What are the biggest barriers preventing gender equality in sports?

Introduction

Women's sport has recently become more popular since the Lionesses won the European Cup twice - once in 2022, and then again in 2025. Since then, the media coverage has been on the rise. However, male sponsorships still seem to dominate the media industry. In this report, research has been conducted to determine the barriers that prevent gender equality in sport, and we will look at education, advertisements, sponsorships, pay and stereotypes.

Education and adolescence

There are three main barriers preventing school sports equality for girls: social standards, feeling uncomfortable and limited sporting opportunities. Research reveals a shocking 30% confidence drop among girls between ages seven to fifteen. This decline directly stems from menstruation anxiety, leakage, and pain during class. Furthermore, in some schools there is a culture for bias where boys are favoured for athletics, football and rugby. Whereas girls school sport focuses on lacrosse and trampolining. Studies show companies are less likely to hire female coaches, which can be seen as uninspiring for the younger generation. Girls are often stereotyped in sports, being surrounded by expectations that will limit their enjoyment of and participation in sport and physical activity. By the time they are teenagers many girls have already decided that they do not 'belong' in sport. Girls often face subtle and covert messages that limit their sport choices. For example, football is considered "too rough," rugby "for boys," or weightlifting seen as "bulky".

Salary

Gender pay disparity in sports remains one of modern sport's most glaring injustices. Despite matching or surpassing men's dedication, skill, and public appeal, female athletes routinely earn a fraction of what their male counterparts receive.

This gap is not about ability. Instead, it stems from historical neglect, unequal funding, and outdated assumptions that women's sport draws fewer viewers. Events like the FIFA Women's World Cup, the UEFA Women's Euros, and major tennis tournaments now attract record-breaking audiences and generate massive revenue. Even so, prize money, sponsorship deals, and salaries lag far behind men's.

Fair pay is a sign of respect, recognition, and equality. When women are paid less, their achievements are devalued, and fewer girls see sport as a viable career path.

Media and advertisements

The most popular advertisement for women in sports is Nike's "Dream Crazier" (2019). Narrated by Serena Williams, the historic 90-second spot challenged the negative stereotypes of women being "too emotional" or "unhinged". The message directly calls out gender bias in sports. It lists actions that were historically considered "crazy" for women (running marathons and returning to sports after having a baby) and frames them as groundbreaking milestones. Premiering at the Oscars, it became a huge cultural touchstone for female empowerment. Advertisements targeted at men and women differ significantly in the emotions they appeal to, the roles characters are cast in, and the products being sold. While men's advertisements often focus on utility, performance, and humour, women's advertisements frequently emphasise beauty, community, and social validation. Whereas female athletes received a mere 2-4% of media coverage compared to men. Furthermore, female sponsorships focus often on charitable programs that empower young women in developing regions by providing access to education and healthcare. By directly supporting a female athlete sponsors help break cycles of generational poverty's, reduce child marriage and violence.

Our Data

To ensure that our data set was reflective of our target audience, we surveyed all students who study GCSE PE within our school. As this was less than 50 students, we recognise that this was a small data set and can be considered a limitation of our data. With more participants the data may have altered, and the conclusion may have been different.

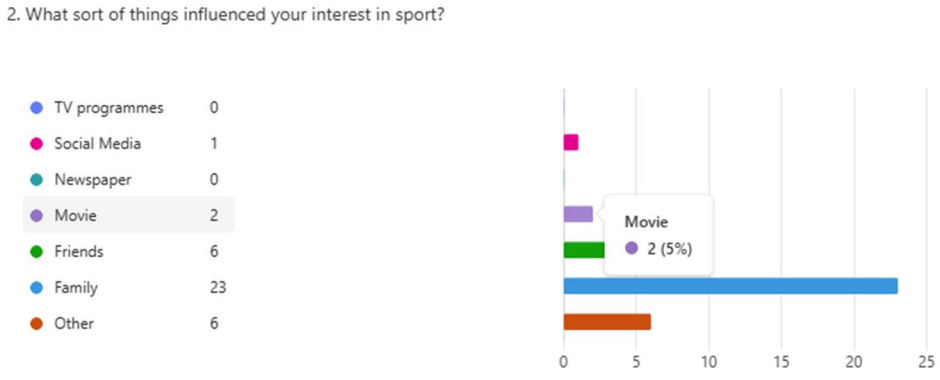


Figure 1

In a form of covert questioning, our data supported the research that we had conducted as it showed that public advertisements had the least influence in students wanting to pursue sports.

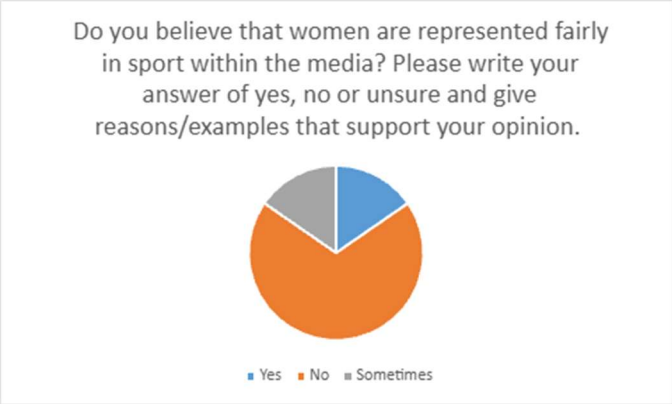


Figure 2

When asking the participants if they believe whether women are fairly represented in the media, 69% of responses indicated that they believed women were not represented fairly – a further 15% of responses indicated that it was sport dependent. While this supports research conducted on fair representation in the media, it also supports the idea that acceptance and representation for women is limited to a selection of sports.

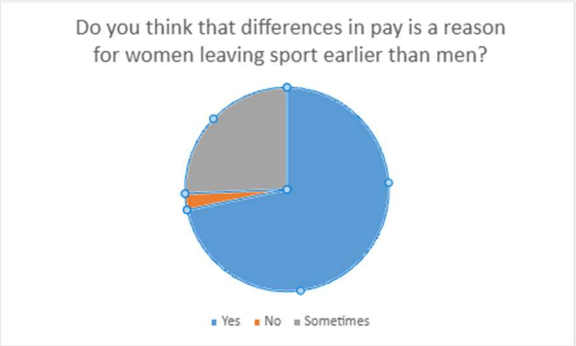


Figure 3

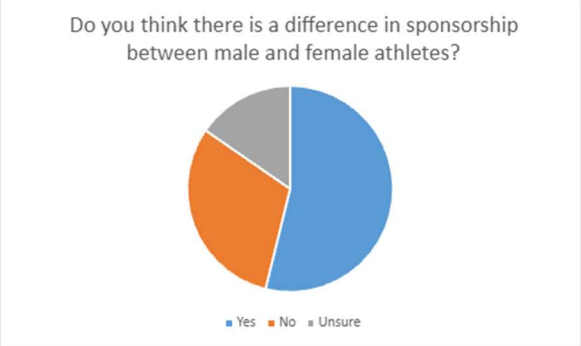


Figure 4

When considering pay and sponsorship, responses overlapped. While 71% of responses indicated that they thought differences in pay was the main factor in women leaving sport earlier, there were a significant number of responses (26%) that said that they were unsure; their reasoning for this was that while pay was unequal, it was because their sport was not as well advertised and therefore did not sell as many tickets/ generate enough profit. However, when asked specifically about sponsorship, there was a greater percentage who believed that there was no difference.

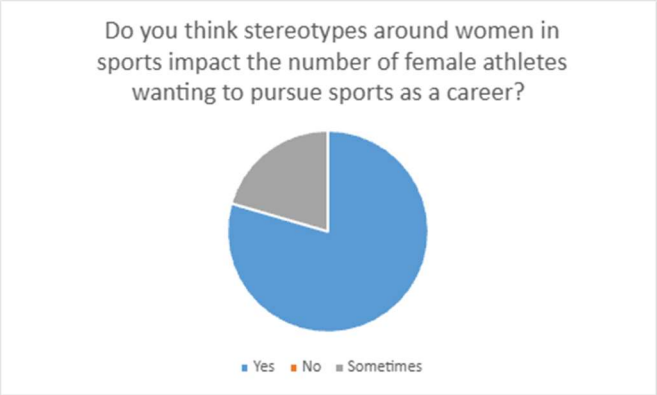


Figure 5

Finally, when asked about stereotypes, the data collected from the responses showed the greatest support of our research. 80% of responses showed that stereotypes did have an impact on women in sports, written responses suggesting that women faced “negative comparisons” within a “male dominated” arena such as sport and feared the “judgement” that came with pursuing athletic dreams.

Conclusion

Overall, our research and studies show that there are clear barriers that women face when attempting to pursue academic futures. Through a narrowed focus on pay, advertisement, sponsorships, education and stereotypes, both the research conducted and the data collected suggests that significant improvements need to be made within each area in order for women to feel comforted, supported and valued in the sport industry.

References

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