What Are the Biggest Barriers Preventing Gender Equality in Sport Today?

Gender equality in sport has improved over the years, but there are still barriers preventing women and girls from having the same opportunities as men. These include public views, media coverage, stereotyping, sponsorship and the pay gap. This report explores these barriers and considers how gender equality in sport can be improved.

Public Views

Primarily, the public view of women's participation in sport is that they do not possess the agility and physicality of men to compete against them. This is one reason why we have separate women's and men's competitions in sports such as football. This is due to the preconceived stigma throughout history that men are "stronger" and more "physically capable". Though this has changed over time, it is still a complex and problematic situation in modern-day society.

To show how judgement has impacted girls in this generation, we can look at some recent statistics:

- 1.3 million girls dropped out of sport as teenagers.
- 61% of girls feel profoundly judged when attempting to participate in sport or exercise.
- Only 23% of girls dream of achieving new heights within sport, as opposed to 53% of boys.

In a survey we carried out just before the summer break, we discovered that females aged 41–50 were the most unanimous in these views, suggesting that Gen X and Millennials are the biggest influences on this attitude.

Media Coverage

Media coverage is a big part of preventing gender equality in sport; the more matches, games or races that are broadcast, the more people watch and support them.

My research found that men's sport clearly has more viewers, with claims that "women's sport represents only 4% of all sports media coverage across the globe". Much of this depends on how many events are broadcast. Last year, Sky Sports said they would broadcast 118 women's Super League matches each season and at least 215 live games for the men's Premier League, a difference of 97 games.

However, football does seem to be improving. In summer 2025, 27 million people watched the women's Euros on BBC and ITV, three times more than in 2017 and ten times more than in 2009. In our questionnaire to teachers, 18 of the 27 respondents were more likely to watch men's sport, four preferred women's sport and five did not watch sport. This suggests that women's sport still needs greater visibility.

Stereotyping

Women in sport face massive stereotypes regarding how they should approach sport. Girls as young as five have already been taught that they do not have a place in sport. The number of girls who dream of being an athlete has dwindled over the past few years.

Girls and women also face barriers in co-ed sports. Research has suggested that women and girls would thrive better in all-female groups rather than mixed groups. Over the past six years, the dream rates for girls have dropped from 29% to 21%, with the highest rate during this period being only 38%.

According to our teachers' survey, however, hope is not lost. Twenty-six of our 27 participants (96%) said that women's stereotypes have changed for the better over the past 50 years.

Many girls have said that girls-only clubs for predominantly male sports, such as cricket and football, would help them gain confidence in their abilities.

Sponsorship

Gender equality in sporting sponsorship is improving, but our school group's research proved that there is still change needed. Of the 27 staff members who answered our survey, only one had bought from a women's sponsor, compared to nine who had bought from men's sponsors.

Research from the Women's Sport Trust in December 2024 shows that interest in supporting women's sports teams and players is increasing. Of the brands questioned, 85% were likely to invest in the coming years, 80% were looking to invest in female sports sponsorship, and 69% were already sponsors of women's sport.

Organisations mainly wanted to support women's sport to "showcase community" and "change/reinforce brand image". However, barriers included the "perceived smaller scale of sponsorship opportunities", "lack of familiarity" and "lower perceived appeal amongst the public".

Many sites mention the Visibility Loop: no views means no sponsors, no sponsor profit, no improvements to facilities or recruitment, and no improvement in sporting quality. This leads to less visibility and gives companies more reason not to support a team or player. This raises the question of why companies would not sponsor a team with a large fan base.

The Pay Gap

Based on information from the top leagues of football, basketball and golf, the average pay gap across these sports is £3,032,433. Many people and organisations are helping to decrease it, including Caitlin Clark and the Homestretch Foundation.

In 2022, the US Women's Soccer team sued the US Soccer Organisation for underpaying them, although they were the more successful side. They won the case with a $24,000,000 settlement. In 2026, the WNBA increased its base salary by 246.15%. These facts show the big steps being taken towards pay equality.

The gap is ridiculous considering the skill of some female athletes. Due to this gap, 74% of professional female athletes have to work a second job because their payments cannot cover the current cost of living. Furthermore, 54% of female footballers are considering early retirement due to the psychological stress of working two jobs. This shows how unequal pay affects athletes' careers and wellbeing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the biggest barriers preventing gender equality in sport are public attitudes, limited media coverage, stereotypes, sponsorship inequalities and the pay gap. Although attitudes are changing and investment is increasing, there is still a long way to go. Greater media coverage, more opportunities for girls, increased sponsorship and fairer pay could all improve equality. Women's sport needs the same recognition, support and opportunities as men's sport so that future generations of girls can pursue their sporting ambitions.