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GENDER EQUITY IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS PARTICIPATION: TRENDS AND DISPARITIES

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ABSTRACT

The issue of gender equity in participation in physical education and sports has become of interest in current research in the field of education. In this paper, the trends and differences in the participation of boys and girls are investigated based on a secondary data analysis methodology. The study is based on the information contained in governmental reports, the educational databases, international institutions, and the published research studies aiming to get the idea of the dynamics of the gender engagement into the physical education and sporting activities. The results show that the boys tend to be more vigorous and competitive in sports and girls in individual or aesthetic. These disparities have been aggravated by social norms, cultures, lack of infrastructure and institutional barriers. This analysis also demonstrates that gender gaps are more likely to increase in adolescence making the girls less interested in sports and physical education programs. Although numerous policy interventions and educational reforms are intended to achieve gender equality, it has a lot of challenges. The paper specifies that gender-related issues in terms of policies, practices, and provision of supportive environments are essential to facilitate equal participation in sports and physical education.

KEYWORDS: *Gender Equity, Physical Education, Sports Participation, Gender Disparities, Secondary Data Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Gender equity in education and sports focuses on addressing fair access, opportunities, and treatment of all students irrespective of their gender, challenging heteronormativity, and androcentric frameworks that complement discourses of so-called equality, especially in schools where gender disparities are normalized and constructed as normal.<|human|>Gender equity in education and sports involves fair access, opportunities, and treatment of all students, regardless of sex, breaking the heteronormativity idea and androcentric structures of creating disparities as normalized and acceptable in schools.

It is important that physical education and participating in sports helps students to develop holistically, promoting physical wellness through better cardiovascular fitness and strength, mental status by decreasing anxiety and improving self-esteem, and social skills that would enhance the overall benefit of all students through managing gender differences (Kohl et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, global and domestic issues concerning gender differences in sports continue to persist, and females are less likely to participate in PE or join team sports, which are more likely to be regarded as female sports with a low inclination towards contact and violence (Metcalfe and Lindsey, 2019; Parri and Ceciliani, 2019; Ramos et al., 2020).

Educational institutions and schools in particular can contribute to the advancement of equal opportunities by adopting the following: gender-sensitive pedagogies, co-educational programs, such as Teaching Games for Understanding, policies highlighted in the promotion of inclusive settings and the introduction of stereotypes as a means of promoting student engagement and well-being (Hernandez et al., 2022).

The analysis of available data is needed to learn the trends and inequalities because existing statistics have shown omnipresentation of gaps based on physiological, social, and cultural factors that require evidence-based intervention (Bi et al., 2024; Gomwe et al., 2024).
This study aims to examine patterns and gender inequity in physical education and sports participation, based on which the strategies to enhance inclusiveness will be drawn.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on gender differences in Sports Participation

Persistent gender differences in the engagement in sports are recorded in the literature, boys are more rather than girls, who choose rather unphysical activities like dancing, exercise, and gymnastics (Bi et al., 2024; Parri and Ceciliani, 2019, 2024). These behaviors are mirrored in systematic reviews, which show small but significant effects on intervention in leisure-time PA between the two genders, although the difference in preferences and enjoyment is much stronger in adolescence (Schlund et al., 2021; Schulze et al., 2021)

Research on Barriers Faced by girls in Physical Education

The negative experiences introduce multiplex barriers to PE such as male dominance, perceived poor performance, and the environment, such as the absence of changing facilities, conditional dress, and the presence of boys, which further

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discourage greater declines in younger age groups (although this trend decreases with age). (Parri and Ceciliani, 2019) Multiverse barriers to PE, such as perceived poor performance, male dominance, and the environment (poor changing facilities, clothing requirements, and the presence of boys), discourage participation (although this decreases with age). (Alcala et al.,

Impact of Social, Cultural, and Institutional Factors

The norms society enforces about the significance of contact sports and aesthetic activities to femininity and masculinity, respectively, reinforce gender stereotypes, supported by heteronormative discourses and heteronormative school systems (Camarasa et al., 2023; Hernandez et al., 2022; Ramos et al., 2020). Institutionalized inequality, widespread in equality discourses, places girls in disadvantaged positions to pursue masculine contact sports; male hierarchies in coed fields put women in disadvantaged poses (Parri and Cec

Government and Policy Initiatives Promoting Gender Equality in sports

At national level, initiatives by governments and international agencies such as the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative combats gender violence and stereotypical participation in sports, and UNESCO approaches to girls enrollment into sports and access to policies tailored to MDGs and strategies to enforce these policies (Camara et al., 2023) The issues are the gaps in implementation, where sustainability of policy implementation and resource allocation leads to inclusive participation (Watson, 2016).

Research Gaps Identified in Previous Studies

Definite gaps exist in the existing literature, such as less attention to late adolescence, mixed-methods, and two areas: intersectional factors, such as ethnicity and socioeconomics, and inconclusive evidence on the equity influence of pedagogical models and the sustainability of equity practices in the long term(Cereda, 2023; Schlund et al., 2021; Schulze et al., 2020).

Objectives of the Study

- To examine trends in sports participation among boys and girls
- To analyze gender disparities in physical education participation
- To identify factors influencing gender equity in sports
- To evaluate progress toward gender equality in sports participation

Research Questions

- What are the trends in participation of boys and girls in physical education and sports?
- What gender disparities exist in sports participation?
- What social or institutional factors influence gender equity?

METHODOLOGY

The current research uses descriptive research design, which is founded on secondary data, to evaluate gender equity in physical education and participation in sports. The research is based on earlier published and open access information gathered by different authoritative sources. Such sources are the government reports, education databases, sports participation in the country and internationally (published by UNESCO, and the World Health Organization (WHO)) and the research journals and published studies regarding gender and sports participation. The secondary data obtained were critically analysed and tabulated to designate the patterns and differences in participation among the male and female students. To analyze the data, the comparative analysis was applied in comparing the participation levels of the genders and trend analysis assisted in identifying the change as well as the developments in sports participation over the years. Also, statistical interpretation of the given data was utilized to see the extent of gender inequalities, as well as to make relevant conclusions about the issue of gender equity in participating in physical education and sports.

Trends in Physical Education and Sports Participation

Participation Rates among Boys and Girls

Gender differences in sport participation and access to physical education have been extensively recorded and boys are always more engaged in vigorous and contact sports activities unlike girls who engage in activities with more individual appeal or aesthetic appeal that are not competitive. An example is that male students would be more interested in organized forms of contact sport such as basketball as opposed to female students who prefer the idea of dancing, exercise, and gymnastics, and are subjected to greater stereotyping based on their sexual differences (Bi et al., 2024; Lobo et al., 2023; Lobo and Dimalanta, 2024, 2023) boys have more discussions on moderately intensive physical activity out-of-school and in mixed groups (Metcalfe & Lindsey, 2019; Schlund et al., 2021; Schulze et al., 2021)

Changes in Participation over Time

Inequity in participation tends to increase in the adolescence stage, but girls decline in PE enjoyment and participation at a faster rate than boys due to the socialization of gender roles, the role of body image, and negative experience among other factors (Lubans et al., 2017; Parri and Ceciliani, 2019, 2023).

Regional or Institutional Variations

The trends depend on the regions and institutions due to cultural norms and policies. The PE curriculum in Rwanda was overhauled, and TV campaigns have seen to increase female participation in increased secondary schooling, which fits into the MDGs (Watson, 2016). Divides between males and females are aggravated by family roles, media, and androcentric structures, which in European countries have gained calls to implement single-sex education, and equity models (Abdul Aziz et al., 2012; Camarasa et al., 2023).

Gender Disparities in Sports Participation

Differences in Access to Facilities

Lack of sports infrastructure faces girls because of their safety, harassment in open spaces, and the poor infrastructure would

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support their needs (Abdul Aziz et al., 2012; Işikgoz et al., 2025) is aggravated by the urban planning gaps, where women and girls are targets of violence on streets and buses as well as recreational sectors, which restricts equitable access to resources (Abdul Aziz et al., 2012).

Differences in Participation Levels

Boys are always more involved in strenuous, intense sports activities such as basketball and football, whereas girls prefer those involving appearance, such as dancing, gymnastics, and exercise (Lobo et al., 2023; Lobo and Dimalanta, 2024, 2023, 2024). Girls rather indulge in activities that do not rely on physical activities, such as dancing, gymnastics, and exercise (Lubans et al., 2017; Parri and Ceciliani, 2019,

Representation in Competitive Sports

It continues to propagate gender stereotypes where there is under-participation of girls in competitive, traditionally male sporting activities such as boxing or team games, in favor of more feminine alternative activities (Bi et al., 2024; Gomwe et al., 2024, 2024) and restricts leadership positions of girls on a gendered basis (Camarasa et al., 2023).

Factors Affecting Gender Equity

Cultural and Social Norms

Gender disparities in physical education and sports activity are culturally and socially constructed, and these differences are reinforced by historical, cultural, and societal factors that socialize gender roles since childhood, causing an increasing trend in decreasing numbers of girls participating in sports in adolescence because of body image and the fear of social reproach (Lubans et al., 2017; Parri and Ceciliani, 2019).

Availability of Infrastructure

Inadequate and limited infrastructure prevents girls engaging and being challenged by the safety concerns, harassment in the open spaces, and absence of specialized facilities (Abdul Aziz et al., 2012). Policy actions such as Uruguay action plans aim to facilitate inclusive environments, and gaps in implementation are witnessed globally (Abdul Aziz et al., 2012).

School Policies and Teacher Attitudes

The equity aspect of school policies and attitudes to teaching boosts participation of girls in PE activities and girls experience disadvantage in most instances compared to boys (as minority as compared to minorities in other studies).(Camarasa et al., 2023; Lobo et al., 2023) In the Philippines, there are curriculum reforms, TV campaigns, and education policies of girls that encourage participation of girls in PE activities (as the minority when compared to other minorities in other studies).(Lubans et al., 2017) In Rwanda, school policies on gender

Family and Community Support

Participated in varies according to family and community support, with physical activity levels and preferences in children being influenced by the parental care (Peral-Suarez et al., 2020) Sex/gender Rwanda women in sports Programs may be helpful, yet interventions based on sex/gender show little impact on leisure-time physical activities in both groups (Schlund et al., 2021; Schulze et al., 2021).

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Trends and Disparities

It shows that there are gender differences in participation in physical education and physical activities and girls habitually do worse in vigorous, contact sports like basketball and football, with girls doing more arts and book-like exercises, reinforcing androcentric systems.<(Lubans et al., 2017; Parri and Ceciliani, 2019, 2023, 2024) Interventions only achieve minor changes on participation in leisure-time physical activities, which also do not greatly reduce disparities (Schlund et al., 2021; Schul

Comparison with Previous Research Findings

These findings can be compared to earlier research that reports boys dominance in team sports and higher out -of-school moderate-vigorous PA levels, compared with girls preference for individual and aesthetic activities, due to gender socialization during childhood.(Lobo et al., 2023; Peral -Suarez et al., 2020, 2023, 2024) Policies so effective in Rwanda to boost reach to both genders can be attributed to the similar effects of socialization during childhood and fear of negative evaluation and media influential practices (Abdul

Implications for Education and Sports Policy

The gender-sensitive pedagogies, single-sex choices, and equity models are the most effective solution to address the inequities since they reduce boys dominance in co-ed schools and increase girls participation in lifelong PA (Camarasa et al., 2023; Işıkgöz et al., 2025; Lubans et al., 2017; Watanabe, 2019). Equity can be promoted through investments in safe and inclusive infrastructures and urban planning (Abdul Aziz et al., 2012)

CONCLUSION

The research finds that gender inequality in physical education and participation in sports still persist in various teaching situations in spite of the increasing awareness and the policy programs aimed at ensuring gender equality. Analysis of secondary data proves that boys are always more active in competitive and vigorous sports activities as girls are frequently denied social, cultural and institutional access to do so due to various constraints. These inequalities are caused by gender stereotypes, insufficient and unsafe infrastructure, teacher attitude and community insufficient support. The results further show that participation gaps are increased in adolescence, which means that special interventions are necessary at this age. Schools have a critical part in tackling these issues, though provision of gender sensitive school curricula, encouraging inclusive sports activities and the stimulation of equal opportunities to all learners. This can go a long way in ensuring that gender equity is achieved through policy implementation, better facilities and more awareness among the community on issues of physical education and sports participation.

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