

# Gender Stereotypes in Sports: A Study of Sports Women in Punjab

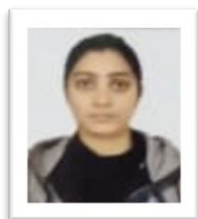
## Abstract

Sports are gendered institutions because of its roles in providing and emphasizing beliefs about gender inequalities and discrimination; varied opportunities are provided for each gender who are associated with sports; and divergent resources for women and men participating in sports. It has been studied that women are always encouraged to play those games and sports that emphasize grace, beauty, and co-ordination whereas males are encouraged to play sports such as football, rugby, and cricket. The present paper attempts to obtain the information on gender stereotype in sports. For the purpose of analysis of this paper both primary and secondary sources will be used. The objective of this paper is to find out reasons behind women's participation in various sports. Three districts of Punjab (Amritsar, Jalandhar and Ludhiana) have been selected for the research, where maximum number of women are pursuing their career in sports. Indoor, outdoor, group and individual games have been considered in each district.

**Keywords:** Sports, Women, Stereotype, Gender.

## Introduction

Gender stereotypes can be observed from birth till death. Once a new born baby sex is disclosed, they are dressed either in blue or pink, given gifts of truck and soldiers (Male Child) or dolls (Female Child) and animals according to the gender of the baby. They are referred to as strong and alert or soft and delicate according to the gender. (Malszecki and Cavar, 2005, Zimmerman and Reavile, 1998). The process of socialization clearly leads to certain stereotypes such as gender discrimination, gender roles, gender rules and male dominance. Traditionally, women have been expected to wear dresses, cook and clean, raise child bearing, maintain a beautiful, attractive and delicate body and remain passive, moral, and pure. (Griffin, 1998; Sherrow, 1996; Woolum, 1998; Zimmerman and Reavill, 1998). These stereotypes are often linked to sports leading to various forms of abuse against sports women. In general, sports is considered as male dominated domain. Sports events may be recognized under three categories ie: masculinity, femininity, neutral according to the eminent writers, (Koivula, 1995; Riemer & Visio, 2003). During the times of ancient Olympics, only men were allowed to participate however, women all over the world were not only allowed to participate but were also forbidden to watch to Olympic games. Many nations restricted women's participation in sports. Besides that, the founder of modern Olympics was also rigidly against the participation of women in sports events. During the modern Olympics, held in 1896, there was no contribution from women in sports. With the passage of time, Women started participating in sports. During 1900 Modern Olympics, women could participate only in Tennis, Golf and Yatching. In the worldwide scenario, Women started entering sports and games during 1840-1901. During the 1900 Modern Olympics, from 1900 to 1950 women started participating in Tennis, Sailing, Croquet, Equestrian, Golf, Swimming, Archery & Figure Skating. It has been clearly seen that women's participation in sports was very limited. During 1960, women began to play various team and individual games such as Volleyball, Handball, Hockey, Cycling, Softball, Ice Hockey, Athletics and Judo. However, women's participation was very low in various games such as Wrestling, Boxing, and Kabbaddi during these years. Similarly, inequalities may be observed in various sports activities. (Koivula, 1995; Riemer & Visio, 2003). Later, Weightlifting was introduced in 2000. Wrestling sport was played in Olympics in 2004 for the very first time. Introduction of boxing and Ski Jumping games were introduced quite late in Olympics. The gender stereotypes can be seen since the history of sports." Women are supposed to be more compatible for expressive activities or



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feminine activities such as dancing, gymnastics, tennis and swimming activities whereas fighting sports are observed as masculine." According to Hardin & Greer, 2009; Metheny: 1965; Riemer & Visio, 2003. Indian women's entry into Olympics was much later as compared to the other women in the world. The London Summer Olympic Games held in 2012 served as a gender equity milestone. It was the first Olympic Games, in which all, 26 countries sent their female representatives to participate in athletics were open to both the genders. (Blyler 2012).

Additionally, women started participating in various sports. Gender stereotypes and discrimination can be observed during the selection of the game. Women are less interested to participate in masculine games such as boxing, wrestling, kabaddi etc. The reason being personal preferences and societal stereotypes as a result which they end up making career in sports reflecting femininity. Three districts of the state of Punjab have been selected for this paper, as Punjab is considered as patriarchal state.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

For the present paper, the review of literature has been carried out following objective. The objective of the paper is as under:

1. To find out prevalence of Gender stereotypes in sports.

#### **Review of Literature**

Historical background clearly represents that women not only in India but throughout the world have limited access and limited opportunities in sports and are forbidden to participate in different sports. Women have had fewer events as compared to men (Coakley, J., 2001). Women often experience constraints for participation into sports religious beliefs, moral restrictions and gender stereotypes from birth until death including gender stereotypes that prevent women to take part in sports events. The socialization of an individual clearly depicts the influence of masculinity over femininity. A gender stereotype includes gender discrimination, gender roles, Schemas, gender rules and male dominance. These stereotypes are often linked to sports leading to various forms of abuse and harassment against sportswomen.

Higginson (1985) explored about gender stereotypes in sports. Prevalence of gender related myths in our community clearly show that males are supposed to be more powerful and assertive than girls in sports or physical activities are more appropriate for males than females. Author indicated that play styles, type of game and selection of games are gender labeled in our society.

Sherrow (1996) described "The issue of Femininity in sports, what is feminine in appearance and behavior e.g. being attractive, carefully groomed, submissive and nurturing women. Sports and athletics have been restricted to and associated with males, masculinity and the manly domain".

Woolum (1998) and Sherrow (1996) described "The masculine culture and highlighted how sports have, over the time evolved and team sportsmanship have been deemed appropriate within

the masculine domain". As a result many girls and women avoid taking part in sports.

Coakley, J. (2001) concluded in "*Gender and Sport*" that The people of North American society had a myth that women should not take part in sports such as wrestling, boxing and other strenuous sports. The author further described about participation of women in various sports and misconception about women's body and health. Girls and women have been excluded from sports participation due to gender order and their femininity. Women are always encouraged to play those games and sports that emphasize grace, beauty, and co-ordination only.

Jain, R. (2002) in book "*Sports Sociology*" dealt with the fear of competitive sport. There is fear in the minds of girls, women, their parents and their guardians that undergoing a heavy schedule of training may cause some adverse structural and functional changes in organism. The body may become strong, sturdy, and masculine, which a woman would dislike.

Kimura, M. (2003) conducted a study of Japan in an article "*Gender Relations in Japanese Sports Organization and Sports Involvement*" and found that in Japan, many sports activities or events such as baseball and soccer were banned for women.

Key, T. (2003) defined masculinity and femininity in "*Sport and Gender*" that women have traditionally participated in games such as swimming, tennis, and gymnastics, which show femininity. Male sports such as football, rugby, and crickets how masculinity. The masculinity of sports is a product of way in which sports have been institutionalised and developed, rather than a reflection of the intrinsic qualities of sporting activity.

Singh, Y. (2005) in his book "*Sociology in Sports*" showed women's participation into various sports. The author found in 1986 survey, the participation of women into sports such as swimming, fit/yoga, cycling, Athletics including jogging had increased.

Chappell (2010) in his article "*Equality, Equality and Inclusion in Physical Education and School Sports*" introduced unequal opportunities and gender stereotype in sports. The author examined that sometimes family circumstances, gender stereotypes prevent children to get involved into sports activities. In many nations various school sports activities were different for both the sexes like netball and hockey for women and soccer and rugby for males.

Lata, K. et al. (2015) conducted a study on "*Attitude towards Female Sports Participation: A Study of Haryana*". To know about the psychology of the respondents towards gender and sports activities in Haryana. 192 respondents out of 432 of which 36.5% were females and 63.5% were males strongly agreed that wrestling, boxing, rugby, cycling and football were the games that were for males. 52.6% of female respondents and 47.4% of males also supported this argument.

#### **Research Methodology**

Research has been conducted in the three districts of the state of Punjab, which are Amritsar, Ludhiana, and Jalandhar. For the present research

paper, a purposive sample of 210 sports women, who were playing sports under professional training academies and were pursuing games as their career at district, national and international level were taken. The research design for study was partially exploratory and partially descriptive. Group discussions were also framed to understand the various problems in sports. An interview schedule was constructed to collect in-depth information for the present study.

### Results

To understand the nature of the social grouping as well as the existence of gender stereotypes in sports field. It is important to understand their demographic background. Socio-economic background of the respondents is given below:

**Table 1**  
**Socio Economic Background of the Respondents**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age (in years)</b>		
15-20	147	67.61
20-25	67	31.91
25-30	1	0.48
<b>Level of game</b>		
State level	72	34.28
National	131	62.38
International level	7	3.34
<b>Form of game</b>		
Indoor	34	16.19
Outdoor	91	43.33
Both	85	40.48
<b>Caste</b>		
Upper	130	62
Middle	28	13
Lower	52	25
<b>Education</b>		
B.A	188	89.52
M.A	14	6.66
Professional	8	3.82
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	94	44.77
Sikh	114	54.28
Muslim	2	0.95
<b>Family type</b>		
Nuclear	145	69.5
Joint	65	30.95

Table.1 shows that majority of the sportswomen in the sample i.e. 67.61 were in the age group of 15-20 years and 62.38 percent were found to be national level/interuniversity level players. 43.33 percent sportswomen were engaged in outdoor games. It includes hockey, football, athletics, basketball, volleyball, korfbal, softball and handball. Most of the women in the study (130) belonged to the upper caste.

The educational background of the respondents indicates that 89.52 percent of the total respondents were pursuing graduate degrees and 6.66 percent were pursuing post graduate degrees. There were only 3.82 percent of the total respondents who were pursuing professional degrees i.e. B.P.E.d, M.P.E.d, etc. It was assumed that women with higher

educational qualification were aware about their rights at their workplace. Majority of the respondents were Sikhs as the study was conducted in the state of Punjab. The research clearly reveals the dominance of nuclear family in the sample. The nuclear family perpetuates more open and healthy interaction between the family members. It is believed that respondents discuss their problems with family members to find out solutions.

**Table 2**  
**Number of Sports Women in Different Games**

Form of game	Frequency	Percent
Gymnasium games	18	8.57
Field games	180	85.71
Aquatic games	2	0.95
Court games	10	4.77
Total	210	100

Table 2 indicates that 8.57 percent of the respondents were engaged in gymnasium games, which included i.e. gymnastics, judo, kick boxing, weightlifting and wrestling. 85.71 percent of the total respondents joined field games. It included archery, athletics basketball, cycling, football, handball, hockey, kabaddi, kho-kho, korfbal, netball, softball, taekwondo, volleyball and Wushu .0.95 percent respondents were involved in aquatic games like swimming and skating. 4.77 percents respondents played court games. It included table tennis and badminton games. Thus, it was found in the present study that maximum percentage of the respondents were playing field games. It was found that women played football game only in one of the academy of Punjab. In spite of that it has been concluded that there were low participation in various games such as kickboxing, boxing, judo, wrestling, weightlifting, and so on. It was also found that in academies women face significant barriers to participate in specific sports, such as gender roles, less encouragement from family members and legal, traditional and cultural restrictions. Another important reason for low participation is security of girls. Majority of the respondents had an opinion that most of the parents were worried about their daughter's married life, body figures and they felt that participation in masculine sports events may have negative effect on their beauty or social life.

### Importance of the Study

As we know that sports is a male dominant sphere. The questions of female participation in specific games have gained utmost importance. In order to highlight the gender bias to sportswomen, which they face during sports training. The significance of the study is that this study would throw a great deal of light on gender discrimination faced by sportswomen in three districts of Punjab at various levels and would lay emphasize on their participation in different games.

### Conclusion

Such results clearly indicate that women started to participate in all games. As history of sports women represents male domination in sports. Although Indian women started to play various games such as kabbaddi, wrestling, boxing and so on. But the participation rate is very low in the male

dominated games. By This, it can be concluded that women felt they were not capable for specific games and cannot play boldly as compared to men. The parents of respondents were also worried about their daughter's body figure, married life and social life. This clearly state that the participation rate of women in masculine sport is very low. The present paper supports the influence of power and gender stereotypes for the existence perpetuation of gender bias faced by sports women at their workplace.

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