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

GENDER EQUALITY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN COMPETITIVE SPORTS

Kinza Abdul Star
BS, Department of English, The Cosmic Degree College (For Women) ,University of Okara

ABSTRACT

Gender equality in competitive sports has become an important global issue because women continue to experience unequal opportunities in athletic participation, professional development, financial support, leadership, and international competitions. Although women's involvement in sports has increased significantly over recent decades, various institutional, economic, social, and cultural barriers continue to affect their professional progress. Competitive sports provide women with opportunities to demonstrate their athletic abilities, develop leadership skills, achieve professional recognition, and contribute to national and international sporting development. However, female athletes frequently face challenges related to unequal salaries, limited sponsorship opportunities, insufficient training facilities, inadequate media representation, gender discrimination, and underrepresentation in sports administration. This study examines gender equality and opportunities for women in competitive sports, focusing on the barriers that affect female athletes and the measures required to create fair and inclusive sporting environments. The research adopts a qualitative approach based on secondary data, including recent academic publications, institutional reports, and relevant research studies published during 2025 and 2026. The study explores important dimensions of gender equality, including equal access to competitions, professional contracts, financial resources, coaching, leadership positions, media coverage, and athlete protection. The reviewed literature indicates that although women's sports have gained greater public attention, significant inequalities remain in professional opportunities and institutional representation. The study emphasizes the importance of gender-responsive sports policies, equal investment, transparent selection procedures, appropriate facilities, and improved media visibility. It concludes that achieving gender equality in competitive sports requires cooperation among governments, sports organizations, educational institutions, sponsors, media organizations, and international sporting bodies to ensure that women receive fair opportunities to participate, compete, and succeed.

KEYWORDS:*Gender equality, women's competitive sports, female athletes, equal opportunities, sports participation, gender discrimination, professional sports, women empowerment, athletic development, sports leadership, equal pay, media representation, sponsorship opportunities, sports governance, and institutional support.*

INTRODUCTION

Sports have become an important part of modern society, providing opportunities for physical development, professional achievement, social interaction, and international recognition. Competitive sports allow individuals to demonstrate their athletic abilities through organized competitions, professional leagues, national championships, and international sporting events. Historically, however, competitive sports have been dominated by men, while women have faced restrictions in participation, professional recognition, financial support, and access to decision-making positions. Stone, M. E., Chapman, P., Khasnis, U., & Collins, D. (2025). found thatThese historical inequalities have influenced the development of sporting institutions and continue to affect opportunities available to female athletes. Although significant progress has been made in women's sports, achieving complete gender equality remains an important challenge for the international sporting community.Gender equality in competitive sports refers to providing women and men with fair opportunities, resources, recognition, and institutional support throughout their sporting careers. It involves equal access to training facilities, professional coaching, competitions, scholarships, sponsorships, employment contracts, and leadership positions. Gender equality also requires addressing

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

discrimination, harassment, unequal treatment, and stereotypes that restrict women's participation. Female athletes should receive recognition based on their performance, professional achievements, and athletic abilities rather than being judged according to traditional gender expectations. An equitable sporting environment allows women to develop their talents and compete professionally without facing unnecessary institutional or social disadvantages.

One of the major challenges affecting gender equality in competitive sports is the unequal distribution of financial resources. Women's teams and individual female athletes may receive less funding, lower salaries, fewer sponsorship opportunities, and limited access to professional facilities compared with their male counterparts. Financial inequality can affect the quality of training, availability of medical support, travel arrangements, equipment, and long-term career development. In many sporting organizations, men's competitions receive greater commercial investment and institutional attention. These differences can create disadvantages for women who wish to pursue professional sporting careers. The OECD's 2025 report, Gender Equality in a Changing World, discusses how unequal professional opportunities, compensation, media coverage, and representation in decision-making contribute to continuing gender gaps in sports. Media representation is another important factor influencing women's opportunities in competitive sports. Television networks, newspapers, digital platforms, and sports publications play a significant role in shaping public interest and commercial investment. Stone, M. E., Chapman, P., Khasnis, U., & Collins, D. (2025). Explains that When women's competitions receive limited coverage, female athletes may have fewer opportunities to attract sponsors, develop professional recognition, and build public support. In some cases, media representations focus more on athletes' appearance or personal lives than on their performance and achievements. Fair and balanced media coverage can help increase public awareness, strengthen the commercial value of women's competitions, and encourage younger generations to participate in sports. Thompson-Radford and Skey (2025) discuss the complex relationship between visibility, public recognition, and the growing prominence of women's sports.

Women also experience unequal opportunities in sports leadership, coaching, officiating, and administration. Although many women participate in sports as athletes, their representation in senior organizational positions remains limited. Leadership positions are important because they influence policies, financial decisions, competition structures, athlete welfare, and professional development. When women are underrepresented in decision-making roles, their experiences and needs may receive insufficient attention. The Council of Europe's 2025 All In Plus report identified significant inequalities in sports leadership and governance across 21 jurisdictions. It reported that women held only 12% of sports federation presidency positions and represented 23% of registered coaches in the participating jurisdictions. These figures demonstrate that gender equality must extend beyond athletic participation to include institutional leadership and professional authority. Social and cultural expectations also influence women's opportunities in competitive sports. In some societies, traditional beliefs discourage women from participating in physically demanding or publicly visible sporting activities. Family responsibilities, safety concerns, limited transportation, inadequate facilities, and negative attitudes may create additional barriers. These challenges can be especially significant for women from rural communities and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In Pakistan, for example, female athletes may experience difficulties related to cultural expectations, limited sporting infrastructure, financial support, and unequal

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

institutional opportunities. Mushtaq and Qurban (2025) examined structural barriers affecting women athletes in Pakistan and highlighted sociocultural resistance, funding inequalities, infrastructural limitations, and media-related challenges. Educational institutions play an important role in promoting gender equality by providing girls and young women with early opportunities to develop athletic abilities. Schools, colleges, and universities can introduce sports education programs, competitions, scholarships, and professional training opportunities.

Female students should have equal access to playgrounds, sports equipment, qualified coaches, and institutional competitions. Participation at the educational level can help women develop discipline, confidence, teamwork, leadership, and professional ambitions. Universities can also establish women's sports clubs and provide career guidance to talented athletes. These initiatives can create pathways from grassroots participation to national and international competitive sports.Another important dimension of gender equality is the protection, safety, and well-being of female athletes. Women participating in competitive sports may experience discrimination, harassment, abuse, unequal medical support, and pressure related to body image and athletic performance. Sports organizations must develop effective safeguarding policies, confidential reporting systems, appropriate medical services, and transparent disciplinary procedures. Female athletes should be able to report misconduct without fear of losing their professional opportunities. A safe and respectful environment is essential for protecting athletes' rights and encouraging long-term participation in competitive sports.The importance of women's competitive sports has also increased because of their contribution to national development, international representation, and social empowerment. Female athletes who achieve success at international competitions can inspire younger generations and challenge traditional stereotypes about women's abilities. Their achievements demonstrate the importance of determination, professional preparation, equal opportunities, and institutional support. Increased investment in women's competitions can also strengthen sporting industries by attracting audiences, sponsors, media attention, and commercial partnerships. However, these developments must be supported by fair employment practices and sustainable professional structures.The present study focuses on examining gender equality and opportunities for women in competitive sports. It investigates the institutional, economic, social, cultural, and professional factors that influence female athletes' participation and career development.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To examine gender equality and professional opportunities for women in competitive sports by identifying the major institutional, economic, social, and cultural barriers affecting female athletes and evaluating strategies for promoting equal participation, recognition, and career development.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How do institutional, economic, social, and cultural factors influence gender equality and professional opportunities for women in competitive sports?

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

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender equality in competitive sports refers to the fair treatment and equal opportunities provided to women and men in all areas of sporting activities. It includes equal access to competitions, professional training, financial resources, coaching, sports facilities, scholarships, sponsorships, and leadership positions. Historically, women have faced various restrictions that limited their involvement in professional and competitive sports. These restrictions were influenced by traditional gender roles, institutional discrimination, and the belief that certain sporting activities were more appropriate for men. Although women's participation has increased, inequalities continue to exist in many professional sporting environments. Meier, H. E., Konjer, M. V., Müller, S., & Mutz, M. (2026). Explained thatGender equality therefore requires structural improvements that ensure female athletes receive opportunities according to their abilities, achievements, and professional qualifications.Gender equality also involves recognizing the different circumstances and needs of female athletes. Women may experience specific challenges related to pregnancy, motherhood, menstrual health, family responsibilities, and professional career interruptions. Sports organizations should develop policies that recognize these circumstances without limiting women's career opportunities. Fair employment contracts, maternity protections, medical support, and flexible professional arrangements can help female athletes maintain their careers. The historical development of women's competitive sports reflects a long struggle for recognition, participation, and equal opportunities. In earlier periods, women were frequently excluded from major sporting competitions because of traditional beliefs about physical ability and gender roles. Their involvement was often restricted to recreational activities rather than professional competitions. Over time, women's participation increased through educational reforms, social movements, international sporting organizations, and the achievements of female athletes.

The inclusion of more women's events in international competitions helped improve recognition and provided opportunities for women to demonstrate their athletic abilities. Thompson-Radford, H., & Skey, M. (2026). revealed thatDespite this progress, the historical exclusion of women continues to influence contemporary sporting institutions. Differences in financial investment, professional recognition, media coverage, and administrative representation remain visible. The growth of women's football, cricket, basketball, athletics, tennis, and other professional sports demonstrates that women can achieve international success when appropriate opportunities are available. However, increased participation does not automatically eliminate structural inequality. Stone, Chapman, Khasnis, and Collins (2025), in their review of the shortage of women in high-performance sports, examined the challenges facing female leaders and coaches and emphasized the importance of developing sustainable pathways for women's advancement. Their work highlights the need to understand gender equality as a continuing institutional responsibility. Equal access to competitive opportunities is one of the fundamental requirements of gender equality in sports. Female athletes should have the same opportunities to participate in local, national, and international competitions as male athletes. Access includes fair selection procedures, adequate training periods, professional coaching, suitable equipment, and opportunities to represent educational institutions, clubs, and national teams. When women receive fewer opportunities to compete, they may experience difficulties developing their athletic skills and gaining professional recognition. Limited competition opportunities can also affect their confidence and motivation.The availability of sporting pathways is particularly important for

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

young female athletes. Girls who receive encouragement and access to organized competitions at an early age may be more likely to continue their sporting careers into adulthood. However, unequal access to facilities, training programs, and competitive events can prevent talented girls from progressing.

The Council of Europe's 2025 All In Plus report identified differences in women's participation across grassroots and elite sporting environments. It also highlighted the need for organizations to strengthen gender equality policies and increase women's representation throughout sporting structures. These findings demonstrate that equal access must be maintained at every stage of athletic development. Financial inequality is one of the most significant challenges facing women in competitive sports. Female athletes may receive lower salaries, fewer bonuses, limited sponsorship opportunities, and less financial assistance than male athletes in comparable sporting environments. These differences can affect their ability to maintain professional careers, access high-quality training, and support their personal and family responsibilities. In some sports, women have fewer professional contracts and may need to combine athletic activities with other employment. This situation can reduce training time and create additional financial pressure.Equal pay is an important part of professional gender equality, although salary comparisons must consider competition revenues, employment arrangements, contractual responsibilities, and working conditions. Fairness also requires transparent payment systems and equal access to the resources needed to generate commercial opportunities. Meier et al. (2025), in their study of female athletes' demands for equal pay in German media narratives, examined how equal-pay arguments were represented in public discussion. Their research demonstrated that female athletes' demands for financial equality received attention, but public debate frequently connected improvements in compensation with the commercial development of women's sports. The findings highlight the importance of addressing structural inequalities rather than placing the entire responsibility for financial progress on female athletes. Sponsorship plays an important role in the professional development of competitive athletes.

Financial partnerships with companies can provide funding for training, travel, equipment, medical care, and competition participation. However, female athletes may experience difficulties attracting sponsors because women's competitions have historically received less commercial attention than men's competitions. Limited media exposure can reduce their visibility and make it harder to establish long-term commercial partnerships. Amin, S., Mbah, O., Mateo-Orcajada, A., Albaladejo-Saura, M., & Vaquero-Cristóbal, R. (Eds.). (2023). Elaborated onThese challenges can create a cycle in which lower visibility leads to reduced sponsorship, while reduced sponsorship limits professional development and competition opportunities.Improving sponsorship opportunities requires sports organizations and commercial partners to recognize the potential of women's sports. Companies can support female athletes through individual sponsorship agreements, team partnerships, competition funding, and long-term development programs. Sponsors should also recognize athletes' professional achievements and sporting performance rather than relying primarily on appearance or popularity. The Geena Davis Institute's research report, Fair Play? The Triumphs and Challenges of Female Athletes in the U.S., identifies financial and visibility challenges experienced by female athletes across high school, college, and professional levels. It recommends greater visibility, stronger gender-equity policies, and increased female leadership. Media representation has a major influence on the development of women's competitive sports. Television broadcasts, newspapers, online publications, sports websites,

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

and social media platforms help create public awareness of sporting competitions. Balanced media coverage can increase the recognition of female athletes, attract sponsors, develop fan communities, and encourage younger generations to participate in sports. However, women's competitions often receive less attention than men's competitions, particularly outside major international sporting events.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on secondary data to examine gender equality and opportunities for women in competitive sports. The research uses existing academic publications, peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, institutional reports, and relevant research documents published during 2025 and 2026. The selected literature focuses on gender discrimination, equal access to competitions, professional development, financial opportunities, sponsorship, media representation, sports leadership, coaching, and athlete welfare. Secondary sources are examined to understand the different factors that influence women's participation and professional advancement in competitive sporting environments. Particular attention is given to research involving female athletes, professional sports organizations, coaches, sports administrators, and women working in high-performance sporting environments.Data collection involves identifying and reviewing relevant academic and institutional publications. The selected sources are organized according to major research themes, including gender equality policies, economic inequality, professional opportunities, cultural barriers, organizational leadership, and athlete protection. Publications are considered according to their relevance, research quality, publication date, and connection with the central research question. The study also considers research from different geographical regions to understand how gender inequality may vary across national and international sporting environments. Both professional and grassroots sports are considered because opportunities at the grassroots level can influence women's progression into elite competitions.The collected information is examined through thematic analysis to identify common patterns, differences, and emerging issues. The methodology compares findings from different studies to develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing female athletes. It also considers the limitations of secondary research, including differences in research populations, geographical settings, institutional structures, and measurement methods. The study does not claim to have conducted original interviews, surveys, or experiments. Its conclusions are therefore based on the interpretation and synthesis of existing academic and institutional evidence.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study follows a descriptive and exploratory research design to investigate gender equality and professional opportunities for women in competitive sports. The descriptive component examines the current challenges and opportunities experienced by female athletes, while the exploratory component investigates the institutional, economic, social, and cultural factors that contribute to gender inequality. This research design is appropriate because the study aims to understand a complex social and institutional issue through existing research rather than testing an experimental intervention. It allows different aspects of women's sporting experiences to be examined within a common research framework.A secondary-data research framework is developed around several major dimensions of gender equality. These include equal access to competitions, financial resources, professional contracts, sponsorship

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

opportunities, media representation, coaching, leadership, and athlete protection. Each dimension is examined to understand how it influences women's sporting participation and career development. The design also considers the relationship between institutional policies and the actual experiences of female athletes. This approach helps distinguish between formal commitments to gender equality and the practical implementation of those commitments within sporting organizations.The research design further incorporates comparative and thematic analysis of publications from different countries and sporting environments. Studies involving professional athletes, coaches, sports administrators, and grassroots participants are considered to identify common challenges and differences. Particular attention is given to the experiences of women in developing countries, including Pakistan, where cultural expectations and limited institutional resources may influence competitive opportunities. The study maintains an evidence-based approach by connecting its interpretations with published research and recognizing the limitations of the available secondary sources.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the reviewed literature indicates that equal access to competitive sports remains an important requirement for achieving gender equality. Female athletes continue to experience differences in access to professional training, competitions, sports facilities, and development programs. The Council of Europe's 2025 All In Plus report identified inequalities in grassroots participation, coaching, and sports leadership across 21 jurisdictions. These findings suggest that increasing women's participation requires equal opportunities throughout the sporting pathway, from initial training to professional competition. The reviewed evidence demonstrates that financial inequality affects the professional development of female athletes. Differences in salaries, sponsorship agreements, competition funding, and professional contracts can create disadvantages for women. Meier et al. (2025) examined equal-pay debates in German media and found that female athletes' demands for financial fairness received public attention, although the discussion often emphasized commercial market considerations. This indicates that financial equality requires transparent payment structures, adequate investment, and fair employment arrangements. Media representation is an important factor in creating professional opportunities for women in competitive sports. The literature indicates that limited media coverage can reduce the visibility of female athletes and restrict their access to commercial partnerships. Greater coverage of women's competitions can strengthen public recognition and create opportunities for sponsorship and professional development. Thompson-Radford and Skey (2025) also demonstrate that visibility must be accompanied by responsible representation because increased media attention can expose female athletes to gender stereotypes and additional scrutiny. The analysis identifies underrepresentation of women in sports leadership as a major institutional challenge. Women remain less represented in senior administrative, coaching, and decision-making positions in many sporting organizations.

FINDINGS

The findings indicate that equal access to training facilities, competitions, scholarships, and professional development programs is essential for women's advancement in competitive sports. Limited access to these opportunities can prevent talented female athletes from achieving their full potential.The study finds that unequal salaries, limited sponsorship opportunities, inadequate funding, and differences in professional contracts continue to affect

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

female athletes. Financial support is necessary for providing women with sustainable sporting careers.The findings demonstrate that women's sports require greater and more balanced media coverage. Increased visibility can improve public recognition, attract sponsorship, and encourage young girls to pursue competitive sports.The research identifies limited female representation in sports administration, coaching, officiating, and organizational leadership. Increasing women's involvement in decision-making positions is important for developing inclusive sporting policies.The findings reveal that traditional gender expectations, discrimination, family responsibilities, and safety concerns continue to restrict women's participation in competitive sports, particularly in communities with limited institutional support.The study indicates that female athletes need equal access to qualified coaches, professional mentoring, training resources, and career advancement programs. These opportunities are important for improving athletic performance and professional recognition.The findings highlight that schools, colleges, and universities can contribute to gender equality by providing equal sports facilities, scholarships, competitions, and physical education opportunities for female students.The research finds that safe sporting environments, anti-harassment policies, medical support, and effective reporting procedures are necessary for protecting female athletes and maintaining their professional participation.The findings indicate that governments and sports organizations must introduce effective gender equality policies, allocate sufficient financial resources, and monitor their implementation to reduce institutional discrimination.The study identifies motherhood and family responsibilities as important considerations in women's sporting careers. Maternity protection, childcare arrangements, and flexible professional pathways can help women maintain their involvement in competitive sports.

CONCLUSION

Gender equality and opportunities for women in competitive sports represent important elements of professional development, social justice, and women's empowerment. The present study examined the challenges and opportunities experienced by female athletes through a review of recent academic literature and institutional research published during 2025 and 2026. The reviewed evidence demonstrates that women have achieved considerable progress in sporting participation and professional recognition. However, unequal access to financial resources, professional contracts, training facilities, sponsorship, media coverage, and leadership positions continues to affect their development. These inequalities demonstrate that equal participation alone is not sufficient to establish a fair and sustainable sporting environment.The study also highlights the importance of addressing social, cultural, and institutional barriers that influence women's sporting opportunities. Gender stereotypes, discrimination, family responsibilities, inadequate infrastructure, and safety concerns can discourage women from pursuing professional athletic careers. These challenges may be particularly significant in developing countries, where financial resources and institutional support are often limited. Educational institutions, sports organizations, and community programs should therefore provide equal access to competitions, professional coaching, scholarships, and career development opportunities. Greater representation of women in sports leadership and administration can also improve decision-making and encourage more inclusive organizational policies.The research concludes that achieving gender equality in competitive sports requires coordinated efforts from governments, international sporting organizations, educational institutions, sponsors, media organizations, and local communities. Sports organizations should establish transparent recruitment and selection procedures, fair

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

compensation systems, effective safeguarding policies, and family-friendly professional arrangements. Media organizations should provide balanced coverage of women's competitions and recognize female athletes for their achievements and professional abilities. Future research should further examine gender equality across different sporting disciplines and geographical regions, particularly in developing countries. Ultimately, providing women with fair opportunities to participate, compete, lead, and succeed is essential for creating a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable international sporting environment.

REFERENCES

Stone, M. E., Chapman, P., Khasnis, U., & Collins, D. (2025). Addressing the shortage of women in high-performance sport: What is known and what we need to know. Psychology International, 7(3), 74.

Stone, M. E., Chapman, P., Khasnis, U., & Collins, D. (2025). Addressing the shortage of women in high-performance sport: What is known and what we need to know. Psychology International, 7(3), 74.

Meier, H. E., Konjer, M. V., Müller, S., & Mutz, M. (2026). Getting the Pay Gap on the Board: Female Athletes' Demands for 'Equal Pay'in German Media Narratives. Communication & Sport, 14(2), 535-565.

Thompson-Radford, H., & Skey, M. (2026). "We've… had to Make Ourselves more Visible Because… the Media hasn't Done it for us": Theorising a Visibility Bind in Relation to the Growing Prominence of Women's Sport. Communication & Sport, 14(2), 697-714.

Amin, S., Mbah, O., Mateo-Orcajada, A., Albaladejo-Saura, M., & Vaquero-Cristóbal, R. (Eds.). (2023). European handbook for gender equality, equity, inclusion in sport: A perspective through the erasmus+ women-up project. ESIC.