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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS AND ITS IMPACT ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation in sports has become an important area of research because of its significant contribution to physical fitness, psychological well-being, social development, and overall quality of life. Sports provide women with opportunities to improve their physical health, develop confidence, strengthen social relationships, and overcome various social and cultural barriers. Regular participation in physical and sporting activities can help reduce the risk of chronic diseases, improve cardiovascular health, maintain healthy body weight, strengthen muscles and bones, and enhance physical endurance. In addition to physical benefits, sports participation plays an important role in supporting women's mental health by reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms while promoting self-esteem, emotional stability, and personal satisfaction. However, women continue to experience several challenges that limit their participation in sports, including gender discrimination, inadequate sports facilities, financial difficulties, cultural restrictions, safety concerns, and limited institutional support. This research examines the relationship between women's participation in sports and its impact on physical and mental health. It also explores the importance of equal sporting opportunities, supportive environments, and accessible sports programs in encouraging women to participate in different physical activities. The study adopts a qualitative research approach based on existing academic literature and secondary sources to understand the physical, psychological, and social outcomes associated with women's sports participation. The research highlights that promoting women's involvement in sports is essential for improving health, encouraging gender equality, and supporting women's empowerment. It concludes that governments, educational institutions, sports organizations, and communities should develop inclusive policies and accessible sporting opportunities to improve women's participation and long-term well-being.

KEYWORDS:*Women's participation in sports, physical health, mental health, psychological well-being, gender equality, women's empowerment, physical activity, cardiovascular fitness, emotional well-being, self-confidence, sports education, social inclusion, healthy lifestyle, gender discrimination, and sports development.*

INTRODUCTION

Sports and physical activities are essential components of a healthy and balanced lifestyle. They contribute significantly to physical fitness, psychological development, social interaction, and personal well-being. In recent years, women's participation in sports has received increasing attention because of its important role in improving health outcomes and promoting gender equality. Women participate in various sporting activities, including athletics, football, cricket, basketball, volleyball, swimming, tennis, and recreational fitness programs. These activities provide opportunities for women to maintain physical fitness, develop athletic abilities, improve endurance, and strengthen their overall health. Participation in sports is not limited to professional athletes; it also includes students, working women, community members, and individuals who engage in physical activities for recreation and personal development.Physical health is one of the most important benefits associated with women's participation in sports. Khan, M., Alhammad, A. A., & Muteesasira, E. (2026). found that Regular exercise and sporting activities help improve cardiovascular functioning, strengthen muscles, maintain bone density, and support healthy body weight. Physical activity can also reduce the risk of several non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and certain metabolic disorders. Women who regularly participate in sports may experience improvements in flexibility, balance,

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coordination, and physical endurance. These benefits are particularly important throughout different stages of women's lives, including adolescence, adulthood, pregnancy when appropriate medical guidance is followed, and older age. Sports can therefore serve as an effective approach to maintaining long-term physical health and preventing lifestyle-related health problems.In addition to physical benefits, sports participation has a meaningful relationship with women's mental and emotional health. Modern lifestyles expose many women to different forms of stress associated with education, employment, family responsibilities, social expectations, and personal challenges. Physical activities provide a constructive way to manage stress and improve psychological well-being. Participation in sports can stimulate positive emotional experiences, support better sleep, improve mood, and strengthen confidence.

Team sports also encourage communication, cooperation, friendship, and a sense of belonging. Women who participate in sporting activities may develop stronger coping skills and experience greater personal satisfaction through achievement, discipline, and social interaction.Despite these benefits, women's participation in sports remains affected by various social, cultural, economic, and institutional barriers. In many societies, traditional gender expectations influence the types of physical activities women are encouraged or permitted to undertake. Some women experience limited access to sports facilities, trained female coaches, financial resources, transportation, and appropriate sporting equipment. Educational institutions play an important role in encouraging women's involvement in sports. Schools, colleges, and universities can provide physical education programs, sports competitions, recreational activities, and opportunities for developing athletic skills. Early participation in sports can help girls develop confidence, leadership qualities, teamwork, and healthy lifestyle habits. Similarly, workplace sports programs and community-based recreational activities can encourage adult women to remain physically active. When educational institutions and communities create safe and supportive sporting environments, women are more likely to participate regularly and experience the benefits of physical activity. Steele, C., Simpson, M. H., Jacobs, E., Galan-Lopez, N., Taylor, L., & Chrismas, B. C. (2026). Explained thatThe relationship between sports participation and women's empowerment is another important dimension of this subject. Sports provide women with opportunities to demonstrate their abilities, challenge gender stereotypes, and develop independence. Female athletes can become positive role models for younger generations and encourage girls to pursue their interests without being restricted by traditional expectations. Greater representation of women in sports leadership, coaching, administration, and professional competitions can also contribute to institutional equality.

Thus, women's sports participation should be understood not only as a health-related activity but also as a means of promoting social inclusion, confidence, and equal opportunities.The present study focuses on examining the impact of women's participation in sports on physical and mental health. It explores how regular sporting activities contribute to physical fitness, emotional stability, psychological well-being, and social development. It also considers the barriers that prevent women from participating in sports and the importance of creating supportive environments. By examining existing research and relevant academic literature, this study aims to develop a broader understanding of the relationship between women's sporting participation and overall health. The findings may provide useful insights for educational institutions, policymakers, sports organizations, and communities seeking to promote healthier and more inclusive opportunities for women.

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the impact of women's participation in sports on physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life while identifying the major factors influencing their involvement in sporting activities.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How does women's participation in sports influence their physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's participation in sports is increasingly recognized as an important factor in improving physical health and preventing lifestyle-related diseases. Regular involvement in sporting activities supports the development of cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, balance, and physical coordination. Activities such as running, swimming, football, cricket, basketball, cycling, and strength training help women maintain healthy body composition and improve their overall physical condition. Physical fitness is particularly important for women because health requirements may change throughout different stages of life. Regular sports participation can support healthy aging, maintain bone strength, and improve functional independence. Teychenne, M., Sousa, G. M., Baker, T., Liddelow, C., Babic, M., Chauntry, A. J., ... & White, R. L. (2026). Explains that Recent research by Khan, Alhammad, and Muteesasira (2026) examined organized sports participation among adult women and reported improvements in cardiorespiratory fitness, body composition, and several psychological outcomes. Their systematic review and meta-analysis included 16 studies involving 6,271 women, providing important evidence of the potential health benefits of organized sports.Physical activity also contributes to the prevention of chronic health conditions. Women who participate regularly in sports may experience improvements in blood circulation, glucose regulation, blood pressure, and metabolic functioning. A physically active lifestyle can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. Strength-based activities are particularly beneficial because they help develop muscular strength and maintain bone density.

These benefits are relevant for young women as well as older adults who may experience changes in muscle mass and bone health. Abdulrasol et al. (2026) discussed the effects of physical workouts on women throughout different stages of life, emphasizing the importance of understanding both health benefits and potential risks associated with exercise. Appropriate exercise programs should therefore consider age, fitness level, health conditions, and individual physical requirements.Cardiovascular health is an essential dimension of women's physical well-being. Sporting activities that involve continuous movement, such as running, swimming, cycling, football, and aerobic exercise, improve the efficiency of the heart and lungs. Regular participation can increase aerobic capacity, improve circulation, and support the body's ability to use oxygen during physical activity. Women who engage in regular exercise may also develop greater stamina and experience less physical fatigue during everyday activities. Cardiovascular fitness is particularly important because heart-related diseases remain a major public health concern among women. Conklin, K. K., Nakayama, J. Y., Van Dyke, M. E., Harley, K. G., & Thompson, H. R. (2025). revealed that Sports

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programs can provide an enjoyable and structured method of increasing physical activity and encouraging healthier lifestyles.Resistance training and muscle-strengthening activities also contribute to cardiovascular and metabolic health. Although aerobic exercise receives considerable attention, strength training is equally important for maintaining physical fitness. It supports muscular development, improves functional movement, and helps women maintain physical independence as they grow older. Rosaini et al. (2026), in their qualitative study of women's participation in muscle-strengthening activities, explored the factors that encourage or discourage women from undertaking strength exercises. Their research highlighted the importance of personal motivation, accessible facilities, supportive environments, and positive experiences. These factors suggest that improving women's physical health requires opportunities for different forms of exercise rather than concentrating exclusively on competitive sports.Mental health is another important dimension of women's participation in sports. Women may experience psychological pressure associated with education, professional responsibilities, family expectations, financial difficulties, and social challenges. Regular participation in sports can provide opportunities for relaxation, emotional expression, and stress management. Physical activities can improve mood, encourage positive thinking, and support psychological resilience. Women who participate in sports may also develop greater confidence in their abilities and become more comfortable dealing with personal and social challenges. Sports provide structured opportunities to establish goals, recognize personal achievements, and develop a positive sense of identity.

Recent research has strengthened the relationship between exercise and mental health. Teychenne et al. (2026) conducted an updated systematic review and multilevel meta-analysis examining physical activity and mental health across a combined sample of more than 3.3 million people. Their findings indicated positive associations between leisure-time physical activity and mental health. The study also emphasized that the context in which physical activity takes place can influence psychological outcomes. Similarly, an umbrella review published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine in 2026 examined 63 reviews and reported that exercise interventions were associated with reductions in depression and anxiety symptoms. These findings support the importance of making enjoyable and accessible physical activities available to women.Emotional well-being refers to the ability to manage feelings, respond to difficult situations, and maintain a positive psychological condition. Sports participation can contribute to emotional development by encouraging discipline, patience, determination, and self-control. Women who participate in sporting activities often have opportunities to experience achievement, overcome challenges, and improve their confidence. Individual sports may encourage independence and personal responsibility, while team sports can strengthen cooperation and mutual support. Massey, W. V., Veliz, P., Farello, A., Zdroik, J., & Zarrett, N. (2025). Elaborated on These experiences can help women develop emotional resilience and a stronger sense of personal accomplishment.The emotional benefits of sports are also influenced by the quality of the sporting environment. A supportive environment can help women feel respected, accepted, and motivated to continue participating.

In contrast, excessive pressure, discrimination, unrealistic performance expectations, and negative coaching practices may create psychological difficulties. Research by the Women's Sports Foundation (2025), published in its report Thriving Through Sport: The Transformative Impact on Girls' Mental Health, highlighted the relationship between sports participation and lower levels of depression and anxiety symptoms among girls. The report

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also emphasized that supportive sporting environments, teamwork, and opportunities for personal choice are important for positive mental health outcomes. This evidence suggests that sports programs should prioritize personal development and emotional well-being alongside athletic performance.Self-confidence is an important psychological outcome associated with women's participation in sports. Through regular training and sporting activities, women can develop a stronger belief in their physical abilities and personal potential. Learning new skills, achieving individual goals, and participating in competitions can improve self-esteem. Sports also encourage women to recognize their strengths and develop a positive attitude toward their bodies. Such experiences may be particularly valuable for young girls who are developing their personal identities and social relationships.A 2025 study titled Self-Esteem, Wellbeing, and Health Status of Female Athletes in the Context of Sport Performance examined 296 women between the ages of 18 and 35. The research compared high-performance athletes, recreational athletes, and women with lower levels of physical activity. Its findings indicated that women participating in sports reported better self-esteem, subjective well-being, and health status than those with low or limited participation. The study also suggested that recreational sports can provide meaningful benefits without requiring professional athletic involvement. This demonstrates that women do not need to become professional athletes to experience positive psychological outcomes. Accessible recreational activities can also contribute to confidence, independence, and personal satisfaction.Sports provide important opportunities for women to develop social relationships and strengthen community connections. Team-based activities such as football, cricket, basketball, volleyball, and hockey encourage communication, cooperation, leadership, and mutual respect. Women participating in these activities can develop friendships and establish supportive networks outside their families and workplaces. These relationships may contribute to a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on secondary data to examine the impact of women's participation in sports on physical and mental health. The research uses existing academic literature, peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, research reports, and relevant publications from 2025 and 2026. The selected materials focus on women's involvement in recreational and competitive sports, physical fitness, cardiovascular health, psychological well-being, emotional development, self-confidence, and social relationships. Secondary sources are examined to understand how different sporting activities influence women's health and identify the major factors that encourage or restrict their participation. Particular attention is given to research involving adolescent girls, adult women, female athletes, and women from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.Data collection is based on the examination of relevant scholarly publications and institutional reports. The literature is organized according to major research themes, including physical health outcomes, mental health benefits, social development, gender equality, and barriers to participation. Sources are selected according to their relevance, publication quality, research objectives, and connection with the central research question. The study also considers differences between recreational and professional sports because women may experience different physical and psychological outcomes depending on their level of participation. Information from the selected sources is compared to identify common findings, differences, and emerging research trends.The collected information is analyzed

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through thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify repeated ideas and relationships across the literature. Major themes include improvements in physical fitness, psychological well-being, stress management, self-confidence, social support, and gender-related barriers. The methodology also recognizes the limitations of secondary research, particularly differences in research populations, measurement methods, geographical settings, and study designs. No new participant interviews, surveys, or medical examinations are claimed in this study. The findings are therefore based on the interpretation and synthesis of existing research rather than newly collected primary data.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study follows a descriptive and exploratory research design to investigate the relationship between women's participation in sports and physical and mental health. The descriptive component examines the major health benefits associated with sporting activities, while the exploratory component investigates social, cultural, economic, and institutional factors influencing women's involvement. This research design is suitable because the study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the subject through existing evidence rather than testing an experimental intervention. It considers both positive outcomes and possible challenges associated with sports participation.A secondary-data research framework is used to organize and examine relevant academic publications. The research focuses on two major dimensions: physical health and mental health. Physical health includes cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength, flexibility, body composition, endurance, and general physical functioning. Mental health includes psychological well-being, stress management, emotional stability, anxiety, depressive symptoms, self-esteem, and confidence. Social participation and gender equality are also considered as supporting dimensions because they influence women's experiences and opportunities in sports. Information from different studies is compared to understand the relationships between these areas.The research design also incorporates a thematic comparison of findings from different populations and sporting environments. Studies involving recreational participants are considered alongside research on professional and competitive athletes. Differences related to age, cultural background, socioeconomic conditions, and access to sporting facilities are also examined. This approach helps identify common patterns while recognizing that the experiences of women are not identical across all communities. The study maintains an evidence-based approach by distinguishing findings reported in previous research from the researcher's interpretation and by acknowledging the limitations of the available literature.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of existing literature indicates that women's participation in sports is associated with improvements in physical fitness and general health. Regular involvement in activities such as running, swimming, cycling, football, and strength training can improve cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition. Research reviewed by Khan et al. (2026) reported positive changes in cardiorespiratory fitness, fat mass, and lean body mass among women participating in organized sports. These findings suggest that sports can provide an effective approach to improving physical fitness and supporting a healthy lifestyle. However, the extent of improvement may vary according to exercise intensity, participation frequency, age, and individual health conditions. The analysis also identifies a positive relationship between physical activity and psychological well-being.

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Women participating in regular sports may experience improvements in mood, emotional stability, and psychological resilience. Physical activities provide opportunities to manage daily stress and reduce feelings of anxiety and depression. Teychenne et al. (2026) found positive associations between leisure-time physical activity and mental health in their large-scale systematic review and meta-analysis. Similarly, research published in 2026 on exercise interventions reported reductions in depression and anxiety symptoms. These findings suggest that regular and enjoyable sports participation can contribute to improved psychological health. The reviewed evidence suggests that participation in sports can improve women's self-confidence and self-esteem. Women who participate in athletic activities have opportunities to develop new skills, achieve personal goals, and recognize their physical abilities. These experiences can strengthen self-belief and encourage a positive attitude toward personal development.

FINDINGS

The findings indicate that women's participation in sports contributes significantly to improving physical health and overall fitness. Regular involvement in activities such as football, cricket, basketball, swimming, running, and other recreational exercises helps strengthen muscles, improve cardiovascular functioning, increase flexibility, and maintain healthy body weight. Women who participate in sports regularly may also experience better physical endurance and improved body coordination. The study highlights that consistent physical activity can reduce the risk of lifestyle-related health problems, including obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and type 2 diabetes. Therefore, sports participation is an important approach to promoting long-term physical health among women.The findings reveal that sports participation has positive effects on women's mental health and psychological well-being. Regular physical activities can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms while improving mood and emotional stability. Women who participate in sports may develop healthier ways of managing personal, educational, and professional pressures. Sporting activities also provide opportunities for relaxation, enjoyment, and positive emotional experiences.The study suggests that physical activity can contribute to better psychological health and help women maintain a more balanced lifestyle.The research findings demonstrate that participation in sports can strengthen women's self-confidence and self-esteem. Through regular training, competitions, and personal achievements, women gain greater awareness of their abilities and develop confidence in their physical and mental capabilities. Learning new sporting skills and achieving individual goals can create a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction. Sports also encourage women to challenge negative stereotypes and develop a positive attitude toward their potential. These experiences can support independence, leadership, and personal development.The findings indicate that sports play an important role in supporting women's emotional well-being. Regular participation encourages discipline, patience, determination, and emotional control. Women involved in sporting activities may develop stronger coping abilities when facing difficulties and stressful situations.

CONCLUSION

Women's participation in sports is an important contributor to physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. The present study examined how sporting activities influence different dimensions of women's health through a review of recent academic

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literature and research reports. The reviewed evidence indicates that regular involvement in sports can improve cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength, flexibility, endurance, and general physical functioning. Participation in sports may also help women maintain healthy lifestyles and reduce the risk of several chronic health conditions. These benefits demonstrate that sports should be considered an important component of women's health promotion and preventive healthcare strategies.The study also highlights the importance of sports in supporting women's psychological and emotional well-being. Regular physical activity can provide opportunities for stress management, emotional development, improved self-confidence, and positive social interaction. Women participating in recreational and competitive sports may develop stronger relationships, leadership abilities, discipline, and personal independence. Team-based sporting activities can further encourage cooperation and a sense of belonging. These outcomes demonstrate that sports contribute to women's development beyond physical fitness and can support their participation in wider social and community activities.Despite these benefits, several barriers continue to restrict women's involvement in sports. Cultural expectations, gender discrimination, financial limitations, insufficient facilities, safety concerns, and family responsibilities may reduce opportunities for participation. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from governments, educational institutions, sports organizations, healthcare professionals, and local communities..

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