particularly women and non-binary individuals. Despite legislative measures such as Title IX in the United States and international advocacy for gender equity, significant disparities persist in pay, media coverage, sponsorship, and leadership roles. This paper examines the extent of gender discrimination in sports, the underlying causes, and the ongoing efforts to create a more equitable playing field.

### Historical Context of Gender Discrimination in Sports

The exclusion of women from competitive sports dates back centuries, with societal norms dictating that women should not participate in physically demanding activities. In ancient Greece, women were not allowed to compete in the Olympic Games. Similarly, in the early 20th century, female athletes faced resistance when trying to establish their presence in competitive sports.

The establishment of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894 did not initially support female participation. Women were first allowed to compete in the 1900 Paris Olympics, but only in limited events such as tennis and golf.

Over the years, female participation in sports has increased, yet the battle for equal opportunities and recognition continues.

### Forms of Gender Discrimination in Sports

#### **1. Pay Disparities**

One of the most significant forms of gender discrimination in sports is the pay gap between male and female athletes. Professional male athletes generally earn higher salaries, bonuses, and endorsement deals compared to their female counterparts. For example, the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team (USWNT) fought a legal battle against the U.S. Soccer Federation for equal pay despite outperforming the men's team in international competitions. Their victory in 2022 marked a historic step toward wage equality, but disparities persist across different sports.

#### **2. Unequal Media Coverage**

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception and generating revenue for athletes

through sponsorships and endorsements. Studies indicate that only about 4% of sports media coverage is dedicated to women's sports, while men's sports dominate airtime and headlines. This underrepresentation affects sponsorship opportunities for female athletes, as brands prefer to invest in widely broadcasted sports.

### 3. Limited Sponsorship and Endorsements

Female athletes receive significantly fewer endorsement deals than male athletes. Even high-profile female athletes such as Serena Williams and Simone Biles have faced challenges securing sponsorships compared to their male counterparts. The lack of visibility of women's sports in mainstream media further exacerbates this issue.

### 4. Underrepresentation in Leadership Roles

Women are significantly underrepresented in coaching and administrative roles within sports organizations. Male coaches dominate both men's and women's teams, limiting opportunities for women to lead and mentor athletes at professional levels. According to a 2021 report, only 10% of head coaches in men's professional sports leagues were women.

### 5. Gender Bias in Rules and Regulations

Many sports governing bodies impose different rules for men and women, reinforcing gender stereotypes. For example, in professional tennis, men play five-set matches while women play three-set matches, perpetuating the perception that female athletes are less capable of endurance. Additionally, female athletes have faced dress code restrictions, such as requiring skirts in certain sports, highlighting outdated gender norms.

### 6. Discriminatory Gender Testing

Several female athletes have been subjected to invasive gender testing to determine their eligibility to compete. South African runner Caster Semenya has faced restrictions due to naturally high testosterone levels, raising ethical concerns about bodily autonomy and the fairness of such regulations.

## 5. LACK OF WOMEN COACHES

Sport is one of the world's most visible and influential social institutions. Individuals who are visible and well-known in the world of sports, such as coaches, convey who and what is significant and valuable, and in the majority of cases, such coaches are men.<sup>13</sup> Another indicator of gender discrimination in sports is the dearth of female coaches. Males dominate the administration, sports federations, and coaching centres. If appointed to sports federations, the women are expected to address the rising number of sexual assault accusations in Indian sports organisations. Many female coaches considered this disrespectful, as their value was frequently viewed solely as

security guards for the safety of female players.<sup>14</sup> According to a research by the International Olympic Committee, over half of the National Olympic Committees polled have fewer than 20% of women on their Executive Boards, with ten nations having no women at all. Women make up only 2.8 percent of the members of Indian sports association governing bodies. Among the few female coaches who have made a reputation for themselves are Sunil Dabas, the only woman coach to be awarded the Padma Shri in India; Nikki Ponappa, a golf coach; and Simi Begam Sharma, a tennis coach. Female coaches also face hostility from their families, as travelling as a female **is** not deemed safe. Occasionally, female coaches are replaced for no apparent reason. Purnima Rao, the coach of the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup, was replaced by a former Baroda batsman, despite the fact that the squad was already doing well and was reported to be in winning form. Men and women must be represented equally in all aspects of sports, whether they are participants or future coaches. Scholars have etched out distinctions between male and female coaches' coaching styles. However, the disagreements should not compromise the economic or social interests of any community



## ROLE OF MEDIA

Globally, the media is seen as the fourth pillar of democracy, providing citizens with information about what is occurring in their country. It assures that the other three pillars, namely the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary, operate transparently. With such a critical function to play, it is terrible to see the fourth pillar wobbling in respect to equitable coverage of women's and men's sports, which is having a detrimental effect on the popularity and economic worth of the former. In the Indian context, where the Apex Court has declared the Right to Sports to be a Fundamental Right under Article 21, clarifying the obligations of media houses is critical. Nations must consider enacting legislation requiring networks to provide equal coverage to women's sports, or else any international or national marketing plan.

### . The U.S. Women's Soccer Team's Fight for Equal Pay

The USWNT has been a vocal advocate for equal pay in sports. Despite winning multiple FIFA Women's World Cup titles and Olympic gold medals, they received significantly lower salaries compared to the U.S. Men's National Team. After a long legal battle, they reached a historic settlement in 2022, securing equal pay agreements and setting a precedent for other sports organizations.

**2. Wimbledon's Prize Money Disparity** Until 2007, Wimbledon, one of the most prestigious tennis tournaments, paid female champions less than their male counterparts. Following years of advocacy by players such as Venus Williams, Wimbledon finally implemented equal prize money for men and women. Media Bias in Coverage of the WNBA and NBA

The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) has struggled to gain media attention compared to the NBA. While NBA players receive multimillion-dollar contracts and widespread coverage, WNBA players earn a fraction of that

amount, with significantly fewer broadcast opportunities and sponsorship deals.

## Progress and Efforts Toward Gender Equality in Sports

**1. Implementation of Equal Pay Policies** Organizations such as FIFA, the IOC, and national sports federations are working toward closing the pay gap by implementing equal prize money

policies. The USWNT's legal victory has encouraged other women's teams to demand pay equity.

**2. Increased Media Representation** There is a growing movement to provide more media coverage for women's sports. Major networks and streaming platforms have begun broadcasting women's leagues, increasing visibility and engagement. Campaigns such as #SeeHerInSports aim to highlight female athletes' achievements.

### 3. Advocacy for Equal Sponsorship Opportunities

Brands are increasingly recognizing the potential of investing in female athletes. Companies such as Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour have launched campaigns that promote women's sports and provide sponsorship opportunities.

### 4. Encouraging Women in Leadership Roles

Efforts are being made to increase the number of female coaches, referees, and executives in sports organizations. Initiatives such as Women in Sports Leadership programs are helping bridge the leadership gap.

### 5. Reforms in Gender Policies

Governing bodies are revising policies on gender testing and participation rules to create a more inclusive environment for all athletes. The IOC has updated its gender eligibility policies to be more inclusive of non-binary and transgender athletes.

## **Challenges in Achieving**

### **Gender Equality in Sports**

Despite progress, several challenges remain:

- **Cultural and societal norms** continue to discourage female participation in sports in certain regions.
- **Resistance from traditional sports organizations** delays the implementation of equitable policies.
- **Financial disparities** make it difficult for women's leagues to expand and attract top talent.
- **Lack of grassroots programs** for young female athletes limits their opportunities for professional development.

### **Strategies for Change**

Parents' influence is important. Girls are more likely to participate if they have a parent who participated as a child, or who still plays sports. Also, parents can help by insisting schools provide equal facilities and opportunities to their daughters and sons. Unfortunately, even girls who participate in sports and fitness cite obstacles, girls getting picked for teams after all the boys are picked; gym teachers who assume girls are not as good as boys; and better coaches and equipment for boys' teams.

While urban and rural girls participate equally in sports and fitness, rural girls who quit sports, are more likely to have problems with transportation or inadequate funds. In addition, more rural girls than urban girls feel boys make fun of girls who play sports.

- 1: Support Women's and Girls' Sports
- 2: Join a Women's Rights Organization
- 3: Challenge the Myths
- 4: Speak Out Against Gender Inequity
- 5: Encourage Other Women and Girls
- 6: Push for Gender Equity Policies
- 7: Publicize Discrimination at your School or University

8: Spread general awareness. Gender discrimination and sexual harassment are prevalent issues in

India's sports industry, undermining the principles of equality, fairness, and inclusivity. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, provides a legal framework to address and prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, including sports organizations. Creating a safe and inclusive sports environment requires a multi-faceted approach that includes robust policies, reporting mechanisms,

training programs, and support systems for victims. Athlete well-being, both physical and mental, is crucial, and instances of gender discrimination and sexual harassment can have severe consequences on an athlete's performance and overall health.

Learning from the experiences of countries like the United States and Canada, implementing measures such as comprehensive policies, independent oversight bodies, and collaborations with international organizations can contribute to combating gender discrimination and sexual harassment effectively in India's sports industry.

### **Conclusion**

Gender discrimination in sports remains a pressing issue, but significant progress has been made in addressing inequalities. From equal pay movements to increased media representation and policy reforms, the fight for gender equality in sports continues. By fostering inclusivity, ensuring fair compensation, and challenging outdated gender norms, society can create a more equitable sports industry for future generations. While challenges persist, sustained advocacy and policy changes will play a crucial role in shaping a future where all athletes, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to succeed.