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Inequalities and discrimination: Constraining women in sport sedition

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Abstract

The position outcomes of sport for gender equality and women's empowerment are constrained by gender-based discrimination in all areas and at all levels of sport and physical activity, fuelled by continuing stereotypes of women's physical abilities and social roles. Women are frequently segregated involuntarily into different types of sports, events and competitions specifically targeted to women. Women's access to positions of leadership and decision-making is constrained from the local to the international level. The value placed on women's sport is often lower, resulting in inadequate resources and unequal wages and prizes. In the media, women's sport is not only marginalized but also often presented in a different style that reflects and reinforces gender stereotypes. Violence against women, exploitation and harassment in sport are manifestations of the perceptions of men's dominance, physical strength and power, which are traditionally portrayed in male sport.

There is a general understanding among people that being successful at a sport means becoming a successful man. However, for girls the problem is when a sport does not jibe with the image of womanhood or femininity

This paper is an effort to explore the power of sport and physical education to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It examines persistent inequalities and challenges to equal participation and benefits for women and girls, as well as ways to address them. Examples of good practices are provided in all areas. The report outlines recommendations for action in the areas of research, policy and operational activities.

Keywords: Inequalities, discrimination, constraining women, sport sedition

Introduction

The position outcomes of sport for gender equality and women's empowerment are constrained by gender-based discrimination in all areas and at all levels of sport and physical activity, fuelled by continuing stereotypes of women's physical abilities and social roles. Women are frequently segregated involuntarily into different types of sports, events and competitions specifically targeted to women. Women's access to positions of leadership and decision-making is constrained from the local to the international level. The value placed on women's sport is often lower, resulting in inadequate resources and unequal wages and prizes. In the media, women's sport is not only marginalized but also often presented in a different style that reflects and reinforces gender stereotypes. Violence against women, exploitation and harassment in sport are manifestations of the perceptions of men's dominance, physical strength and power, which are traditionally portrayed in male sport.

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The United Nations human rights and sport for development and peace framework,

A rights-based understanding of sport and physical activity has been present since the founding of the United Nation. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out a framework of rights and duties and recognized that "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure.

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“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality...” and “Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community . . .”

Sport and physical activity were first specifically recognized as a human right in the International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, adopted in 1978 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, also supports the notion of sport and physical education as a human right. States parties agreed that the education of the child shall be directed to “the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”.

The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 marked a significant step forward in the policy framework on sport for people with disabilities.

Over the past decade, there has been a growing understanding that access to and participation in sport and Physical Education is not only a right in itself, but can also be used to promote a number of important development goals through facilitating democratic principles, promoting leadership development, and encouraging tolerance and respect, as well as providing access to opportunities and social networks.

In 2004, the General Assembly adopted resolution 58/5, “Sports as a means to promote Education, Health, development and peace,” which invited Governments, the United Nations, the specialized agencies, where appropriate, and sport-related institutions to work collectively so that sport and Physical Education could present opportunities for solidarity and cooperation, in order to promote a culture of peace and social and gender equality. It recognized the power of sport to contribute to human development and proclaimed the year 2005 as the International year of Sport and Physical Education.

In 2006, Secretary-General Kofi Annan presented the United Nation action plan on Sport for development and peace, which was included in his report on “Sport for development and peace: the way forward”.

Resolution of the Second International Olympic Committee World Conference on Women and Sport

The resolution adopted in 2000, calls for a number of strategies and actions to be taken by the International Olympic committee, Governments and International organization, including the United Nations systems, such as :

- Meeting the 20 per cent goal of women in decision making by 2005 ;
- Increasing scholarship and training for women athletes, coaches and other officials;
- Raising awareness about the positive influence of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women on the development of Physical activity and Sport for women and girls;
- Urging the commission on the status of women to recognize the importance of physical activity and sport to women’s and girls development at all stages of their lives;
- Raising awareness about the importance of quality Physical Education;
- Developing strategies and educational material to support Physical Education for Girls;
- Implementing sexual harassment policies, including codes of conduct;
- Working with the media to ensure a more accurate projection of women’s Sport.

Sport as a vehicle for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

The relationship between gender equality and sport is not solely about achieving equality in women’s participation and treatment within sports, but it is also about promoting “sport for gender equality”. Or harnessing the potential of sport for social empowerment of women and girls. Sport offers a valuable channel to strengthen women’s and girls’ capabilities and provide information on important social issues, such as health, HIV/AIDS and women’s rights. Women’s and girls participation in sport can also challenge gender stereotypes and break down entrenched discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.

Steps and practical measures for Empowering Women and Girls through Sport

Sport can be an important tool for social empowerment through the skills and values learned, such as teamwork, negotiation, leadership, communication and respect for others.

- ❖ Women and girls acquire new interpersonal networks, develop a sense of identity and access new opportunities, allowing them to become more engaged in school and community life.
- ❖ Participation in sport also enables women and girls to enjoy freedom of expression and movement and increase their self-esteem and self-confidence.
- ❖ The concept of positive embodiment implies that women and girls have the right and responsibility to create active, healthy lifestyle to sustain vitality in their lives.
- ❖ Positive embodiment can be seen as a model of self-care that allows women to achieve a balance between caring for themselves and caring for others.

Sport can serve as a vehicle to improve women’s and girls’ leadership roles and participation in decision-making. The potential for sport to contribute to the social, economic and political empowerment of women and girls is clear and has been recognized by Governments, the United Nations system, NGOs and other actors. The task ahead is to act on this recognition and bring the benefits of sport and physical education to women and girls throughout the world.

Studying attitudes towards women and girls in sport in India.

A study was carried out in rural and urban India by the Indira Gandhi Institute of Physical Education and Sport Sciences on the attitudes of parents, teachers and coaches towards female participation in sport. The findings indicated that policies are needed at the local level to support and protect women’s participation in sport and, in particular, efforts are required to remove misconception related to women’s participation in sport and the impact of sport on women’s health.

Women are traditionally not encouraged to indulge in sports. Sports are men oriented, where men play and women watch. It is clearly visible in the Indian media too, be it films or advertisements. For instance, in an advertisement of Clinic Plus shampoo, a coach of a boys’ cricket team in school discourages a girl to play with the team by fearing, when he says, “Baal Kharab ho jayege” (your hair will get damaged if you will play cricket in sun). Another advertisement of Tata Sky featuring Gul Panag and Aamir Khan, she has been portrayed as a women for whom sports is a nuisance. During the cricket matches and sports world cups, time and again, many news channels have shown how women have to sacrifice watching their saas-bahu dramas and newspapers

also write about falling TRP's of TV serial and how these matches are a jeremiad for women. Because in the family, their husbands, brothers and father are glued to the sports channel and the power of attorney for the remote control is transferred to men for those few days when the matches are held.

These news channels, newspapers and advertisements depict our societal attitude and it clearly shows that sports are still considered to be a male domain. As even today, while buying toys for children, parents automatically go for buying dolls, indoor games and kitchen playing sets for their daughters, but cricket bats and footballs for their sons.

Girls are encouraged to learn virtues of a good homemaker since their childhood whereas boys are encouraged to play outdoor sports. We hardly even see a girls' sports team or uni-sex sports team in co-educational schools. The upbringing of boys is such that they are not able to digest girls as opponents or team members. On top of it, glitters over gold are Indian movies and the Indian Premier League matches, which have reduced status of girls in the sports to mere cheer leaders and spectators, whose heart stops beating on the glimpse of a cricketer.

Women's vulnerability to being sexually exploited by men coaches, scarcity of women coaches and lack of sports ground and sponsors for sportswomen are acting as hindrance in promoting sports among women, especially in suburbs and rural areas. It's obvious for parents to feel worried for their girl children in such a society.

All this, directly or indirectly, sings the same song that women are the weaker sex psychologically, physically, are docile and lack aggression, which are prerequisites for being a sports person.

But then, encouraging sports among girls are the answer to make girls stronger. How can one forget that scene in "Chak De India" when the girls' hockey players, taught an eve teaser a good lesson? They were able to do so because of their physical stamina only.

The time has come to change societal attitude towards women and practice gender equality. Here, the media needs to play a central role. The manner in which women are portrayed in the media influences our mindsets and attitudes. There is a need to transform the portrayal of women in advertisements. Women should be portrayed for sports, not anti- sports. There is dire need for making more films like, "Chak De India", highlighting the women sports players for their games, rather than there good looks and sexy figures.

In the end, Indian women making mark internationally clearly shows that the attitude of our society towards women is changing. Indian families understand the importance of their daughter's academics and educational qualification, to make her independent. However, they still need to understand that encouraging sports among girls is as important for her personality development as her academics are, and the virtues like team spirit, leadership, decision making abilities and flexibility can be learned on the sports ground only, not by merely playing Ghar-Ghar with kitchen sets.

Now Women in the Inter National Level

For the first time this year, women will compete in every competition at the

Olympics. Surprised it's taken this long to get on an even footing? Well think again,

we're far from equal when it comes to both participation **and** coverage. By the age of 14, girls are dropping out of sport at twice the rate of boys and with only 12% of those 14 year

olds meeting official guidelines for physical activity, this trend has worrying consequences for the future health and wellbeing of our gender. We all know the teenage years can be tricky to navigate but just why do girls drop out of sport during adolescence when it's so crucial that they're kept engaged? Studies by the Women's Sports and Fitness Foundation found that many young females are put off by the idea of sports being perceived as unfeminine which is hardly surprising when you consider the images of supposed female beauty they're bombarded with. From the size zeros of the fashion mags to the overly sexualised images of botoxed, boob jobbed women like Katie Price, it's really no wonder that girls develop skewed ideas of what it means to be feminine. With girls maturing faster than ever and developing body and image issues at an ever earlier age, surely it's important that these are not the only images on their radar? So where are the images of strong, confident female athletes? In a struggling global market, women's events and coverage are often the first to be axed and with a lack of investment in women's sports we have a real battle on our hands in order to make a change. I've often heard the argument from even my most enlightened male counterparts that the level of female participants (in skateboarding usually) is far below that of the men's and therefore less deserving of both coverage and investment. But currently only 0.5% of commercial sponsorship is in women's sports so we've hardly got a level playing field and when you're battling against centuries of being held back, that argument just doesn't hold with me. It seems obvious that the chronic lack of investment in women's sports makes it harder for ladies to reach the top of their game which coupled with the fact you have to fight your way onto the pitch past decades of bias before you've even started makes things more than a little tricky.

Promoting women's participation in the Paralympic Games.

The International Paralympic committee's Sport Technical Department promoted women's participation in the 2000 Paralympic Games in Sydney focusing on women in the allocation of sport wildcard, adding more events and disciplines for women, and raising awareness of issues related to women and sport among the leadership of national Paralympic committees.

Conclusion

The gender-based discrimination against women in sport-related employment is also apparent in the unequal representation of women in sport media, and the negative portrayal of women athletes and women's sport remains a persistent problem. "It is heartening that so many public and voluntary sports and Physical Education organization have embraced the challenge of gender equality. It means that more and more girls and women may receive the same benefits which boys and men have enjoyed for years, and their fair share of the social resources available ...It is not enough simply to extend the programs which males have enjoyed to females. Give the differences in needs, interests and circumstances, and the diversity of the female population, it will require careful 'needs based' planning and innovative programming". In order to realize the full potential for sports as a vehicle for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, gender inequality in sports must be addressed. The prevalence of gender-based discrimination in sport mirrors traditional gender stereotypes and reinforces gender inequalities. Opportunities for women and girls to

participate in sports may be restricted. Even when participation is allowed, the dynamics of gender relations and notions of masculinity and femininity may result in gender segregation in different types of sport and Physical Education. Inequalities also exist in access to resources, wages and financial incentives and in media representation of women athletes and women's sport. The lack of women and girls in decision-making and leadership positions, as well as exploitation, harassment and violence against women and girls, is also prevalent in sport and the commercial sporting industry.

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