



Exploring the Gender Disparity in Sports Participation: A Qualitative Analysis of Women's Limited Engagement in Sports in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Gender equality is the subject of Sustainable Development Goal 5, one of the UN's 17 objectives. Assuring women's full and effective involvement and equitable opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life is the emphasis of SDG target 5.5. In Bangladesh, there is still a significant gender gap in sports participation, which limits women's access to physical activity, personal growth, and social empowerment, a major hindrance to achieving SDGs within 2030. In Bangladesh, there is still a significant gender gap in sports participation, which limits women's access to physical activity, personal growth, and social empowerment, a major hindrance to achieving SDGs within 2030. The research aims to uncover the socio-cultural, institutional, and psychological barriers hampering women's active sports involvement through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis. The study finds that traditional gender norms and societal expectations emerged as significant barriers to women's sports participation, and parental attitudes and support have been identified as major issues in enabling girls to participate in sports. Limited access to training facilities, coaching, and competitions specifically tailored for women hindered their progress, and the importance of mentors and role models was underscored throughout the study.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Women in Sports, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental principle embedded in Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Under SDG 5, global efforts are directed towards achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. A key focus of SDG 5 is to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life (United Nations, 2015).

In the context of Bangladesh, a South Asian nation with a population of over 160 million (World Bank, 2021), the pursuit of gender equality has faced numerous challenges, including disparities in sports participation. While sports have the potential to offer women opportunities for physical activity, personal growth, and social empowerment, there exists a significant gender gap in sports involvement in the country. This gender disparity presents a major hindrance to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals within the stipulated timeframe (United Nations, 2015).

Gender disparity in sports participation is a complex issue influenced by various factors such as sexist gender ideologies, economic barriers, lack of sporting infrastructure and culture, lack of potential career opportunities, knowledge barriers, and socio-cultural barriers (Das et al., 2023; Lütkevitte, 2023). Studies have shown that men who are sports club members tend to endorse sexist gender ideologies to a greater degree than men who are not sports club members, regardless of the prevalence of gender inequalities in a country (Roh & Chang, 2022). In India, women face significant barriers that limit their participation in sports, including economic barriers, lack of infrastructure and culture, and socio-cultural barriers (Willinger et al., 2022).

In Korea, men and women participate differently in sports based on social stratification, with men from lower social strata participating more in less capital-intensive sports. In contrast, women tend to participate in sports traditionally associated with femininity (Rasmussen et al., 2021). Participation in competitive sports has been found to reduce gender gaps in competitiveness and risk tolerance. However, stereotypical depictions of gender in sports advertising, such as those seen in Nike commercials, may discourage sports participation for individuals who do not align with traditional gender norms.

A study conducted by Nxumalo and Beetge (2017) enumerates the factors contributing to the limited involvement of female university students in sports. These factors encompass constraints such as time scarcity, transportation issues, expensive

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club membership, and insufficient facilities. Both urban and rural women regarded economic and personal barriers as their primary concerns, while family and cultural barriers were considered less significant. In order to facilitate physical activity, effective interventions should address the hindrances and motivating factors associated with cultural, economic, and personal determinants. The study underscores the necessity for comprehensive and targeted advertising campaigns, as well as a diverse array of mass entertainment programs for sports activities, to enhance the participation and attendance of women in urban and rural communities.

Women's engagement in sports in Bangladesh is limited (Roy, 2022), as indicated by the content analysis of mainstream newspapers. The study found that the "Sports" beat in these newspapers was heavily male dominated, with females mostly unavailable as news sources (Aktar, 2019). This suggests that women's voices and perspectives in sports are not adequately represented in the media. However, it is important to note that the abstracts provided do not specifically focus on women's engagement in sports in Bangladesh. Therefore, further research may be needed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

This research aims to deeply understand the several aspects of barriers faced by women in Bangladesh, acknowledging the unique cultural, economic, and social contexts of the country. By focusing on Bangladesh, the study provides context-specific insights that can inform targeted interventions and policies to address gender disparities in sports participation in the country.

To better understand the multifaceted factors contributing to the limited engagement of women in sports in Bangladesh, this qualitative study seeks to explore the socio-cultural, institutional, and psychological barriers hindering women's active sports involvement. Recognizing that sports participation is influenced by complex interactions among individual, societal, and institutional factors, this research employs a qualitative methodology.

By addressing the issues identified in the literature review and content analysis and offering empirical insights into the specific challenges and opportunities for women in Bangladesh, the research will contribute to advancing scholarly understanding of gender disparities in sports participation. It will also provide a foundation for future research and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting gender equality in sports not only in Bangladesh but also in similar socio-cultural contexts globally.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Existing Literature related to the topic

Several studies have highlighted the importance of traditional gender norms and societal expectations as significant barriers to women's sports participation (Chalabaev et al., 2013; Hu et al., 2012). Additionally, the role of parental attitudes and support has been identified as instrumental in enabling girls to participate in sports (Whitley et al., 2013). Just like the society in which they were raised, those in charge of sports in Bangladesh place less emphasis on women than on males (Jahin, 2022). In Bangladesh, there is already a sizable gender imbalance in sports, which explains both the lack of possibilities and the resources as well as the social stigma attached to the games (Kabir, 2023). The significant pay disparity between male and female athletes in Bangladesh must be reduced (Akther, 2022).

Institutions and sports organizations play a crucial role in facilitating or hindering women's access to sports. Limited access to training facilities, coaching, and competitions specifically tailored for women can hold back their progress in sports (Liechty et al., 2021). The importance of mentors and role models in promoting women's sports participation has also been emphasized (Nicholls, Polman, & Levy, 2012).

Women and girls in Bangladesh face numerous barriers to their growth due to the country's persistent gender inequality (Patwary, 2017). According to a study by Uddin et al. (2017), social taboo frequently prevents females from meeting men outside of their immediate family and from playing team sports. Despite the challenges, women who participate in sports have reported positive psychological impacts, including increased self-confidence and empowerment (Kilpatrick, Hebert, & Jacobsen, 2005). Recognizing these benefits, it is imperative to explore strategies to increase women's participation in sports in Bangladesh.

It is critical to combat sexism in sports at all levels, challenge apparent instances of discrimination and harassment, and address structural barriers to equality in order to close the gender gap in sports participation in Bangladesh. Equal access to sports facilities and physical education in schools is essential, as is supporting women's sports and funding research on the physiology and performance of women athletes. In addition, it's critical to remove the social stigma connected with women and girls participating in sports (Akther, 2022; Jahin, 2022; Kabir, 2023).

The issue of women's limited participation in sports is a global concern that persists across various societies. Within the field of journalism, there is a lack of female representation in professional sports reporting, both in university student newspapers (Schmidt, 2013). Furthermore, socio-cultural barriers in developing countries restrict women's involvement in sports and physical activities, thereby impacting national productivity and the economy. Consequently, the restrictions placed on women's engagement in sports and physical exercises have adverse implications for both national productivity and the economy (Elendu & Bright, 2013).

Despite the increased presence of women as athletes, coaches, and officials in national and international sporting events, they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions within sport organizations (Aman et

al., 2018). Feminist scholarship has explored how women navigate the intersection of femininity and athleticism in sports media, as well as address the challenges of sexism in their respective professions (McClearn, 2018). Additionally, there is growing concern about the decline in physical activity among school children, with a negative trend persisting as they age (Pavlović, 2016). These findings underscore the importance of addressing societal, cultural, and organizational factors that contribute to the limited engagement of women in sports.

The increased engagement of women in sports activities can be attributed to various factors such as advancements in leisure time, improved living standards, heightened focus on health and fitness, the influence of mass media, greater attention towards sporting accomplishments, and transformations in traditional gender roles. Nevertheless, it remains evident that women's involvement in sports activities is still limited on a global scale (Ahmadi & Kargar, 2014).

According to a study conducted by Ge et al. (2022), eight common factors were found to influence sports participation among female students in Pakistan. These factors encompassed religious and cultural factors, gender inequality, and socio-cultural restrictions. The study concluded that the provision of exclusive facilities for women, the dissemination of an accurate understanding of religion (Islam), and the promotion of awareness among women and their parents could significantly enhance the participation of female students in sports in Pakistan. Sociological and economic factors were found to be the main reasons for the poor participation of women in games and sports in a study by Singh et al. (2013).

The study by Ping et al. (2022) mentions that women's limited engagement in sports is influenced by factors such as negative body aesthetic perception, family burden, modernization of lifestyle, and the normalization of sub-health. Economic and personal barriers were reported as the highest priorities for both urban and rural women, while family and cultural barriers were reported as the lowest priorities in a study by Farzaneh et al. (2021). Limited engagement of college female students in physical activities, such as lack of consciousness of physical exercise and sports habits, limited extracurricular activities for physical exercise, and psychological factors like anxiety and shyness (Sun, 2013).

2.2. Knowledge Gap Identified from the Literature

While several literatures highlight general socio-cultural, institutional, and psychological barriers to women's sports participation, there is a lack of specificity regarding how these barriers manifest in the Bangladeshi context. Further study is needed to explore the distinctive socio-cultural norms, institutional practices, and psychological factors that hinder women's active involvement in sports in Bangladesh.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to gain an understanding of the complex circumstances that limit the participation of women in sports in Bangladesh. This study focuses on the provision of limited participation of women in sports and seeks to address both the 'why' and 'how' questions in an exploratory framework.

Both primary and secondary data sources are used to understand the subject matter in this research. Secondary data were used to create the content analysis of the study, which indicated the variables of the study. Primary data are gathered from students from Shahjalal University of Science and Technology. Data are collected by separating those who are actively participating in sports into one group and those who are not into another. This division made it easier for us to recognize various viewpoints coming from different people and groups. The research site, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Bangladesh is purposively selected due to its development status. On the other hand, where Shahjalal University of Science and Technology is located, the city of Sylhet is referred to as Bangladesh's spiritual capital (Saha et al., 2020). So, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology is a vital site for identifying cultural factors that influence the limited engagement of women in sports.

Table 1: Participant details of the study

Group A	Actively involved in sports activities	FGD participant: 8 IDI participant: 4
Group B	Not involved in sports activities	FGD participant: 8 IDI participant: 4
Total: 24 students from different departments and different age		

Source: Field Data (2024)

Variables for this study have been identified by the existing literature and content analysis. These variables have been utilized to create a semi-structured questionnaire. Furthermore, a content analysis has been built up through newspaper data sources. Content analysis frequently uses newspaper stories as a data source. They offer a wide variety of rich and varied textual material that can be examined to comprehend a range of phenomena (Amelinda, 2022). So, this study has used newspapers to develop a content analysis as a part of data triangulation.

Research participants (Table 1) include 24 female students from different departments of the institute and different ages. Before selecting the participants, their family background, their surroundings, and their present

sports-related activities were considered. Data were collected through methods such as focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual in-depth interviews (IDIs). To analyze qualitative data, field notes and recordings are employed to organize primary data into themes and sub-themes. Transcribed interviews and FGDs are analyzed through thematic analysis, categorizing data into subthemes for a deeper understanding of the study's objective. All of the respondents took part in this research willingly. There were not any inquiries made that could have bothered the respondents. In addition, the respondents gave their verbal consent for the interview to be conducted.

In order to address a research topic, data triangulation in research refers to the utilization of numerous datasets, procedures, theories, and/or investigators (Ajemba & Arene, 2022). Merging data from other sources, is a technique to improve the validity and trustworthiness of study findings (McCreery et al., 2022). This study has employed data triangulation using various sources. Primarily, variables were identified from existing literature, then newspaper data sources were used to create a content analysis, and finally, primary data from the respondents were linked to the data triangulation.

4. Findings

A category of Bangladeshi university students who participate in sports were interviewed in-depth and in focus groups to gather qualitative data. Before conducting interviews, a content analysis was conducted using newspaper articles. The newspaper articles highlighted the issues that hinder the participation of women in the sports arena in the context of Bangladesh. These information sources offered numerous insightful viewpoints on the subject. By reading through transcripts, notes, and other pertinent documents, the researchers thoroughly familiarized themselves with the gathered data. This stage ensured that the data were thoroughly understood before starting the analysis. For the purpose of identifying significant patterns, topics, and categories, the data were methodically coded. Initial codes were created based on the data's content, identifying important ideas and repeating themes. Themes were initially created from the codes. The members of the research team repeatedly discussed and compared these emergent topics with one another.

4.1. Findings from Content Analysis using Newspaper data sources

This study employed a content analysis of seven newspaper articles retrieved from prominent Bangladeshi publications such as The Daily Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, The Daily Jai Jai Din, The Daily Inqilab, and DW, focusing on the limited involvement of women in sports within Bangladesh. These sources highlighted various challenges aligning with the objectives of the study.

Financial instability emerged as a primary constraint to female participation in sports, as reported by The Daily Prothom Alo (2023). The lack of recognition and respect for female athletes in the sporting arena, heightened by societal discrimination and the absence of supportive structures such as tournaments and clubs for girls, were underscored in a report by DW (2022). Instances of societal condemnation, as evidenced by criticism from neighbors, further exemplified the hurdles faced by aspiring female athletes, as illustrated in The Daily Prothom Alo (2023).

Family dynamics also play a significant role, with familial discouragement often blocking girls' interest in sports. Factors contributing to this discouragement include societal norms, religious constraints, and social biases, as highlighted in The Daily Jai Jai Din (2018). Despite a rise in the number of female athletes and organizers, the lack of representation in sports federations and decision-making bodies remains a notable issue, as observed in the DW report (2022).

Furthermore, the prevalence of child marriage presents a significant obstacle, with many talented young girls becoming victims of this practice, as reported by The Daily Inqilab (2022). Financial support for lesser-known sports, particularly those involving female participants, is lacking, extending disparities in remuneration and access to facilities between genders, as discussed in The Daily Prothom Alo and The Daily Star (2021).

In summary, these findings underscore the complex challenges hindering women's engagement in sports in Bangladesh, encompassing financial constraints, societal attitudes, familial pressures, and institutional barriers.

To ensure reliability and consistency in interpretation, the original themes were examined and refined numerous times. The data were reviewed, codes were modified, and themes were clarified during this iterative process. The finalized themes were precisely defined, and names that appropriately reflected their meaning were assigned. Quotations from the data were chosen in this step to exemplify each subject.

4.2. Findings from Primary Data Sources

The qualitative analysis of this study's data revealed a number of significant themes that shed important light on the variables influencing women's engagement in sports in Bangladesh. Participant quotations, which provide real voices and opinions on each subject, have been used to investigate these topics.

a. Socio-cultural barriers is a major concern in the context of Bangladesh

Socio-cultural barriers emerged as a prominent theme in the study. Participants consistently cited traditional gender norms and societal expectations as significant deterrents to women's active involvement in sports. These norms dictate which sports are deemed suitable for women and perpetuate stereotypes about feminine behavior. Women who challenged these norms faced social pressure, criticism, and sometimes even ostracism. The study

underscored the deeply ingrained nature of these cultural beliefs, indicating a substantial challenge in dismantling these barriers. Strategies to address this theme include cultural sensitivity training, community awareness programs, and media campaigns aimed at challenging stereotypes and promoting gender-neutral attitudes toward sports. Many of the study's participants shared that nobody from their home was concerned about their sports activities. If anybody knew about it, they would have faced repercussions.

One of the participants shared her experience:

"I faced backlash from relatives when I started playing football in 8th grade. They'd say, 'Why can't you be more like other girls?' It's not easy to go against these expectations."

Another participant said:

"In our society, girls are often expected to be quiet and not engage in physically demanding activities like sports. It's seen as a deviation from traditional gender roles."

Participants often referred to social norms and established gender conventions as major obstacles to women actively participating in sports. These norms enforce gender assumptions about how women should behave and specify what kinds of activities are appropriate for them.

b. Parental Attitudes and Supports play a significant role for sports participation

The role of parents emerged as a critical factor influencing women's sports participation. Supportive parents who encouraged their daughters' involvement in sports were often the driving force behind women's participation. They provided emotional and logistical support, helping their daughters navigate the challenges posed by socio-cultural norms. In contrast, participants who lacked parental support faced increased barriers to entry into sports. This finding underscores the importance of family dynamics and the need for interventions that target parents and caregivers. Educational programs and awareness campaigns that emphasize the positive impact of sports on a child's development could promote more supportive attitudes among parents.

Parental attitudes emerged as a critical factor impacting women's sports engagement. Supportive parents played a pivotal role in facilitating participation. A participant of the study, who is actively in sports said that:

"My parents always encouraged me to pursue my passion for athletics. They were my biggest supporters, and that made all the difference. It's one of my biggest motivations that although nobody can see me on television, my parents are looking forward to my matchday result!"

Another participant who is not active in sports said that:

"I have friends who wanted to play, but their parents were against it. Similar to how they did, my family also treated me. I never got the chance to explore my potential in the sports arena."

Participants emphasized the significance of family support in driving out gender stereotypes by stating that the views of their parents had a significant impact on their decision to participate in sports. Participants also emphasized the necessity of educational efforts aimed at families to spread awareness of the advantages of sports for their girls and to encourage more accepting views.

c. Institutional Challenges and Poor infrastructure make a huge difference

Women in Bangladesh face substantial challenges within sports institutions and organizations. Limited access to training facilities, coaching, and competitions tailored for women were identified as significant obstacles. These institutional shortcomings often hindered the progress of female athletes and discouraged participation. The study revealed a clear need for sports organizations and institutions to invest in infrastructure and resources that cater to women's sports, creating an environment that fosters equality in opportunities and access. One of the participants shared her voice:

"We have limited access to proper training facilities even at the university level. It's frustrating to see the disparities in resources allocated to men's and women's sports. Female physical trainers are also incapable than male trainers."

Furthermore, women's advancement in sports is significantly hampered by a lack of infrastructure and funding. The disparity in resources given to men's and women's sports irritated the participants. There is a definite need for sports organizations and institutions to make investments in facilities, coaching programs, and competitions that are gender-inclusive in order to address this subject. Steps that must be taken include equitable resource distribution and institutional policies that support gender inclusion.

d. Mentors and Role Models are a key source of encouragement

Mentors and role models played a significant role in inspiring and guiding women in their sports journeys. Female athletes and coaches who had achieved success in their respective sports were identified as influential figures. They served as sources of motivation and support, not only offering technical guidance but also embodying the possibility of breaking through gender barriers. Recognizing the importance of this theme, efforts should be made to promote female representation and leadership in sports. Mentorship programs and initiatives that facilitate

interactions between aspiring female athletes and successful role models can empower and inspire the next generation.

A respondent of the study said:

"Our physical trainer is not competent. She always tries to apply traditional applications in sports, but we need advanced techniques to make a betterment. Boys get better treatment than us. While we work with our physical trainer, she always points out our physical ability is poorer than boys."

A respondent of the study, who is active in sports said:

"When I see successful female athletes from Bangladesh, it gives me hope and motivation to pursue my dreams. But it's always hard to reach their position, so I have to study hard rather than focusing on sports."

Another participant who is not active in sports said:

"Having a female coach who had been through similar struggles made a huge difference. There was no mentor for me when I was younger, so nobody showed me what's possible."

Women's sporting aspirations were greatly influenced and guided by mentors and role models. Female athletes and coaches who had overcome obstacles and succeeded in their particular sports were seen as strong sources of inspiration. Along with offering technical advice, they represented what women could accomplish in athletics. This research emphasizes the value of encouraging female leadership and representation in sports to motivate and encourage upcoming generations of female athletes.

e. Psychological Benefits pursued by the participants came out significantly

Despite the challenges, women who engaged in sports reported substantial psychological benefits. Increased self-confidence, a sense of empowerment, and enhanced self-esteem were recurrent outcomes cited by participants. Engaging in sports provided women with opportunities to challenge societal expectations and build resilience. This theme underscores the transformative power of sports beyond physical health, offering a pathway to personal growth and development. Strategies should aim to capitalize on these positive psychological impacts to motivate and retain female participants in sports.

A participant from FGD told upon it:

"Sports boosted my self-confidence. I learned to challenge stereotypes and believe in myself. Before getting into the university, I had serious confidence issues. When I came into my varsity, I got engaged with sports and it boosted me up in several ways."

Another participant said in a similar manner:

"Empowerment is not just a word; it's what I feel when I step onto the field. It's liberating."

Despite the challenges and barriers, women who participated in sports reported significant psychological benefits. Increased self-confidence, a sense of empowerment, and enhanced self-esteem were common outcomes cited by participants. Engaging in sports provided women with opportunities to challenge societal expectations and build resilience. These positive psychological impacts suggest that sports can serve as a platform for personal growth and development, transcending the physical realm.

f. Awareness and Advocacy programs need to be enhanced

The study emphasized the need for awareness and advocacy campaigns to change perceptions about women's sports participation. Participants recommended educational initiatives targeting families and communities to shift the narrative from traditional gender roles to the multifaceted benefits of sports for women. Raising awareness about the positive aspects of health, confidence, and empowerment through sports is crucial. Advocacy efforts should also focus on policy changes that promote gender inclusivity and equal opportunities within sports institutions.

One of the participants said upon it:

"We need to educate families and communities about the positive impact of sports on our lives. It's not just about breaking records; it's about breaking barriers. Moreover, the society in Bangladesh needs to be more liberal towards women."

The study emphasized the need for awareness and advocacy campaigns that highlight the advantages of women's sports participation. Participants recommended educational initiatives aimed at families and communities to shift the narrative from traditional gender roles to the benefits of sports for women. Promoting the positive aspects of health, confidence, and empowerment through sports could help change perceptions and encourage greater participation among women in Bangladesh.

The thematic analysis of the data revealed a composite connection of socio-cultural, institutional, and psychological factors influencing gender disparity in sports participation in Bangladesh. These findings underscore the versatile nature of the challenge and the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses each theme. By

targeting socio-cultural norms, parental attitudes, institutional barriers, mentorship, psychological benefits, and awareness campaigns, stakeholders can work toward creating a more inclusive and equitable sports environment that empowers women and girls to actively participate in sports and enjoy the associated benefits.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the comprehensive factors contributing to the limited engagement of women in sports in Bangladesh. By comparing these findings with existing literature, we can gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities in this context.

The identification of socio-cultural barriers aligns with previous research (Chalabaev et al., 2013). Cultural norms and societal expectations have consistently been recognized as significant obstacles to women's sports participation globally. However, the study provides unique insights into the depth of these norms in Bangladeshi society. As claimed by participants, these norms often exert substantial pressure and resistance on women who challenge them. This finding emphasizes the urgent need for culturally sensitive interventions and community engagement to address these deeply ingrained barriers.

The significance of parental attitudes and support in influencing women's sports participation is consistent with prior research (Whitley et al., 2013). Supportive parents have been acknowledged as pivotal in facilitating women's involvement in sports. The study contributes context-specific knowledge by highlighting the specific role of parents in the Bangladeshi context. Participants' testimonies underscored the crucial role played by supportive parents and the adverse consequences of unsupportive attitudes. To capitalize on this positive influence, adapted awareness campaigns targeting parents should be considered, emphasizing the long-term benefits of sports on their daughters' lives.

The identification of institutional challenges echoes existing literature (Gray, 2020), which underscores limited access to resources and gender-specific competitions as barriers to women's sports participation worldwide. However, the study adds depth by shedding light on specific institutional challenges faced in Bangladesh. Participants emphasized disparities in resource allocation and the lack of gender-inclusive policies, providing valuable insights into the local context. To address these challenges, a concerted effort is needed from sports organizations and policymakers to invest in infrastructure and advocate for gender equality within sports institutions.

The significance of mentors and role models in inspiring women to participate in sports aligns with prior research (Nicholls, Polman, & Levy, 2012). Female athletes and coaches as role models have been shown to be influential. The study highlights the importance of female representation and leadership in sports, particularly relevant in Bangladesh. The personal testimonies of participants vividly illustrate the impact of visible role models on motivating women to pursue sports. To harness this potential, efforts to promote and showcase female role models should be intensified within the sports landscape.

The limited participation of women in sports undermines the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.5, which aims to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. Sport is not just a recreational activity; it serves as a platform for empowerment, confidence-building, and leadership development. When women are excluded or face barriers to participating in sports, they miss out on opportunities to develop essential skills and networks that are crucial for leadership roles. Additionally, sports offer a powerful means to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality, contributing to broader societal shifts towards more inclusive and equitable societies. Therefore, addressing the obstacles to women's sports participation is essential for advancing SDG 5.5 and creating pathways for women to engage fully in decision-making processes across various spheres of society.

The findings regarding the positive psychological impacts of sports participation on women are consistent with previous research (Kilpatrick, Hebert, & Jacobsen, 2005). Increased self-confidence and empowerment have been reported in numerous studies. However, the study enriches the literature by presenting personal testimonies from participants. These testimonies provide a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological benefits experienced by women in Bangladesh. They underscore the transformative power of sports, not just in physical terms but also in building self-esteem and resilience.

6. Conclusion

The study emphasized the importance of awareness and advocacy campaigns to change perceptions about women's sports participation. Participants proposed educational initiatives targeting families and communities to shift the narrative from traditional gender roles to the multifaceted benefits of sports for women. Promoting the positive aspects of health, confidence, and empowerment through sports was deemed crucial. Advocacy efforts were encouraged to focus on policy changes that promote gender inclusivity and equal opportunities within sports institutions.

In conclusion, this study's analysis provided comprehensive insights into the complex factors influencing gender disparity in sports participation in Bangladesh. The use of participant quotations added depth and authenticity to the findings, highlighting the challenges and opportunities specific to this cultural and institutional

context. The study's recommendations offer practical strategies for addressing these disparities and promoting gender equality in sports participation.

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