

The role of women in Taekwondo: a literature review

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ABSTRACT

This literature review aimed to examine the role of women in sport, with a particular focus on Taekwondo, and to provide an analytical overview of the position of female athletes within contemporary sport contexts. The findings of the reviewed literature highlighted persistent gender inequalities, including limited access to opportunities, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and the continuation of gender-based stereotypes that affect women's participation and performance. At the same time, the review identified significant progress achieved through institutional and legislative initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in sport. These include policies designed to enhance women's participation, ensure equal opportunities, and challenge discriminatory practices. Furthermore, the study emphasized the evolving and transformative role of women in sport, as evidenced by the increasing participation rates and notable athletic achievements in recent years. Despite this progress, structural and cultural barriers remain. Overall, the findings suggest that while important steps have been taken toward gender equality, continued efforts are required at policy, institutional, and societal levels. This study contributes to the advancement of gender equality in sport by synthesizing current knowledge and highlighting the need for sustained and targeted interventions.

KEYWORDS

Women in Sport; Taekwondo; Gender Equality; Female Athletes; Sport Participation

1. INTRODUCTION

The position of women's sport in our society continues to vary depending on the cultural and historical context. Possible reasons for these differences between countries may be religious beliefs, level of education, legislation and social traditions.

However, many positive measures have been taken to combat gender discrimination. A very important example is the implementation of Title IX in the United States (Title IX, Education Amendments, 1972). Title IX stipulates that no person shall be excluded from participation in any education programme or activity receiving federal financial assistance. This legislation is credited with increasing the participation rates of girls and women in sport. Although sports are not explicitly mentioned in the article, schools are required to offer male and female students' equal opportunities to compete, give male and female athletes their fair share of athletic scholarships, and treat athletes equally in other aspects, including equipment, facilities, and coaching. In this way, it prohibited gender discrimination in educational programmes and, by, led to a significant increase in the participation of women and girls in sport (Hepler, 2013).

Research on women's sport has developed significantly in recent decades, particularly in relation to Title IX, the law that established gender equality in education and sport. Studies focus on three main areas: women's resistance to discrimination, the complexity of institutional regulations in women's sport, and women's attitudes towards physical activity and their role as role models for the next generation. The relevant literature highlights both the challenges and successes experienced by women in sport, underscoring the impact of Title IX in exploring their opportunities. Understanding the multidimensional nature of women's participation in sport is vital for promoting positive social change and creating opportunities for future generations of female athletes (Brake 2010).

From the ancient Olympic Games, where women were completely excluded from both participation and spectating, with the sole exception of the priestess of Demeter, the history of women's sport has been characterised by systematic discrimination and exclusion. Although there were women's competitions, such as the Heraea, they did not enjoy the same recognition as the Olympic Games. Even after the revival of the Olympic Games in 1896, women had to fight hard to gain limited access, with the first women's sports being introduced only in 1900 and on a small scale. Throughout the 20th century, social perceptions linking physical activity with masculinity limited women's opportunities, while discrimination was expressed through unequal funding, lack of infrastructure and exclusion from professional opportunities. The big change came in 1972 with the passing of Title IX in the United States.

The evolution of women's participation in society and sport has been a difficult and lengthy process. Although progress has been made, it has clearly been slower than that of men. The road to gender equality in sport has been fraught with challenges that have tested the endurance and determination of countless women. Despite the adversities, alternative sporting opportunities for

women began to emerge. These opportunities provided a platform for them to showcase their abilities, challenge the social norms that marginalised them, and overturn the prevailing perception that women were not suited to competitive sports.

Women who sought to participate in sports often faced ridicule, discrimination, and even open hostility. Society struggled to accept the idea that women could excel and compete on an equal footing with men. Stereotypes and prejudices were deeply ingrained, perpetuating the perception that women were physically inferior and incapable of excelling in sports. However, determined women forged ahead, defying social norms and negative attitudes, their perseverance was a source of inspiration for subsequent generations, who continued to break stereotypes and redefine the limits of women's achievements in sport.

Over the decades, the hard work and perseverance of these women began to bear fruit. Gradually, attitudes towards women's participation in sport began to change. Women gained more opportunities to showcase their talent and compete on equal terms. Pioneering athlete Billie Jean King was discouraged from pursuing sports as a child, as she was advised to find a more feminine activity, while her brother showed promise in baseball. However, she was determined to overcome this injustice and, at the age of 12, it took her just one tennis lesson to decide that she wanted to devote her life to the sport. She bought her first racket with money from odd jobs and slept with it, dreaming of a career at Wimbledon. King became one of the most decorated tennis players in the world, but her legacy is much more than her success on the court. At the beginning of her career, women's tennis was considered insignificant and unworthy of awards or prize money. Together with other talented women, she fought to raise women's tennis to the level it is at today, with its stars enjoying the same love, prize money and sponsorships as their male counterparts. In 1973, she won the US Open but received \$15,000 less than her male opponents. She refused to play the following year unless the prizes were equal, making the US Open the first major tournament to equalise the prizes. To protest the inequality and support other women, she and other players started their own association, helping all the major tournaments move towards equal prize money. In this way, Billie Jean King paved the way for countless women to follow in their footsteps, charting a course towards equality in sport (King, 1998).

Examining and Challenging Stereotypes

Stereotypes in sport affect both the perception and active participation of male and female athletes, creating a system of inequalities that is often perpetuated through social norms, the media

and sporting structures. Women are often considered less strong, less resilient or less capable of performing in demanding sports, which leads to their underrepresentation in certain areas, such as dynamic or masculine sports (e.g. football, wrestling, weightlifting). On the other hand, men often face social pressure to engage exclusively in activities considered 'masculine', avoiding sports stereotypically associated with femininity, such as dance, rhythmic gymnastics or figure skating. Stereotypes not only affect women, but also limit both genders, as they restrict individuals' choices and freedom of expression in sport.

These prejudices have significant consequences. They reduce opportunities for training and participation, hinder the recognition and promotion of male and female athletes, and often lead to an unequal distribution of resources and support. Furthermore, they affect athletes' self-confidence and psychology, as internalising negative perceptions can limit their performance and lead to lower perseverance or even abandonment of sport. Breaking down and dismantling these stereotypes is a prerequisite for promoting gender equality and ensuring fair and equal participation in sport.

Mourão was one of the Brazilian researchers who conducted an extensive study on the scientific evidence of hegemonic and dominant masculinity in football. The research was based on meticulous recording of the practice and time devoted by boys and girls to football during physical education classes. The results revealed significant gender inequality, with boys dominating activities in this school setting (Votre & Mourão, 2003).

The deep connection between football and male identity in Brazilian society reinforced and perpetuated gender roles and expectations. Historically, men have been encouraged to compete fiercely and demonstrate their physical abilities, reinforcing socially constructed notions of strength and power in sport. In contrast, women are placed in roles that emphasise femininity, often expected to display passivity or remain invisible when participating as athletes to conform to traditional norms and become more acceptable in the sporting arena.

The processes of constructing femininity and masculinity that are embedded in societies assign different social roles to the sexes, hierarchising values, duties and behaviours in both visible and invisible ways. These constructs also permeate educational spaces, regulating behaviour in schools. In sport, the situation is not particularly different, as there is daily tension between reasons for recognising and excluding women. This is because the social dynamics surrounding sport are historically and culturally shaped by mechanisms of exclusion and prejudice, despite efforts to change the sporting and educational context.

The characteristics of femininity and masculinity are still being constructed today, with physical activity symbolically linked to movements and abilities that correspond to the ideal of the male body. The development of sports culture has historically elevated men as dominant protagonists. From an early age, girls are encouraged to participate in activities considered 'feminine', such as dancing, while boys are encouraged to participate in 'masculine' activities such as football or martial arts.

This dichotomy reinforces the perception that the male body, associated with strength, is the standard of athletic ability, while the female body is often underestimated and limited by stereotypes. However, these perceptions are gradually changing. Many women are defying social expectations, pushing boundaries and proving that athletic ability is not determined by gender.

Recognition of women's achievements is growing, especially through prestigious events such as the Olympic Games, which showcase their abilities and challenge prejudices and stereotypes against them. This visibility is crucial for overturning patriarchal norms and fostering a more inclusive sporting environment. However, stereotypes and discrimination continue to exist and manifest themselves through inequalities in opportunities and remuneration, media coverage and recognition of women's achievements. The struggle for equality requires constant effort to challenge social norms, combat institutional bias and ensure equal treatment for all.

These stereotypes are being challenged on many levels. Firstly, through the very presence and successes of female athletes, who are breaking down the perception that women are less capable. Secondly, through educational programmes and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in school sports, where early sporting identities are formed. Thirdly, through the actions of international and national organisations that establish regulations for equality and promote anti-discrimination campaigns. Finally, social movements and social media have created new platforms where female athletes can share experiences, highlight inequalities and strengthen their voice against entrenched perceptions.

In conclusion, the social construction of femininity and masculinity has greatly influenced gender dynamics in sport. However, efforts to challenge stereotypes and promote inclusion are gradually reshaping the sporting landscape.

Lack of Representation in Leadership Positions and Promotion of Female Coaches and Officials

The influence of sports governance extends beyond the playing field and into society as a whole. It shapes practices and values that we encounter in education, the media, politics, and

business. However, women's presence in these positions is still limited, even though society has made strides toward gender equality. Despite the increased participation of women in sporting events, leadership positions continue to be held mainly by men, reflecting deeply rooted prejudices and stereotypes.

Experience, expertise and specialisation tend to be recognised and valued only when expressed by men, resulting in women being trapped in a constant state of victimisation and exclusion. This pattern is not limited to their immediate professional experiences, but shapes their overall expectations, opportunities for professional advancement and self-image in the field of sport. It is therefore imperative to challenge and eliminate the stereotypes that keep women out of leadership positions and to establish conditions of true equality.

In this context, the lack of attention to the specific needs and interests of women in sport is even more evident in the gaps in equality policies. For example, the Action Plan for Gender Equality (2003–2010) did not include substantive provisions for the representation of women in decision-making centres. This omission reinforces the unequal distribution of power and hinders progress towards equality.

Although the 2012 Olympic Charter included recommendations on gender equality, men continue to be overrepresented in leadership positions, and efforts have failed to achieve true equality. Addressing the problem requires systematic and collective action by all stakeholders: sports organisations, athletes, sponsors and the media. Coordinated support is needed to ensure that women occupy leadership positions, that their voices are heard and that their contributions are recognised.

Sport reflects society in general. The increase in the presence of women in coaching roles in university programmes, the Women's National Basketball Federation, the US Women's National Football Team and other sports supports this view. Data show that women's coaching positions remain limited and are often undermined by social prejudices. Rather than passively waiting for attitudes to change, it is recommended that targeted awareness and public relations campaigns be organised to enhance the image and status of women coaches. Such a campaign should be accompanied by financial and institutional support to empower institutions willing to challenge policies that prevent women from advancing to higher levels in sport.

In addition, organisations need to make conscious choices about recruiting, promoting and retaining women in coaching roles. 's analysis of the literature and data from relevant summits has

highlighted several strategies that can be implemented to achieve this goal, focusing on both structural changes and the cultivation of positive role models.

The power and influence exercised by sports governing bodies today remain closely linked to the male domain and male role models. This male dominance in leadership positions is not limited to the management of sports issues, but also carries with it a deep historical symbolism of power and control, which has gradually become entrenched in social and cultural traditions. Sports administration is not only exercised as a neutral, bureaucratic function; it is also a form of enforcement that conveys and reinforces social structures of inequality and confirms the privileged position of men in decision-making and policymaking.

Furthermore, government and administrative bodies in sport use the power and influence of sport not only as a tool for entertainment, but also as a means of communication and socialisation, which appeals to the general public and incorporates cultural values and symbols. Sport has the power to unite people from different backgrounds, strengthen the sense of community and act as a common language that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers. However, this power is organised and expressed through structures shaped by men, which tend to exclude women from active participation in management and decision-making.

Suggested strategies include mentoring and training programmes, development opportunities, transparent recruitment and promotion processes, and institutional initiatives that promote diversity and equality. It is not enough to proclaim equality; it is necessary to cultivate a culture where women feel truly empowered, visible and valued. Harnessing their potential not only promotes fairness, but also enhances quality and innovation in sport.

Increasing the number of female coaches and officials requires conscious strategies from sports organisations and educational institutions that encourage and support women to pursue this profession (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).

Empowering Women in Sports Governance

As part of the Independent Academic Research Programme (IARP), funded by the IWG and conducted in the context of the 7th IWG Global Conference (June 2014, Iceland), qualitative and quantitative research was conducted to examine the challenges and opportunities faced by women in sports governance. The research focused primarily on Icelandic women, drawing on the unique social and cultural context of Iceland, which has the highest levels of gender equality in the world.

The qualitative research included interviews with 16 Icelandic leaders and one international leader, focusing on experiences, challenges and strategies for promoting women's participation in governance. The quantitative research examined the awareness of Icelandic women who participated in the Brighton and Helsinki Declarations, as well as the impact of the Sport Accord Convention on their mobilisation. The long-standing commitment of the Reykjavik Sports Union (RSU), which has made equality a core value since 1935, provided a highly conscious framework for gender balance.

The results underscore that the active participation of women in governance is essential not only for their own empowerment, but also for creating equal opportunities for future generations. However, despite progress, women continue to be underrepresented in these positions. The International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG), established in 1994 with the Brighton Declaration, continues to work to ensure equal opportunities through global conferences and partnerships with stakeholders.

Empowering women in sports governance is not only a moral imperative, but also a practical necessity for the advancement of sport. Their direct participation in decision-making, the creation of positive role models and the development of policies that promote their participation are of central importance. Through targeted programmes, support and institutional changes, conditions can be created that will allow women to contribute fully and equally to the sporting arena.

The widening pay gap in professional sport

The dedication, commitment and commitment required to excel in professional sport are enormous, regardless of gender. Athletes invest years in developing their skills and abilities and need financial stability to maintain their careers. It is therefore crucial that they can earn income not only from participating in top tournaments, but also from other sources, so that they can continue to compete at the highest level.

In some sports, such as golf and tennis, women have managed to claim significant prize money. In women's golf, for example, prizes in major competitions can far exceed the cost of university studies and reach impressive amounts, often exceeding \$90,000. This provides female athletes with the opportunity to compete at an elite level, showcasing their talent and enjoying rich experiences through their participation in international competitions in Europe, the USA and Asia.

Similarly, women's tennis offers high prize money, especially in major tournaments that include both men and women. Events such as the Grand Slam and WTA tournaments prove that women in tennis can achieve remarkable financial success. A prime example is Simona Halep,

winner of Roland Garros in 2018, who earned €2.775 million, confirming that top female tennis players have the potential to earn incomes comparable to those of their male counterparts.

These successes show that women in professional sport now have more opportunities to claim significant financial rewards for their dedication and talent. However, the progress made in some sports is not reflected across the professional sports landscape. The pay gap remains wide, especially in sports that have not yet achieved the mass recognition or television revenues of men's leagues.

The economic gap between male and female athletes is not related to limitations in their performance or commitment, but to limited exposure, fewer sponsorships and the lower commercial value attributed to female athletes. Despite improvements in commercial rights and television coverage of women's tournaments, more investment, consistent exposure and strategies are needed to achieve true pay equality.

The emergence of a new generation of talented female athletes who are making their mark on the international stage is proof of the potential of women's sport. In golf, for example, the names of the new generation of women, who combine skill and dedication, compete at a high level and attract public interest, contributing to the gradual reduction of inequalities. However, in many cases, their earnings remain much lower than those of their male colleagues, and women often depend on coaching or other activities to financially support their careers.

Addressing the Pay Gap

In 1970, the United States enacted the Equal Pay Act, which makes it illegal to pay different wages to men and women who perform the same work with equal requirements and responsibilities. However, in professional sports, inequalities continue to exist and fuel debate and activism.

According to estimates, achieving gender equality, including equal pay, could add \$12 trillion to global GDP (2018). A study by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (2018) showed that women account for 50% of sporting goods consumers in the US, while women's sports account for only 25.6% of television time on ESPN. Boosting demand for women's sports, improving television coverage, promoting products with female branding and highlighting positive female role models can help reduce the pay gap.

The Australian Football League Players' Association (AFLPA, 2016) highlighted the need to improve athletes' financial literacy and for organisations to adopt alternative forms of incentives to address inequalities.

Furthermore, a 2019 study noted that the successes of the England women's national football team and public discussions about their pay and conditions boosted donations to the FA, showing that social pressure and mobilisation can positively influence progress towards equality. Increasing sponsorship and donations to women's teams can act as leverage to pressure organisations and administrations to address inequalities in pay and working conditions.

In conclusion, addressing the pay gap requires a combination of legislative interventions, marketing strategies, increasing the visibility of women in sport, and social awareness. Only through coordinated action can equal opportunities and fair pay for women athletes be ensured, so that they can continue to contribute to the sport with the same passion and excellence as their male colleagues.

Discrimination and Harassment in Sport

According to the survey, the experiences that most stigmatize women in sport are the most serious forms of violence, such as sexual abuse and moral harassment. In a deeply patriarchal society, women continue to be subjected to traumatic experiences because of an unequal power relationship. Women are stereotyped as fragile, submissive, non-aggressive and compliant, which legitimizes — in the eyes of some — practices of oppression and harassment. Even today, some men mistakenly believe that women exist to satisfy their desires, degrading them to objects of use and disregarding their rights and autonomy.

These experiences leave deep scars on the lives of female athletes, affecting their psychological well-being, sense of identity and professional careers. Sexual violence and moral harassment are forms of oppression that undermine women's talent and personality, reinforcing their image as "victims" and discouraging them from participating and advancing in sport.

Women in sport often experience situations ranging from malicious objectification of their bodies to systematic harassment, authoritarianism and humiliation. Painful testimonies from female athletes from different social backgrounds and age groups describe degrading behavior ranging from verbal abuse to physical violence and psychological intimidation. These practices not only restrict their personal freedom and professional development, but also stigmatise the entire field of sport.

Perpetuating stereotypes of women as submissive, "fragile" and passive perpetuates an oppressive social context, reinforced by acceptance of the status quo. Society must recognise these imbalances and take action to create an environment where women are not defined by their traumas but have the strength and confidence to claim the space they deserve.

It is important to note that these practices are not limited to a few sports or specific environments but are recorded across the entire spectrum of sport: from professional competitions to amateur leagues, and from training sessions to official events. The existence of these abusive behaviours is a shameful phenomenon that must be eliminated through targeted interventions and awareness-raising among all those involved (Hindman & Walker, 2020; DiCaro, 2022; Gurgis et al., 2022; Bermon et al., 2021; Barnes & Adams, 2022; Kavasoglu et al., 2024; Goldman & Gervis, 2021; Sehlkoglu, 2021; Bull & Faure 2022).

Creating Safe and Inclusive Sports Environments

Combating violence and discrimination requires the creation of safe, inclusive and supportive environments in sport. In this context, organizations can adopt policies such as 'Some Limits in Sport' (DBiS), developed by the National Association of Girls and Women in Sport (NAGWS). This policy, designed in collaboration with major sports organizations, aims to ensure equal opportunities, prevent violence and harassment, and create educational frameworks that promote respect and diversity.

Programs and policies implemented in sports organizations, academic institutions and clubs must be evaluated and adapted to the needs of women's sport. It is important that staff (coaches, boards of directors, trainers) are trained in gender and equality issues so that they can intervene effectively in incidents of harassment and violence. It is equally essential to create communities based on mutual trust, transparency and respect for the individuality of each athlete.

Once violence against women is recognized as a human rights violation, a global social issue and a public health issue, it becomes a priority for continuous monitoring, evaluation and accountability. Sports programs can collaborate with organizations specializing in violence against women, join national and international alliances for gender rights and equality, and leverage the support of sponsors and social partners in the context of corporate social responsibility.

Parents, teachers, coaches and team leaders must be trained to recognize and intervene in incidents of abuse, privacy violations and harassment. Preventing violence and ensuring a positive environment is not an option, but a prerequisite for the development of sport as a field of respect, equality and empowerment.

The International Olympic Committee and UN Women have developed a unified policy framework that provides guidelines and tools for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs that promote a violence-free environment in sport. The adoption of such

frameworks empowers women, protects their rights and contributes to the creation of a sporting environment that reflects the values of inclusion and equality.

Cultural and Religious Barriers

Research by Mabogunje, Muhammad, Dangata and Sanni has shown that the social status of working women is less influenced by their educational achievements and more by their ability to generate income. The ability to generate income plays a crucial role in reducing inequalities in family income, while also contributing to the development of skills and abilities, which in turn lead to a positive transformation of their self-esteem and worldview.

To better understand the relationship between resource ownership, social organization and dynamics, researchers examined recruitment strategies in Bauchi, Nigeria, for both families and unmarried young women with degrees, focusing on sport and its role in empowering women. In addition, they analyzed recruitment practices for amateur boxing in India and women's participation in judo and boxing at the national level. This comparative approach combined findings from African and Eastern societies with the cultural specificities described in the literature and in reviews of African cultures. The study showed that economic empowerment through income and skills is crucial for women's social advancement. Although education contributes to personal development, the real improvement in their position is due to their productive capacity and ownership of resources.

However, socio-cultural constraints remain strong. Social norms and expectations surrounding sport often make it difficult or even undesirable for women to participate. In many cases, sport is considered incompatible with 'feminine nature', with gender differences being presented as an obstacle. Furthermore, it is often perceived as a threat to the modesty of the female body, reinforcing stereotypes and traditional roles.

The influence of religious beliefs is decisive. The imposition of strict dress codes and the patriarchal influence of older, often male, leaders in small communities further restrict women's participation in sport. In many societies, women are seen as bearers of family honor, with the result that any action considered threatening to this reputation, such as participation in sports, provokes social outcry

The lack of inclusive spaces and opportunities, entrenched notions of family decorum, and the association of women's participation with the risk of losing dowry or other advantages act as deterrents. For example, in India and Nigeria, educated young women with successful athletic careers

faced delays in their marriages in the early 2000s, leading to a decline in the marriage rate in this demographic group.

Overall, cultural and religious barriers are deeply rooted in diverse geographical and cultural contexts, making women's participation in sport difficult regardless of location. Addressing them requires a comprehensive change in social attitudes, institutional frameworks, and religious interpretations to create conditions of equal opportunity (Laszlo et al., 2020; Eggers del Campo & Steinert, 2022; Standing, 2022; Agarwal et al., 2020; Andriamahery & Qamruzzaman, 2022).

Overcoming Cultural and Religious Barriers

In Western societies, liberal ideas and struggles for emancipation, particularly since the French Revolution, have contributed to greater equality and increased participation of women in sport. Despite significant progress, women continue to be judged by male-centered standards, and their participation often takes place in environments of reduced overall participation in sport. Feminist theories, adapted to poststructuralist frameworks, point out that this progress is part of the logic of the hegemony of the capitalist system (Valverdi), focusing on improving techniques and performance, but not on substantive change in participation and quality.

At the elite level, the performance of top female athletes continues to be criticized by male-centered perceptions. This development is considered counterproductive, as it is characterized by a lack of zeal and deeper institutional change.

In countries in the Global South, cultural issues remain more prominent. In the Middle East, Malaysia and Indonesia, women's participation in sport is limited by traditional values, with modesty and public image acting as restrictive factors. Even in Indonesia, where progress has been made, stereotypes persist in a more subtle way, with double standards being upheld and women being judged harshly for their public presence and behavior.

The emphasis on sexual modesty is particularly strong in the Muslim world, where women are considered not to be seen in public, while in India the custom of purdah continues to suppress women's participation. Despite the provision of quotas (e.g. 20% of positions in the public sector in India), social acceptance of women's participation in sport remains low.

Overcoming cultural and religious barriers requires fundamental change in social values, institutional frameworks and educational programs to create an environment where women can participate equally and without stigma. Rethinking stereotypes and creating supportive institutions are essential to ensure the meaningful inclusion of women in sport at all levels.

Inequality in Media Coverage

It is interesting to note that society places great value on certain characteristics of women, such as femininity and youthfulness, while often overlooking their athletic abilities. This is evident in the promotion of young women who dress provocatively for commercial purposes. This trend is observed in various forms of media, especially in advertisements that emphasize beauty rather than athletic talent.

However, there is a stark contrast between this spectacle promoted by the media and the world of women's flat track roller derby leagues. These leagues are a symbol of empowerment and athleticism, even though they were not initially financially profitable. As these leagues grew, they caught the attention of newspaper publishers, who recognized their importance and gave them extensive coverage. This raised the profile of roller derby leagues and highlighted the competitiveness and talent of the women who participate in them.

Roller derby leagues demonstrate women's potential to excel in physically demanding sports and defy social norms and expectations. As they continue to thrive and captivate audiences, their legacy grows, leaving a lasting impression on those who witness the strength and grace of these remarkable women. In a world that often overlooks female athletes, roller derby leagues serve as a reminder of the untapped strength and resilience that lies within every woman, waiting to be admired (Tucker & Spears, 2023; Cronn-Mills, 2022; Ritondo & Trussell, 2023; Morris, 2022; Solomons, 2023).

Today, data provides a rough estimate of the leading position of men's sports in media coverage. The latest study conducted by the Women's Sports Foundation and the Centre for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California, covering the period from 1989 to 2014, highlights two key findings regarding media coverage of women's sports. First, female athletes are depicted twice as often as cheerleaders or participants in athletic activities (41.4%) than as skilled athletes (22.9%) or professional athletes who are role models (19.0%). The percentage of images presenting women as skilled athletes has increased over time, suggesting a gradual and positive development in the media in this regard. However, female athletes are not represented equally in terms of their ability, depending on the sport they practice. Sports in which male and female athletes demonstrate high ability receive the most coverage in women's sports, while those with female characteristics show greater inequalities in terms of ability in coverage. Secondly, female athletes receive significantly less coverage in digital media, television and print media. The media does not provide

adequate coverage of female athletes in general, either during the Olympic and Paralympic Games or even in mixed doubles tennis, except when Elena Vesnina is involved.

It is vital to address these inequalities and strive for greater gender equality in the media's portrayal of women in sport. Although the progress made in promoting women as capable athletes is commendable, there is still much to be done. By promoting female athletes in various sports and highlighting their achievements, the media can play a decisive role in breaking down gender stereotypes and inspiring

Furthermore, it is essential to ensure that female athletes receive equal coverage across all media. Digital platforms, television programs and print media should provide ample opportunities for the public to learn about the achievements and stories of female athletes. This inclusivity will not only benefit female athletes individually but will also contribute to the growth and popularity of women's sport.

It is vital to recognize that gender inequalities in media coverage extend beyond major sporting events such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Even in lesser-known events, such as mixed doubles tennis, media attention tends to focus on specific individuals, such as Elena Vesnina, rather than providing comprehensive coverage of all participating athletes. This selective presentation further perpetuates the marginalization of female athletes and hinders progress towards gender equality in sports media.

To overcome these challenges, collaboration between sports organizations, media outlets and governing bodies is vital. By working together, they can develop strategies to ensure the fair and equal representation of female athletes across all media. This may include dedicating a significant portion of coverage to women's sports, actively seeking out and promoting diverse stories, and providing platforms for female athletes to share their experiences and opinions.

In conclusion, the existing evidence clearly highlights inequalities in media coverage of women's sports. Although positive steps have been taken in portraying women as capable athletes, there is still much room for improvement. By addressing these issues, promoting gender equality and providing comprehensive coverage, the media can contribute to a more inclusive and diverse portrayal of sports. This is not only a moral responsibility, but also a strategic decision to bridge the gender gap and empower female athletes to thrive in their respective fields. Only then can we truly celebrate the achievements and potential of all athletes, regardless of gender.

Why is the media important in reducing barriers to women's participation and recognition in sport? By shaping our perceptions and understanding of sport, media coverage sheds light about women in sport and contributes to the recognition of women's achievements and the changing of social norms and expectations. However, even recent data show a lack of media coverage for women in sport, thus reinforcing gender inequalities in this area.

Improving Media Representation

All of the most important sports from a historical, iconic, contemporary and commercial point of view are sporting events for female athletes, where these athletes are forced to compete wearing minimal clothing. The power to control one's body, physical effort, and the courage to compete have finally ceased to be the privilege of men and something excluded from the sphere of women (if there is a break in her schedule, a woman who has become too 'masculine' and decided to join a male-dominated field should be the object of our laughter or pity). Considering the above, the inadequacy of media commentators and the absence of real experts or analysts covering women's sports is simply superficial negligence. Women in sports media do not appear in any other role than advertising specific products. The presentation of women in sports media is mainly limited to advertisements for products used exclusively by women, such as skin care products, clothing or personal hygiene products.

Sport is a product with clearly defined rules and is usually covered based on those rules. However, in some areas, sport suffers because of the interest surrounding it. The image of female athletes and women as future mothers and caregivers continues to dominate the media. Any case of "breaking the mold" in the image of female athletes quickly and emphatically becomes the subject of discussion in the media. As mentioned, the "lack of feminine characteristics" complicates the acquisition of prime-time slots for sports coverage. The media are reluctant to talk about women's sports, citing low interest. Women are interested in sport, but are they interested in women's sport? Who, if not the protector of a country or region with a developed male sports industry, can introduce women's sports to society, break down stereotypes and inspire women like Ms. S. around the world? Let us leave the questions about standards in the social sciences aside and, as far as the media is concerned, let us present some specific proposals.

4. DISCUSSION

The position of women in sport has been the subject of intense scientific and social interest in recent decades. This literature review focused on the historical progress of women in sport, highlighting their contribution, the challenges they faced and the obstacles that still exist at the institutional and social level. The aim of this chapter is to combine the theoretical findings of international and Greek literature with empirical data from the thematic analysis of interviews with women with experience in Taekwondo.

Research in recent decades indicates that women's participation in sport is neither self-evident nor linear. On the contrary, it has been shaped by conflicts, demands and institutional interventions. Despite the progress that has been made, women continue to be underrepresented in many aspects of sport, such as leadership positions, while continuing to experience stereotypes, discrimination and sexist behavior. This review examines the historical institutional and social parameters that have shaped the current position of women in sport, while focusing on the specific characteristics observed in the Greek context.

Despite significant achievements, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership and administrative positions in sport, while wage inequalities remain pronounced. In Greece, as recorded in the interviews conducted for the research project, the participants point out that taekwondo is still considered a "male-dominated" sport and that women must prove their worth to gain trust and respect.

At the same time, it is recognized that things are changing, albeit slowly. Women are demanding greater visibility and equality, with the promotion of female role models being an important factor, as confirmed both in theory and in the findings of this research.

Overall, the historical review highlights the resilience and courage of women who broke down barriers and redefined their place in sport. Despite ongoing challenges, institutional reforms, social changes and the individual perseverance of women continue to shape a landscape that, although still unequal, appears to be moving towards inclusion and equality.

Discrimination and sexism in sport are the subject of extensive discussion in the literature. International literature emphasizes that women face systematic inequalities that manifest themselves in different forms: from exclusion from leadership positions to wage gaps and daily comments that undermine their abilities (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Sexism is defined as any behavior, comment or

practice based on the perception that one sex is superior to the other. While institutional changes have limited overt forms of discrimination, more covert or indirect forms persist.

In Greek sport, discrimination is often linked to the mindset that sport is a 'male privilege'. Women who seek roles as coaches, referees or administrators are often considered 'out of place'.

Analysis of interviews conducted as part of a research study confirms the continued existence of discrimination in the Greek context. It is interesting to note that discrimination is often linked to the exclusion of women from high positions and that sport remains male-dominated. Women seem to deal with discrimination through perseverance, success and proving their worth.

As far as sexism is concerned, the data show that it is widespread, although it is often more covert today. Personal experiences of sexism are often recorded, while its existence is reported even when there is no personal experience. It is indicative that sexism is mainly attributed to male coaches and manifests itself through comments and insinuations about appearance, the way women compete and their life choices. The phenomenon is described as in a "transitional phase," as many women observe improvement, respect, and a reduction in the intensity of the phenomenon over time. Nevertheless, it remains evident and can negatively affect women's careers.

The women who participated in the surveys describe various strategies for dealing with discrimination and sexism. Several describe the "diplomatic management" of situations, where women isolate incidents, do not allow them to escalate, and proceed calmly. They also emphasize the importance of highlighting successes and maintaining a steady presence in high positions to gain respect.

Discrimination and sexism in sport, and especially in Greek Taekwondo, although limited, remain real phenomena that burden women. The experiences of the participants show that progress is gradual, and changes are achieved through coordinated effort, persistence and the adoption of appropriate strategies.

Women's participation in administrative and leadership positions in sport remains limited at the international level. The literature emphasizes that women continue to be a minority on the boards of sports organizations, with percentages rarely exceeding 20–25% (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). The reasons for low participation include social stereotypes, lack of support networks, and the dominant male culture in sport.

In the Greek context, the research findings reinforce this picture. It has been noted that management is considered a "male domain", while many participants describe obstacles and

discouragement to engaging in administrative tasks. The exclusion of women from high positions in sport, whether as coaches, referees or administrators, still largely exists, admittedly. At the same time, there are voices that recognize small but significant changes: women in administrative roles gain respect when they demonstrate competence, efficiency and success.

The presence of female role models is crucial for empowering and motivating young girls to get involved in sport. The literature points out that role models not only inspire but also shape new perceptions of what is possible (Reid, 2020). Female role models in sport usually come from the sporting careers of top athletes, but also from female coaches and referees who are breaking new ground in male-dominated fields.

It is interesting to note that participants describe dynamism and knowledge of the rules as key characteristics of role models. In addition, suggestions are made for strengthening female role models through greater confidence, improving the social structure and increasing the presence of women in national teams.

Women's participation in management remains limited, reflecting the male-dominated nature of the sporting arena. At the same time, the presence of strong female role models contributes significantly to encouraging young girls and gradually challenging stereotypes. The combined efforts of women themselves, institutions and society are essential to increase participation in leadership roles and establish female role models.

Support from the family and social environment is crucial for women's athletic careers. The literature emphasizes that positive parental attitudes reinforce girls' self-confidence and commitment to sport (Nielsen, 2020).

Traditionally, mothers provided emotional support to their children, while fathers provided guidance and approval for participation in sports, a pattern that is also reinforced in Greece (Reid, 2020). Social pressures and stereotypes that associate femininity with calmness and caring often make sports "inappropriate" for girls.

Analysis of the interviews shows that most participants received positive support from their family environment, with characteristic phrases such as "they were always there for me" and "the family environment is the be-all and end-all". However, there were also cases where support was absent or came too late. Of particular interest is the role of the father, which was recorded as decisive, confirming the importance of paternal approval and encouragement. In addition, the participants pointed out that support was necessary due to the increased demands of the sport, both physically and

psychologically. However, there is a difference in the modern family, with examples and confessions mentioning full support, while at the same time describing the reasons that prompt parents to encourage girls to take up the sport: for self-defense, self-confidence and protection from violence. Of course, some participants report that they experienced discouragement from their family environment, with the excuse that the sport "is not for girls" or that they should engage in more "feminine" sports.

Family and social support play a fundamental role in strengthening the presence of women in sport. Although perceptions are changing, older stereotypical perceptions continue to influence women's choices and paths. The participants' experiences demonstrate the importance of a positive attitude on the part of the family, especially the father, as well as the impact of social progress in supporting women.

The literature highlights the importance of developing strategies to address the barriers women face in sport. These strategies include personal resilience, the use of social and professional support networks, and institutional reinforcement of their rights (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Women are often required to repeatedly prove their worth, while adopting behaviors that combine assertiveness and diplomacy to gain the trust and respect of their colleagues (Reid, 2020). Furthermore, contemporary approaches suggest fostering a culture of equality through education, positive role models, and stricter regulations against discrimination and sexism.

When it comes to sexism, participants describe "diplomatic management" strategies, such as isolating the incident, responding calmly, and focusing on their work. Some stated that they were forced to adopt a more "masculine temperament" in order to survive in male-dominated environments.

The feeling that the situation is gradually improving strengthens their perseverance. Several women believe that the sport is in a "transitional phase," with more equality and fewer open conflicts. The progress made to date is an indication that institutional changes and personal efforts are having an effect. It is recommended that there be a greater presence of women in leadership positions, the development of positive role models, and further education of society on the value of equality in sport.

The literature agrees that change cannot rely solely on women, but requires a systemic approach that includes all stakeholders, from families and communities to sports federations and the state.

The coping strategies described by the participants demonstrate their determination and adaptability. Future progress depends on the continuation of women's personal efforts, but also on the support of institutional and social factors. Developing an inclusive and equitable sporting environment takes time, but the changes that have already taken place indicate that the direction is positive.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This literature review highlighted the complexity of women's position in sport, combining theoretical data and empirical evidence from women in Taekwondo. Through the analyses, it became apparent that, despite the progress that has been made at the institutional and social level, women continue to face challenges such as discrimination, sexism, underrepresentation in management, and stereotypes about femininity and the suitability of sport for women.

The historical review highlighted the resilience of women who fought for and secured the right to participate and be visible. This development was reinforced by institutional changes, positive role models, supportive families and individual strategies for overcoming obstacles. The experience of the participants shows that, although sport remains largely male-dominated, it is in a transitional phase towards greater equality.

The contribution of social institutions and women themselves is proving decisive in shaping an inclusive and fair sporting environment where women have equal opportunities to excel and lead. Based on the findings of this analysis, the following directions for future research are proposed directions for future research. A more in-depth study of women's experiences in different sports and a comparison between them is a prerequisite, as is an analysis of differences in experiences according to age, socio-economic class, level of athletic involvement, and geographical area. Equally important is the study of the impact of the media and social networks on the formation and dissemination of positive or negative role models for women in sport, as well as research into the strategies implemented by sports organizations and federations to strengthen the presence and participation of women in management. Finally, interventions should be developed to raise awareness among coaches, referees and officials on issues of equality and respect. Continuing research and implementing these proposals will contribute significantly to the development of policies and practices that promote gender equality in sport, strengthening the positive climate and active participation of women at all levels.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

FUNDING

This research received no external funding.

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