



CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ATHLETICS IN THOOTHUKUDI CITY

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ABSTRACT

Women athletes in Thoothukudi face a variety of obstacles that hinder their quest for sporting achievement. Objectives of the Study are to examine the gender pay gap, societal stereotypes, sexual harassment and abuse and balancing sports careers with family responsibilities. Primary data and Secondary data was used in this study to collect the data. A purposive sampling technique is adopted to select 104 respondents who are women athletes actively participating in sports within Thoothukudi City. Create and promote programs that give both genders equal opportunity and equal remuneration in sports, including access to training, tournaments, and resources. Provide stricter penalties for the offenders. Establish secure channels for reporting issues and offer victims' support. In order to overcome these obstacles, athletes, sports organizations, legislators, and the general public must work together to promote equality of opportunity, remove stereotypes, and create an encouraging atmosphere for women in sports.

Key words: Women Athletics, Gender Pay Gap, Societal Stereotypes, Sexual Harassment and Abuse

INTRODUCTION

Athletics, often referred to as track and field, is a dynamic and encompassing sport that showcases the pinnacle of human physical prowess. Female athletes have achieved notable progress, surmounting obstacles and questioning conventional beliefs. Women athletes in Thoothukudi face a variety of obstacles that hinder their quest for sporting achievement. Even with the incredible progress made toward gender parity, from restricted access to resources and training facilities to pervasive social preconceptions. The purpose of this study is to explore the complex web of obstacles that Thoothukudi female athletes must overcome to shed light on the various problems that impede their progress. Understanding these obstacles is imperative to execute focused treatments and cultivate an environment that empowers women athletes to flourish and overcome obstacles.

Despite significant progress, female athletes in Thoothukudi face considerable barriers that impact their sporting success. Nationally, research indicates that women athletes receive only 4% of total sports funding, highlighting a critical disparity in resources (National Women's Sports Foundation, 2023). In Thoothukudi, this issue is exacerbated by limited access to training facilities, with only 30% of female athletes reporting adequate training infrastructure compared to 60% of their male counterparts (Local Sports Survey, 2024). Social preconceptions further complicate their journey; a study found that 50% of female athletes in Tamil Nadu experience discouragement from traditional gender norms, affecting their participation and performance (Rana, 2020).

Moreover, barriers such as inadequate financial support and lack of specialized coaching contribute to the challenges. Only 20% of female athletes receive scholarships or financial aid, compared to 45% of male athletes (Sports Authority of India, 2024). This disparity limits their ability to compete at higher levels and achieve their full potential. Addressing these issues through targeted interventions and support mechanisms is crucial for fostering an environment where female athletes in Thoothukudi can excel and overcome the challenges they face.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Adhikary, D. B. (2020). "Sports and Social Capital: A Qualitative Study on Women Athletes with Disabilities", this study focuses on the conversation around the intersections of gender, disability, and sports in the development and upkeep of social capital among five female athletes with impairments. Narrative and content analysis were used to conduct a qualitative study based on primary and secondary data. Even though the study only included five respondents, it still provides a broad picture of the value of sports for individuals with impairments, particularly for women, in overcoming both physical and mental limitations. One of the study's primary limitations is the small sample size of respondents. The findings suggest that sports may help people build social capital that enables them to overcome some physical and emotional obstacles. The study ultimately demonstrates the advantages of the socio-cultural facets of social capital.
2. Baghel, B. K. (2021), "Comparative study of personality among unmarried and married female athletes", the purpose of this study was to compare married and single female athletes' personality attributes. It was predicted that married and single female

athletes would differ significantly in their personality features. 400 (200 single and 200 married) female athletes from various sports and Indian states were chosen at random to compete in the Masters Championship (married athletes only) and the Open National Games or All India Intervarsity Games for two years in a row. The individuals' ages ranged from 20 to 35. The 44-item Big Five Personality Inventory was the instrument used to gather the data. The Mann-Whitney U test and the independent t-test were used to analyze the data. It is possible to conclude from the data that married female athletes are more outgoing, while single female athletes are more conscientious, open, agreeable, and neurotic. It should be mentioned that the current study was only a comparison, and more research will be required to determine how athletes truly understand their behaviour in competitive sports settings. Once more, more investigation is required to determine the true cause of the differences and similarities found in this study. To maximize the experience of participation in sports and exercise activities, coaches and players may find it helpful to elaborate on this information.

3. Rajesh (2021). "Role of socio-economic status and emotional intelligence on sports attainments: a cross-sectional study with women athletes in Kerala, India, This study noted that sports around the world have a reputation for uniting people despite differences in age, gender, colour, and social standing. This study looked into the relationship between socioeconomic status, emotional intelligence and athletic achievement in college track and field athletes. The study's sample comprised two hundred and eleven (N = 211) female athletes who were chosen from institutions in Kerala, India that were top performers in track and field sports. Descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, one-way and two-way ANOVA, and the Chi-square test were used to analyse the data. The study's findings showed a significant difference between socioeconomic status and emotional intelligence achievement levels, and they also found a significant correlation between the athletes' accomplishments and emotional intelligence but not socioeconomic status. International athletes had the highest levels of emotional intelligence and socioeconomic status, according to the study's findings.
4. Schneider (2023). "A six-country study of coaches' perspectives of girls' body image concerns in sport and intervention preferences", Athletes' body image is greatly influenced by their coaches, who may also reinforce negative body ideals and feel

unprepared to handle body image issues. Few useful tools are available, and there hasn't been much research done on coaches' attitudes and views. The current study investigated the views of coaches toward female athletes' bodies and their preferences for interventions related to body image. Thirty-four coaches (41% female; age = 31.6 years; standard deviation = 10.5) from the US, UK, Mexico, France, India, and Japan participated in semi-structured focus groups and answered an online questionnaire. Eight first-order themes were identified through template analysis of survey and focus group data, and these were categorized into three groups: (1) perspectives on body image among girls in sport; (2) preferences for intervention design (intervention content, accessibility, participation incentives); and (3) cross-cultural considerations (acknowledging your privilege, cultural and societal norms). There were two identified integrative themes: (1) girls' withdrawal from sports; and (2) the community's role. Coaches believed that girls' body image posed a serious obstacle to participating in sports and that this issue needed to be addressed in a structured and approachable way.

5. Armendáriz, M. L. (2023). “Anthropometric characteristic, somatotype, and body composition of Indian Female Combat Sport Athletes: A comparison between Boxers, Judokas, and Wrestlers”, this study aimed to discover the anthropometric traits of Indian female combat athletes as well as compare and ascertain the somatotypes of these athletes that are peculiar to their sport (wrestling, judo, and boxing). Ninety-nine female combat sports athletes at the national level—40 boxers, 25 judokas, and 34 wrestlers—who participate in regular national and international events were included in the study. Measurements of body mass, stature, seven skinfold locations, three girths, and two breadths were taken using anthropometry. The unique demands of each sport may be the reason for the notable variations in anthropometric traits found in the somatotypes of Indian female combat athletes. Coaches and practitioners should take into account sport-specific training plans that take into account the anthropometric traits and somatotypes of female athletes who compete in boxing, judo, and wrestling.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Thoothukudi city, women athletes face significant challenges that hinder their participation and success in sports. Key issues include inadequate infrastructure and facilities

tailored to women's needs, which limit their training and competitive opportunities. Societal stereotypes and cultural norms create a discouraging environment, often viewing women's athletic pursuits as secondary to traditional roles. This is exacerbated by the poor promotion of women's sports in the media and insufficient representation at local sporting events, which deprive young girls of role models and diminish their aspirations in athletics. To address these challenges, a comprehensive approach is necessary. This includes developing dedicated sports facilities, promoting cultural shifts through education and advocacy, increasing financial investments in women's sports, and running awareness campaigns to foster inclusivity and equal opportunities. Delving deeper into Thoothukudi's local context reveals that traditional gender roles and a lack of community support significantly impact women's ability to engage in sports.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the gender pay gap in women's athletics.
2. To analyze the influence of societal stereotypes on the perception of women in athletics.
3. To assess the impact of sexual harassment and abuse on women in athletics.
4. To examine the challenges women athletes face in balancing sports careers with family responsibilities.

In many parts of Thoothukudi city, traditional gender roles often dictate that women prioritize household responsibilities over personal pursuits like sports. There can be societal pressure for women to conform to these roles, which might limit their participation in sports activities. In more progressive families, women might receive encouragement to participate in sports, while in conservative families, they might face resistance. The availability of sports facilities and opportunities for women in Thoothukudi can be limited compared to urban centers. Thoothukudi has a vibrant culture with many local festivals and events, which sometimes include traditional sports. However, these are often male-dominated. Surveys collected data on pay disparities, with percentage analysis highlighting earnings differences. Data analyzed using Likert's scale and Chi-Square tests. 44% of surveyed participants reported harassment; responses were analyzed with statistical tests. Surveys evaluated career-family balance challenges and family support significance analyzed with Chi-Square tests.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling Design	Purposive sampling
Period of the study	December 2023 - March 2024
Data used	Primary and Secondary data
Test for analysis	Percentage Analysis, Pie-chart, Likert's scale, Garrett Ranking and Chi-Square

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was conducted in a specific location, its conclusions might not apply outside of Thoothukudi.
- Due to the study's small sample size, not all Thoothukudi female athletes' varied experiences and viewpoints may be adequately represented.
- The study might not have included all of the difficulties that female athletes encounter, thereby leaving out crucial information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table No. 1 Sports Participated

Events	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Sprints	7	6.7
Long jump	9	8.7
Triple jump	6	5.8
Relay races	11	10.6
Javelin	9	8.7
Hammer throw	2	1.9
Discus throw	4	3.8
Race walking	3	2.9
Marathon	10	9.6
Shot put	7	6.7
High jump	4	3.8
Pole Vault	3	2.9
Hurdling	5	4.8
Swimming	5	4.8
Cycling	7	6.7
Gymnastics	0	0
Taekwondo	0	0
Running	12	11.6
Total	104	100

The Table No. 1 inferred that 6.7% of the respondents participated in sprints, 8.7% of the respondents participated in long jump, 5.8% of the respondents participated in triple jump, 10.6% of the respondents participated in relay races, 8.7 of the respondents participated in javelin, 1.9% of the respondents participated in hammer throw, 3.8% of the respondents participated in discus, 2.9% of the respondents participated in race walking, 9.6% of the respondents participated in marathon, 6.7% of the respondents participated in shot put, 3.8% of the respondents participated in high jump, 2.9% of the respondents participated in pole vault, 4.8% of the respondents participated in hurdling, 4.8% of the respondents participated in swimming, 6.7% of the respondents participated in cycling, 11.6% of the respondents participated in running and there is a zero respondents for gymnastics and taekwondo.

Table No. 2 Criticism of Women Sports

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Less exciting than men's sports	33	32
Less skilful than men's sports	43	41
Less competitive than men's sports	28	27
Total	104	100

The Table No. 2 inferred that 32% of the respondents criticised for less exciting than men's sports, 41% of the respondents criticised for less skillful than men's sports and 27% of the respondents criticised for less competitive than men's sports.

Table No. 3 Challenges Faced By Women Athletes

Particulars	Average	Rank
Lack of fund for equipment	3.80	I
Inadequate sponsorship	3.69	II
Low price money and earnings	3.61	V
Limited media attention	3.43	XI
Low level coaching and training	3.36	XII
Gender discrimination	3.51	VII
Facing harassment and abuse	3.65	III
Restricting women participation	3.63	IV
Fewer opportunities	3.51	VII
Inadequate medical support	3.44	X

Health concerns	3.45	IX
Balancing a career with family and study/work life	3.61	VI
Traveling for competitions	3.06	XIII

The Table No. 3 inferred that lack of fund for equipment is the major challenge faced by the respondents that has been rank as I, inadequate sponsorship rank as II, facing harassment and abuse rank as III, restricting women participation rank as IV, both low price money and earnings and balancing a career with family and study/work life were rank as V, gender discrimination and fewer opportunities are rank as VII, health concerns rank as IX, inadequate medical support rank as X, limited media attention rank as XI, low level coaching and training rank as XII and travelling for competitions rank as XIII.

Table No. 4 Opinion about Women Faced in Sexual Harassment

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	46	44
No	26	25
Maybe	32	31
Total	104	100

The Table No. 4 inferred that 44% of the respondents said that women in athletics have experienced sexual harassment or abuse, 25% of the respondents said that women in athletics have not experienced sexual harassment or abuse and 31% of the respondents said that may be women in athletics experienced sexual harassment or abuse.

Table No. 5 Respondents Face Challenges in Balancing Sports Career with Family and Personal Responsibilities and Family Support

Null Hypothesis (Ho):

There is no significance relationship between the respondents face challenges in balancing sports career with family and personal responsibilities and family support.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1):

There is a significance relationship between the respondents face challenges in balancing sports career with family and personal responsibilities and family support.

$$X^2 = \sum (O-E)^2 / E$$

Supportive measures Opinion	Very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Not Supportive	Total
Yes	21	26	7	54
No	2	12	2	16
Maybe	11	15	8	34
Total	34	53	17	104

Rows & columns	O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² / E
R1C1	21	17.65	3.35	11.22	0.64
R2C1	2	5.23	- 3.23	10.43	1.99
R3C1	11	11.12	- 0.12	0.01	0.001
R1C2	26	27.52	- 1.52	2.31	0.08
R2C2	12	8.15	3.85	14.82	1.82
R3C2	15	17.33	- 2.83	5.43	0.31
R1C3	7	8.83	-1.83	3.35	0.38
R2C3	2	2.62	- 0.62	0.38	0.15
R3C3	8	5.56	2.44	5.95	1.07
					X² = 6.441

Degrees of Freedom

$$= (r-1) (c-1)$$

$$= (3-1) (3-1)$$

$$= 2 \times 2$$

$$= 4$$

The table value for 4 degrees of freedom at 5% level of significance is 9.488. It is found that the calculated value i.e., 6.441 is less than the table value. Thus the result is independent. Hence it is concluded that there is no significant relationship between the respondents face challenges in balancing sports career with family and personal responsibilities and family support. Therefore Null Hypothesis is accepted.

In discussing the results, it is critical to link findings back to existing literature to provide a comprehensive analysis. The study identified that women athletes in Thoothukudi face significant challenges, such as lack of funding for equipment, inadequate sponsorship, and gender discrimination. These issues align with findings from Adhikary (2020), who

emphasized the necessity of social capital for overcoming obstacles in sports, particularly for women with disabilities. Furthermore, Brisbine (2020) highlighted the impact of physical challenges like breast pain on female athletes' performance, reflecting the broader context of physical and psychological barriers identified in this study. Rana (2020) and Rajesh (2021) also discuss the importance of socio-economic status and emotional intelligence in athletic achievement, underscoring the complex interplay of personal and societal factors influencing women athletes' success. Finally, Armendáriz (2023) provides a comparative analysis of physical traits in female combat athletes, which underscores the need for sport-specific support highlighted by the current study. Thus, integrating these references enriches the discussion, illustrating that the challenges faced by women athletes in Thoothukudi are part of broader systemic issues observed globally.

FINDINGS

- Most of the respondents (11.6%) participated in running.
- Most of the respondents (41%) criticised for less skillful than men's sports.
- Majority (3.80) of the respondents said that lack of fund for equipment is the major challenge faced by them and that has been rank as I.
- Most of the respondents (44%) said that women in athletics have experienced sexual harassment or abuse.
- Most of the respondents (28%) said that to prevent harassment by providing stricter penalties for offenders.

The findings highlight several issues in women's athletics, some of which are unexpected. Despite a significant participation in running (11.6%), a higher percentage (41%) perceive women's sports as less skillful than men's, indicating a persistent stereotype undermining women's capability. The high ranking (3.80) of equipment funding challenges suggests financial disparities are critical, but it's surprising this isn't a more widespread perception given the known funding issues in women's sports. The most alarming and unexpected finding is that 44% of respondents have experienced sexual harassment or abuse, reflecting a severe, underreported issue that needs urgent attention. However, only 28% believe stricter penalties for offenders are necessary to prevent harassment. This gap suggests a disconnect between the recognition of harassment as a problem and the belief in the effectiveness of stricter penalties, possibly due to skepticism about enforcement or the cultural normalization of such behavior.

SUGGESTIONS

Implement school and community-based initiatives that ensure equal access to sports for both genders. Partner with local sports organizations to offer joint training camps, tournaments, and resource sharing. Monitor participation rates and outcomes to ensure gender parity and address any disparities promptly.

Create scholarships and sponsorship programs specifically for female athletes. Collaborate with employers and educational institutions to offer flexible training schedules and childcare facilities. Ensure these programs are well-publicized and accessible, addressing both urban and rural athletes' needs.

Develop tailored training programs that address physiological differences and specific challenges faced by female athletes. Engage expert trainers and sports scientists to design these programs, and ensure they are implemented across schools, colleges, and local sports clubs.

Establish comprehensive policies and protocols to prevent and address sexual harassment in sports. Implement mandatory training for all stakeholders, create anonymous reporting mechanisms, and ensure swift, transparent handling of complaints. Enforce strict penalties for offenders and provide continuous support for victims.

Invest in modernizing sports facilities to meet female athletes' needs, including gender-specific locker rooms, training equipment, and sports medicine centers. Ensure equitable distribution of resources across urban and rural areas, and maintain facilities to high standards through regular inspections and upgrades.

CONCLUSION

This project aims to tackle the challenges that hinder women's participation, progression, and success in athletics. To address these issues, a multifaceted approach is needed. Initiatives should challenge and dismantle gender biases within sports institutions to ensure equitable treatment and opportunities for female athletes. Increasing the representation of women in leadership roles within sports organizations is crucial for fostering supportive and inclusive environments. Collaboration among athletes, sports organizations, legislators, and the public is essential to promote equality, remove gender stereotypes, and create a positive atmosphere for women in sports. Women athletes deserve respect, acknowledgment, and opportunities, achievable only through collective efforts.

Future research should focus on the intersection of gender with factors like race, socioeconomic status, and disability in sports participation. Understanding the psychological impacts of gender biases and harassment on women athletes can highlight necessary support systems. Evaluating the effectiveness of interventions, such as mentorship programs and policy changes, in reducing barriers is essential. Additionally, examining how media representation affects public perceptions and opportunities for female athletes can be beneficial. Exploring global perspectives on women's sports can uncover diverse challenges and effective strategies for promoting equity.

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