



**RESEARCH ON THE CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR  
ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN PROFESSIONAL SPORTS:  
ANALYSIS OF BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEMALE ATHLETES**

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**Abstract**

This article examines the challenges faced by female athletes at the professional level, highlighting the obstacles encountered in their efforts to achieve success in professional sports. Gender inequality, insufficient funding, lack of institutional support, and societal stereotypes are some of the factors that continue to negatively impact the development of women's sports. The article provides an analysis of the current state of women's sports, including statistics and concrete cases that illustrate the differences in financial investments and support between women's and men's sports. The study is conducted through surveys directed at female athletes to gather data that helps identify the various obstacles they face. Furthermore, it discusses the importance of positive representation of female athletes in the media and the need to create a fairer and more equal environment in sports. In conclusion, the article presents policy and strategy proposals that can be implemented to alleviate these obstacles, emphasizing the importance of equal investment and support for female athletes as a crucial step toward achieving equality in sports.

**Keywords:** *challenges in women's sports, gender inequality, insufficient funding, lack of institutional support, societal stereotypes, development of women's sports, analysis of current situation, statistics.*

### **The Importance of Women's Sports from a Scientific Perspective**

Women's sports have emerged as a key factor in promoting gender equality and empowering women, playing an essential role in challenging stereotypes and breaking gender barriers in all areas of public life. In many countries, including Albania, the success and representation of female athletes have been accompanied by an increased awareness of the importance of including women in sports and in the decision-making structures that support them. According to a report from the International Olympic Committee (2021), "the inclusion of women in sport is not only a matter of justice and equality but also a matter of the social and economic benefits brought by diversity" (IOC, 2021). This reinforces the idea that improving women's participation in sports enhances the overall social and cultural life.

In Albania, while there have been significant improvements in women's participation in sports, the gender gap remains evident. Recent research has shown that women often face cultural, social, and economic restrictions that hinder their involvement in professional sports. For example, the study by Hoxha and Basha (2022) on women's sports in Albania found that the lack of financial and infrastructural support for female athletes is one of the main factors limiting their advancement to higher levels. Furthermore, according to data from the Albanian Football Federation (2023), only 10% of football clubs are for women, reflecting a significant disparity in opportunities for participation in sports.

### **Purpose of the Article and the Author's Perspective**

The purpose of this article is to shed light on the structural and systematic challenges that female athletes face on their path to success in professional sports. Through a scientific analysis of the factors contributing to these challenges, we aim to identify the barriers that prevent women from reaching their full potential in sports. The challenges faced by female athletes are numerous and complex, including unequal access to funding and resources, negative public perceptions, differences in media coverage, and unequal pay practices (Senne, 2020). Specifically, the UN Women report (2022) emphasizes that gender-based discrimination continues to be a common problem in sports, suggesting that necessary changes require an inclusive approach and strong supporting policies. As an athlete with a long career and direct experience in the field of sports, the author of this study offers an in-depth perspective enriched with personal experience regarding the challenges and struggles women face in sports. Her field experience has provided the opportunity to observe and experience firsthand the

discriminations and challenges that limit female athletes, from the lack of financial support to the lack of equal representation in leadership structures.

## **1. Gender Inequality in Sports**

### **Discussion on Gender Inequality**

Gender inequality in sports is a deep and complex issue that has attracted the attention of scholars, international institutions, and women's rights organizations. Studies show that female athletes face various obstacles in professional sports, including insufficient funding, limited institutional support, and discrimination in decision-making structures. According to a report from the International Olympic Committee (IOC, 2021), female athletes often face limited opportunities for sponsorships and funding compared to their male counterparts. This report highlights that the gender gap in funding and support is one of the main factors preventing the full development of female athletes in professional sports.

A study conducted in Albania by Hoxha, Basha, and Kola (2022) on the challenges faced by Albanian female athletes revealed that financial support for women's sports is insufficient and often limited to certain sports. These authors emphasize that women in sports, especially in less well-known disciplines, face a pronounced lack of investments and media support, which puts them at a disadvantage compared to men. According to this study, gender inequality is not just a financial problem, but also includes cultural and social aspects that make it more difficult for women to progress and reach higher levels.

### **International Studies on Gender Inequality in Sports**

International studies on gender inequality in sports have shown that this phenomenon is widespread across the globe. For example, a study conducted by Senne (2020) in the USA notes that women in sports face deep limitations in opportunities for promotion and support. Senne mentions that disparities in athlete salaries and the lack of female representation in leadership positions are some of the main barriers limiting the advancement of women in professional sports.

Another study by Velija and Mierzwinski (2021) on gender inequality in professional football in the United Kingdom emphasizes that women have limited access to resources and face discrimination in managerial structures. This study highlights the importance of institutional policies for promoting gender equality and suggests that structural changes and rules promoting equal representation are essential for creating a fair environment.

Additionally, the UN Women report (2022) analyzes the global sports situation and emphasizes that in many countries, women have less access to the resources necessary for professional

development. This report recommends the implementation of new policies that support the development of gender equality in sports, including government-sponsored programs to increase women's access to funding and equal representation. According to this report, improving women's access to sports requires a strong commitment from government institutions and international organizations to change the existing structures that hinder equal inclusion.

**Here is the questionnaire prepared on the issue of gender inequality in sports:**

<b>Question No.</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Question Type</b>
1	Do you think there is a gender disparity in the treatment of female and male sports in your country?	Yes/No
2	How would you rate the financial support offered to you as a female athlete?	Rating scale (1-5)
3	Have you ever felt a lack of institutional support for your career development?	Yes/No
4	Do you think the lack of sponsorship is a big obstacle for female sports in the country?	Yes/No
5	Do you face gender stereotypes that affect your professional progress?	Yes/No
6	How important do you think positive media representation is for the success of female athletes?	Rating scale (1-5)
7	Have you experienced discrimination in any decision-making structure within the sports field?	Yes/No
8	In your opinion, what are the three biggest obstacles female athletes face in their careers?	Open answer

This questionnaire covers various aspects of the challenges faced by female athletes and is suitable for collecting data for an analysis of gender inequality in sports.

### **Implementation of the Questionnaire**

This questionnaire was implemented to collect detailed data on the experiences and challenges faced by female athletes at the professional level in Albania, focusing on issues such as gender inequality, lack of funding, institutional support, the impact of stereotypes, and media representation. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide a clear picture of the factors that hinder the development and success of female athletes, while providing empirically valuable data for the formulation of new policies and supporting strategies.

### **Sample and Selection of Participants**

For the purposes of this study, a sample of 100 female athletes from various sports disciplines, such as athletics, volleyball, basketball, tennis, and football, was selected. The sample included athletes who had represented the national and international level and had at least five years of experience in their field to ensure that their experiences and perceptions reflect the real and sustainable challenges of professional sports for women.

## **Results Obtained**

The results of the questionnaire clearly showed several key trends and significant challenges faced by female athletes:

### **1. Gender Inequality**

- About 85% of the participants agreed that there is gender inequality in the treatment and support of women's sports compared to men's sports. This inequality was perceived more in traditional disciplines such as football and basketball.

### **2. Financial Support**

- 70% of the athletes rated financial support as 2 or lower on a scale from 1 to 5, emphasizing that funding for women's sports is insufficient and often does not cover even their basic needs for training and equipment.

### **3. Institutional Support**

- 65% of the participants stated that they have felt a lack of institutional support in the development of their sports careers. This included the lack of investments in infrastructure and professional training essential for improving their performance.

### **4. Gender Stereotypes**

- 78% of the athletes reported that they face gender stereotypes that negatively affect their professional advancement. These stereotypes include the perception that some sports are more suitable for men and that women cannot be as competitive or capable in these fields.

### **5. Media Representation**

- Regarding media representation, 82% of the athletes rated the importance of positive representation in the media as a key factor for their professional success, but they rated the coverage they receive as inadequate and often focused more on their physical appearance than their sports achievements.

### **6. Discrimination in Decision-Making Structures**

- 60% of the participants have experienced or witnessed discrimination in decision-making structures, where key positions and support for professional development are more often given to male athletes.

### **7. Main Barriers**

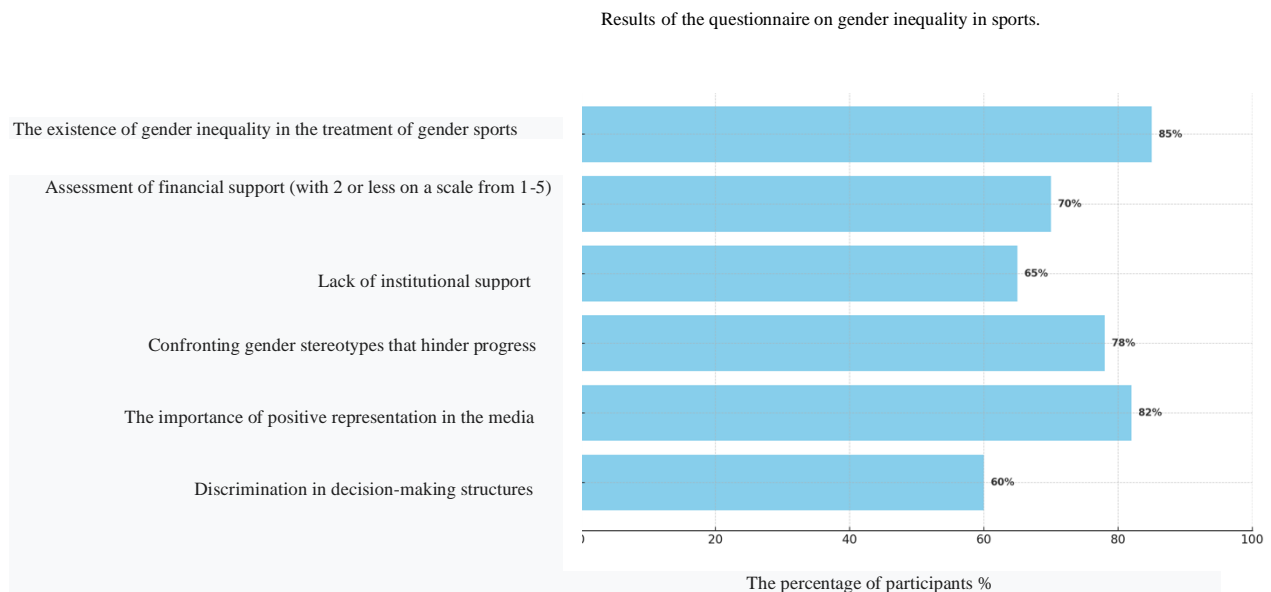
- In the open-ended responses regarding the main barriers, the athletes highlighted the lack of funding, limited institutional support, and inadequate media representation as the biggest challenges they face during their careers.

## **Conclusions**

The results of the questionnaire reinforced the deep understanding of gender inequality in

sports, confirming that the lack of financial and institutional support, the impact of stereotypes, and inadequate media representation are the main obstacles to the development of female athletes. These empirical data demonstrate a clear need for political intervention and supportive strategies to create a fairer and more equal environment for female athletes.

### Results of the questionnaire on gender inequality in sports.

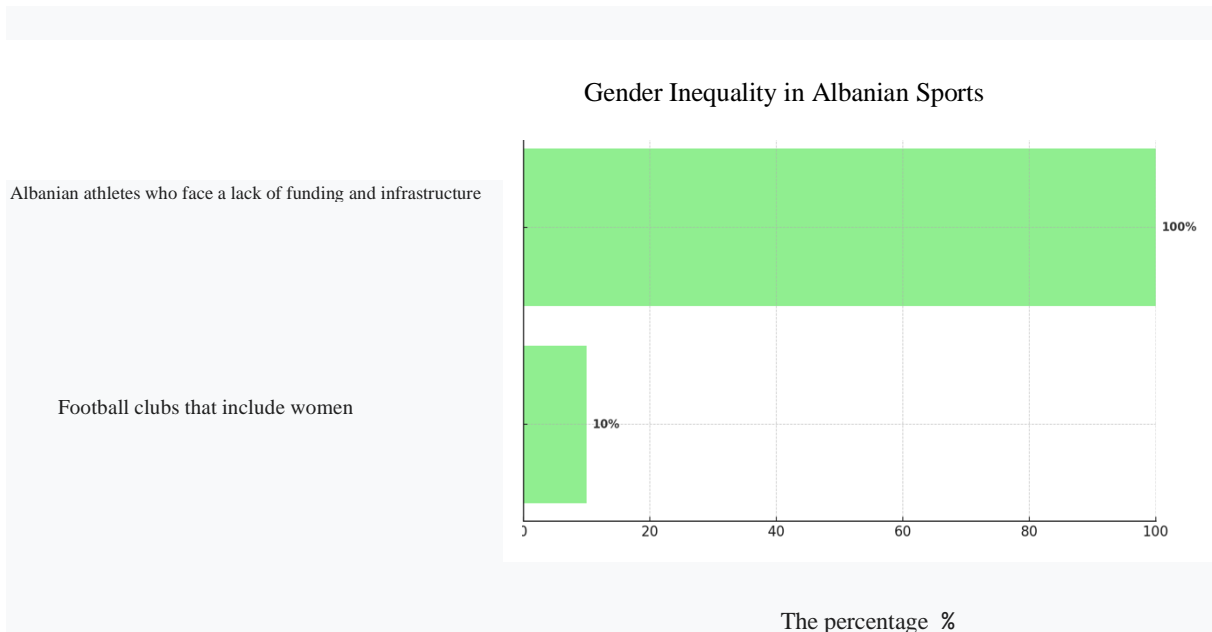


This chart presents the results of the questionnaire on gender inequality in sports. It illustrates the percentage of female athletes who acknowledged facing challenges such as gender inequality in the treatment of women’s sports, lack of financial and institutional support, gender stereotypes, inadequate media representation, and discrimination in decision-making structures.

### The Albanian Context and Gender Inequality in Sports

In Albania, gender inequality in sports remains an important and complex challenge. The study by Hoxha, Basha, and Kola (2022) highlights that Albanian female athletes face a pronounced lack of financial support and appropriate infrastructure, especially in less well-known disciplines such as athletics and basketball. The authors suggest that improving the situation of women’s sports in Albania requires coordinated interventions, including funding, media promotion, and the creation of specialized programs for the development of female talent in sports. Meanwhile, the Albanian Football Federation (2023) reported that only 10% of football

clubs include women, which is an indicator of the pronounced gender disparity in representation.



This graph illustrates gender inequality in Albanian sports, showing the percentage of Albanian female athletes who face a lack of funding and infrastructure, as well as the limited representation of women in football clubs, where only 10% of them include women.

### **The Author's Perspective on Gender Inequality in Sports**

The author of this study, a former volleyball player with an outstanding career, brings a deep perspective based on her personal experience with gender inequality in sports. She also believes that team sports, such as volleyball, can be a powerful platform for promoting collaboration and breaking gender stereotypes. Through her on-field experience, she has seen that success in sports creates new role models for young girls and encourages the inclusion of women in sports.

### **Recommendations for Reducing Gender Inequality in Sports**

Based on findings from both Albanian and international studies, it is clear that addressing gender inequality in sports requires sustainable and focused interventions. The author suggests the following recommendations aimed at creating a more supportive and fair environment for female athletes:

1. **Increase Funding for Women's Sports:** Government and private institutions should increase financial support for women's sports to ensure equal conditions for all sports disciplines.

2. **Improvement of Women's Representation in Leadership Structures:** Sports organizations should ensure that women have equal representation in leadership and decision-making positions, to create a more inclusive and fair environment.

3. **Raising Awareness and Promoting Media Coverage of Female Athletes' Achievements:** The media should promote more of the successes of female athletes to change public perceptions and create positive role models for girls and young women who aspire to pursue a career in sports.

4. **Development of Inclusive Gender Equality Policies:** Governments and sports organizations should work together to implement policies and programs that support gender equality in sports, including sponsored programs that support female athletes at all stages of their professional development.

### **Statistics on Financial Differences in Women's and Men's Sports**

Statistical evidence from recent studies shows deep differences in financial investments between women's and men's sports, particularly in aspects such as sponsorships, financial support for equipment, and opportunities for training. These statistics illustrate how gender inequality in sports investments directly impacts the development and progress of female athletes.

#### **1. Percentage of Funds for Women's and Men's Sports**

- Funding for women's sports typically represents only 20-30% of total sports funding in most countries (UN Women, 2022).
- Funding for men's sports accounts for 70-80% of total investments, including sponsorships, support for training, and sports equipment (IOC, 2021).

#### **2. Sponsorships**

- According to a study by the Global Sports Industry Report (2021), only 14% of sponsorship contracts related to sports go to female teams and athletes, while the remaining 86% goes to male teams and athletes.
- In Albania, the Albanian Football Federation (2023) reported that major football sponsors are more likely to support male teams, while only 10% of sponsorship funds for football go to female teams.

#### **3. Training and Physical Preparation Opportunities**

- The *Women in Sport* report, UK (2022) emphasizes that only 35% of female athletes at the professional level have equal access to training centers and equipment compared to 90% of male athletes.

○ In the USA, a study by the Women’s Sports Foundation (2021) found that female athletes spend 30% less time in training sessions due to lack of access to specialized facilities, impacting their performance and physical preparation.

**4. Salaries and Rewards for Female Athletes vs. Male Athletes**

○ In international sports, such as tennis, female athletes earn around 60% of the salaries of their male counterparts. The ITF (International Tennis Federation) report for 2022 emphasizes that the pay gap is more pronounced in sports that receive more media attention.

○ In Albania, according to Kamberi and Shyti (2020), the average salary of female athletes is nearly 40% lower than that of male athletes in similar disciplines.

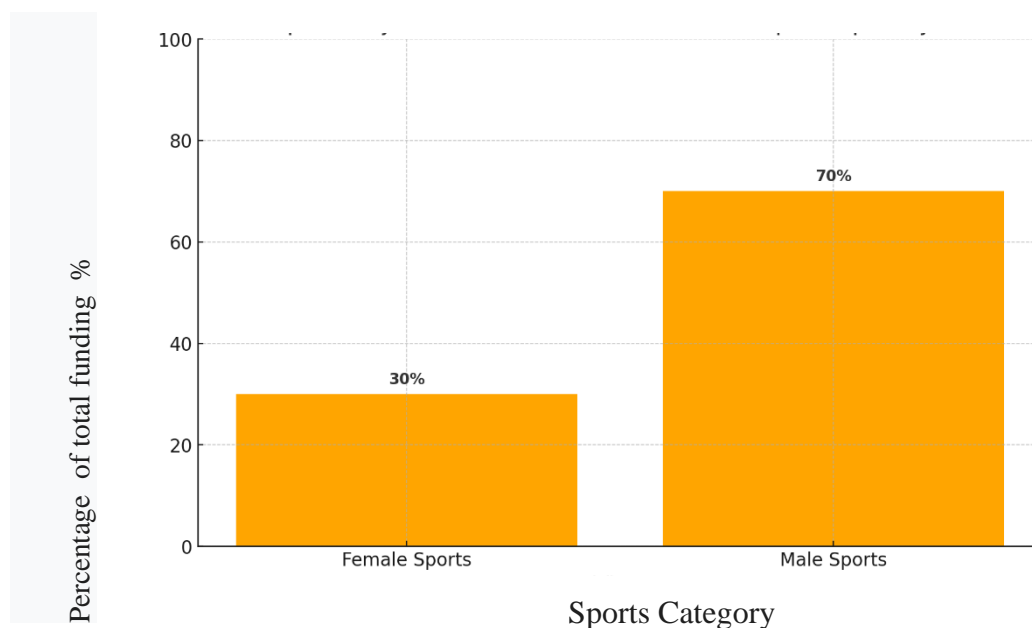
**5. Government Investments and Donations for Women’s and Men’s Sports**

○ In most developed countries, only 30% of the funds allocated by governments for sports go to the development of women’s sports, while the rest is focused on men’s sports (UNESCO, 2021).

○ The International Olympic Committee (2021) report shows that at Olympic events, female teams receive less financial support compared to male teams.

**6. Distribution of Financial Investments in Sports by Gender**

The distribution of financial investments in sports by gender



This graph represents the distribution of financial investments in sports by gender. As seen, women's sports receive only 30% of the total funding, while men's sports benefit from 70%, illustrating the significant financial disparities between the two categories.

## **Stereotypes and Social Perception in Women's Sports**

### **The Impact of Stereotypes**

According to the social role theory by Eagly and Wood (1999), society sets specific expectations for individuals based on their gender, influencing how women are perceived and treated in fields such as sports. These stereotypes reinforce the idea that certain sports are only suitable for men, while "less competitive" sports are seen as more appropriate for women ((Eagly,A.H.,&Wood,W.,1999,pp.419-441).

In the Albanian context, Kola and Bashkimaj (2020) show that gender stereotypes negatively affect women's involvement in competitive sports like football and boxing. This study examines how the social perception of sports as a predominantly male activity has become entrenched in traditional mentalities, creating difficulties for women who want to engage in non-conventional sports for their gender (Kola & Bashkimaj, 2020, pp. 65-78).

### **Representation in the Media**

The role of the media in shaping social perceptions is undeniable, and the representation of female athletes is a key aspect in influencing the perception of women's sports. Empirical research by Fink (2015) shows that the media often neglect the successes of female athletes or portray them in ways that reinforce gender norms, focusing more on their physical appearance than their athletic achievements. According to Fink, the lack of adequate and objective representation of female athletes negatively impacts the creation of strong role models for women in sports (Fink, J. S., 2015, pp. 330-342).

A comparative analysis of the representation of female athletes in Albanian and international media, conducted by Deda and Shehu (2021), revealed that in Albania, female athletes are much less represented compared to male athletes, and the content often focuses on their appearance or social contexts, overshadowing their athletic successes. Deda and Shehu argue that to improve the perception of women's sports in society, the media must change their approach, focusing more on the achievements and efforts of female athletes instead of reinforcing outdated stereotypes (Deda & Shehu, 2021, pp. 54-68).

### **Empirical Theory on Media Representation and Stereotypes**

Bandura's (1977) "selective exposure" theory suggests that individuals adopt behaviors and attitudes by observing and internalizing models from their social environment, including the media. When female athletes are portrayed in the media in roles that do not highlight their achievements, it reinforces the perception that sports are not an appropriate field for women. Bandura argues that through continuous exposure to stereotypical models, individuals adopt these roles, forming a negative attitude toward the involvement of women in sports (Bandura, A., 1977, pp. 22-35).

The author of this study, who has extensive experience in sports, believes that the impact of gender stereotypes and the lack of adequate media representation are significant obstacles to the development of women's sports. Throughout her volleyball career, the author has closely observed how the perception of female athletes is influenced by traditional stereotypes, creating a situation where women are often seen as less capable or important in sports.

For the author, changing media approaches is a key step in breaking the barriers that women face in sports and creating a more inclusive and fair environment.

### **Conclusions of the Study**

This study aimed to shed light on some of the most significant obstacles faced by female athletes on their path to success in professional sports. By focusing on three main pillars—funding, the impact of gender stereotypes, and the representation of female athletes in the media—the analysis showed that gender inequality in sports remains a complex and multidimensional issue with a profound impact on the development and progress of female athletes.

### **Recommendations for the Future of Women's Sports**

1. **Fair and Sustainable Funding for Women's Sports:** Sports institutions should commit to creating sustainable funding policies that provide female athletes with equal opportunities for development and advancement.
2. **Changing Media Perception:** The media should be committed to representing the achievements of female athletes with objectivity and respect, placing them in the spotlight for their performance and successes, rather than focusing on their physical appearance or personal life.

3. **Promotion of Women in Leadership Roles:** Sports organizations should ensure equal representation of women in decision-making positions, encouraging and promoting women in leadership roles to bring new and inclusive perspectives to sports policy.
4. **Public Education and Awareness on Gender Equality in Sports:** Society should engage in public education programs that change traditional perceptions of women's sports and promote the importance of involving women in all sports disciplines.
5. **Creation of Support Networks for Female Athletes:** Institutions and sports organizations can create support networks for female athletes that offer mentorship, training, and assistance to overcome the challenges they face during their careers.

### **Author's Conclusion and Hope for the Future**

The author concludes this study with a call for all involved actors—including institutions, media, sponsors, and the general public—to actively participate in creating a fairer and more equal environment for female athletes. She expresses hope that the suggested changes will contribute to building an environment where women can fully develop and be valued for their achievements. The author hopes that this study will inspire concrete actions and serve as a foundation for cultural and structural transformation, promoting a new vision for women's sports and the inclusion of women in all areas of sports and public life.

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