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## Empowering women through sports

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### Abstract

**Background:** Sports can be used to promote gender equity and empower girls and women. It is true that in all countries, girls and women are less likely than boys and men to participate in sport, and sport continues to be dominated by males. It is a mistake however, to assume that this is because girls and women do not wish to participate.

**Recommendations:** Gender equity will not happen by itself we have to work for it and speak out against discrimination. There are recommendations to bring about gender equity, support women's and girls' sports, challenge the myths, speak out against gender inequity, encourage other women and girls, push for gender equity policies, publicize discrimination at your college or university and develop a media strategy.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, equality, gender and sports

### Introduction

Sport is an integral part of the culture of almost every nation. However, its use to promote gender equity and empower girls and women is often overlooked because sport is not universally perceived as a suitable or desirable pursuit for girls and women.

It is true in all countries that girls and women are less likely than boys and men to participate in sport, and sport continues to be dominated by males. It is a mistake however, to assume that this is because girls and women do not wish to participate.

Poverty, heavy domestic demands, safety concerns, lack of accessible transportation, inadequate sport and recreation facilities, and few opportunities for physical education and skill development frequently prevent women's participation in physical activity and sport. At the same time, many international frameworks support women's participation in sport, with some national laws requiring equal access and opportunities for females (Title IX and CDAWS). A small but growing body of evidence has also begun to establish sport as a viable tool for addressing gender equity on a broader scale. Research on sport, gender, and development indicates that sport can benefit girls and women by:

- Enhancing health and well-being;
- Fostering self-esteem and empowerment;
- Facilitating social inclusion and integration;
- Challenging gender norms; and
- Providing opportunities for leadership and achievement.

Sport programs can enhance the empowerment process by challenging gender norms, reducing restrictions and offering girls and women greater mobility, access to public spaces, and more opportunities for their physical, intellectual and social development. By involving families, community leaders, and boys and men in gender education, changes to gender norms can benefit men and women alike. Sport can also provide girls and women with powerful role models, leadership skills and experience that they can transfer to other domains such as their family life, civic involvement, and advocacy. All of these beneficial effects are self-reinforcing, and may also make sporting opportunities for girls and women more sustainable over time. Sport programs provide girls and women with valuable opportunities to interact and socialize with one another in a constructive way.

Participation in sports benefits women just as it does men, helping to develop leadership skills, boosting self-esteem and grades, and promoting physical fitness and health.

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### **Equality for Women in the Olympics**

Women first took part in the Olympics of 1900, with 22 women competing in only golf and tennis. Indian woman started participated in Olympics in 1952, since that time, women's participation in the games has been slowly, but steadily, increasing. In 2000 Karnam Malleswari became the first woman to win an Olympic medal. In the 2012 London Olympic Games, Sushil Kumar was the flag bearer in opening ceremony and Marry Kom was the flag bearer in closing ceremony which strongly advocates the equality for women. In London Olympics 60 men and 23 women competitors were there to represent India and women won 2 medals out of total 6 medals won by India.

Every four years, the IOC organizes a world conference on Women and Sports. The last conference was held in February 2012 in Los Angeles, California. The delegates unanimously approved "The Los Angeles Declaration," a series of recommendations aimed at promoting gender equality in sport and using sport as a tool to improve the lives of women around the world.

Despite these numerous accomplishments, there is still sex discrimination. Even though the 2012 Olympics was the first in which almost every country sent at least one woman, many Muslim countries still discourage female athletes from competing in public.

### **Exploding the Myths**

**MYTH:** Some Physiologist are of the view that participation in sports can damage reproductive organs.

**FACT:** Studies have proved that with exercise there is no damage to reproductive organs and are less likely to have unwanted pregnancy.

**MYTH:** With participation in sports their physique becomes less attractive than other girls.

**FACT:** But the fact is they are having stronger self-Image and lower levels of depression

**MYTH:** More fragile bone structure.

**FACT:** Exercise is crucial to prevention of osteoporosis and prevention of breast cancer.

**MYTH:** Less time to focus on academics.

**FACT:** More likely to get better grades as sports helps to improves concentration

**MYTH:** Women do not have as much relevant experience as men do in running large athletic departments.

**FACT:** In colleges and universities many women are administrating higher posts. If women are not given the chance to gain experience, how will they ever get it?

**MYTH:** It's hard for schools and colleges to hire women coaches because women drop out of the workforce to raise a family.

**FACT:** The argument that women drop out of the work force for family reasons is a common way to excuse sex discrimination. But there is no evidence that women drop out in great numbers.

**MYTH:** Sports is not an important issue for women's equality

-we should be focusing on more important issues like political participation and pay equity.

**FACT:** Sports affect pay equity, leadership development, and women's health. The exclusion of women from sports creates a false image of women as the weaker sex, which leads to our exploitation in all walks of life. Feminists and women in sports must join together to end discrimination against women and girls in sports.

Despite the myths women face in sports, many women have led and are leading the way to gender equity. Women athletes and administrators who have paved the way, and offers "Strategies for Change" that women and girl athletes, coaches, administrators, and parents can take to make college and university level sports more equitable.

### **Recommendations for Change**

Gender equity will not happen by itself we have to work for it and speak out against discrimination. The following are some recommendations we can use to bring about gender equity in sports. Everything we can do will help.

- **Support Women's and Girls' Sports**

We can support women's sports at any age. Participate in sports yourself. Attend women's and girls' sporting events. Do not be taken in by stereotypes that negate women's athletic abilities and deride women who perform well in sports. Coach, athlete, fan and fundraiser are all roles that can build confidence and initiative, and promote women's leadership.

- **Challenge the Myths**

Stereotypes unchallenged are stereotypes accepted. Familiarize yourself with the myths and point out the discrepancies between myth and reality about women and girls in sports. Arm your- self with the facts provided earlier in the "Exploding the Myths" section.

- **Speak Out Against Gender Inequity**

*Remember, you're in the Majority!* Breaking the silence has a tremendous impact. It puts women's issues at the forefront of everyone's mind and identifies them as legal topics to be addressed.

**At every opportunity--** in meetings, at conferences, and in the classroom -- point out inequalities in women's participation in sports. Don't hesitate: feminists are the majority.

- **Encourage Other Women and Girls**

Your visibility to women just starting out in athletics can make a critical difference in their future. Invite women and girls to informational meetings about sports. Encourage them to see themselves as players, coaches-whatever role they would like to play. Offer advice on how they can get their athletic careers started and where to go for more information.

- **Push for Gender Equity Policies**

Gender equity in sports applies to three basic areas: participation opportunities, athletic financial aid, and all other athletic benefits and opportunities. Encourage local, state, and national policy makers to take steps towards ending gender bias by promoting and reinforcing gender equity policies and practices in the Department of Education, state education programs, and in educational funding and research. Write to the Office of Civil Rights, your members of assembly, and

members of your state government to let them know you want gender equity enforced.

- **Publicize Discrimination at your College or University**

1. Are men's and women's sports programs funded in proportion to the percentage of men and women students?
2. Are opportunities for participation for women and men athletes proportional to enrollment?
3. Is there an unmet need for a varsity women's sport (such as a club sport whose members want to upgrade to a varsity sport)?

If you can prove that participation is not proportional, and that there is an unmet need for more women's sports, talk to the concerned authorities.

- **Develop a Media Strategy**

The media is vital to creating change. Never hesitate to contact the media and make them aware of actions, workshops, or other activities. Encourage reporters to cover women's sports in your area. Local radio and TV talk shows should also be encouraged to devote programs to women's athletics. Support women sports reporters and media coverage of women's sports.

### **Conclusions**

The recent success of Indian sportswomen in the global sporting arena should be utilized as a springboard to promote the sustainable participation of young girls in sports. We need more Saina Nehwals and Marry Koms. For that we have to take the initiatives of 'Go Out and Play'

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