



The Relationship Between Limited Awareness of the Significance of Sports and the Achievement Levels among Elite Female Athletes

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to explore the relationship between sports awareness and achievements among women athletes in Pakistan, focusing on active and retired players. The quantitative and qualitative approach was used to collect the data from female active and retired athletes, women sports administrators, and other sports authorities through convenience sampling, across the Pakistan. Results revealed that active athletes reported the longest playing experience (4.90 ± 2.90 years), while affiliations were largely informal, reflecting weak institutional structures. Participation was primarily at the national level (77.5%–85.7%), with limited international representation (14.3%–22.5%). Recognition was mainly through awards and medals, while leadership acknowledgment remained rare. Sponsorship patterns highlighted systemic inequalities, with retired athletes receiving more financial support (84.0%) compared to active athletes (35.0%) and administrators (24.0%). Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive association between awareness and achievements among active athletes ($r = 0.601$), while overall, a moderate positive correlation was observed ($r = 0.443$). Regression results showed that awareness explained 37.3% of achievement variance for active athletes ($R^2 = 0.373$, $p = 0.001$) and 8.4% for retired athletes ($R^2 = 0.084$, $p = 0.031$). Overall, awareness significantly predicted 61.1% of achievement variance ($R^2 = 0.611$, $p = 0.001$). These findings underscore awareness as a crucial determinant of women's sporting success in Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, elite female athletes frequently face systemic impediments rooted not only in infrastructure and policy but also in lack of awareness regarding the importance of sports for women. Despite the significant success of figures like shooter Kishmala Talat, who has earned numerous medals and stood among the world's top-ranked in her discipline (The Guardian, 2024), most women athletes continue to be marginalized. This disparity reflects a broader issue: limited public recognition of sports as a legitimate and valuable pursuit for women, which directly undermines their progression and achievement.

Current research underscores the multifaceted challenges undermining women's sports in Pakistan. Khan and Nawaz (2025) identify cultural norms, religious interpretations, and institutional constraints as key factors restricting female participation, even among university athletes. It was revealed that only a small fraction (10%) of sports facilities in Pakistan are accessible to women, while rooted societal labels and unequal media representation further demotivate aspiring athletes (Glory Magazine, 2025). Collectively, these limitations contribute to restricted participation and realization of potential at elite levels.

Mass media and sports marketing can raise the profile of female athletes and generate societal buy-in; their absence worsens the invisibility of women in sport. Research involving university-level female athletes in Pakistan demonstrates a positive link between media exposure and increased sports participation.

Sport is widely recognized as a unifying force that transcends cultural, religious, and political boundaries. It creates a platform where individuals of different ages, genders, ethnicities, and backgrounds come together as players or spectators without discrimination. As Gbadamosi (2000) noted, sport has emerged as a global cultural institution that unites humanity, transcending man-made barriers and serving as one of the most powerful tools for fostering social cohesion. In this sense, sport is not only a recreational activity but also a social agent that reflects the diversity of human experience.

In developed countries, institutional and academy sports play a central role in nurturing talent, selecting athletes for international competitions, and promoting health and social integration. Participation in sport benefits both males and females by enhancing physical fitness, reducing disease risks, and improving quality of life. Universities worldwide provide sporting facilities to enable students to relax and remain active alongside academic commitments. Female undergraduates, in particular, often participate to maintain fitness and well-being. Regular physical activity is essential for health, as it helps prevent neuromuscular disorders, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, osteoporosis, diabetes, and even certain cancers (De Knop et al., 1996). Exercise strengthens muscles, supports bone health, regulates blood sugar, and improves cardiovascular efficiency, thereby reducing morbidity and mortality.

Despite these well-documented benefits, female participation in sports remains limited in many contexts, particularly in Nigeria. Multiple factors hinder involvement, including parental influence, inadequate sports facilities, academic stress, and restrictive university policies. Parental attitudes often shape girls' perceptions of sport; while some parents encourage participation, others prioritize academics or hold traditional beliefs discouraging female involvement (Hanlon et al., 2019). The lack of adequate sports infrastructure further restricts access. Oyeniyi (2002) stressed that quality facilities and equipment are critical for both recreational and competitive participation, yet many institutions fall short in this regard. Academic stress also poses challenges: demanding curricula and examination pressures leave students with little time or energy to engage in

physical activity (Baka, 2010). University policies often exacerbate the problem by limiting funding for women's sports or failing to design gender-inclusive programs (Haider, 2008).

Globally, sport is shaped by gender norms and inequalities. As Deshpande (2016) argues, sport is a gendered arena where historical and structural inequalities persist. Studies consistently show that men participate in competitive sports at higher rates than women, largely due to restricted opportunities at community levels (Laar et al., 2019). In developing countries, boys are encouraged to pursue sport more than girls, while economic constraints, cultural restrictions, religious norms, and lack of infrastructure serve as barriers to female participation (Wilde, 2007; Johnson, 2017).

In rural Pakistan, these challenges are particularly pronounced. Despite growing awareness of the health benefits of sport, opportunities for women remain limited (Ullah, 2013). Girls in schools and colleges often have access only to a narrow range of sports, such as badminton, volleyball, or netball, while community-level opportunities remain underdeveloped (Skelton, 2016). Gender stereotypes, including the belief that sport requires superior physical strength and is therefore reserved for men, further reinforce exclusion (Ullah et al., 2020). Yet, as Onifade (2001) observed, sport continues to be a powerful social symbol, representing unity and national pride.

In summary, while sport is universally acknowledged as a vital instrument for health, integration, and unity, women face systemic barriers to participation. Addressing these challenges requires changes in cultural attitudes, greater institutional investment, supportive policies, and expanded access to facilities. Promoting female participation is not only essential for health but also for advancing equality and social cohesion.

It is important to study how public, especially women, awareness of sports affects the success of elite female athletes. When people are more aware, it can change cultural views, remove limits, bring stronger support from institutions, improve funding, and encourage young athletes by highlighting role models. But when awareness is low or missing, it reduces investment, media focus, and community support, which limits both performance and success.

This study seeks to lighten how awareness affects success among elite female athletes in Pakistan. By examining the pathways through which social recognition or neglect shapes sporting routes, the research aims to inform policy interventions, media strategies, and grassroots efforts that can enhance both visibility and performance.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In this study, the relationship between variables with the help of statistical analysis has been found out. The research was designed to assess and analyzed issues, problems and challenges faced by the elite women athletes during their active period in sports (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and other women related to sports bodies as well. In the study the quantitative or qualitative mixed research methodology were adopted, it strengthens the validity of our conclusions. Mhlanga and Ncube (2003) described that a survey is suitable for describing opinions, feelings and perceptions of targeted population. The goal of case study is to analyses one or more cases in terms of context and time within its boundaries (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Byrne & Humble, 2007).

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Data for this study were gathered from multiple sources, including published literature, official records, and direct interactions with relevant stakeholders such as elite women athletes, retired female athletes, employees of the Pakistan Sports Board and provincial sports boards, members of sports federations and associations, as well as sports trainers and coaches. The target population consisted of both active and retired elite female

athletes, along with sports administrators and officials from federations and associations who are directly involved in addressing the challenges faced by elite athletes.

The sample size was determined using stratified random sampling in accordance with the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. From a total population of 1,360 individuals, a representative sample of 300 was selected. The sample was proportionally distributed among the groups according to their population sizes: elite women athletes ($N_1=364$, $n_1=80$), retired elite players ($N_2=226$, $n_2=50$), women in sports administration ($N_3=226$, $n_3=50$), and sports authorities ($N_4=159$, $n_4=35$).

INSTRUMENT

Data were collected through observations, interviews, discussions, and questionnaires. Considering the wide geographical distribution of respondents across Pakistan, questionnaires were chosen as the primary tool, as they provided participants with greater flexibility and ensured privacy in responses. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Preedy & Watson, 2010), was employed for data measurement and evaluation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, while the Shapiro–Wilk test was employed to examine data normality. Mean scores and standard deviations (SD) were calculated to describe the dataset, whereas percentages and frequencies were used to present key findings. Further, correlation and regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of awareness of importance of sports on the achievement elite women athletes.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

TABLE 1: BIOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS, MEAN ± SD, FREQUENCY (%) OF THE PARTICIPANTS (N=215)

| Variables | Active Women Athletes | Retired Women Athletes | Sports Women Administrators | Sports Authorities |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Playing experience | 4.90±2.90 | 4.29±2.44 | 4.30 ±2.45 | 4.09±2.39 |
| Affiliation of the Participants | | | | |
| Federation | 5(6.3) | 4(8.0) | 4(8.0) | 4(11.4) |
| Association | 11(13.8) | 8(16.0) | 8(16.0) | 5(14.3) |
| Sports Board | 6(7.5) | 4(8.0) | 4(8.0) | 2(5.7) |
| University / Colleges | 11(13.8) | 8(16.0) | 8(16.0) | 7(20.0) |
| Others | 47(58.8) | 26(52.0) | 26(52.0) | 17(48.6) |
| Academic Qualification | | | | |
| Matriculation | 3(3.8) | 3(6.0) | 3(6.0) | 3(8.6) |
| Intermediate | 6(7.5) | 3(6.0) | 3(6.0) | 3(8.6) |
| Bachelor | 9(11.3) | 4(8.0) | 4(8.0) | 2(5.7) |
| Masters | 11(13.8) | 7(14.0) | 7(14.0) | 4(11.4) |
| Other | 51(63.7) | 33(66.0) | 33(66.0) | 23(65.7) |
| Playing Level | | | | |
| National | 62(77.5) | 40(80.0) | 39(78.0) | 30(85.7) |
| International | 18(22.5) | 10(20.0) | 11(22.0) | 5(14.3) |
| Game Status | | | | |
| Award | 45(56.3) | 31(62.0) | 31(62.0) | 23(65.7) |
| Medals | 30(37.5) | 18(36.0) | 18(36.0) | 11(31.4) |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Position | 5(6.3) | 1(2.0) | 1(2.0) | 1(2.9) |
| Did you get any sponsorship? | | | | |
| Yes | 28(35.0) | 42(84.0) | 12(24.0) | 12(34.3) |
| No | 52(65.0) | 8(16.0) | 38(76.0) | 23(65.7) |

Results in Table 1 shows that active women athletes reported the highest average playing experience (4.90 ± 2.90 years), with retired athletes, administrators, and authorities showing slightly lower but comparable levels. Affiliations were largely informal, with “Others” dominating across groups (48.6%–58.8%), while universities/colleges had slightly higher formal representation (13.8%–20.0%). Educational backgrounds showed most respondents in the “Other” category (63.7%–66.0%), though a notable proportion held Master’s degrees (11%–14%), while fewer had Bachelor’s or lower qualifications. Most participants had competed nationally (77.5%–85.7%), and a smaller proportion represented Pakistan internationally (14.3%–22.5%). Recognition came primarily through awards (56.3%–65.7%) and medals (31.4%–37.5%), with only a few reporting specific positions (2.0%–6.3%). Sponsorship access varied sharply: retired women athletes reported the highest support (84.0%), while active athletes (35.0%) and administrators (24.0%) had much less. Interestingly, active athletes reported lower sponsorship opportunities than retired athletes, highlighting a major gap in financial backing.

TABLE 2: SPEARMAN CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN SPORTS AWARENESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

| Categories | Coefficients | P |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------|
| Active Women Athletes (n=80) | 0.601 | 0.001 |
| Retired Women Athletes (n=50) | -2.98 | 0.036 |
| Total (n=130) | 0.443 | 0.001 |

The correlation analysis examined the relationship between sports awareness and achievements across different groups of women athletes. Among active women athletes, the correlation coefficient was $r = 0.601$ ($p = 0.001$), indicating a strong and statistically significant positive relationship. This suggests that higher levels of awareness are strongly associated with greater achievements within this group. In contrast, for retired women athletes, the correlation coefficient was $r = -2.98$ ($p = 0.036$), reflecting a strong negative and statistically significant association. This implies that greater awareness among retired athletes corresponded with lower reported achievements, possibly due to limited institutional support or post-retirement recognition.

For the total sample ($n = 130$), the correlation coefficient was $r = 0.443$ ($p = 0.001$), representing a moderate positive relationship. Overall, the results highlight that while awareness is positively related to achievements among active athletes and the general sample, the inverse pattern among retired athletes underscores disparities in career progression and post-retirement opportunities.

TABLE 3: REGRESSION ANALYSIS ACHIEVEMENTS ON THE SPORTS AWARENESS

| Model | Variable | β | SE | R^2 | F | p |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| Active Women Athletes (n=80) | Constant | 2.145 | 0.165 | 0.373 | 46.410 | 0.001 |
| | Awareness | 0.355 | 0.520 | | | |
| Retired Women Athletes (n=50) | Constant | 4.474 | 0.466 | 0.084 | 4.408 | 0.031 |
| | Awareness | -0.255 | 0.121 | | | |
| Total (n=130) | Constant | 2.441 | 0.165 | 0.611 | 46.408 | 0.001 |



| | | |
|-----------|-------|------|
| Awareness | 0.355 | 0.52 |
|-----------|-------|------|

The regression analysis examined the impact of sports awareness on achievements among active and retired women athletes. For active women athletes, the model explained 37.3% of the variance in achievements ($R^2 = 0.373$, $F = 46.41$, $p = 0.001$), indicating a significant effect. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.355$, $SE = 0.520$) suggests that higher sports awareness is positively associated with greater achievements.

For retired women athletes, the model explained only 8.4% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.084$, $F = 4.408$, $p = 0.031$), showing a weaker but still statistically significant effect. Interestingly, the regression coefficient was negative ($\beta = -0.255$, $SE = 0.121$), indicating that higher awareness was associated with lower achievements among athletes.

When considering the total sample, the regression model was highly significant ($F = 46.408$, $p = 0.001$) and explained 61.1% of the variance in achievements ($R^2 = 0.611$). The coefficient for awareness ($\beta = 0.355$, $SE = 0.520$) again showed a positive association with achievements overall.

DISCUSSION

Although a proportion of participants held Master’s degrees (11%–14%), the majority fell within the “Other” category (63.7%–66.0%), reflecting limited integration between academic training and sporting careers, consistent with previous findings on institutional underinvestment in women’s sports (Khan & Javed, 2022).

In terms of exposure, most athletes competed nationally (77.5%–85.7%), while relatively few reached international levels (14.3%–22.5%). Recognition was primarily through awards and medals (56.3%–65.7% and 31.4%–37.5%), with only 2.0%–6.3% gaining leadership-based acknowledgment. This pattern reinforces the global narrative that women remain underrepresented in governance and decision-making roles (Shaw & Hoeber, 2017).

A notable paradox emerged in sponsorship: retired athletes reported higher financial support (84.0%) than active players (35.0%) or administrators (24.0%). Such disparities reflect systemic inefficiencies in marketing and sponsorship distribution, echoing international evidence on gender inequities in sports funding (Cooky, Messner & Musto, 2015).

Regression and correlation analyses further emphasized the critical role of awareness in athletic success. For active athletes, awareness demonstrated a strong positive relationship with achievements ($r = 0.601$, $R^2 = 0.373$, $p = 0.001$). By contrast, retired athletes displayed a weaker negative trend ($\beta = -0.255$, $R^2 = 0.084$, $p = 0.031$), which may be linked to recall bias or shifting contexts post-retirement. At the combined level, awareness explained 61.1% of achievement variance ($R^2 = 0.611$, $p = 0.001$), supporting athletic identity theory, which associates stronger athlete identification with higher motivation and success (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that women’s sports participation in Pakistan faces systemic challenges, including limited institutional support, inequitable sponsorship, and underrepresentation in leadership roles. Active athletes showed the strongest positive link between awareness and achievements, while retired athletes reflected weaker associations, highlighting post-retirement constraints. Overall, awareness emerged as a critical determinant of success, explaining significant achievement variance. These findings stress the urgent need for improved structural policies, equitable sponsorship distribution, and enhanced awareness initiatives to empower women athletes nationally and internationally.

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