International Journal Of
Women's Sports And Games Research
VOL 01 | No. 1 | 2026
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS AFFECTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS AND GAMES

Sumaira Ameen
BS, Department of English, The Cosmic Degree College (For Women) ,University of Okara

ABSTRACT

Women's participation in sports and games is an important aspect of gender equality, social development, physical well-being, and personal empowerment. However, women and girls in many societies continue to experience social and cultural barriers that restrict their involvement in sporting activities. These barriers include traditional gender roles, cultural expectations, family restrictions, gender discrimination, religious and social misconceptions, economic limitations, safety concerns, inadequate sports facilities, and limited access to female coaches and role models. Such challenges can discourage women from participating in sports, pursuing professional athletic careers, and accessing the physical, psychological, and social benefits of sporting activities. This study examines the social and cultural barriers affecting women's participation in sports and games, with particular attention to the influence of family attitudes, community expectations, educational institutions, gender stereotypes, and institutional policies. The research adopts a qualitative methodology based on secondary sources and thematic analysis of recent literature, particularly publications from 2025 and 2026. The study explores how social norms and cultural practices influence women's sporting opportunities and identifies strategies for promoting equal participation. The reviewed literature suggests that women's participation improves when families, educational institutions, sports organizations, and communities provide encouragement, safe facilities, financial support, and equal opportunities. The study concludes that overcoming social and cultural barriers requires coordinated educational, institutional, and community-level efforts to establish inclusive sporting environments in which women and girls can participate freely, safely, and confidently.

KEYWORDS:*Women's participation in sports, social barriers, cultural barriers, gender discrimination, gender stereotypes, women's empowerment, sports and games, gender equality, family support, traditional gender roles, female athletes, social inclusion, sports education, cultural expectations, and women's rights.*

INTRODUCTION

Sports and games are important components of human development because they promote physical fitness, mental well-being, teamwork, discipline, confidence, and social interaction. Participation in sports provides individuals with opportunities to develop their abilities, establish relationships, and become active members of their communities. For women and girls, sports participation has additional importance because it can contribute to personal independence, social recognition, empowerment, and gender equality. Işıkgöz, M. E., Şahbudak, M., Deveci, M. E., & Öztunç, M. (2025). found thatDespite the growing recognition of women's achievements in international and national sporting events, their participation remains limited in many societies due to social and cultural restrictions. These restrictions are often connected with traditional gender roles, family expectations, community attitudes, economic conditions, and institutional inequalities. As a result, women may have fewer opportunities than men to participate in recreational sports, competitive games, professional athletics, and organized physical activities.Social and cultural barriers are among the major factors influencing women's participation in sports. In many communities, traditional beliefs associate sports with masculinity and consider competitive physical activities more appropriate for men than women. Girls may be discouraged from participating in sports because of assumptions about physical appearance, behaviour, family responsibilities, and social reputation. Such expectations can influence their confidence and

International Journal Of
Women's Sports And Games Research
VOL 01 | No. 1 | 2026
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

limit their freedom to choose sporting activities. In some families, parents may believe that sports participation takes time away from education, household responsibilities, or other activities considered more suitable for girls. These attitudes can create an environment in which female students are unable to explore their interests and develop their sporting abilities. Therefore, understanding social and cultural influences is necessary for identifying the reasons behind unequal participation.Family support is another important factor affecting women's involvement in sports and games.

Parents and relatives often influence girls' decisions regarding education, physical activities, mobility, and participation in public events. Rind, I. A., & Naz, A. (2025). Explained thatSupportive families can encourage girls to join sports clubs, attend training sessions, and participate in competitions. However, restrictive family attitudes may prevent them from accessing sports facilities or travelling to sporting events. Concerns about safety, cultural expectations, clothing, and interaction with male participants can also influence family decisions. These issues may be particularly significant in communities where women's participation in public activities is closely connected with social expectations. The absence of encouragement at home can reduce girls' motivation and make it difficult for them to continue participating in sports.Educational institutions also play an important role in shaping women's sporting experiences. Schools, colleges, and universities are often the first places where girls receive formal opportunities to participate in physical education and organized games. However, unequal access to sports equipment, limited playing areas, insufficient female instructors, and gender-based selection practices can reduce participation. In some institutions, sports activities receive greater attention and financial support for boys, while girls have fewer opportunities to participate in competitions or represent their institutions. Teachers and coaches may also unintentionally reinforce stereotypes by assigning activities according to traditional gender expectations. Inclusive physical education programmes, trained female coaches, safe facilities, and equal opportunities can help reduce these inequalities and encourage girls to develop their sporting abilities.In Pakistan and other South Asian societies, women's participation in sports may be influenced by a combination of cultural expectations, economic limitations, mobility restrictions, safety concerns, and inadequate sporting infrastructure. Female athletes may face difficulties accessing appropriate training facilities, transportation, professional coaching, and family support. Social criticism and concerns about clothing or public visibility can also discourage girls from pursuing sports.

Recent research on women's sports participation in Pakistan has examined how women negotiate social expectations and develop personal agency despite these challenges. Studies have also highlighted the importance of institutional support, suitable facilities, and community awareness in improving opportunities for female athletes. The consequences of these barriers extend beyond the sports environment. Limited participation can reduce women's opportunities to benefit from physical activity, develop leadership skills, improve self-confidence, and build social networks. It can also restrict their visibility in public life and reduce the representation of women in sports leadership, coaching, administration, and professional competitions. When girls are discouraged from sports at an early age, they may lose opportunities to develop skills that could support their future educational and professional development. Consequently, improving women's participation should be considered part of broader efforts to promote equal educational opportunities, public health, social inclusion, and women's empowerment.The present study examines the social and

International Journal Of
Women's Sports And Games Research
VOL 01 | No. 1 | 2026
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

cultural barriers affecting women's participation in sports and games. It focuses on the influence of traditional gender roles, family attitudes, community expectations, economic conditions, educational institutions, safety concerns, and sports policies. It also considers strategies that can help reduce these barriers, including awareness programmes, family engagement, inclusive physical education, improved facilities, female representation, and institutional reforms. By examining recent literature, the study aims to develop a clearer understanding of the challenges women face and the steps required to create a more supportive and equal sporting environment.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the major social and cultural barriers affecting women's participation in sports and games and identify strategies for promoting gender equality and equal sporting opportunities.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How do social and cultural factors influence women's participation in sports and games, and what measures can help overcome these barriers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional gender roles are among the major social factors influencing women's participation in sports and games. In many societies, men and women are expected to perform different social responsibilities, and these expectations can influence their educational, recreational, and professional opportunities. Sports have historically been associated with physical strength, competition, and public visibility, characteristics that some traditional communities have considered more appropriate for men. Consequently, girls may be discouraged from participating in activities such as football, cricket, wrestling, athletics, and other competitive sports. These attitudes can begin during childhood and continue into adulthood, limiting women's opportunities to develop sporting abilities. Saleem, T., Khan, W., & Khan, S. N. (2025). Explains thatTraditional expectations may also influence how families and communities view female athletes. Girls who participate in competitive sports may experience criticism about their appearance, clothing, behaviour, or social responsibilities. Such criticism can create pressure to withdraw from sporting activities or select only those activities considered socially acceptable. These expectations do not affect all communities equally, and cultural practices are diverse. However, when social expectations restrict women's choices, they become barriers to equal participation.Işıkgöz et al. (2025), in a systematic review of 65 studies, identified restrictive social norms and stereotypes as major challenges to gender equality in physical education and sports. Their review emphasizes that awareness programmes, inclusive teaching, supportive policies, and female role models can help address these challenges. This evidence suggests that changing traditional gender expectations is important for improving women's access to sporting opportunities.Family attitudes play a significant role in shaping women's participation in sports, particularly during childhood and adolescence. Parents often influence decisions about education, recreational activities, mobility, and participation in public events.

International Journal Of
Women's Sports And Games Research
VOL 01 | No. 1 | 2026
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

When families support girls' interests in sports, they can provide encouragement, transportation, financial assistance, and permission to attend training sessions and competitions. Such support can help girls develop confidence and continue participating even when they face difficulties.In contrast, restrictive family attitudes may prevent girls from joining sports clubs or representing their schools and universities. Some parents may consider sports an unnecessary activity, while others may be concerned about safety, social reputation, mixed-gender environments, or the time required for training. Laar, R. A., Liu, R., & Zhang, Q. (2025). revealed that Financial responsibilities and household expectations may also influence whether families prioritize sports opportunities for daughters. In some households, sons may receive greater access to equipment, coaching, and sporting facilities than daughters.Saleem, Khan, and Khan (2025), in their study of female university athletes in Pakistan, identified family and societal attitudes as important influences on women's participation. Their qualitative findings also highlighted the role of personal motivation and supportive peer networks in helping athletes manage cultural restrictions. Flower et al. (2025), in a mixed-methods study involving 1,349 survey participants and 46 interviewees in women's and girls' rugby, also identified parental and peer support as important facilitators of participation. These studies indicate that family engagement is important for improving women's participation. Awareness programmes can help parents understand the educational, physical, and social benefits of sports and encourage them to support girls' interests.Cultural and religious expectations can influence the types of sports women participate in, the facilities they use, their clothing choices, and their freedom to attend training sessions.

Respectful and culturally responsive sports programmes can help address these concerns without excluding women from sporting opportunities.Rinda and Naz (2025) examined socio-cultural influences on female students' sports participation in Pakistan through a multiple-case study. Their research identified traditional expectations, clothing and appearance concerns, limited dedicated facilities, and restricted mobility as barriers. The study also found that active participants used personal agency, social networks, and adapted clothing to continue their involvement in sports. Ullah and Liu (2025) also explored women's sports participation and sociocultural constraints in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Their research highlights the relationship between gender expectations, mobility, and women's opportunities to participate in sporting activities. These studies demonstrate the importance of developing programmes that respect cultural diversity while protecting women's freedom to participate.Gender discrimination is another important barrier affecting women's participation in sports and games. It may occur through unequal access to training, facilities, equipment, coaching, financial support, competitions, and leadership positions. In some institutions, male sports programmes receive greater investment and attention, while female athletes have fewer opportunities to participate in organized competitions. Such inequalities can reduce the quality of training available to women and limit their chances of achieving professional success.Gender discrimination can also influence the attitudes of coaches, administrators, sponsors, and sports media. Female athletes may receive less recognition for their achievements or face assumptions that women's competitions are less important than men's events. These attitudes can affect sponsorship, career development, and public visibility. When women do not receive equal institutional support, their sporting potential may remain underdeveloped.Mushtaq and Qurban (2025) examined gender inequality and structural barriers affecting women athletes in Pakistan.

International Journal Of
Women's Sports And Games Research
VOL 01 | No. 1 | 2026
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

Their research identified socio-cultural resistance, gender-insensitive policies, unequal infrastructure, funding difficulties, and media representation as important issues. The authors emphasized the need for gender-responsive budgeting, infrastructure investment, media improvements, and reforms in sports governance. The systematic review by Işıkgöz et al. (2025) similarly identified systemic discrimination and limited institutional resources among the continuing challenges to gender equality in sports. These findings indicate that equal participation requires not only changes in public attitudes but also fair institutional policies and resource distribution.Economic conditions can strongly influence women's opportunities to participate in sports. Ullah, R., & Liu, H. (2025). Elaborated on Organized sporting activities may require expenses for equipment, uniforms, transportation, registration, coaching, nutrition, and competition participation. Families with limited financial resources may find it difficult to support these expenses, particularly when sports are not considered an essential educational priority. Girls from low-income households may therefore have fewer opportunities to access sports facilities and professional training.Financial limitations can also affect sports organizations and educational institutions. Schools with restricted budgets may not have sufficient equipment, qualified female coaches, or dedicated facilities for girls. In some areas, sports programmes may be concentrated in major cities, requiring students from rural communities to travel long distances. Such arrangements can create additional financial and practical difficulties.Women athletes may also face challenges in obtaining sponsorships and professional contracts. Limited media visibility and unequal commercial investment can reduce financial support for female sports teams. Without adequate funding, athletes may struggle to continue training or participate in national and international competitions. Economic inequality therefore influences both entry into sports and the ability to continue participation.Zhou and Liu (2025), in their narrative review of barriers affecting female college students' sports participation, identified environmental, social, and psychological challenges that can interact with practical access limitations. Their proposed strategies include improving facilities, adapting sports spaces, and developing institutional approaches that make participation more accessible.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on secondary data to examine the social and cultural barriers affecting women's participation in sports and games. The research uses recently published academic articles, systematic reviews, research reports, and scholarly publications, with particular attention to literature from 2025 and 2026. The selected sources address gender inequality, traditional social expectations, family attitudes, cultural influences, economic limitations, safety concerns, institutional discrimination, and women's experiences in sports. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study aims to understand the social conditions and experiences that influence women's participation rather than measure athletic performance or physical outcomes.The study uses relevant literature from different geographical and cultural settings, including Pakistan, Iran, England, Saudi Arabia, and other international contexts. Special attention is given to research examining women's participation in South Asian societies because family expectations, community attitudes, mobility, and access to facilities may create particular challenges in these settings. The selected publications are reviewed according to their research objectives, methodologies, major findings, and recommendations. Information is organized into themes to identify common barriers and compare the ways in which different studies explain women's sporting experiences.The research does not claim to have conducted original interviews, surveys, or

International Journal Of
Women's Sports And Games Research
VOL 01 | No. 1 | 2026
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

experiments. Instead, it uses a thematic review of previously published evidence. The analysis identifies recurring patterns, examines relationships between different barriers, and considers strategies recommended by the literature. This approach provides an organized understanding of the challenges affecting women's participation while recognizing that the experiences of women may differ according to culture, economic background, age, geographical location, and institutional circumstances.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study follows a qualitative descriptive research design supported by a thematic literature review. This design is suitable for examining the relationship between social and cultural conditions and women's participation in sports. It allows the researcher to explore how traditional gender roles, family expectations, religious and cultural interpretations, economic circumstances, and institutional practices influence women's opportunities to participate in sporting activities. Rather than testing a statistical hypothesis, the research focuses on describing and interpreting the major barriers identified in recent academic literature.The research design is structured around the central research question and the main concepts identified in the reviewed studies. These concepts include family support, gender stereotypes, cultural expectations, mobility restrictions, safety, financial resources, educational opportunities, sports facilities, media representation, and institutional policies. The selected literature is examined and compared to identify similarities, differences, and recurring themes. Thematic categories are then developed to explain how these factors influence women's participation and what strategies may help reduce their effects.The design also considers differences between social and cultural contexts. Women's sporting experiences in Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and England may be influenced by different institutional arrangements, community expectations, and economic conditions. Therefore, the study does not assume that a single explanation applies to every society. Instead, it uses international research to identify common patterns while recognizing the importance of local circumstances. This research design provides a basis for understanding the complexity of women's participation and identifying areas where further field-based research is needed.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis uses a qualitative thematic approach to organize and interpret information from the selected academic sources. First, the literature was reviewed to identify findings related to women's participation in sports and games. Relevant information was then grouped according to recurring themes, including traditional gender roles, family restrictions, cultural expectations, gender discrimination, financial limitations, safety concerns, educational barriers, and institutional support. This organization helped identify the most frequently discussed challenges and understand how different factors interact.The first major theme identified through the analysis was the influence of social and cultural expectations. The reviewed literature suggests that traditional gender roles and stereotypes can discourage girls from participating in competitive sports or public physical activities. The second theme concerned family and community attitudes, which may either encourage participation through support or restrict it through concerns about mobility, safety, and social reputation. The third theme involved institutional and economic inequalities, including inadequate facilities, limited coaching, unequal funding, and the cost of training and equipment. These barriers can reduce women's access to organized sporting opportunities.The final analytical themes

International Journal Of
Women's Sports And Games Research
VOL 01 | No. 1 | 2026
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

focused on safety, media representation, and strategies for improvement. The literature indicates that safe facilities, appropriate transport, female coaches, positive media coverage, and supportive educational policies can help improve participation. Studies from Pakistan and other countries also show that women's personal motivation and supportive peer networks can help them manage restrictive circumstances. The findings were compared to identify common patterns and develop recommendations for educational institutions, sports organizations, families, and policymakers. Since this is a secondary-source study, no original survey statistics or interview results are presented as findings of the current research.

FINDINGS

The analysis of recent literature identifies several important findings concerning the social and cultural barriers affecting women's participation in sports and games.The findings indicate that traditional gender expectations remain a significant barrier to women's participation in sports. In some communities, competitive sports are viewed as more appropriate for men, while girls are encouraged to prioritize household responsibilities and other traditional roles. These attitudes may discourage girls from joining sports clubs, attending training sessions, or pursuing athletic careers.Family support has a strong influence on whether girls can participate regularly in sports. Encouragement, transportation, financial assistance, and parental approval can make participation easier. Conversely, restrictive family attitudes and concerns about safety, mobility, and social reputation can prevent women from joining sporting activities. The literature shows that family encouragement and peer support can help women maintain their involvement.Cultural expectations concerning clothing, appearance, public visibility, and interaction with others can influence women's sporting choices. Some women may experience pressure to avoid activities that are considered socially unacceptable. However, the findings also show that many female athletes develop ways to manage these expectations through personal agency, supportive networks, and suitable sporting arrangements.The literature identifies unequal access to facilities, equipment, coaching, funding, and competitions as continuing challenges. Women may receive fewer resources and less institutional attention than male athletes. Such inequalities can limit athletic development and reduce opportunities for professional participation and leadership in sports organizations.Financial difficulties can prevent women from accessing training programmes, sports equipment, transportation, and competition opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Women's participation in sports and games is an important element of gender equality, social inclusion, physical well-being, and personal empowerment. However, this study demonstrates that women continue to face various social and cultural barriers that restrict their sporting opportunities. Traditional gender roles, family restrictions, cultural expectations, gender discrimination, financial limitations, safety concerns, and inadequate facilities can prevent women from participating freely and confidently. These challenges may begin during childhood and continue throughout women's educational and professional lives. As a result, many girls lose opportunities to develop their physical abilities, confidence, leadership skills, and sporting careers.The study also highlights that these barriers are interconnected and cannot be addressed through a single intervention. Families need to provide encouragement and recognize the importance of sports in girls' development. Educational institutions should ensure equal access to physical education, sports facilities,

International Journal Of
Women's Sports And Games Research
VOL 01 | No. 1 | 2026
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

competitions, and trained coaches. Sports organizations and government departments should develop gender-inclusive policies, improve infrastructure, provide financial assistance, and create safe environments for female athletes. Media organizations should also promote women's achievements and challenge stereotypes through fair and positive representation. Community awareness programmes can further encourage social acceptance and strengthen support for women's participation.In conclusion, overcoming social and cultural barriers requires long-term cooperation between families, schools, universities, sports organizations, media institutions, and policymakers. Women and girls should have equal opportunities to choose sporting activities, develop their abilities, and participate in recreational and professional sports without discrimination. Future research should examine the experiences of women from different geographical, cultural, and economic backgrounds to identify effective approaches for improving participation. Creating inclusive sporting environments will not only support female athletes but also contribute to healthier communities, stronger educational institutions, and greater gender equality in society.

REFERENCES

Işıkgöz, M. E., Şahbudak, M., Deveci, M. E., & Öztunç, M. (2025). Challenges and successes in promoting gender equality through physical education and sports: a systematic review. BMC Public Health, 25(1), 2117.

Rind, I. A., & Naz, A. (2025). Challenging the norms: an exploration of socio-cultural influences and women's agency in shaping female participation in sports within Pakistan. Managing Sport and Leisure, 1-17.

Saleem, T., Khan, W., & Khan, S. N. (2025). GENDER, CULTURE AND FEMALE SPORTS PARTICIPATION IN PAKISTAN. Research Consortium Archive, 3(2), 164-173.

Laar, R. A., Liu, R., & Zhang, Q. (2025). Barriers to female participation in physical activity in Pakistan: a feminist sport theory perspective. International journal of women's health, 2715-2727.

Ullah, R., & Liu, H. (2025). Negotiating gender and mobility: A qualitative exploration of women's sport participation, health, and sociocultural constraints in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. African Journal of Reproductive Health, 29(11), 177-188.