

# Leveling the Playing Field: Addressing Gender Barriers in Sports Participation among Tertiary Students in Mindanao

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## ABSTRACT

Physical activity can improve health and well-being over time. Unfortunately, academics, infrastructure, psychology, social and religious backgrounds, socioeconomic level, ethnicity, and others prevent many from participating in or benefiting from sports. Aim: This study examines whether male and female tertiary students in Mindanao, Philippines, face different impediments to sports participation. 638 respondents answered the survey questionnaire for the barriers to sports participation. The researcher employed a stratified sampling to identify the respondents from the selected regions in Mindanao. The study's findings revealed no significant differences in the social and religious barriers, university-related, academic, and overall barriers among male and female tertiary students. There is, however, a significant difference in the mean of psychological barriers to sports participation between male and female tertiary students. This study shows that male and female students face similar challenges in these areas. However, psychological barriers to sports participation differ significantly. The study found significant psychological barrier score differences between male and female tertiary students. This shows that psychological disorders may influence one gender more than the other, impairing their capacity for physical activity. In conclusion, male and female tertiary students face similar challenges in numerous areas, but the psychological gap highlights the need for more study and particular assistance.

**Keywords:** Barriers to Sports participation; Mindanao; Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Participating in sporting activities can provide long-lasting advantages for general health and physical well-being. Unfortunately, numerous persons cannot participate in sports or reap advantages from them owing to several barriers that manifest in diverse ways, including academics, infrastructures, psychology, social and religious backgrounds, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and others. Barriers to sports participation refer to elements that have the potential to impact active participation. According to Herazo-Beltrán et al. (2017), studies classify that barriers can adversely affect sports engagement, and they can be classified into internal and external barriers. Internal barriers pertain to individual variables, including attitudes and preferences, whereas external barriers concern environmental aspects, such as infrastructure. According to Adu and Aboagye (2021), sports participation can be influenced by many hurdles that might impede the participation of enthusiasts or persons who aspire to participate in sports. It was unveiled in their study that personal obstacles exerted the most significant influence, including

familial, cultural, social, and psychological barriers that affected engagement in sports.

Further, in the study of Pedersen et al. (2021), the key barriers that hindered individuals from engaging in sports in Spain, Germany, Australia, Canada, the USA, and other countries were time constraints, fatigue, lack of energy, financial limitations, health-related restrictions, low motivation, and inadequate or unavailable facilities. Furthermore, Pedersen et al. (2021) also state that the local community's shortage or unavailability of sports facilities posed a significant obstacle for individuals from low-income backgrounds. Similarly, individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds faced predominant barriers to sports participation, including inadequate knowledge of facilities, religious and cultural customs, and lack of social support. Also, in the study of Chaabane et al. (2021), the lack of suitable sports facilities, time, social support and motivation, gender and cultural norms, and harsh weather and hot climate were the most commonly reported barriers to sports participation.

Subsequently, studies have shown that men and women face different sports participation barriers. A shortage of athletic venues hinders women's participation in sports, while men's lack of time and health problems are the most prominent barriers (Magno et al., 2020). Also, specific socio-demographic factors, such as advanced age, less education, being female, and being married, were found to be negatively associated with sports participation (Chaabane et al., 2021). Additionally, female physical activity or sports participation in Qatar has decreased significantly due to summer temperatures in the UAE exceeding 40 degrees Celsius (Sayegh et al., 2016).

Likewise, Several individuals are denied access to sporting activities because of their sex, selected gender, or association with a particular religious group (Agergaard, 2015 & Laar et al., 2019). Despite the increases in athletic opportunities for women in high school, college, and professional sports, there are significant barriers to girls' and women's participation. Barriers to girls' and women's sports include structural, cultural, political, and policy barriers. Structural barriers to girls' and women's participation in sports include but are not limited to unequal distribution of resources between girls'/women's and boys'/men's sports, differences in quality and quantity of equipment/uniforms, and overall economic support for sports participation. Additionally, in the past four decades of sports media studies, scholarship has found a lack of coverage of women's sports, particularly in legacy sports media. A longitudinal study examining coverage quality and quantity of men's and women's sports on local and national televised news and highlight shows found that over the 30 years studied (1989-2019), the coverage of women's sports did not exceed percentage double digits (Cooky, 2023).

Furthermore, a study by Amado et al. (2015) shows females have more significant disadvantages in athletics than boys. Similarly, parental influence impacts male sports training less than females. In addition, Bibi et al. (2016) assert that in Pakistan, females have many constraints when engaging in sports, surpassing those faced by women in other parts of the globe. Likewise, Agergaard (2015) conducted research that supported Muslim females engaging in religious practices and athletics, presenting a different perspective from the prevailing narrative. Moreover, Deaner et al. (2016) assert that males and girls possess comparable physical attributes. However, females continue to encounter numerous challenges, particularly in Islamic nations and progressive societies worldwide. Also, Cecilia et al. (2015) affirmed that existing barriers to the desire to practice a type of physical exercise and sports, as well as the ones regarding religion and nationality, have been considered first-rank barriers, along with those related to gender and physical aspect. Women's barriers to sports participation are represented by raising children, housekeeping, and certain religions, as well as being overweight.

The current corpus of research predominantly comprises quantitative and qualitative studies

investigating the barriers to engaging in sports. Nevertheless, academic research that explicitly investigates the significant differences in barriers to sports participation between males and females is scarce. Additionally, most research on barriers to sports participation was conducted in a foreign setting. More precisely, the study published by Adu and Aboagye (2021), Pandya (2021), and Noel-London et al. (2024) was carried out in a foreign context, targeting a distinct age range and specifically examining one gender. The study employed quantitative research methods and revealed that cultural, family, social, and psychological obstacles, sometimes called personal barriers, substantially influence sports participation. Given the circumstances, conducting a study in the Philippines, particularly Mindanao is necessary to address the lack of information on the country's research landscape. The researcher can deepen their comprehensive knowledge of the notable disparity in the obstacles to sports participation in Mindanao.

Additionally, the researcher experienced a necessity to investigate and elucidate the possibilities, causes, and elements contributing to the decrease in sports participation and the barriers to sports participation. The aim was to determine if there are differences in the barriers to sports participation among tertiary students in Mindanao in the Philippines. Furthermore, the results of this study would be advantageous for sports program creators in local and national government ministries, national sports bodies, educational institutions, and sports clubs. The findings of this study will also provide supplementary data for developing novel sports programs aimed at attracting Filipinos or constituents in Mindanao to engage in sports activities. Moreover, the researcher proposed disseminating this study's findings through a written document and verbal presentation to governmental entities, sports councils, educational institutions, sports organizations, and global platforms. Likewise, the researcher intended to disseminate the study's results in prestigious scholarly journals, guaranteeing that future researchers would use the study's discoveries.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The researcher employed a quantitative approach to determine the significant difference in the barriers to sports participation among men and women. With this, statistical tools were utilized to determine the description of the respondents, the level of barriers to sports participation, and the significant differences between the respondents.

### **Participant**

The study comprised 638 participants who answered the survey questionnaire about the barriers to sports participation. The researcher employed a stratified sampling to identify the study's respondents from the selected regions in Mindanao. In a stratified sample, researchers divide a population into homogeneous subpopulations called strata based on specific characteristics (e.g., race, sex identity, location, etc.). Every member of the population studied should be in precisely one stratum (Thomas, 2023). The following criteria were observed: must be at least 18 years old when conducting the study and should be an undergraduate student.

### **Instrument**

The instrument used is the Barriers to Participation in Sports Activities Questionnaire by Al-Tawel and Al Ja'afreh (2017), which measured the different barriers to sports participation. The barriers to sports participation are composed of four subscales, namely social and religious barriers, university-related barriers, academic barriers, and psychological barriers. The questionnaire was pilot-tested by the

researcher, and the reliability of the items of the questionnaire was reported with a reliability coefficient of 0.85 for social and religious barriers, 0.88 for university-related barriers, 0.87 for academic barriers, 0.92 for psychological barriers, and 0.89 for the overall. In addition, the tool is composed of 20 item constructs that the participants will answer using the 5-point Likert scale, which is as follows: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - moderate, 4 - agree, and 5 - strongly agree.

### Procedures

The researcher used the Barriers to Sports Participation Questionnaire. Additionally, 638 tertiary students from four regions in Mindanao participated in the data collection process for the study. The pilot testing phase of this research process is a critical initial stage before the final data collection procedure. This offered the researcher invaluable insights into the feasibility, efficacy, and potential concerns of the research design and the study's methodology. The primary goal of pilot testing is to enhance the study's general quality, reliability, and validity, thereby establishing a strong foundation for subsequent data acquisition and analysis.

The pilot testing phase of this study was conducted with the voluntary participation of 40 tertiary students, who were informed of the study's objectives and the significance of their involvement in its development. All participants submitted the consent form to maintain ethical standards and safeguard their privacy. In order to identify the study respondents, the researcher implemented stratified sampling. According to Thomas (2023), in a stratified sample, researchers divide a population into homogeneous subpopulations known as strata based on specific characteristics, including race, gender identification, location, and other factors. Each individual in the population under investigation should belong to a single stratum.

The responses to questionnaire items, as well as any additional variables that may influence the barriers to sports participation of tertiary students, were included in the collected data. Subsequently, it was further validated by consulting with specialists in the field of statistics, which is subject to quantitative analysis, including statistical tests and analyses, to investigate the substantial disparities between the barriers to sports participation of males and females. Consequently, the data's outcome can be interpreted by researchers, thereby facilitating a thorough comprehension of the research subject.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Level of Social and Religious Barriers

**Table 1. The Level of Social and Religious Barriers**

Indicators	Male			Female		
	Mean	SD	Description	Mean	SD	Description
Social and religious barriers	4.131	0.679	High	4.042	0.816	High

The level of social and religious barriers to sports participation, as assessed by the tertiary students from the selected regions in Mindanao, is reflected in Table 1; the males have a mean of 4.131, described as high, while females have a 4.042 as a mean which is considered as high in terms of the level of social and religious barriers. The results imply that male and female tertiary students often experience social and religious barriers to sports participation. In addition, the standard deviation of the social and religious barriers level for males was 0.679, while the standard deviation for females was 0.816. The result of the study confirms the findings of Laar et al., 2019 that religious and cultural barriers were the most significant factors. Additionally, individuals are denied access to sporting activities because of

their sex, selected gender, or association with a particular religious group.

The study also supports the findings of Gill (2017), who asserted that gender and religion are critical areas that impact how sports are organized and seek to reduce participation. A similar study by Bichi (2018) stated that many Muslims identified sports as prohibited for women of any age. Also, in the study of Dagkas and Benn (2006), they concurred that sporting activities for men and women, inadequate resources, the dress code for playing, religious and cultural barriers, and the general insight of people concerning women's sports were some of the recognized barriers to women's participation in sports. Senarath and Liyanage (2020) also stated that religious involvement influences female participation, but extensive parental influence is vital to young Muslim women's involvement in the sports field. Meanwhile, the result of the study is also parallel to the study of Coakley and Pike (2014), who found that Muslims are specific about women's sports clothing. In certain sports, such as athletics, dress codes reveal most of the body, conflicting with religious beliefs, and suggested that various practices should be implemented to increase social inclusion among different races and religions to maximize participation in physical activities and sports.

## The Level of University Related barriers

**Table 2. The Level of University Related barriers**

	Male			Female		
Indicators	Mean	SD	Description	Mean	SD	Description
University Related barriers	3.158	0.880	Moderate	3.192	0.973	Moderate

Table 2 reveals the level of university-related barriers to sports participation of tertiary students. Results showed that the males' level of university-related barriers toward sports participation has a mean of 3.158 and a standard deviation of 0.880. Meanwhile, the female has a mean of 3.192 and a standard deviation of 0.973. This implies that both males and females have experienced moderate levels of university-related barriers towards sports participation. The result of the study confirms the findings of Bailasha et al. (2020) that the reasons for non-participation in sports programs in the university were inadequate sports facilities 74.6 percent, overcrowded facilities 73 percent, unorganized sports programs 63.5 percent, lack of sports facilities 58.7 percent, lack of sports variety 57.1 percent, inaccessible facility 49.2 percent, no coaches 47.6 percent, unfriendly time for sport 39.7 percent, unsafe sports equipment 38.1 percent, inappropriate behavior of sports personnel 36.5 percent and 34.9 percent was due to unskilled sport personnel. Also, the result of the study supports the findings of Kruszyńska et al. and Poczta (2020), which indicate that the availability of sports facilities directly affects the level of participation in sports.

Additionally, the study highlights the challenges of restricting access to sports and recreation facilities. Wicker et al. (2009) also stated that sports infrastructure significantly influences participation regardless of individual socioeconomic conditions. The study is also parallel to the study of Lee et al. (2016); the research demonstrated that 80.9 percent of its study participants felt that sports facilities were easily accessible and that their sports participation was higher than individuals who needed to travel further to a sports facility. The accessibility and quality of sports athletic facilities and equipment in most schools in progressing nations are subpar, leading to limited participation in sports and a lack of enthusiasm for sports-related activities. Likewise, it is also parallel to the study of Kela and Zulu (2023) that sports equipment in Africa is below average or inadequate, while twenty-six percent deemed the



state of school facilities acceptable or outstanding. Also, less than one-third of the United Kingdom is considered to have adequate facilities. The study's findings are also comparable to the research undertaken by Black et al. (2019), which showed that inadequate sports facilities led to a statistically significant, modest decrease in the likelihood of physical activity participation during adulthood. However, the study of Al-Tawel and AlJa'afreh (2017) revealed that a university-related barrier is a high barrier with a mean of 3.6.

## The Level of Academic Barrier

**Table 3. The Level of Academic Barrier**

	Male			Female		
Indicators	Mean	SD	Description	Mean	SD	Description
Academic Barrier	2.979	0.744	Moderate	2.940	0.889	Moderate

Table 3 presents the academic barriers between male and female tertiary students. Results showed that the overall mean for males' academic barriers to sports participation is 2.979, described as moderate, with a standard deviation of 0.744. The overall mean for females' academic barriers to sports participation is 2.979, described as moderate, with a standard deviation of 0.889. As revealed in the study result, the academic barriers to the participation of students from the selected regions in Mindanao in sports are moderate. This implied that academic barriers such as conflicting class schedules, academic responsibilities, the negative impact of sports on academic performance, and a lack of academic-related incentives to participate in sports activities can sometimes be barriers to sports participation. The result of the study also supports the findings by Al-Tawel and AlJa'afreh (2017) that the academic barrier is a moderate barrier or has a mean of 3.04.

The study also confirms the findings of Griffiths et al. (2020), who concluded that academic obligations, financial concerns, self-doubt, and certain university-specific factors constitute a significant barrier to engaging in athletics and physical activity. Also, the key barrier to participation described by just over 60 percent of the university students was lack of time, mainly due to course commitments. Moreover, the result of the study also supports the findings of Lerner et al. (2011), who found that the prevalent obstacle to engaging in physical activity or athletics among university students was the scarcity of time. Also, the study of Faulkner and Kwan (2011) stated that academic obligations are frequently acknowledged as barriers to sports participation. Their study expressed that the transition from high school into college or university is associated with significant declines in student's physical activities.

## The Level of Psychological barrier

**Table 4. The Level of Psychological barrier**

	Male			Female		
Indicators	Mean	SD	Description	Mean	SD	Description
Psychological barrier	3.009	0.635	Moderate	3.767	0.729	High

The data in Table 4 shows the male and female tertiary students' psychological barriers to sports participation. The male students revealed that the mean for the psychological barrier to sports participation was 3.009 and described as moderate. The female's mean for the psychological barrier to sports participation was high (3.767). The study's results indicated a high psychological barrier to sports participation among women students from selected regions in Mindanao and only a moderate level of male tertiary students. This implies that the psychological aspect of being uninterested in sports, having

a negative attitude, psychological stress, and feeling embarrassed when playing and wearing sports clothes are often barriers to sports participation. The findings of the research validate the assertions made in multiple studies.

The result confirms the findings of Hamer et al. (2021) that fear, particularly pain-related fear, was a prevalent and substantial impediment to physical activity among obese young adults. The study also supports the findings of Maddocks (2021), indicating that individuals avoid physical activity due to negative emotions (such as fear, humiliation, guilt, and embarrassment) rather than because of obstacles associated with time, apparatus accessibility, or illness. Also, in the same study, Maddocks implied that a significant number of young women refrain from participating in physical activities or abandon sports due to feelings of embarrassment associated with exposing their bodies or failing to meet societal ideals of attractiveness. The result of the study is also parallel to the study of Howard (2023), who asserted that gendered sports uniforms significantly contribute to the elevated rates of adolescent female attrition from athletics. Females dropped out of sports because of apparel and body image concerns. On the other hand, in the findings of Al-Tawel and AlJa'afreh (2017), psychological barriers were moderate, with 2.63 as the mean.

## The Significant Difference of Barriers to Sports Participation

**Table 5. Significant Difference of Men and Women's Barriers to Sports Participation**

Indicators	t	df	p
Social and Religious Barrier	-1.195	637	0.233
University related barriers	-0.027	637	0.979
Academic barriers	-0.475	637	0.635
Psychological barriers	-4.321	637	< .001
Overall Barriers	-2.343	637	0.020

Table 5 presents the results of the analysis of significant differences between male and female tertiary students in their perceived barriers to sports participation. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in overall barriers between male and female students ( $t = -2.343$ ,  $df = 637$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ). Specifically, female students reported significantly higher levels of psychological barriers ( $t = -4.321$ ,  $df = 637$ ,  $p < .001$ ) compared to male students. In contrast, no significant differences were found in social and religious barriers ( $t = -1.195$ ,  $df = 637$ ,  $p = 0.233$ ), university-related barriers ( $t = -0.027$ ,  $df = 637$ ,  $p = 0.979$ ), and academic barriers ( $t = -0.475$ ,  $df = 637$ ,  $p = 0.635$ ) between male and female students. This pattern suggests that while both male and female students experience similar challenges related to social, religious, university-related, and academic factors, psychological barriers disproportionately affect female students' participation in sports. These results contradicted the findings of Rosselli et al. (2020) that the perceived barriers to sports participation differences among genders were consistent, with girls having significantly higher levels of perceived barriers than boys in every field except for fear of injury and lack of resources. Further, the most common barrier was lack of energy, time, and willpower, while the least frequent barrier was the fear of injury.

## Research Contribution

The findings of this study benefit sports program developers in the local and national government units, national sports associations, schools, and sports clubs in addressing the barriers to sports participation. The result of this study would also create additional information to develop innovative sports programs

that could entice Filipinos or constituents in Mindanao to participate in sports.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, the research only focused on the significant differences between males and females regarding barriers to sports participation. Future studies may also consider the different genders or the LGBTQ. Additionally, the study was limited to tertiary students in Mindanao.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the limitations and findings. Universities or Schools should lower the barriers to sports participation. The university administration may directly address these barriers through the sports development office and physical education department. Through the sports development office and physical education department, the university administration may hold sports participation seminars, host sports clinics and events, fund new or refurbished sports facilities and equipment, hire trainers across universities, and evaluate current sports programs.

Future researchers may investigate other variables hindering students' participation in sports. Additionally, it is recommended that other research methods be used, such as another set of age groups, and future researchers may conduct a similar study in Visayas and Luzon. Lastly, it is also recommended that future researchers look for other barriers and variables that can significantly influence sports participation.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the barriers to sports participation among tertiary students in Mindanao, Philippines, with a specific focus on gender differences. The findings reveal that while both male and female students face obstacles to engaging in sports, the nature and severity of these barriers vary. The results indicate that both male ( $M = 4.131$ ) and female ( $M = 4.042$ ) students perceive social and religious factors as significant impediments to sports participation. These barriers, which include cultural norms, religious practices, and societal expectations, limit students' involvement in sports activities. University-related barriers, such as inadequate facilities, scheduling conflicts, and lack of support, also present a moderate challenge for both male ( $M = 3.158$ ) and female ( $M = 3.192$ ) students. Similarly, academic barriers, including conflicting schedules and academic workload, are perceived as moderate obstacles by both male ( $M = 2.979$ ) and female ( $M = 2.940$ ) students. However, a notable sex difference was observed in the perception of psychological barriers. Female students reported significantly higher levels of psychological barriers ( $M = 3.767$ ) compared to male students ( $M = 3.009$ ). These barriers encompass factors such as lack of interest, negative attitudes, psychological stress, and feelings of embarrassment related to body image or sports attire. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that psychological factors, particularly those related to self-perception and social anxiety, disproportionately affect women's participation in sports (Hamer et al., 2021; Maddocks, 2021; Howard, 2023). Overall, the study found a statistically significant difference in the overall barriers to sports participation between male and female students ( $t = -2.343$ ,  $df = 637$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ), with females experiencing a greater burden. This suggests that while social, religious, university-related, and academic barriers create challenges for both sexes, psychological barriers pose a more substantial impediment for female tertiary students in Mindanao.



These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address the specific barriers faced by students, particularly female students, to promote greater participation in sports and physical activity. Additionally, the findings contribute valuable insights into tertiary students' barriers to sports participation, addressing an area that still lacks sufficient knowledge. Further, future researchers may investigate other variables that may hinder students from participating in sports. Additionally, it is recommended that other research methods be used, such as another set of age groups, and future researchers may conduct a similar study in Visayas and Luzon. Lastly, it is also recommended that future researchers look for other barriers and variables that can significantly influence sports participation.

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