



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCE RESEARCH, IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS IN TECHNOLOGY

ISSN: 2454-132X

Impact Factor: 6.078

(Volume 10, Issue 4 - V10I4-1180)

Available online at: <https://www.ijariit.com>

Gender Pay Gap in the Two Most Popular Sports: A Comprehensive View of the Current Position of Soccer Players and Cricketers

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Abstract

This research paper discusses the differences between the experiences of women and men in sports, largely focusing on soccer. This paper takes a comprehensive look at factors that prevent women from reaching an equal pay gap, acts in certain countries to prevent pay gap discrimination that is ineffective, comparison of the salaries of men vs women in particular sports, the large difference in media coverage and sponsorships received by women vs men, whether the popularity of a sport impacts the pay gap, challenges women face, recognition of male vs female athletes, and the politicizing of women in sports.

Keywords- Sportsmanship, Women Athletes, Gender Pay Gap, Media Coverage, Soccer, Cricket, Football

Gender Pay Gap in the two most popular sports; a comprehensive view of the current position of soccer players and cricketers

Being the two most popular sports in the world *cite*, a pay gap between men and women in soccer and cricket is a problem we shouldn't be seeing *because*. Yet, there are high levels of disparity between the two genders *highest paid man v woman*. People need to be more aware of this problem because not only are women making less money for the effort and value they bring to their sport, but also are less credited and recognized for their talents. Gender equality is something spoken about a lot *give an example of how it's spoken about*, but that seems to not be as spoken about when it comes to women playing sports, even if they do better for their country or team than the men's team is *example*

This is an extremely important topic because there are women who earn less than the men in their sport when they put in the same amount of effort, and sometimes do even better than their respective mens teams in their sport, for example, in 2014 the United State's Mens National Team in soccer came in 11th place and still received almost 5x the amount the Women's National Team made despite winning. Despite this, they receive less recognition. The 2015 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Women's World Cup saw England win the bronze medal and domestic viewing audiences peaked at over two million (Burnton, 2019). Petty and Pope (2019) showed that coverage of this tournament was generally very positive, focusing on the skill and achievements of the England national team, rather than undermining their achievements and reducing them to sex objects (Clarkson, 2022) Women footballers are looked at in a sexual manner rather than an athlete.

This research paper primarily focuses on Soccer and Cricket as they are the two most popular sports in the world. Soccer has around 3.5 billion fans and Cricket has 2.5 billion. (WorldAtlas 2023)

While the women's Indian cricket team has been doing well lately, they face challenges in areas such as playing fewer matches than the men, receiving very low media coverage in comparison to the men, and often running out of their low funding. Indian Women cricketers receive a much lower salary compared to men. They receive around 1 lakh per international series while male cricketers receive around Rs 7 lakh per international Test match and Rs 4 lakh per One Day International (ODI) match. For one match in a domestic series, women get around Rs 2500 while the Men Ranji team for Tripura receives 1.5L per domestic first-class game and Rs 35,000 for one-day matches. (ESPNcricinfo 2022)

Women in India also tend to participate in cricket far less than men. This is because of the view of cricket as a masculine sport in Indian society which draws women further away from playing the sport. Also, poor infrastructure and low awareness of cricket being an option for girls cause fewer females to partake in cricket. (Gupta, 2013)

In other words, the present socio-political climate coupled with **sexist** economic factors has allowed the lower position of Indian women cricketers to continue.

Even though some terminologies sound empowering, its a loophole

The 'Equal Pay Act' in the United States may sound like a perfect solution and states that it protects individuals of all sexes, All forms of compensation are covered, including salary, overtime pay, bonuses, life insurance, vacation and holiday pay, cleaning or gasoline allowances, hotel accommodations, reimbursement for travel expenses, and benefits it states that this equal pay and equal benefits Can only be in place if they work under the same establishment. When it comes to sports, it is easy to find loopholes around this because usually, the women's category is a different establishment. For example, Golf has the PGA and LPGA; basketball has the NBA and WNBA; Soccer has the MLS and NWSL; and Tennis has the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) and Women's Tennis Association (WTA). So, women who face wage discrimination are unable to benefit from this Act because of the "same establishment" rule. Making the change from "same" to "similar" would be highly beneficial for these just as hardworking and highly achieving women. (Calvin et al, 2022)

Acts against the pay gap, effective or not?

The United States Equal Pay Act signed into law by President John F. Kennedy on June 10, 1963, states that the jobs being compared must require substantially equal skill, effort, and responsibility and be performed under similar working conditions within the same establishment. This doesn't require the jobs to be the same but they must be closely related or very alike. In a regular workspace, this act is helpful but with sports, since the act states that the workers must be with the same establishment, female athletes face difficulties with this act as most of the time they are in a different sector for example the WNBA vs the NBA. (Calvin et al, 2022) India has the same issue. First, there was The Remuneration Act of 1976 which provides for payment of equal wages for work of the same and similar nature to male and female workers and for not discrimination against female employees in matters of transfers, training promotion, etc. This was repealed in 2019 and replaced with the Code on Wages 2019 which wasn't as impactful as it could have been. It contains the same phrase 'same work or work of similar nature' which can be interpreted very narrowly and women can easily face challenges when it comes to fighting for equal pay.

Even women not in the sports industry continue to struggle despite the enforcement of this act. In 2022, women made 83 for every dollar paid to a man. While the conditions have improved since the past as the number has gone up by 23 cents since 2000, with the enforcement of this act it should have been ensured that this gap doesn't exist, yet, it continues. It is even worse for women of color as black women earn around 61 cents for every dollar made by a white man. ([Pew Research Center](#) 2022)

Comparing pay

In the 2022 Men's Soccer World Cup, the prize money for the winning team was allotted 42 million USD while the 2023 women's world cup winning team was allotted around 10.5 million USD. While the gap is improving, starting from 2019 when women were making less than 8 cents for every dollar the men were making, in the most recent World Cups it moved to 25 cents for each dollar, and the gap remains very large.

While the men's world cup gets more viewers than the women's world cup, the women's world cup still is one of the biggest sporting events in the world with an estimated audience of over 1 billion people. With an event so large, it would be expected and logical for the prizes to be more similar, at least at 50 cents to a dollar, but there is such an unfair and evident gap that shouldn't be allowed or permitted. It is only fair for women to earn more than the prize money they are allotted when all the viewership helps the other companies or streamers make so much money. It is understandable if maybe an event isn't as large but one as big as the Women's World Cup deserves more credit for their abilities and also more prize money.

The highest-paid female soccer player, Alex Morgan, earns a little over 7.1 million dollars a year. Ronaldo, the highest-paid male soccer player makes over 260 million dollars a year. (Birnbaum)

The situation is much better in cricket. In the cricket men's World Cup in 2023, the allocated amount of prize money was around 10 million and the winning team received 4 million dollars out of this. The women's World Cup winners received 1 million in 2022 which is a much smaller gap than seen in soccer, and has increased by 5 times since the 2018 World Cup which is a significant and positive change. (Mitra, 2023) While it is great that it is improving, we hope that from here it can only get better and not stay this way because again, the women's World Cup is a big event with lots of viewers and everyone supporting and cheering for their countries.

Media coverage and sponsorships

Throughout history, sports have been seen as more of a masculine thing, and women in sports are seen as less worthy of attention. This is also mainly seen when the sport is considered to be more of a masculine kind of sport such as basketball, football, and cricket. Lots of contact sports are considered to be masculine and sports such as dance, aerobics, and gymnastics are more feminine. When the media does focus on female athletes, it's usually not related to their sporting abilities and revolves around their personal life or how they look. They are described as sex objects and are covered by the media in the wrong light. An example of this is before the World Cup 2011, the national German women's football team was in the German edition of Playboy erotically to promote the sport. After undertaking an analysis of media coverage of the 2015 World Cup, it was seen that the English women's team was seen as inferior to the men's team and the women were compared to the male standard and their level of playing the sport.

In 2021 women received 5% of media coverage while men received 95%. In, 2022, research shows that it increased to 15% and could reach 20% by 2025. While this is a vast improvement, the media is still heavily focused on men's sports, which affects even awareness of teams, players, or how specific leagues are going. Less coverage also makes women's sports seem not as important or

not as interesting to watch but at the end of the day, it is the same thing, just women playing them and that doesn't change how interesting or important the sport is. (Sim)

Sports sponsorships help build awareness and popularity for a certain player, team, or sport. Statistics from 2021 show that women's sports sponsorships accounted for just 0.4% of all sports sponsorships. In the United States of America, nearly 40% of athletes are female, but they only receive 2%-4% of media coverage (Afami). What is surprising about this is that the popularity of women's sports continues to increase. Turnout at women's sporting events has grown an average of 38% each year since 2013. Women receive fewer sponsorships and less media coverage which is not only hurting the players and how well they can do but also the fact that the growing popularity of women's sports has untapped potential for sponsors. This is evident from the fact that 84% of Australian sports fans are interested in women's sports (Afami), which is a clear indication that if companies were putting more focus into presenting women's sports on their channels or ads or being their sponsors, it could not only help the player excel but also themselves.

Does the sport being popular equal more fair treatment in terms of payments for women?

If the case for the two most popular sports is already quite terrible, when we move down the line it just gets worse. For example, in Golf which is largely considered to be a "man's sport", men earn 83% more than the females who play golf. When it comes to basketball, while men will make an average of 10 million in the NBA, women solely make around 113k in the WNBA. Women who train hard to reach levels of professionalism the same way men do, and drop everything to train for their sport should be treated more fairly than this as their aspiration, dedication, and passion are the same.

You would expect that an industry that is constantly in the public eye would have a lower pay gap than that of a cooperate company, but that does not happen to be the case. In the cooperate sector, the gap between men and women is between 28-30%, and for junior management is 8-10% (VERMA). While there is still a gap, that doesn't compare to the gap in sports which has been between 80-84% since 2004 (Adelphi University).

Industries such as healthcare have an even lower disparity as in the UK, the gap between men and women has fallen from 20.9% to 5.5% (Jefferies), and in the US, women earn 8-29% less than their male counterparts, but yet this is less than the disparity faced by female sportspersons. The gap between male and female sportspersons is incredibly big and is a major problem and, astonishingly, this gap is allowed in an industry that is in the public eye. Most people talk about sports regularly but primarily focus on male sports. The popularity needs to be increased and the pay gap needs to be decreased.

Challenges

Since most sportsmen start playing their sports from a young age, it is important to understand what makes girls not want to participate in sports at a lower level such as school, high school, or even college. Girls have 1.3 million fewer opportunities to participate in sports in high school, which requires them to seek opportunities elsewhere that are sometimes not accessible. Social Stigma also plays a heavy role in lower female participation. The perception of sports being manly, or assumptions of a girl's sexual orientation demotivates girls to participate. A lot of times, girls also feel not as cared for or not as important as the boys as many a time they get worse venues to practice, and hand-me-down uniforms. This makes girls usually lose their excitement for the sport. Also, while there are many inspirational female athletes, they aren't as well known as the male athletes so a lot of girls who need motivation don't see even close to as many females in the media as males, which is probably another reason why there is lower female participation.

Women who want to go pro also have factors to consider. They face many challenges and many barriers restrict them. Especially if they have kids, it is harder for women to be able to have a career that requires multiple hours of practice a day and being away from home for long periods. Another challenge is the low levels of funding that women receive. During 2006/07, 41% of female athletes were funded through various programs. This funding gap leads to poorer equipment and facilities and sports kits. Another issue is that women receive less access to facilities. Men are always prioritized with pitch times or play times so they always get the upper hand in this and women receive less time to practice. Another major barrier is that sports by so many people are considered to be a male activity and this entire sector is extremely male-dominated. A lot of the time it is perceived that only men should play sports or that men play sports better than women and that also gives women less confidence to participate in sports.

Recognition of names

Male athletes are much more highly recognized by the average person than female athletes. According to Radio Times, the best male football player as of 2024 is Kylian Mbappe and the best female football player is Aitana Bonmati. Both of them have 1 Ballon d'Or, but Aitana Bonmati is not even close to being as well known as Mbappe when she has similar achievements. Aitana played for Spain in the women's World Cup and Mbappe played for France. Spain even won the World Cup and she won a Ballon d'Or and she doesn't get even close to similar recognition as he does. With cricket, Radio Times says that Ravindra Jadeja is the best male cricketer and they don't even have stats for the best female cricketer. This shows how much more recognizable male athletes are, which is especially weird to hear in a sport that's considered the second most popular worldwide. A male athlete is referred to so much more casually than a female athlete. "Who's the goat, Messi or Ronaldo", "Lebron or Curry". No one ever asks the question "Putellas or Bonmati". These male athletes are common household names. As of April 2024, Kylian Mbappe has 102M followers on Instagram while Aitana Bonmati has 1.6M followers. There is a huge difference between how many followers each of them has which shows how much more popular Mbappe is and how much more he's spoken of rather than Aitana who has a similar level of achievements. Alisha Lehmann is the female soccer player with the most followers at 16.7M as of April 2024 while the most followed male soccer player is Cristiano Ronaldo at 628M followers as of April 2024. The most followed cricketer as of April 2024 is Virat Kohli at 268M followers while the most followed female cricketer is Smriti Mandhana at 11.2M followers. Kohli is another extremely common name and the most popular sportsperson in India, while Smriti Mandhana is a name known by people only if they are really into cricket or watch women's cricket. Women receive 1/8th of the viewership that males receive in the IPL. (Bhandiye)

Politicizing women's sports

Women's sports are constantly criticized and looked upon in a way that goes beyond just their ability to play sports. Male sportsmen are known for their astounding ability in their respective sports such as Usain Bolt, the fastest runner in the world who no one has anything negative to say about. People focus on his impeccable talents and that's it. On the other hand, Sha'Carri Richardson, one of the fastest females in the world, was judged based on her wig and makeup while running. How she wants to present herself while running is her own decision and not others to control. Men's sports are seen as entertainment while women's sports are looked upon or liked based more on how they look, the way they act, and very often the way that they dress and how their body looks. It needs to be more focused on their ability to play their respective sports but it is evident that it's not as important for female sports. Some females who are applauded for their sporting abilities are Simone Biles and Serena Williams. With males, One could come up with at least 10 on the spot. It's almost as if people think it's a battle between men's and women's sports, with constant scrutiny and hatred towards women who play. Men are praised while women are constantly brought down. The Norwegian women's beach handball team is in a battle with the sport's governing bodies to wear less-revealing uniforms. After the team's repeated complaints about the required bikini bottoms were reportedly ignored, they wore shorts during a recent game in protest and were fined 150 euros per player (Pruitt). It is disgusting that women were fined because of wanting to show less skin and this level of sexualization is unbelievable concepts like this, which require women to show parts of their body that they are not comfortable with need to become extinct. Gymnastics is another interesting sport, where women's appearances while performing are crucial. The importance of femininity and appearance in gymnastics is a large disparity between the women's and men's sides of the sport. "There's a different expectation for women to present themselves on the floor whereas the guys can be straight-faced and just do their thing," Wojcik said. "I feel like if I were to do that, it would almost be perceived as having a bad attitude or looking like I don't care." "There are those societal expectations that fall in line with gender norms that are couched in patriarchy about how women should present themselves. ... From hair to makeup to clothing, to how tight [or loose] the clothing is, to the colors," Carter-Francique told NPR. "[All] so that they can be more in line with this notion of girlhood, of womanhood, of what is deemed femininity." (Goldman)

Conclusion

This paper discusses the many discriminatory issues women face in the sports industry. Research shows that while there are acts against the pay gap, for example in the USA there are often loopholes made around them such as by separating the men's league from the women's league which then doesn't require equal pay. The same goes for India where the law is easy to manipulate with the phrase 'same work or work of similar nature' and can be interpreted in many different manners. Comparing certain statistics of the pay received by some men vs women showed a heavy disparity. For example, In the 2022 Men's Soccer World Cup, the prize money for the winning team was allotted 42 million USD while the 2023 women's World winning team was allotted around 10.5 million USD, the highest-paid female soccer player, Alex Morgan, earned a little over 7.1 million dollars a year. Ronaldo, the highest-paid male soccer player makes over 260 million dollars a year. There was a smaller gap in cricket, showing that in the cricket men's World Cup in 2023, the winning team received 4 million dollars and the women's World Cup winners received 1 million in 2022. Research shows that in 2021 women received 5% of media coverage while men received 95%. In, 2022, research shows that it increased to 15% and could reach 20% by 2025. Media coverage shows a massive disparity between men and women. In the United States of America, nearly 40% of athletes are female, but they only receive 2%-4% of media coverage. You would think that an industry that is constantly in the public eye would have a smaller disparity than a cooperate job, but that is not the case. In the cooperate sector, the gap between men and women is between 28-30%, and for junior management is 8-10%, while in sports the gap has been between 80-84% since 2004. We also found that women face challenges right from the beginning. Girls have 1.3 million fewer opportunities to participate in sports in high school, which requires them to seek opportunities elsewhere that are sometimes not accessible. This calls for fewer women in sports or women who had a lot of potential and didn't have the opportunities to excel. Male athletes are highly recognized than females. Aitana Bonmati and Kylian Mbappe who have similar achievements have 1.6M and 102M followers respectively as of April 2024. The most followed cricketer as of April 2024 is Virat Kohli at 268M followers while the most followed female cricketer is Smriti Mandhana at 11.2M followers. Research also showed that women's sports are highly politicized and women are constantly held to a certain expectation outside of just excelling in the sport while men just need to perform well. "There's a different expectation for women to present themselves on the floor whereas the guys can be straight-faced and just do their thing," Wojcik said while talking about gymnastics. After all the research, it is clear that women are facing many unnecessary and unfair issues in the sports industry and there needs to be a change.

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