



Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Sports Participation in India: An Analysis

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Abstract— This research paper examines the socio-economic determinants influencing sports participation in India, drawing on a wide range of secondary data sources, national surveys, and recent academic studies. The analysis highlights that sports participation is shaped by intersecting factors, including household income, parental education, gender norms, urban–rural disparities, and the availability of school and community infrastructure. While schools remain the primary environment where children engage in physical activity, gaps in facilities, trained physical education teachers, and consistent sports programming limit the depth of participation. The study also reveals that disadvantaged groups—including girls, rural youth, and children from low-income or marginalised communities—face multiple layers of structural and cultural barriers that restrict their involvement in organised sports. Policy implications emphasise the need for equitable resource allocation, improved school infrastructure, capacity-building for physical education staff, and targeted interventions for underrepresented groups. The paper concludes that enhancing access, strengthening institutional support, and addressing socio-economic inequalities are critical for fostering a more inclusive and participatory sports culture. By promoting equitable opportunities, India can ensure that sports function not only as a medium of physical development but also as a pathway for social empowerment and holistic well-being.



Keywords— Socio-Economic, Sports Participation, Sports Development, Khelo India Program.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sports participation in India is deeply shaped by the country's socio-economic structure, influencing not only who can access sports but also the type, frequency, and continuity of participation. India has one of the world's youngest populations, with nearly 65% of its citizens under 35 years old and about 27% between 15 and 29 years old, providing a strong demographic base for sports development (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, 2023; National Youth Policy, 2022). Despite this demographic advantage, participation in organized sports remains uneven across socio-economic groups. The NSO Time Use Survey (2020) reveals that individuals aged 6 and above spend only 2.8% of their daily time on sports and physical activities, indicating limited sports engagement. Notably, gender differences are significant, with males dedicating

three times more time to sports and leisure than females (NSO, 2020).

Socioeconomic status (SES) has a significant impact on access to facilities, coaching, nutrition, and competitive opportunities. A study on youth sports participation found that high-income households (annual income \geq ₹10 lakh) reported participation rates of nearly 80%, while middle-income households showed around 60%, and low-income households only 40% (Pareek & Vertika, 2023). This disparity stems from differences in access to safe play areas, school sports infrastructure, parental encouragement, and the ability to afford training, travel, and equipment costs. Research on collegiate athletes in Kerala reveals that students from rural, lower-income backgrounds face structural disadvantages, including inadequate facilities, high opportunity costs of time, and limited institutional support, which significantly hinder

their long-term participation in and achievement in sports. These socio-economic inequalities are further exacerbated by spatial disparities: urban centres like Delhi, Bangalore, and Mumbai have a higher concentration of academies and private coaching centres, while rural and peri-urban areas remain underserved.

Gendered socio-cultural norms intersect with socio-economic factors to create additional barriers, especially for women. Studies on women's participation in Indian sports highlight ongoing challenges, including restrictive gender norms, safety concerns, lack of female-friendly facilities, and underrepresentation of women coaches, all of which disproportionately affect girls from low-income and rural backgrounds. Even national programs like Khelo India, which have supported over 50,000 athletes across various editions, tend to see participation patterns favouring states with better infrastructure and investment (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, 2023). While initiatives like Khelo India Scholarships and community sports centres aim to promote inclusive access, socio-economic barriers continue to influence who can consistently participate and succeed in competitive sports.

Overall, the socio-economic factors influencing sports participation in India exhibit a complex interplay of income, education, gender, location, cultural perceptions, and institutional capacity. These inequalities underscore that sports development cannot rely solely on talent-identification programs but must also address broader structural issues that impact access and opportunity. Recognising these socio-economic elements is essential for making sports more inclusive, nurturing grassroots talent, and harnessing India's demographic potential to foster a healthier and more participatory sports culture.

Definitions of Socio-Economic Factors.

Socio-economic factors refer to the social and economic conditions that influence an individual's behaviours, opportunities, and life outcomes. These factors typically include income, education, occupation, family background, social class, living conditions, and access to resources, all of which collectively shape people's lifestyles, health choices, and participation in activities such as sports, education, or employment.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO):

- "Socioeconomic factors are social and economic conditions that influence people's health, including income, education, employment, social support, and physical environment."

Scholars in social sciences define socio-economic factors as:

- "Measurable characteristics of an individual or group that represent their social and economic standing in society, commonly expressed through indicators such as income, educational attainment, occupation, and access to services."

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pareek and Vertika (2023) reveal in their empirical study that youth from high-income households (\geq ₹10 lakh/year) had nearly double the participation rates in organised sports compared to those from low-income households. Their analysis reveals that access to coaching, equipment, and participation in competitions is significantly influenced by economic privilege. The study further notes that parental awareness about sports careers, social class aspirations, and the ability to bear travel and training costs significantly predict continuity in sports participation among adolescents. This research underscores that socio-economic inequalities—not merely personal interest—decisively shape participation trajectories in India.

Das (2022) examined socio-cultural restrictions on girls' participation in sports and found that gendered expectations, household responsibilities, and social norms disproportionately impact girls from rural and low-income families. The study reveals that a lack of female-friendly facilities (changing rooms, safe play spaces), restrictions on mobility, early marriage pressures, and limited representation of women coaches create a hostile environment for girls aspiring to participate in competitive sports. Das argues that cultural norms amplify socio-economic disadvantages, making girls from low-SES households the least represented in structured sports programmes. The findings highlight how socio-economic and cultural factors intersect to produce persistent gender gaps in Indian sports.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) Time Use Survey (2019–20) provides extensive evidence of how time allocation affects sports participation. According to NSO (2020), individuals aged 6 and above spent only 2.8% of their daily time on "sports, culture, leisure and mass-media practices," showing limited recreational involvement in India. Additionally, the report states that females spend 5 hours more per day on unpaid domestic and caregiving work than males, leaving less time for leisure or sports. The socio-economic divide is evident: urban and wealthier households participate more in leisure and sports activities than their rural and poorer counterparts. This large dataset illustrates how structural inequalities—workload, gendered labour distribution, and time poverty—shape sports participation across the nation.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a secondary data-based research design to analyse the socio-economic factors influencing sports participation in India. Data were collected exclusively from published government reports, national surveys, academic journals, and institutional documents. Key statistical sources include the National Statistical Office (NSO) Time Use Survey 2019–20, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), reports from the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, and datasets from the Khelo India Programme. Scholarly insights were derived from peer-reviewed articles, books, and research papers addressing socio-economic determinants, gender disparities, and sports development. Data were systematically reviewed, compared, and thematically categorised into income, education, gender, infrastructure, and regional disparities. A qualitative content analysis approach was used to identify recurring patterns and conceptual trends across studies, while descriptive statistics from national datasets were employed to highlight socio-economic inequalities in sports participation. This methodology ensures reliability by drawing only from credible, authoritative, and publicly available sources.

Objectives: -

- i. To identify key socio-economic Factors Influencing Sports Participation in the study area.
- ii. To understand patterns of participation across various groups.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Results and Discussion section presents the main findings of the study and interprets their significance. The results summarise key patterns, trends, or relationships observed in the data, while the discussion explains what these findings mean in the broader research context. This section highlights the key points of agreements and differences, and explores the reasons behind the observed trends. It also discusses the implications of the findings for theory, policy, or practice, thereby showing how the study contributes to existing knowledge.

Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Sports Participation

i. Income Levels and Household Economic Status

Income is a key factor influencing sports participation because it directly impacts a family's ability to afford sports-related costs. Participating in sports—especially in structured or competitive settings—requires investment in coaching, training equipment, nutritional supplements,

footwear, travel, tournament fees, and medical care for injuries. Families with higher incomes can easily cover these ongoing expenses, allowing their children to take part in organised sports and advance to higher levels of competition (Hassan, 2016). Conversely, lower-income households focus on basic needs such as food, education, and healthcare, which leaves fewer resources for sports activities. The World Health Organisation (2010) notes that poverty limits access to safe public recreation areas, sports facilities, and health-promoting activities, especially in developing countries where playgrounds and community resources are lacking. Moreover, financial limitations also impact children's available time—those from low-income families may need to work part-time or handle household duties, reducing their training time. Adolescents from high-income families participated more frequently in inter-school and state-level tournaments because they could afford professional coaching and sports gear. Therefore, income influences not only physical access to sports facilities but also psychosocial factors such as motivation, confidence, and sustained involvement.

ii. Educational Background of Parents

Parental education plays a critical role in shaping children's attitudes toward physical activity and sports. Parents who possess higher levels of education generally have stronger awareness about the benefits of sports for physical health, psychological well-being, social skills, and academic performance. Educated parents are more likely to encourage participation, provide sports-related resources, and prioritise a balanced lifestyle that integrates academics and sports (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). They understand long-term pathways in sports, including scholarships, reservations, university admissions through sports quotas, and career opportunities in coaching, physiotherapy, and sports science. Empirical studies in India have shown that students whose parents hold higher educational qualifications tend to exhibit greater involvement in organised sports and competitive events, often because their parents value holistic development and support extracurricular engagement. Conversely, children of less-educated parents often face discouragement due to fears about academic distraction, limited awareness of career benefits, and cultural perceptions that sports are secondary to academics. Parental education thus influences not only economic support but also emotional encouragement, exposure to diverse sports, and willingness to support professional aspirations.

iii. Urban–Rural Differences

Urban and rural environments provide drastically different contexts for sports participation, shaping opportunities,

motivations, and exposure. Urban regions generally offer more developed infrastructure, including stadiums, private academies, fitness centres, indoor sports halls, synthetic tracks, and trained coaches. This modern infrastructure supports participation in a greater variety of sports and enables structured training programs (WHO, 2022). However, urban youth often face competing pressures, such as limited open spaces due to congestion, security concerns, long school hours, and heavy academic workloads. These factors reduce the time available for outdoor play and spontaneous sports. In rural areas, the availability of open fields encourages informal play, but there is a significant lack of formal sports facilities, qualified coaches, and organised tournaments. The India Report Card (2022) reveals that urban adolescents have higher levels of insufficient physical activity compared to rural adolescents, despite supposedly better infrastructure, indicating that environmental and social pressures in cities reduce activity levels (Active Healthy Kids India, 2022). Moreover, rural youth have limited exposure to multi-sport formats and fewer pathways to professional training, which restricts long-term development. Rural youth show a strong interest, but they often lack the support systems necessary to progress beyond local or district-level competitions.

iv. Gender-Based Disparities

Gender remains one of the most deeply embedded socio-cultural barriers to sports participation in India. Girls face multiple constraints shaped by social norms, expectations, and safety concerns. Cultural beliefs often portray sports as masculine, leading to limited encouragement for girls, especially in conservative communities. According to UNICEF (2020), gender stereotypes restrict girls' mobility, reduce their access to sports facilities, and discourage participation in physically demanding activities. National data from the NNMS (2017–18) reveal that adolescent girls have significantly higher rates of insufficient physical activity compared to boys due to household responsibilities, school schedules, lack of female-friendly facilities, and limited role models. WHO (2022) reports similar global trends, indicating that girls engage in less moderate-to-vigorous physical activity across regions. In many Indian households, girls' sports participation further declines after puberty due to concerns about safety, appropriate clothing, body image, and cultural norms about femininity. The absence of female coaches, the absence of safe playgrounds, and inadequate sanitary facilities also serve as major barriers. Thus, gender disparities in sports participation arise from the interaction of social norms, economic constraints, institutional limitations, and cultural beliefs.

v. Caste, Community, and Social Inclusion

Caste and community significantly influence access to sports opportunities in India, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions. Historically marginalised communities often face exclusion from mainstream institutions, including schools, clubs, and private academies. UNESCO (2017) highlights that social exclusion based on caste, ethnicity, and community affiliation restricts equal access to sports and outdoor activities. In India, these inequalities manifest through differences in infrastructure quality, teacher attitudes, club memberships, and affordability. Hassan (2016) found that students belonging to lower socio-economic and marginalised caste backgrounds often have fewer opportunities to join formal training centres or receive quality coaching. However, traditional Indian sports such as kabaddi, wrestling, and kho-kho offer culturally significant avenues for social mobility among lower-caste communities, particularly when supported by state federations and professional leagues (Sharma, 2019). Nevertheless, modern and resource-intensive sports—such as swimming, badminton, tennis, and gymnastics—remain largely accessible to higher-caste and higher-income groups. Therefore, caste and community not only shape accessibility but also determine the *type* of sport pursued, visibility, and career prospects in the sporting ecosystem.

vi. Access to Facilities and Infrastructure

Access to adequate facilities and infrastructure plays a critical role in shaping sports participation across socio-economic groups in India. The availability and quality of playgrounds, courts, tracks, indoor halls, open spaces and equipment determine not only whether individuals can participate, but also the type and frequency of sports activities. According to the *India Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth (2022)*, only 44% of students in sampled Indian states had access to proper activity spaces during school hours, reflecting severe infrastructural gaps, especially in government schools. Urban and affluent private schools typically have well-maintained grounds, synthetic tracks, and modern indoor facilities, whereas many rural and low-income schools lack even basic playgrounds or usable fields (Active Healthy Kids India, 2022). The *Sports Authority of India (2021)* further highlights major disparities in facility distribution and poor maintenance of existing public sports grounds. Insufficient or poorly designed infrastructure also limits the diversity of sports—activities like badminton, basketball, gymnastics, or table tennis require indoor halls, which most rural institutions lack. Additionally, access to safe, clean, and well-lit sports spaces significantly enhances participation among girls, who face mobility and safety concerns. Thus, infrastructure acts as a powerful

mediator of socio-economic inequality, directly shaping opportunities, exposure, and long-term engagement in sports. Here are some points related to the facilities and infrastructure: -

1. Infrastructure Determines Participation Levels

- The presence of usable playgrounds, courts, and open spaces directly influences whether students can participate in sports regularly.

2. Urban–Affluent vs Rural–Government School Divide

- Well-equipped urban and private schools contrast sharply with rural government schools that often lack even basic sports spaces or equipment.

3. Unequal Distribution of Public Facilities

- The Sports Authority of India highlights major gaps in how facilities are distributed across regions, with some areas receiving far better infrastructure than others.

4. Impact of Indoor Facility Shortage

- Lack of indoor halls limits the possibility of practising sports like badminton, basketball, table tennis, and gymnastics, confining students to a narrow sports range.

5. Safe and Well-Lit Spaces Encourage Girls' Participation

- Participation among girls rises significantly when sports facilities are safe, clean, and properly lit—especially in communities with mobility and safety concerns.

6. Infrastructure as a Source of Socio-Economic Inequality

- Unequal infrastructure amplifies socio-economic disparities, shaping who gets access to quality training and long-term competitive exposure.

vii. *Coaching, Training, and Institutional Support*

Coaching quality and institutional support systems are essential for transforming casual participation into structured training and long-term athletic development. Schools with full-time physical education teachers, certified coaches, and regular practice sessions tend to exhibit higher rates of student participation. Structured training builds discipline, provides technique correction, and prepares students for competition. Institutional support also includes organising intra-school, inter-school, district, and state-level tournaments and creating talent pathways. Government programs like Khelo India aim to strengthen grassroots sports by establishing training centres, offering scholarships for talented athletes, and creating competition platforms; however, access remains uneven, with many rural schools lacking links to such initiatives (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, 2022). Schools with supportive

leadership, adequate funding, and a strong sports culture have significantly higher participation rates than institutions where sports are undervalued. Thus, coaching and institutional support act as structural determinants that can either mediate or magnify socio-economic inequalities in sports participation. Here are some points related to the Coaching, Training, and Institutional Support -

1. Role of Qualified Coaches in Enhancing Participation

- Schools with certified coaches and trained physical education teachers report higher student involvement due to improved guidance and structured practice.

2. Structured Training as a Pathway to Skill Development

- Regular sessions, technique correction, and discipline-building help convert casual play into serious athletic engagement.

3. Importance of Competitive Exposure and Talent Pathways

- Inter-school, district, and state-level tournaments provide necessary platforms for identifying and nurturing emerging talent.

4. Uneven Access to Government Sports Programs

- Initiatives like Khelo India offer scholarships and training centres, but rural and under-resourced schools often remain disconnected from such opportunities.

5. Institutional Leadership and Funding as Participation Drivers

- Schools with supportive administration, financial investment, and a strong sports culture demonstrate far greater engagement than institutions where sports are undervalued.

6. Coaching and Institutional Support as Equity Factors

- High-quality institutional support can reduce socio-economic disparities, while a lack of support can intensify inequalities in training and participation.

viii. *Media Exposure and Awareness*

Media plays a dual role in shaping sports participation among children and adolescents. On the positive side, televised tournaments, online sports content, and social media platforms create sports awareness, build aspirations, and expose youth to diverse athletic role models (UNICEF, 2020). International events such as the Olympics, Asian Games, and national leagues like the IPL and Pro Kabaddi League contribute to increased enthusiasm and participation. However, excessive screen time leads to sedentary behaviour, which WHO (2020)

identifies as a major global public health concern. The India Report Card (2022) highlights a strong association between high screen exposure and low levels of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity among Indian adolescents. Digital addiction reduces outdoor playtime, disturbs sleep cycles, and alters daily routines, indirectly reducing participation in physical activities. Nevertheless, well-designed digital campaigns—such as Fit India Movement—can positively influence participation by promoting community events and fitness challenges. Therefore, media exposure must be managed carefully to maximise sports motivations while minimising sedentary lifestyles.

Trends and Patterns in Sports Participation

i. Age-wise participation in sports / physical activity

Large-scale recent data show a very strong age gradient. The State of Sports and Physical Activity in India report estimates that only 9% of Indian adults participate in any sport, whereas 66% of adolescents report regularly playing a sport. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), at least 155 million adults and 45 million adolescents do not meet the WHO physical activity guidelines, and 223 million adults fall short of the South Asian benchmark of 232 minutes of activity per week. Sports Society for Adolescents, the India Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth 2022 synthesises multiple studies and concludes that about 25.2% of 15–17-year-olds have insufficient physical activity, while roughly 72% report at least 60 minutes/day when light activities (e.g., household work) are also counted (Bhawra et al., 2022). activehealthykids.org Objective or city-level survey data show much lower compliance with moderate-to-vigorous activity (MVPA): in Mumbai, only 38% of 10–15-year-olds met MVPA guidelines, while 31.7% of 11–13-year-olds in Tamil Nadu did so. activehealthykids.org The SoSaPA report also highlights a strong gender and age interaction: girls obtain 22% fewer minutes of sports and physical activity per week than boys. The largest gender gap in weekly activity time is observed in the 15–30 years age range, where social expectations around chores, marriage, and caregiving sharply reduce girls' and young women's playtime. Sports Society, together, these studies show that adolescents are far more likely than adults to participate in sports; however, within adolescence, older girls and young women are the most disadvantaged group in terms of actual participation.

ii. School vs. community-level participation

Evidence from national and city-level surveys indicates that schools remain the primary formal setting for sports participation; however, the quality and duration of activity

at school are often limited, and community environments frequently fail to compensate. A national cross-sectional survey of 1,531 adolescents (urban and rural) found that 64.3% reported engaging in physical activity at school, but only for an average of 16.1 minutes per day, which is far below the recommended 60-minute daily guideline (Bhawra et al., 2022). School infrastructure is uneven: in a multi-city survey, PE was in the curriculum in 80% of primary and 90% of secondary private schools and in 78% of primary and 100% of secondary government schools, but in Bangalore, only 16% of private and 65% of government schools had playgrounds, and even their regular access for students was not guaranteed. Community-level opportunities are also constrained: in Pune (urban and rural, n=1042), only 55% of children reported access to outdoor facilities before/after school, and 35% were allowed to use equipment outside class hours, suggesting that structured sports are heavily school-centred and not well supported in neighbourhoods. The India Report Card therefore concludes that while organised sport is often provided via schools, community environments (parks, safe streets, local clubs) get a poor “D” grade for their ability to support regular physical activity.

iii. Regional variations across Indian states/zones

Secondary data indicate substantial regional and urban–rural differences rather than a uniform national pattern. Using a large adult sample, Podder et al. (2021) report that the prevalence of physical inactivity is highest in India's Central zone (29.6%) and Southern zone (28.6%), while it is lowest in the North-Western zone (14.2%) – which includes traditionally sport-strong states such as Punjab and Haryana. A report, based on a nationally representative survey of 4,866 respondents, finds that urban residents are consistently less active than rural residents: inactivity among adolescents is 28% in urban areas vs. 13% in rural areas, and among adults 22% vs. 14%, respectively; urban girls are the worst-off subgroup, with 33% failing to meet WHO activity guidelines, compared to 24% of urban boys. Time-use data also show that time allocated to “culture, leisure, mass media and sports” varies by state: according to an analysis of the *Time Use Survey 2019*, people in Uttarakhand spend about 196 minutes per day on this combined category, compared to an all-India average of roughly 171 minutes, while states like Sikkim and Meghalaya show substantially lower averages (around 130–140 minutes/day). Investment patterns reinforce these disparities: under the Khelo India scheme, Tamil Nadu received only ₹29.5 crore over eight years, whereas Gujarat received ₹605 crore and Uttar Pradesh ₹509 crore, with Rajasthan and Arunachal Pradesh reporting far more infrastructure projects

completed than many other states, implying unequal state-level capacity to support grassroots sport. Overall, regional data suggest that northern and north-western states, as well as rural areas in general, currently exhibit higher sport/PA participation, while some central and southern zones, along with many urban centres, face a growing inactivity burden.

Policy Implications

Improving access and equity, strengthening school sports infrastructure, and implementing targeted interventions for disadvantaged groups are central to creating an inclusive sports ecosystem in India. Secondary data consistently show that socio-economic barriers, gender disparities, infrastructural gaps, and regional inequalities hinder participation—especially among rural youth, girls, and low-income families. Therefore, policy interventions must adopt a multidimensional, equity-oriented approach to ensure that every child, irrespective of background, has the opportunity to engage meaningfully in sports. The following subsections outline key policy implications derived from available evidence and national-level studies.

i. Improving Access and Equity

A primary policy priority is to improve access to sports opportunities across socio-economic groups. Access relates not only to physical infrastructure but also to affordability, safety, awareness, and inclusiveness of sports programs. Policies must aim to eliminate structural exclusion and make sports an essential public good rather than a privilege available only to those who can afford it.

ii. Equitable Resource Distribution

Government schemes should allocate funds based on objective indicators of need, such as socio-economic deprivation, rural-urban disparities, gender gaps, and district-level data on sports participation. Evidence from national surveys shows that children in rural and economically weaker regions often lack even basic playgrounds or equipment. Therefore, states should employ a *needs-based budgeting approach*, ensuring that low-income districts, tribal areas, and backward regions receive a higher share of grants for sports facilities, equipment, and coaching resources. This would help counter the uneven distribution of funds under existing schemes, such as Khelo India, where some states have historically received disproportionately higher allocations.

iii. Reducing Financial Barriers

Many families hesitate to encourage sports participation because of the costs associated with training, travel, and equipment. Policies should introduce *means-tested subsidies* for economically disadvantaged athletes, including waivers for tournament fees, free equipment

banks at school and community levels, and travel grants for district and state competitions. In addition, expanding public–private partnerships can help businesses sponsor local leagues, talent identification camps, and grassroots sports festivals.

iv. Inclusive Governance and Representation

Policies must mandate representation of women, marginalised communities, and grassroots-level stakeholders in sports planning committees at district, state, and national levels. Inclusive decision-making ensures that on-ground realities, cultural constraints, and socio-economic challenges are adequately reflected in program design. Such representation also promotes greater accountability and sensitivity within sports institutions.

v. Enhancing School Sports Infrastructure

Schools remain the most influential setting for promoting sports among children and adolescents. However, several surveys reveal critical shortcomings—ranging from the absence of playgrounds and equipment to irregular physical education periods and a lack of qualified PE teachers. Strengthening school-based infrastructure must therefore be a cornerstone of sports policy.

vi. Upgrading Physical Infrastructure

Policies must prioritise the creation and maintenance of quality sports infrastructure in all schools. This includes ensuring the availability of a functional playground, safe equipment, marked courts for major sports, and, where feasible, indoor facilities for activities such as badminton, table tennis, and yoga. Rural and government schools require special attention because many lack even basic open play spaces. The state should also incentivise private schools and urban institutions to open their facilities for community use after school hours.

vii. Ensuring Dedicated Physical Education Time

Even when infrastructure is in place, many schools fail to allocate sufficient time for physical activity. Policies should mandate *a minimum of 45–60 minutes of daily physical activity*, in line with WHO recommendations, and ensure that physical education is not treated as a non-academic or optional subject. Boards such as CBSE, ICSE, and state boards should incorporate PE into formal assessment frameworks to enhance compliance and legitimacy.

viii. Professionalising Physical Education Staff

A major limitation in school sports programs is the shortage of trained and qualified physical education teachers. Policies must introduce standardised guidelines for teacher recruitment, continuous professional training, and performance evaluation. Establishing district-level PE

training academies and requiring regular certification could significantly improve teaching quality. Additionally, policies should encourage the hiring of more female PE teachers to support girls' participation and address gender-related barriers.

ix. Targeted Interventions for Disadvantaged Groups

Improving overall participation is not enough—policies must explicitly focus on groups that face entrenched disadvantages, including girls, low-income families, rural youth, and children from marginalised communities. Targeted interventions ensure that the benefits of sports reach those who need them the most.

x. Programs for Girls and Young Women

Gender remains one of the strongest predictors of participation in sports. Policies should mandate gender-friendly facilities such as separate changing rooms, well-lit playgrounds, and safe transport options. Schools should organise girls-only sports events, mentorship programs with female athletes, and awareness campaigns addressing stereotypes that discourage girls from playing sports. Scholarships for girls, especially from rural areas, can further enhance their participation and retention.

xi. Support for Low-Income and Rural Youth

Rural youth often lack exposure to professional coaching and competition. Policies must create *block-level sports hubs* with trained coaches, free access to equipment, and regular tournaments. Mobile sports units can bring coaching and equipment to remote villages, ensuring no child is excluded due to geographical location. Nutrition programs for athletes from low-income households are also critical, as malnutrition and poor dietary quality hinder performance and motivation.

xii. Inclusion of Marginalised Communities

SC, ST, OBC, and minority communities often face social and cultural barriers that reduce participation. Policies should incorporate community-based sports festivals, local games, and culturally relevant activities to encourage widespread involvement. Scholarships, reserved seats in sports academies, and targeted talent identification camps in marginalised neighbourhoods can help bridge long-standing gaps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving sports participation in India requires a coordinated, multi-level approach that addresses governmental responsibilities, institutional reforms, community engagement, and the deeper socio-economic barriers that restrict equal access. Based on secondary data trends, the following recommendations outline strategic

pathways for fostering an inclusive and equitable sports ecosystem.

1. Government, Institutional, and Community-Level Suggestions

i. Government-Level Recommendations

The government must prioritise equity-focused investment in sports infrastructure and training facilities across all states, with special attention to rural, tribal, and low-income regions where participation is comparatively lower. A *needs-based allocation formula* should be adopted for schemes like Khelo India, ensuring that disadvantaged districts receive higher funding for playgrounds, equipment, and grassroots coaching centres. Government ministries should establish district sports development cells that monitor school and community participation, track gender disparities, and ensure accountability. Moreover, public-private partnerships must be expanded to support sports federations, talent identification camps, and inter-school competitions.

ii. Institutional-Level Recommendations

Schools and colleges play a central role in early sports exposure. Institutions should implement mandatory daily physical activity periods, aligning with WHO guidelines for youth. Physical education must be integrated into the academic timetable and treated as an essential subject rather than a non-exam component. Schools should also recruit qualified physical education teachers, ensure periodic professional development, and improve access to basic sports equipment. Colleges and universities must strengthen intramural competitions, mentorship by former athletes, and partnerships with local sports academies for advanced training. Institutions should also create inclusive sports policies that support girls, children with disabilities, and first-generation learners.

iii. Community-Level Recommendations

Communities form the social environment that either supports or restricts youth participation. Local bodies—municipalities, panchayats, and resident welfare associations—should develop and maintain safe, accessible playgrounds, community sports parks, and open spaces available to children beyond school hours. Community-led sports festivals, traditional games competitions, and neighbourhood leagues can increase visibility and motivation. Parents and community leaders should be involved in awareness programs that promote the benefits of sports for health, discipline, stress management, and career opportunities.

iv. Strengthening Sports Schemes and Outreach

Strengthening existing government schemes is crucial for expanding their reach. Khelo India, the Fit India

Movement, and state-level sports academies must enhance their communication strategies so that marginalised populations fully understand the benefits, eligibility criteria, and procedures. Grassroots talent identification should be decentralised to *block and village levels*, enabling early spotting of promising athletes. Schemes should include guaranteed equipment support, travel reimbursements, and nutrition assistance for selected athletes. Additionally, a national digital platform should be established to track athlete development, participation statistics, and school-level sports indicators, enabling policymakers to respond more effectively to gaps.

v. Addressing Socio-Economic Barriers

Socio-economic barriers remain the strongest predictors of non-participation. To address these challenges effectively, policy must incorporate **means-tested financial assistance**, such as subsidies for coaching fees, free sports kits, and travel grants for tournaments. Scholarships for low-income and first-generation learners should be expanded, with specific quotas for girls, SC/ST students, and rural youth. Gender-sensitive measures—such as female PE teachers, separate changing rooms, and safe transportation—are essential to ensure girls' participation. Additionally, targeted outreach programs should focus on parents in low-income communities to challenge misconceptions that sports distract from academics. By tackling financial, cultural, and infrastructural inequities, these measures can substantially increase participation among disadvantaged groups.

V. CONCLUSION

Sports participation in India reflects a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors that shape opportunities and constraints for children and youth. The review of secondary literature reveals that access to sports is not merely an individual choice but is deeply influenced by structural conditions, including family income, parental education, gender norms, school infrastructure, and regional disparities. These factors collectively determine who is able to participate, the kinds of sports they engage in, and the extent to which they can pursue training and competition. Schools emerge as the primary setting for early exposure to sport, yet many institutional gaps—such as limited infrastructure, irregular physical education periods, and insufficient coaching—restrict meaningful participation. Similarly, community environments often lack safe, accessible spaces that encourage sustained physical activity.

The broader socio-economic context remains particularly significant. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds face multiple overlapping barriers, including financial

limitations, social expectations, and limited institutional support. Girls, rural youth, and marginalised communities experience additional cultural and structural constraints that further limit their opportunities. Addressing these disparities requires a coordinated and equity-driven approach involving government agencies, educational institutions, community organisations, and families.

Ultimately, fostering a more inclusive sports culture is essential not only for individual health and well-being but also for national development. When access to sports is broadened and socio-economic inequalities are reduced, young people are empowered to develop their physical, emotional, and social capacities. A sustained commitment to equitable policies, infrastructure development, and targeted interventions is crucial for building a vibrant and inclusive sporting ecosystem in India.

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