

Bridging the Gender Gap in Sports Rehabilitation: Policy Strategies for Female Athlete Health in Pakistan

Ghulam Mustafa*

Lecturer in SSPE, department of sports sciences and physical education, Sarhad University Peshawar. Corresponding Author Email: mustafa.ss@suit.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The increasing participation of women in competitive sport in Pakistan marks significant progress toward gender inclusion; however, equitable access to sports rehabilitation services remains critically limited. Female athletes frequently encounter structural, socio-cultural, and economic barriers that delay injury recovery, compromise performance sustainability, and shorten athletic careers. This study examines gender disparities in access to sports rehabilitation services and evaluates the policy gaps that perpetuate unequal health outcomes for female athletes. Using a gender-responsive policy analysis framework, the study synthesizes national sports governance documents, healthcare infrastructure data, and emerging evidence on female athlete health in developing contexts. The findings reveal that rehabilitation facilities are predominantly urban-centered, inadequately integrated within public health systems, and largely staffed by male practitioners. Cultural norms regarding mobility and modesty further restrict female athletes' willingness and ability to seek timely treatment. Financial constraints, including the absence of athlete-specific insurance mechanisms, exacerbate inequities in sustained rehabilitation engagement. Importantly, the analysis identifies a lack of gender-sensitive provisions within national sports and health policies. Existing frameworks adopt gender-neutral approaches that fail to address the distinct physiological, social, and institutional challenges faced by female athletes. As a result, disparities in return-to-play timelines, injury recurrence risk, and long-term musculoskeletal health outcomes persist. This paper proposes a policy roadmap emphasizing gender-responsive rehabilitation infrastructure, workforce diversification through the training of female physiotherapists, integration of sports medicine within public health planning, and the introduction of subsidized athlete health protection mechanisms. Strengthening equitable rehabilitation access is essential for sustaining female athletic participation and fostering inclusive sports development in

Online ISSN

3007-3197

Print ISSN

3007-3189

<http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about>

Pakistan.

Keywords: Gender Equity, Sports Rehabilitation, Female Athletes, Health Policy, Sports Governance and Sustainable Development Goals