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## Women sports persons and their problems and issues

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### Abstract

In line with qualitative research design, the present study of female athlete was to investigate their experiences in depth with full context of sports life. After going through the theoretical work of various theories related with gender especially in feminine perspectives, the data collection tool of semi structure interview in depth was taken and administered in details with all 18 participants of various sports who were having a long and broad experience in their own individual or team games of different colleges of Delhi University. Firstly the purposes of study was decided as their experiences related with social support from family, teachers, relatives etc in social system, also their facilities in their training centers with the specific orientations with power and culture and solutions of their problems. In their versions in data collection, it was reflected in findings that it was very difficult for them to participate in sports from very beginning, even further it was difficult to continue but they resisted to the domination of male in sports system prevailing at all level and continues besides all odds. After going through such ordeals, was reflected in interview that they became persistent and tough in their struggle to continue and they reached to national and international level in their games. In response to question of solution, they demanded of legal provisions be constituted and enforced fairly and stressed their personal transformation as self reliant and self confident as they trained and learnt such lessons from sports experiences. Also found that the male in sports system should be sensitized and facilities especially women type should be provided at training centers and they preferred the female coaches at training centers as well as female administrators in sports organization for their safety and confidence.

**Keywords:** Women sports, problems and issues, Delhi University, sports life

### Introduction

The participation of women and their performance is a very challenging issue especially in India. Where the complexity of society is also problematic area. The prevailing values, norms, sanctions belief system in society are hurdles to the women for outdoor activities like sports, where sports is dominated by male masculinity not suitable to women nature as in general notion. Images of male is muscular, strong and athletic that of female is soft, curvaceous and non-athletic (Greendorfer & Hasbrook, 1991) [6].

The gender based norms are main source of claiming the stereotype labeling to gender role especially for women. Doles tend to promote finite coordination, whereas trucks and blocks tend to foster skills related to spatial relations and perception (Liss, 1981 & 1983) [8, 9]. Not only parents continue to select toys for boys and girls based on gender role stereotypes, they enforce further in choice. (Lloyd & Smith, 1985) [10]. However it proves that parents train the sons from yearly age to assimilate gross motor behavior than daughters so tagging with toys type exposure on gender basis not only impact on early childhood experiences but also late life choice of career activity. Fagot (1984) [5] found that teachers also give more positive feedback to boys participating in sports than girls.

The gender stereotypes role have been challenged and confronted in games and sports by many feminists. The capability to challenge gender barriers and restrictions, attitude about women's appearance and their participation in sports is proved through the increased presence in sports. In sports, experiences of women sports persons present a need to make adding meaning of femininity. After proving in the fields of sports, the girls still are not getting similar encouragement as their male counterparts (Coacklay, 1990) [1].

Under the influence of feminist movements of 1970, women's participation has increased into many track and field events like in throwers especially where strength and power elements are required, however earlier it was related with male masculinity. Female participation in sports suggested, the images of women frailty were rooted in gender perspectives rather than nature. 1970 onwards it had been noted, basic change in more participation in sports female sports persons and also their participation has widened in wider area of activities.

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Sports women have challenged stereotype gender norms and lessened barriers and increased more mobility, for getting public spaces, opportunities for their growth and potential of physical, intellectual and social.

The purpose of present study was to investigate the issues and problems of women sports persons found in the training centers, administration, at home and in culture and society structure. By adopting the qualitative research design, the comprehensive information has been collected in depth and wider context through tool of semi structure interview that gives the more space to researchers as well as to interviewee for questions and answers. Feminist and cultural theoretical perspectives have provided the insights in relation to power, domination, patriarchy etc. Connell has described gender as a process of social embodiment in which bodies are both agents and objects (Connell, 2002) [4]. Power is embodied basically in fundamental structure of society as in economic relation and reflects in culture discourse. Gender is related with division of labor rooted in society and is best reflected in particular task considered fairly in cultural expectations (Ransome, 2010). Women image and condition is also reflected in sports as it is reflection of society, there is sheer discrimination on gender basis, so aim of this study is to find out the reason and effect of the problems and issues relate to women in sports system.

### Methodology

The chapter is to begin with qualitative methodological (phenomenology) approach carried out to discover on an individual's experience. In sports system being a female gender sports person is including the social supporting system to continue their sports career, their problems faced during participation and other concerning issues exist very much in the system.

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the following questions:

- How does social support impact the participation in sports?
- What problems women faced in public space while pursuing the sports?
- What discrimination women face in sports system?
- What are measures for solution of their problems?

For more theoretical clarity, a paradigm of perspectives related to women issues has been adopted as it is about the assumptions, norms, standards and different theoretical aspects of the research. Essentially, research paradigms are the 'world view' that inform research (Ottens, Mueller, & Thoenen 1975) [11]. In such a work i.e. women study in sports must be strengthened with sound logic from theoretical frame work especially from gender and feminist perspectives, where the current social system is assumed to be patriarchy dominated resulting in enforced the existing sanctions and stigmas of participation of women in sports. The women bound narrative is left with narrow space to women sports persons in all respects e.g budgeting, training facilities, presence in sports training centers, administration, coaching system, coverage of media etc. So, to understand the problems and issues related with women sports persons is necessarily aligned with power, patriarchy, culture, historical process etc. Consequently above mentioned problems and issues demand a sound base of solution mechanism. The qualitative research design is considered more relevant to pursue the present research work to gain

more understanding the experiences of women sports persons in depth and broadly (Conroy, 2010) [2]. The questions raised earlier for purpose of study underpinning in the interview to gather data ensuing would be a core criterion of getting the information related with assumed variables and themes.

### Data collection analysis procedure

For data collection, a purposive sampling has been adopted in which 18 sports women as participants for collecting the data through the semi structure interview. Women sports persons were from various sports i.e. individual, combative individual and team games. All were national participation as minimum criterion and few were international level having greater experience of sports life which would be worthwhile in such qualitative study.

Semi structured interview was designed to collect the data. In which questions were formed mostly in line with constructivist approach, where the personal's experiences are shaped and this approach is underpinned on the dynamic and complex reality of individual's life with unique world stand point (Corner, Murray & Brett, 2012) [3]. The thematic questions were asked from women sports persons related with their experiences in the context of their sports experiences. Kumar (2005) [7] views the interview as the most suitable approach for studying the complex and sensitive areas. With greater flexibility, the questions were based on their social support for their decision to participate in sports, problems faced while pursuing the sports for a longer span of time, discrimination they confronted in the social system dominated by men and measures they adopted for the solutions.

For the analysis, the data was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Then it was coded and analyzed. The codes are key words that used to classify and organize the transcription and are considered as an essential part of qualitative research (Sarantakosh, 1998) [14]. The data described in transcription is further analyzed. then depicted in categories and finally organized in to themes and sub themes as it is a coding process. Emerging themes were identified with very specific codes. The themes were also classified by theoretical perspectives based on the power, culture, patriarchy and empowerment of women sports persons. Finally, for data validity re-verification of transcripts and codes was adopted by researcher and also to verify the hypothesis and modify if required. The principles of thematic analysis were employed in the study. ( Mansfield, Kay, Antokeyard & Rsushby, 2008)

### Participants

All women sports participants were classified in three groups i.e. individual sports, individual combative sports and team games. All participants belonged to female category at minimum level of national and few were international level participation in their own games and all were college going students from IGIPSS College, Ramjash college DU campus, Miranda House College, Inderparasth College and Daulat Ram College and further division of the participants is according to sports categories i.e. 10 participants from team games mainly from Kabaddi and Kho-Kho followed by Hand Ball, Volleyball and basket Ball, 5 from individual games mainly from Athletics followed by Swimming and 3 from combative individual sports only of Jodo.

## Results

On the basis of data analyzed from interview transcriptions, four main themes scrutinized and indentified: (1) Social support impact on their choice of sports. (2) Problems faced during their training career. (3) Challenges and dangers to dignity of women sports persons in sports system. (4) Addressing of empowerment of women through sports experiences.

### Impact of social support on their choice of sports career

Social system is assumed to be patriarchy dominated resulting in enforced the existing sanctions and stigmas of participation of women in sports. All participants were agreed to the resistance created by not only their parents but also neighbors, kinship relatives and known persons including male female both.

**Resistance:** Initially, there was no issue for my involvement in playing the games as it was considered too simple play like a simple activity, as soon as it was pursued as career activity, then everybody tried to prevent me and clearly told not to go outside, many times it became a contentious question at home and everyone was against my participation”, as expressed by participant (2) this was a common view expressed by all 18 participants. But the participants (6 & 1) belonged to game of Kabaddi and Kho-Kho were not opposed more as they expressed “definitely the involvement in sports was not initiated by any family member or other person but it was chance factor, they started to participate as recreation but later on they adopted it regularly where academic side became weak that was already not good, so it was not a planned decision but became a part of natural selection to sports, then gradually became regular career choice, their parents were not bother about choosing the activity”. It is common that women sports persons were not encouraged from family side or from other relatives

**Conversion to support:** Now I gathered the courage by declaring of my decision to pursue the regular sports, initially I was hesitant to express myself but after due time in sports involvement, I got confidence and assertively declared my decision, mean time I got silver medal in my game of Judo at state level so it became me easy to say like this, consequently family members especially my mother began to consent and gave support to me, and gradually all members stopped to oppose me, contrary they started to give help in many ways like my elder brother drive the bike to travel to my training center” stated by participant (10). This was a common feature to be happened to all women participants, consistently all women continued to participate in sports in any way, even by concealing the fact of their continued involvement in sports, as soon as they got achievement, they got guts to their decision, after a span of time family members started to give their support to all participants.

**Appreciation:** sports persons either it is women they got applause and appreciation not only from family members even other members of our social system; “as soon as I reached a respectable position in my sports career, I started to gain the approval and social support from all walks of life, gradually I reached to the international level, I got recognition and even economic incentives, then especially

family members appreciated me and encouraged me to work hard and go further by winning the medals”, participant (16). Such sentiments were reflected by every women participant as they advanced in their career, an another national level player expressed; “a big applause I got when I received the reward of ten thousands rupees from state govt, of Delhi, my parents were very happy and they showed it to other community members and felt very proud and very earnestly the encouraged me to compete more and more and slowly they hoped a good job in sports category in future which is very pertinent today”. Participant (4); Such views were belonged to lower middle class women where economic factor is crucial for their survival, so women participants and their family members hoped a bright future in relation to govt. job.

**Problems faced during their training career;** as the women participants in sports faced various types of problems and so it becomes very difficult to continue the sports, they overcame the hurdles at various level that are related to the system associated with in the their training regime.

**Transportation:** “very easy to participate near to home as stated by the participant who becomes very difficult if it is far away of home, parents genuinely become anxious for safety, we have only option to go training center by public transport, cannot take personal bicycle, even a bike we cannot think, this is only considered for male only. It is very time consuming if we take public transport and moreover in public we have to face other gender problems also” (P-12). Another participant belonged to Judo and Swimming revealed “if we take personal vehicle to reach the training center, we have to depend to other male person, which very frustrating to my prestige, they expressed their privileged status as we felt if we get the facility like male inherently why we need to depend to other but it is very sorry state “(P-13& 14). This is the core sentiments of women participants so only creating the opportunity for their participation in sports is big thing in magnitude.

**Facilities:** facilities related with toilet and changing room are big problems at training center as well as privacy also. One participant states “this is always haunting us as we need to use such facilities, we have fear of exposing ourselves to other male persons who always have in their mind to malign the female persons and male sports persons are same as common person in society in this regard. They always have staring on our body parts”, (participant (12). She expressed other problems at training centers like other personnel attitude even attendant have such inclinations including male coaches also. There is lack of free movement at training; they have to be extra conscious. Even in relation to their uniforms, they have be extra conscious as compared to male sports persons. “We have to practice with male standardized equipments liked balls, medicine balls, weight training devices which are very suitable to male, nor designed by keeping the female requirements”, as per views expressed by women participant (6).

**Practice time:** The women participant (9) revealed; “as compared to male sports persons we cannot do practice at late ours, even we have to wind early than male so we have very limited time for practice, even at after home coming we

have to do domestic work in kitchen the time of practice and time shortage is due to our traditional work assigned to gender role, male are very privileged to have lot of time for fun and discussion. It is very difficult to continue the sports for a female they have to undergo double work load". Another participant (2) says; "boys are facilitated with both time practices at training centers where as female are likely to be in practice at one especially at evening".

### **Challenges and dangers to dignity of women sports persons in sports system**

In the findings, it was very shocking that women are not safe in over all sports system in including coaching and administration and more over practice with male sports persons. Women sports persons do practice and pursue their sports career in very insecure conditions where even they have not facility as redressed mechanism of any assault if they face.

**Coaching:** It is common in women participants when expressed regarding coaching, all participants were common in agreement regarding male coach attitude; one participant especially of team game says participant (7&8); "we were always scared to the behavior of male coach, it is always susceptible to the hypocrisy of coach, even when they touch our body parts on the name of coaching, I was always uncomfortable and gradually the male coach attempted to lure me and flirt me, I have seen many the other female sports persons to surrender and compromise. So always prefer to have coaching with female coach". Regarding the sexual assault, other participant (14) of individual sports states; "they offer us bright opportunity of selection at higher level if they favor them and many high level female sports persons compromise with their dignity for the sake of good opportunity, they falsely promised the female but ultimately they sexually exploit them, it is very much at higher level". The coaches connived with other officials". All female participants were agreed to have female coach at training centers especially for the sense of security of them, they are not comfortable with male coaches.

**Associations and federations:** "they are main predators of female sports persons in sports system, this is a trend among sports probable to have good chance of selection especially for national and international level if you please the selectors of the game. The sports officials use their power position to lure the female, in long pursuit of the career, female are hunted to such cravings". A team game participant (2) expressed her views; "the male are lucky, they do not have to face the gender problems as faced by women especially the sexual assault to female sports persons.

It is very horrific in sports, women have to compromise against their will with sports officials, and this is common habit of the officials and power game. In sports system, female officials must be there, then female may feel more protective", participants (2 & 11). This is common opinion among female sports persons, they do not express openly such things, only when they such opportunity of having such interview with full confidentiality.

**Male sports persons:** We have to do practice with male from very inception of our training, always they do eve teasing and give sarcastic comments, they dominate us, we

have to appease them in general lest they do not insult us. We go to at practice centre with fear or protective mind sets. We are not found ourselves to express freely. We always submissive among the company of male counter parts at the ground", this was the statement of a women participant (5). Other participant (16) alleged; "male sports persons have very dominating attitude to female at ground, they express their domination in language they use to women image, they have concealed mala fide intentions for sexual urge, they try to flirt by their power of masculinity at the ground by showing with their gesture and actions. If they do not succeed, then ultimately give threat to malign the image of female sports persons, in my opinion much female surrender to them".

### **Addressing of empowerment of women through sports experiences**

In spite of challenging experiences in sports social system, the female sports persons refine their individuality and learn to express themselves in very tough and assertive manner. They become very aware about their common identity and womanhood with issue and problems even prevailing in society in general. They have very strong feelings with other females in society

**Solutions of their specific problems:** Participant no.(9) says "the ground already occupied by male players or we have to leave the court very soon and practice is hurriedly and leave the ground early for the practice of male players, main attention is given to them, other facilities of ball, training equipments etc are specifically targeted for male, female are not encouraged to train with other ways like male, only purpose is to give them ball do simple exercises and do practice such as in very formal way. So it requires special attention from not only coaches, but as program of sports at all level, more time be given, more budget for equipments, more training methods suitable to female and more over fearless environment be given female players". Other participant no. (7); "Separate swimming pool or only time lot to female swimmers should be allotted, it is very harassing to do practice with male swimmers, very strict instructions should be implemented to protect the privacy of women at the pool".

### **Increasing of assertiveness and self-confidence:**

Participant (18) states with enthusiasm "I am very different from my friends who do not play games, they are always dependent on me in crowd, any eve teasing done by male they hope for intervention from my side, I intervene and control the situation, not only control but to rebuke the miscreants and easily, other my girlfriends are surprised to see my daring attitude, this is due to my sports experience, in sports we to fight not only competition but had to cope up the pressure from male players, we find the way out, how deal with them, one thing very specific of challenging them, first by simple words then with hard language if not succeed then have challenge them physically if required". Participant (5) sees herself very brightly with hope, "there is very much difference between me and my cousin in dealing with personal problems at home as well as outside. She could not resist her early marriage arrangement, I intervened and manage the matter, she always expect form me whenever she is in problems". Participant (8) "expresses her sentiments regarding her approach to work out side of

home, being only sister of young brother I used to do all daily work at home, for me it is very easy to do, this trait is due to sports involvement, a lot of experience and lot of outside exposure in sports instilled the self-confidence and such assertiveness”.

**Experiences in sports make them tough:** participant (13) confidently answered “I am not weak physically I find myself very strong mentally also in sports situation and in use this trait in many other difficult situation, in comparison with other common girl I find myself very different, they are very submissive but I never frighten with anxiety, boldly I face the situation, this credit goes to my sports experience in competition and hard training, while travelling in bus for going to training centers, many times we had to face eve teasing and sarcastic comments from male, then we collectively rebuked very harshly and boldly, such behavior also we have to face at ground also, so we have to be tough if we want to continue the practice, no other way”. Participant (15) eagerly answered “my parents say I am very different from your elder sister due to my involvement in sports, at time of competition, I am always prepared to do extra ordinary attempt to achieve the position, I never gave up, more competition then more attempt to go higher and higher.

**Increasing of womanhood sense and common identity:** participant (1) in response to the solution of problems and issues faced by women “as I raised my voice to my rights when are ignored systematically by various agency including coach, family etc. women must have courage to say ‘No’ if not agreed with someone, simply female do not have guts to say ‘no’ so collectively we should raise our voice and also there should be sensitive and responsible system to the women issues.

In exposure of sports, every women should get to be exposed to sports experience, sports experience instill the sense of empowerment due to increasing confidence. When I get success in sports in form of victory always I get a sense of power sharing in the system leading to another bright career, all women have sense of unity and solidarity when we get the opportunity to be united, or collective strength will create the power in organization based female issues and problems”.

When the question of male domination was asked, participant (17) replied aggressively,” no difference is found in male attitude to the women, all are conditioned with patriarchy value system, they do not want their counterparts independent, especially in India traditionally they like to have a veiled wife with covering the face with appearance of decency defined by them, male are allowed to staring the women but women considered to be decent when she has habit of limited gaze of watching the others, but women in sports are not so submissive, so male even do not like to marry with the girl with sports back ground, this is a stigma, must be broken”.

To the question of general identity of women participant (11) stated “all women have same problem all over world and in all fields, they have common problems so common identity, it is easy to be united against such common problems, we should lead the women issues to the solutions by promulgating the policies and programs legalized, and enforced by the agencies even in field of sports, where equal opportunities be created in all sense”.

## Discussion

All participants have common agreement regarding issues and problems of women sports persons. In the findings, they need more social support base from family, school, college, sports social system including coaches and administrator. As already, the women are under restrictions so they need encouragement from parents, adding more emphasizing in interview data collection to the conducive initiative from coaches as they are very instrumental in training and coaching. One participant states “I expect very good result if women sports persons find the coach very honest and with integrity of his conduct, mostly the male coaches are appointed at training centers. Always, there is fear in the mind of female sports persons to undue intentions of male coaches”. In this regard special education and training of male coaches must be imparted to make them responsible and sensitive to female dignity. Further, initially no single female was encouraged to sport, it was chance factor that started to play and performed brilliantly, afterwards family members inspired them in future.

Another important point of the facilities related with physical demands becomes a matter of management and use of resources. In the findings, all participants indicated sheer negligence to the need of female at training center i.e. toilet, changing room, training equipments, playing, ground, court and other paying space. According to version of one participant; “female play in the centers which are occupied by male, being absence of specific facilities for women, female have to wait to get the chance of practice or get very short time for practice as expressed by female, this is very common thing, male players are more than female at playing space and female practice has to be managed in between practice time by coach, so they get very little time for practice, other restrictions is to go home before sun set”. In a very fixed atmosphere, female has to do practice in rigid regime; training centers should be equipped with all facilities according to women needs.

The core issue of the male domination prevailing at all level needs to postmortem for diagnosis and treatment, in the findings it is revealed in the interview that positions are acquired by male in sports system at all levels. Female sports persons has to face male chauvinism in coaching, selection, in playing ground, travelling, at home etc. one participant presents the views “I find very scare at coaching center, I have to adjust to be submission to male, they take the advantage of the situation very recklessly, administrator, coaches and male players are very brutal to this”. It is a pandemic which is underneath of surface, only female is not so bold to make it in objective reality however few cases are appearing in the mass media in which the minor girls are molested by male. The problem is structural and systematic which needs to change drastically at power distribution level, cultural level, educational level. More training is required to make the male more sensitive to the dignity of female in general in society as well as specifically to female sports persons. Female is also required to be aware about their rights and duties if something happens wrong. There should be legal remedies in provisions; female should be educated to take legal aid to make them confident to their positions of work place.

Experiences in sports settings of female is very increasing of self-confidence and making them bold to face and solve their problems, in response to a question one participant answered “in comparison of common girl, the female

engaged in sports find themselves very confident to address the issues in society as well, as sports social system. My cousin is very dependent on me for her every personal matter. She relies on me and gives the credit to my sports exposure". Female sports persons would evolve very distinct strong individual and very sensitive to other female. In the findings it was revealed in the data collection analysis that female in sports become more responsible and become tough by facing daily ordeals in social system including coaching center, but sports teach them to be competitive and bold to evade the fear and anxiety. It is advisable to other common female to engage themselves in sports to imbibe such traits and it is essential to participate in sports to make them out from gentle vulnerability of female. For solutions at work place, the legal provisions should be propagated and awaked for maintaining their sense of security. The sports administrator should be made assigned with responsibility to strengthen such provisions in sports system at all level, regular training and education be practice from lower to upper level in sports system. As slogan: dignity of women should be maintained and respect the women.

### Conclusion

It is recommended that sports facilities should be provided to women in schools and colleges at all level, even at work place for increasing their confidence and makes them tough so as to break stereo type image of female. Women sports persons should be treated equally at all level including job of coaches, appointment of administrator in sports associations, federations and other sports organizations, media coverage to women sports participation, funding and special facilities at coaching centers. Educational programs of lessening the patriarchy values to male should be given to male coaches and players at coaching centers. Female sports persons also should be aware about their legal rights and provisions.

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