

Navigating Challenges: Sociological and Psychological Barriers to Women's Sports Participation in Punjab

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Abstract

This comparative study explores the sociological and psychological barriers that restrict women's participation in sports within two key regions of Punjab: Doaba and Malwa. Through a self-constructed questionnaire, data were collected from 200 respondents, revealing region-specific challenges tied to cultural norms, family roles, societal judgments, and psychological stress. Key findings suggest that while both regions experience significant barriers, the intensity and nature of these obstacles vary, indicating the need for tailored solutions to enhance women's sports participation.

An effective way to look at the challenges women face in participating in sports in Punjab is through a socio-cultural and policy-focused lens. This view brings attention to both the broader societal norms and family expectations that limit women's roles, as well as the individual struggles that arise from these restrictions. Traditional beliefs often place women in domestic roles, making sports seem out of place for them and limiting their opportunities.

A policy-focused angle also sheds light on the importance of government and community programs in encouraging women's sports participation. For example, programs that provide sports facilities, training, scholarships, and mentorship for girls could help open doors for more women to get involved in sports. These initiatives can help address the financial and resource-based barriers that many families face, especially when sports opportunities for girls are limited.

On the psychological side, women often encounter internal barriers like fear of judgment, low self-confidence, and limited belief in their abilities. These feelings can be intensified in environments where female athletes are seen as going against cultural norms. By understanding how these societal expectations influence personal beliefs, this view shows how individual mindsets are shaped by community standards.

This combined perspective suggests practical solutions for addressing the issue, such as policy changes, community outreach, and individual support. These efforts can help reduce the barriers stopping women from participating in sports and build a more welcoming environment for female athletes in Punjab.

Keywords: Women in Sports, Sociological Barriers, Psychological Barriers, Gender Discrimination, Doaba, Malwa

Introduction

Women's participation in sports across India, particularly in Punjab, faces considerable challenges due to a variety of barriers that stem from entrenched cultural norms, societal expectations, and psychological

constraints. Despite increased visibility of female athletes on the national stage, women's involvement in sports remains limited, especially in the Doaba and Malwa regions of Punjab. Each of these regions possesses distinct cultural dynamics that shape the experiences and opportunities available to women, impacting their engagement with sports in unique ways.

In Doaba, for instance, there is a significant diaspora influence due to migration, which brings mixed perspectives on gender roles and societal expectations. Malwa, in contrast, tends to reflect more traditional norms that often place limitations on women's public activities. This paper seeks to explore how these sociological and psychological factors interact and reinforce each other, creating substantial barriers to sports participation for women in these regions. By investigating the cultural attitudes, family expectations, economic constraints, and self-perception issues that women face, this study aims to provide insights into the complex web of challenges that inhibit sports involvement. Understanding these factors is essential for crafting effective strategies to empower and support women's sports participation across Punjab.

2. Objectives

- To assess the sociological and psychological barriers to women's participation in sports in the Doaba and Malwa regions of Punjab.
- To compare the sociological and psychological barriers to women's sports participation in these regions.
- To explore individual factors influencing women's engagement in sports.
- To propose recommendations for promoting gender equality and enhancing women's participation in sports.
- **Identify Cultural Norms and Expectations**
Examine how traditional cultural beliefs and gender expectations in Punjab, specifically in the Doaba and Malwa regions, influence women's attitudes and opportunities regarding sports.
- **Analyse Family and Societal Influence**
Assess the role of family dynamics, social support, and community attitudes in shaping women's involvement in sports, including how they reinforce or discourage participation.
- **Explore Psychological Challenges**
Identify common psychological barriers, including fear of judgment, low self-confidence, and self-efficacy issues, that affect women's motivation and willingness to engage in sports.
- **Propose Strategies for Enhanced Participation**
Based on the findings, suggest practical recommendations for policy interventions, community awareness, and psychological support that could encourage a more inclusive environment for women in sports in Punjab.

3. Literature Review

Prior research indicates that women across India face multiple challenges when it comes to sports participation. Cultural biases, family expectations, societal judgments, and internal psychological factors, such as stress and fear of failure, are prevalent. However, limited studies explore the regional differences within Punjab. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on two culturally rich regions Doaba and Malwa each of which has its own set of values and expectations regarding women's roles.

Cultural and Societal Barriers

Research indicates that across much of India, entrenched cultural norms strongly reinforce traditional gender roles, often restricting women's participation in public physical activities, including sports (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). In Punjab, these norms are especially influential, shaping family expectations and community views on acceptable behaviour for women (Kaur & Singh, 2020).

Further studies on the Doaba and Malwa regions of Punjab reveal nuanced differences in how these cultural dynamics impact women's sports involvement. In Doaba, the presence of a large diasporic community has introduced some openness toward gender roles, shaped by exposure to Western cultural norms. This influence has somewhat softened local perceptions regarding women's sports, leading to greater, though limited, acceptance (Dhillon, 2021). In contrast, the Malwa region remains more conservative, with stronger adherence to traditional beliefs that restrict women's access to sports facilities, resources, and community support (Singh & Gill, 2022).

These regional variations suggest that while cultural and societal barriers are widespread, their impact is not uniform. Addressing these barriers to women's sports participation in Punjab requires tailored approaches that consider each region's specific cultural context.

Psychological Barriers and Self-Perception

Psychological barriers, such as low self-confidence, fear of judgment, and internalized societal expectations, also play a significant role in limiting women's sports involvement. Gill (2020) argues that cultural expectations often lead to low self-efficacy among women, making them less likely to pursue sports. Studies in Punjab indicate that women's perceptions of their physical abilities are shaped by external judgment, which deters them from active participation (Chopra, 2021). These psychological barriers are reinforced by a lack of visible female role models in sports, which can otherwise inspire confidence and ambition in young women (Sharma & Kaur, 2019).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

A quantitative research design was used to compare the sociological and psychological barriers faced by women in Doaba and Malwa. A self-administered questionnaire was developed and distributed to 200 women (100 from each region).

4.2 Sample and Data Collection

The sample included women aged 18-25 from both regions. The questionnaire comprised two main sections: Sociological and Psychological barriers, each addressing different aspects that impact sports participation.

5. Results

The following results highlight the sociological and psychological barriers faced by women in the Doaba and Malwa regions, as reflected in the survey responses.

Table 1: Sociological and Psychological Barriers to Women's Participation in Sports

Barriers	Doaba Yes (%)	Doaba No (%)	Malwa Yes (%)	Malwa No (%)
Sociological Barriers				
Discrimination within sports organizations	84	16	88	12
Prevailing male-dominated culture	78	22	70	30
Use of abusive language or derogatory terms	84	16	80	20
Negative perception of women in sports	86	14	78	22
Social pressure to conform to traditional roles	82	18	74	26

Barriers	Doaba Yes (%)	Doaba No (%)	Malwa Yes (%)	Malwa No (%)
Peer influence	80	20	86	14
Family pressure	80	20	82	18
Social judgment and criticism	84	16	80	20
Psychological Barriers				
Psychological stress	80	20	90	10
Embarrassment with short clothes	48	52	52	48
Fear of hard work	58	42	76	24
Lack of self-confidence	82	18	82	18
Societal expectations	86	14	80	20
Lack of moral support	74	26	86	14
Fear of losing competitions	68	32	72	28
Anxiety related to sports participation	66	34	68	32

5.1 Doaba: Women in Doaba face more significant sociological barriers related to societal expectations, negative perceptions, and traditional roles. While psychological barriers such as stress and anxiety are also present, these are slightly less intense than in Malwa.

5.2 Malwa: Women in Malwa face greater psychological barriers, particularly stress, fear of hard work, and lack of moral support. Sociological barriers such as discrimination and societal expectations are also significant but manifest slightly differently than in Doaba.

6. Discussion

The findings highlight several sociological and psychological barriers that women in both regions face, though with different levels of intensity. Women in Doaba struggle more with family-related responsibilities, while women in Malwa are more affected by societal expectations regarding femininity. Both regions exhibit high levels of psychological stress and anxiety, though it is more acute in Malwa.

The male-dominated culture and family pressure appear to be pervasive in both regions, influencing women's decisions to either not participate or to engage minimally in sports activities. These results suggest that targeted strategies must be developed to address both external societal pressures and internal psychological challenges.

6. Conclusion

This study emphasizes the importance of addressing both sociological and psychological barriers to enhance female participation in sports in Punjab's Doaba and Malwa regions. While both regions share similar cultural values, the challenges faced by women differ slightly in their intensity and impact. Regional-specific strategies need to be employed to create inclusive sports environments for women.

7. Recommendations

To enhance women's participation in sports in Punjab, particularly in the Doaba and Malwa regions, a multifaceted approach is necessary. The following recommendations aim to address the cultural and societal barriers identified in the study:

1. **Community Engagement Programs:** Conduct awareness campaigns in both regions focusing on the importance of women's participation in sports and the role of community support.
2. **Psychological Counselling:** Establish counselling and mental health support systems for female athletes to address stress, anxiety, and self-confidence issues.

3. **Policy Implementation:** Advocate for regional sports bodies to enforce anti-discrimination policies and create more opportunities for women in sports.
4. **Family and Cultural Interventions:** Encourage families to support female athletes by balancing family expectations and allowing women more freedom to pursue sports.
5. **Community Awareness Programs**
 1. **Educational Campaigns:** Launch initiatives to educate communities about the benefits of women participating in sports, not only for their physical health but also for their mental well-being and social empowerment. Workshops and seminars can involve local leaders and influencers to help shift societal perceptions.
 2. **Role Models and Success Stories:** Promote successful female athletes from Punjab as role models. Highlighting their achievements in local media can inspire young girls and challenge traditional norms.
6. **Family Engagement Initiatives**
 1. **Family Inclusion:** Create programs that involve families in sports activities, encouraging them to support their daughters' participation. Activities could include family sports days or community challenges that emphasize teamwork and collaboration.
 2. **Parent Workshops:** Organize workshops specifically for parents to discuss the positive impacts of sports on young girls, addressing common misconceptions and encouraging supportive attitudes.
7. **Access to Facilities and Resources**
 1. **Improved Infrastructure:** Invest in building and maintaining sports facilities that are accessible to women and girls, particularly in rural areas. Ensure these facilities are equipped with the necessary resources, such as coaching staff trained in gender-sensitive approaches.
 2. **Scholarships and Financial Support:** Establish scholarships and financial assistance programs for girls interested in sports, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, to help alleviate economic barriers.
8. **Policy Advocacy and Support**
 1. **Government Initiatives:** Advocate for policies that prioritize women's sports at both the state and national levels, including funding for women's sports programs and infrastructure development.
 2. **Targeted Programs:** Develop and implement targeted programs within schools and communities that specifically address the needs of female athletes, promoting equal opportunities for participation.
9. **Psychological Support and Empowerment**
 1. **Mentorship Programs:** Create mentorship schemes pairing young female athletes with experienced sportswomen. These mentors can provide guidance, encouragement, and emotional support, helping to build confidence and self-efficacy.
 2. **Psychological Workshops:** Offer workshops focused on building self-esteem and overcoming psychological barriers, such as fear of judgment or low self-confidence, specifically tailored for young women in sports.
10. **Collaboration with Local Organizations**
 1. **Partnerships with NGOs:** Collaborate with local non-governmental organizations that focus on women's empowerment and sports development. These partnerships can help leverage resources and expertise to create effective programs.
 2. **Inter-school Competitions:** Encourage collaboration among schools to host inter-school sports competitions for girls, creating a supportive network of female athletes and promoting healthy competition.

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