



Women's Sports Needs in Wasit Governorate: Challenges of Participation and Opportunities for Physical Activities

Hamid Hussein Thaban*

University of Wasit, College of Computer Science and Information Technology

*Correspondence: Hamid Hussein Thaban
Email: hthaiban@uowasit.edu.iq

Received: 02-10-2025
Accepted: 18-11-2025
Published: 25-12-2025



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the sporting needs of women in Wasit Governorate, focusing on the challenges hindering their participation in physical activities and the opportunities available to enhance this participation, with a particular focus on the Youth Forum Center affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Al-Nu'maniyah. The study adopted a descriptive approach to ensure a thorough and accurate analysis, with a sample of 150 women who frequent the center. Data were collected using various tools, including questionnaires and personal interviews, to gain a deep understanding of the challenges and needs. The results showed that socio-cultural barriers constitute the greatest challenge (70%), with traditional norms and expectations of gender roles playing a significant role in limiting women's participation in sports. The results also indicated that religious barriers (60%), often associated with strict interpretations of norms, and security challenges (55%), such as the lack of safe facilities, negatively impact participation. In addition, the lack of dedicated sports facilities was identified as a major obstacle (50%), reflecting the weak infrastructure in the region. On the other hand, the study revealed promising opportunities, such as the Youth Forum programs that offer diverse sports activities, and university programs that support female students'

participation in sports. These opportunities form a foundation upon which to build in order to enhance sports participation. Based on these findings, the study recommends activating dedicated women's sports courses within the framework of the Forum, with a focus on designing training programs that meet the needs of women of different age groups. It also recommends improving infrastructure by establishing safe and well-equipped sports facilities, especially in areas lacking such facilities. In addition, it suggests organizing awareness campaigns to change negative social and cultural perceptions about women's participation in sports, utilizing social media and community workshops. The study also emphasizes the importance of partnerships with sports clubs and local institutions to provide the necessary financial and technical support. These recommendations aim to promote women's participation in physical activities, contributing to their empowerment and improving their quality of life. The study provides a comprehensive overview of sports needs in Wasit Governorate, highlighting the importance of investing in infrastructure and raising awareness to overcome challenges and capitalize on available opportunities.

Keywords: Sports Needs, Challenges to Women's Participation, Opportunities for Physical Activities, Wasit Governorate, Al-Nu'maniyah Youth Forum

Introduction

Sport is a cornerstone of promoting physical and mental health, improving quality of life, and empowering individuals to reach their full potential. However, women in Wasit Governorate, as in many parts of Iraq, face complex challenges that hinder their effective participation in sports activities. These challenges range from social and cultural barriers, often rooted in conservative customs and traditions, to economic obstacles such as a lack of financial resources, as well as a shortage of suitable sports infrastructure for women, such as dedicated gyms and safe playing fields. These combined obstacles leave women's

sporting needs in Wasit insufficiently met, limiting their ability to reap the health and social benefits of sports. In fact, the local context in Wasit Governorate, characterized by its rural and conservative nature, shows that women's participation in sports activities does not exceed 20%, according to unofficial estimates from the Ministry of Youth and Sports. This reflects a significant gap between actual needs and available opportunities. These challenges are further exacerbated by Iraq's historical context, where conflicts and security conditions have impacted the development of sports programs, particularly for women, relegating sports to a secondary priority compared to other concerns.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on the Youth Forum Center in Al-Nu'maniyah, a major youth activity center in Wasit Governorate, which could serve as an effective platform for addressing these needs. The research aims to explore how women can be empowered through sports by identifying their athletic needs, analyzing the challenges they face, and reviewing the opportunities available through the center's programs. According to previous studies, women's sports in Iraq suffer from governmental and societal neglect, despite achieving notable accomplishments such as winning medals at the Paralympic Games. This highlights the gap between the potential of Iraqi women and the support they receive.

This problem is evident in Wasit Governorate through the limited number of sports activities for women and the weak community awareness of the importance of their participation. This necessitates an in-depth study to understand these challenges and find practical solutions. For example, a 2023 study by Wasit University on "The Role of Sports in Empowering Women in the Southern Governorates" found that 65% of women in Wasit suffer from a lack of sports opportunities due to cultural restrictions. This underscores the need for a planned study focusing on specific needs and how to integrate them into youth center programs, such as the Al-Nu'maniyah Center. Such a planned study would contribute to developing a roadmap for specialized sports programs, focusing on socioeconomic aspects, to ensure broader participation of women in physical activities.

The absence of sports programs specifically for women in Wasit reflects broader challenges at the national level. Studies show that social and cultural factors constitute the biggest barrier to women's participation in sports. For example, a study conducted at the University of Baghdad indicates that 70% of women in Iraq face social restrictions that prevent them from participating in sports activities, including family disapproval and traditional beliefs that associate sports only with men. In Wasit, this problem is exacerbated by a lack of well-equipped sports facilities. There are only a limited number of gyms that cater to women's needs, and these are often located far from their homes or are unsafe. The security situation in some parts of the governorate further complicates women's access to these facilities. According to a 2024 report by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Wasit Governorate has fewer than 10 sports facilities specifically for women, making access difficult, especially for women in rural areas. This planned study will employ a descriptive-analytical approach to explore these gaps, drawing on field data from the Al-Nu'maniyah Center, to identify how these challenges can be transformed into opportunities through training and awareness programs.

Moreover, the women's sports sector in Iraq suffers from a lack of government funding, which limits the potential for developing dedicated sports programs or providing specialized training for women. In the context of Wasit Governorate, the Al-Nu'maniyah Youth Forum Center is one bright spot that attempts to offer sports activities, but these activities are often limited in scope and do not meet the diverse needs of women across different age groups. For example, young women may need team sports activities such as football or volleyball, while older women may need fitness training or rehabilitation activities. This gap in meeting needs requires a careful analysis to understand the nature of these needs and how to design appropriate programs. A previous planned study conducted by the Wasit Sports Directorate in 2022, titled "Challenges of Women's Sports in the Eastern Provinces," indicated that 55% of women prefer safe indoor physical activities, but a lack of funding prevents the implementation of such programs. This supports the need to study this planned research to provide practical recommendations for the Al-Nu'maniyah Center, such as allocating a budget for monthly women's sports courses.

On the other hand, successful experiences in other parts of Iraq, such as the women's football teams in Dhi Qar, demonstrate the significant potential for Iraqi women to achieve sporting success when provided with the right support. However, these teams face similar challenges, such as family and societal disapproval, which hinders their continued participation. In Wasit, the Youth Forum Center can play a pivotal role in changing this reality by providing a safe and supportive environment for women and organizing sporting activities that meet their needs and align with the governorate's cultural context.

For example, a planned study published in the Iraqi Journal of Sport in 2021 analyzed how youth programs in Dhi Qar contributed to a 40% increase in women's participation, and this could be replicated in Wasit by strengthening the role of the center in Al-Nu'maniyah. This planned study will review such experiences to propose a local model that focuses on partnerships with universities and local organizations to ensure the sustainability of sports opportunities for women

The Importance of the Research

This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap regarding women's sports needs in Wasit Governorate by identifying the obstacles preventing their participation and exploring the opportunities available at the Al-Nu'maniyah Youth Forum Center. Through this research, the researcher seeks to provide a comprehensive perspective to assist decision-makers in developing tailored sports programs that promote women's participation and contribute to improving their health and well-being. Empowering women through sports extends beyond improving physical fitness to enhancing self-confidence and social integration, particularly in conservative societies like Wasit. This planned study will also contribute to national sports policies by providing accurate statistical data on needs, which can lead to increased investment in youth centers. Furthermore, the study will utilize research tools such as questionnaires and interviews to ensure a comprehensive analysis, focusing on the 18-45 age group to address diverse needs. In conclusion, the research problem lies in the ineffective fulfillment of women's sports needs in Wasit Governorate, and this planned study will be a crucial step towards addressing this issue by focusing on the Al-Nu'maniyah Center as a catalyst for change. The importance of this research lies in

its contribution to women's empowerment through sports, thereby promoting gender equality and improving quality of life. In Wasit, where youth centers like Al-Nu'maniyah exist, this study can serve as a guide for developing tailored programs.

Research Objectives:

1. To identify women's sports needs in Wasit.
2. To explore the main challenges to participation.
3. To analyze the opportunities available through the Al-Nu'maniyah Youth Forum Center.
4. To propose recommendations for improving the situation

Research Hypotheses:

1. Social Barriers as Major Challenges: The study hypothesizes that social and cultural barriers, such as conservative traditions and family disapproval, constitute the main obstacle to women's participation in sports activities in Wasit, with an expected rate exceeding 60% based on previous surveys and studies.
2. Limited Opportunities at the Forum: It is assumed that the Al-Nu'maniyah Youth Forum Center provides limited sports opportunities for women due to a lack of dedicated programs and funding, reducing their participation by up to 50% of their full potential.

Research Scope

The research scope defines the area covered by the study, helping to focus efforts and avoid inaccurate generalizations. In this study, the scope was defined to ensure a focus on the local context in Wasit Governorate, taking into account the researcher's available resources. This scope is based on a descriptive approach, which focuses on describing reality without intervention, and considers logistical challenges such as sample access and time constraints.

Temporal Scope: 2024-2025

The research is limited temporally to the period from 2024 to 2025 to capture the current reality of women's sports needs in Wasit without delving into earlier historical periods. During this period, data was collected in specific months (January to June 2025), focusing on recent sporting events such as the Iraqi club championships in which Wasit Girls Club participated. This scope avoids the long-term effects of past conflicts, such as those that have impacted women's sports since 2003, and focuses on contemporary challenges such as funding shortages in 2024-2025. This scope allows for the analysis of fresh data, but it may overlook future changes after 2025 Spatial boundaries: Wasit Governorate, Al-Nu'maniyah Center

The research is geographically limited to Wasit Governorate, with a primary focus on the Youth Forum Center in Al-Nu'maniyah as the main study site. This limitation reflects the local nature of the problem, as the challenges in Wasit differ from those in other governorates due to the prominent tribal customs.

The study excludes other governorates such as Baghdad or Dhi Qar, despite some similarities in challenges, to ensure a focused analysis within a single context. The center in Al-Nu'maniyah serves as the field site, where questionnaires were distributed, making the results locally applicable but not generalizable to Iraq as a whole. Specific Population: 150 Women Aged 18-40

The human sample is limited to 150 women aged 18-40, selected from attendees of the Youth Forum Center in Al-Nu'maniyah. This focus on young adults is particularly relevant, as studies indicate lower participation rates among young women due to social constraints. Men and women outside this age group are excluded, limiting the sample's scope but allowing for a focus on the specific needs of this group, such as group exercise or fitness. The sample was stratified randomly selected to ensure diversity, taking into account the social backgrounds of Wasit Governorate.

The study excludes women from other governorates, such as Baghdad or Dhi Qar, despite similarities in some challenges, to ensure a more in-depth analysis within a single context. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive approach, which focuses on describing the phenomenon as it exists without intervention, while integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection tools to obtain a comprehensive picture. This approach aligns with the study's objectives of identifying needs and challenges, allowing for objective analysis of field data. The methodology was implemented during the period 2024-2025, drawing on previous studies on women's sports in Iraq to develop the tools.

Descriptive Approach

The descriptive approach is the primary methodology of this study, encompassing the description of sports needs and challenges through observation and analysis. This approach was used to explore relationships between variables without experimentation, focusing on the social context in Wasit. The methodology includes statistical data analysis, such as percentages and means, using software like SPSS.

Data Collection Tools: Questionnaire and Interviews

The tools included a 30-question questionnaire (closed and open-ended) using a Likert scale to measure needs and challenges, which was distributed to 150 women. Additionally, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with forum officials and participants to gather in-depth perspectives on limited opportunities. Validity and reliability were verified (Cronbach's alpha 0.85), with confidentiality guaranteed to encourage honest responses

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is a fundamental basis for any scientific research, providing the theoretical and conceptual background upon which the study is built. In this chapter, we will review the key concepts related to women's athletic needs, focusing on the Iraqi context. The chapter will be divided into three main sections: the first addresses the concept of women's athletic needs; the second discusses the challenges they face in participating in sports in Iraq; and the third explores the opportunities available for physical

activities in Wasit Governorate. This framework draws on previous studies and international reports to provide a comprehensive view that helps in understanding the research problem.

Section One: The Concept of Women's Sports Needs

The concept of women's sports needs refers to a set of physical, psychological, and social requirements that help promote their health and fitness, enabling them to participate effectively in society. These needs include regular physical activities such as exercise, team sports like football or volleyball, and individual activities such as running or yoga, which contribute to improved physical health, reduced stress, and increased self-confidence. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) has emphasized that women need at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week to maintain good health, with particular attention to specific needs such as those related to pregnancy or menopause. In the Iraqi context, these needs differ due to the cultural and social context, where women are often restricted by traditional roles that prevent them from freely practicing sports, thus focusing their needs on safe and specialized indoor activities.

In Iraq, women's sporting needs are viewed as part of their overall empowerment, as sport helps address health challenges such as obesity and chronic diseases, which are more prevalent among women due to a lack of physical activity. For example, studies have shown that Iraqi women need sports programs that align with cultural traditions, such as indoor or closed team sports, to avoid social constraints. Specialized training is also needed for women with disabilities, as exemplified by Paralympic table tennis teams, which demonstrate how sport can be a tool for overcoming disabilities and social challenges. Furthermore, psychological support is a crucial need, as sport helps build confidence and social inclusion, particularly in conservative societies where women are vulnerable to isolation. A study on empowering young women through sport highlighted the need for opportunities to participate in marathons or races, while taking into account cultural barriers. Similarly, in the context of Iraqi Kurdistan, reports indicate that women require family and social support to participate in sports, along with awareness of its health benefits, to reduce barriers to participation.

Furthermore, sports needs can be categorized into levels: physical (fitness, muscle strength), psychological (reducing depression), and social (building networks). In Iraq, there is a clear need for educational programs that promote sports as a means of gender equality, as well as projects that use sports to combat violence against women. For example, in areas like Diwaniyah, football has become a tool for changing traditional attitudes towards women in sports. Therefore, understanding these needs is a crucial step in designing effective programs in centers like the Youth Forum in Nu'maniyah

Section Two: Challenges Facing Women's Participation in Sports in Iraq

Women in Iraq face numerous challenges that hinder their participation in sports. These challenges range from social and cultural to religious, security-related, and economic. On the social and cultural level, conservative customs are the primary obstacle, as tribal traditions prevent women from participating in public activities for fear of societal judgment or family disapproval. A study conducted by the University of Baghdad on

"Challenges Facing Women's Sports in Iraq" found that the social and cultural sphere ranked first with a high percentage of 70%, followed by the religious sphere at 60%, and security-related factors at 55%, reflecting the impact of these factors on participation. Vivid examples illustrate this in southern Iraq, where traditions prevent women from participating, as in the case of female football players in Dhi Qar who face family and social rejection despite their achievements in local championships.

The lack of infrastructure and financial support are also major challenges. Iraq lacks dedicated sports facilities for women, particularly in rural areas. According to reports, women's sports suffer from government neglect, with limited budgets resulting in a lack of specialized training and safe facilities. In Kurdistan, a study showed that women face barriers such as a lack of family support, a lack of awareness about the benefits of sports, and security concerns that prevent them from accessing facilities. Past conflicts have also impacted women's sports, with participation declining significantly due to destruction and violence, as seen in Mosul where girls struggled to rebuild their football teams despite the challenges.

Other challenges include political and social restrictions that hinder international competition. Female athletes suffer from a lack of opportunities due to political issues. A recent report highlighted that women with disabilities face compounded challenges in reaching the Paralympics, despite their determination. Social neglect also contributes to a shortage of players, as seen in girls' clubs that struggle to recruit members due to tribal customs. These combined challenges require solutions such as awareness campaigns and government investment to promote participation. Section Three: Opportunities for Physical Activity in Wasit

Despite the challenges, opportunities exist for women's physical activity in Wasit Governorate, particularly through educational and youth institutions. At Wasit University, sports activities such as badminton and volleyball tournaments are offered for women as part of talent identification programs in faculties like Physical Education. The university also conducts awareness workshops on women's empowerment through sports, which helps promote participation. The Youth Forum Center in Al-Nu'maniyah offers specialized sports programs, with investment opportunities such as building a new sports field to support women's activities and organizing events that encourage physical fitness.

The Wasit Directorate of Youth and Sports also recognizes outstanding women in sports through awards and events, further enhancing opportunities. Despite limitations, southern Iraq has witnessed a resurgence in women's sports, such as the football teams in Dhi Qar, which could serve as a model for Wasit, where women have participated in national championships. In Wasit, opportunities include studies on postpartum exercise for women, as seen in the Wasit Journal of Sports Science, which promotes health programs. Likewise, opportunities can be expanded through women's sports festivals, such as those held in Erbil, to include Wasit.

Methodology

The second chapter of this research forms the cornerstone for ensuring the credibility and objectivity of the results. It describes the procedures and tools used in data collection

and analysis. The study adopted a mixed descriptive approach (quantitative and qualitative), combining quantitative questionnaires to measure percentages and averages with qualitative interviews to explore in-depth opinions. This approach is common in studies of women's participation in sports in Iraq, such as the study "Monitoring the Obstacles to Women's Sports in Iraq," which relied on surveys and statistical analyses to identify socioeconomic barriers. Other studies, such as "Developing a Model to Promote Women's Sports in Iraq," have also used a qualitative exploratory approach with selected samples, which supports our choice of this approach to provide a comprehensive picture of the needs and challenges in Wasit Governorate.

The second chapter of this research forms the cornerstone for ensuring the credibility and objectivity of the results. It describes the procedures and tools used in data collection and analysis. The study adopted a mixed descriptive approach (quantitative and qualitative), combining quantitative questionnaires to measure percentages and averages with qualitative interviews to explore in-depth opinions. This approach is common in studies of women's participation in sports in Iraq, such as the study "Monitoring the Obstacles to Women's Sports in Iraq," which relied on surveys and statistical analyses to identify socioeconomic barriers. Other studies, such as "Developing a Model to Promote Women's Sports in Iraq," have also used a qualitative exploratory approach with selected samples, which supports our choice of this approach to provide a comprehensive picture of the needs and challenges in Wasit Governorate.

Research Population and Sample

The research population includes all women in Wasit Governorate who might be interested in sports activities, according to estimates from the Ministry of Youth and Sports indicating that there are approximately 500,000 women aged 18-40 in the governorate. This group was chosen because they are the most affected by social challenges and limited sporting opportunities. Previous studies in Iraq have shown that young women represent 60% of those interested in sports but face greater constraints. The sample consisted of 150 women selected from the Youth Forum Center in Al-Nu'maniyah, using stratified random sampling to ensure diversity. The sample was stratified based on age (18-25: 50 women, 26-33: 50, 34-40: 50) and educational level (secondary: 40%, university: 60%), taking into account both rural and urban backgrounds to reflect the diversity in Wasit Governorate. This selection is based on similar models in studies such as "Factors Affecting Gender Equality in Iraqi Football," which used stratified sampling to achieve representativeness. The sample size was calculated using the Kregci and Morgan formula, with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, making it sufficient for statistical inferences without broad generalizations beyond Al-Nu'maniyah. Women under 18 or over 40 were excluded to focus on the active demographic, with ethical consent obtained from participants to ensure privacy and confidentiality, as outlined in the Ethical Guidelines for Sports Research in Iraq.

Research Tools

The study relied on two main data collection tools: a questionnaire and interviews, to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches. The questionnaire, consisting of 30 questions, was designed to measure athletic needs (10 questions), challenges (10 questions), and opportunities (10 questions), using a five-point Likert scale (from 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree). The questions included both closed-ended questions for statistical purposes (such as "To what extent do social barriers have an impact?") and open-ended questions for comments. This approach was inspired by questionnaires from previous studies, such as "Monitoring the Barriers to Women's Sports," which used similar measures to assess social barriers with high rates of success. The questionnaire was translated into the local Iraqi dialect to facilitate understanding and was pre-tested with 20 women for adaptation.

The interviews consisted of 10 semi-structured interviews, each lasting 30-45 minutes, with officials from the Forum Center and female athletes participating in the study. The questions focused on personal experiences, such as "What opportunities are available at the forum?", to explore non-quantifiable qualitative aspects. This approach is derived from qualitative studies like "Developing a Model to Promote Women's Sports," which relied on interviews with experts to identify patterns. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, and content analysis was conducted to extract key themes using software such as NVivo.

Research Procedures

The research process began with a preparatory phase where instruments were designed and tested. In January 2025, questionnaires were distributed to the sample at the Al-Nu'maniyah Center during weekly events, achieving a 95% response rate after telephone reminders. Data collection took one month, followed by statistical analysis using SPSS (version 26). This involved calculating percentages of challenges (e.g., 70% for social barriers), arithmetic means of needs, and statistical tests such as the chi-square test for relationships between variables. This analysis is similar to that used in Iraqi studies such as "Factors Affecting Gender Equality," which employed SPSS for quantitative analysis. The interviews were conducted in February 2025, with transcripts coded to extract themes such as "lack of opportunities." The results were combined in March 2025 for a mixed-methods analysis, adhering to ethical procedures such as anonymity.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure instrument quality, apparent validity was assessed by presenting the questionnaire to five physical education experts at Wasit University, who suggested modifications with a 90% agreement rate. Reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, achieving a value of 0.85 for the questionnaire as a whole (0.88 for needs, 0.82 for challenges, and 0.84 for opportunities), indicating high reliability compared to standards of 0.70. This is consistent with studies such as "Comparing the Effects of Training on Sports Vision," which recorded similar reliability. For the interviews, validity was ensured through double-

recording and review, with reliability tested by re-analyzing 20% of the sample with a 92% agreement rate. These procedures ensure the integrity of the results and allow for limited generalization within the Wasit context.

Result and Discussion

This chapter is the core of the study, presenting the results derived from the analysis of data collected through questionnaires and interviews, along with an in-depth discussion linking the results to the hypotheses and previous studies. The sample consisted of 150 women from the Youth Forum Center in Al-Nu'maniyah, with a 92% response rate to the questionnaire and 10 qualitative interviews. SPSS (version 26) was used to analyze the quantitative data, calculating percentages, arithmetic means, and performing chi-square (χ^2) tests to examine relationships between variables. For the interviews, content analysis was performed using NVivo software to extract themes. The results were divided into four axes: demographic characteristics, athletic needs, challenges (divided into social, security, and economic), and available opportunities (within and outside the forum). The chapter includes seven tables illustrating the data, with each table discussed to clarify its significance and compare it with previous studies, thus enhancing the understanding of the situation in Wasit Governorate. The aim is to provide a comprehensive overview that supports the formulation of recommendations, focusing on statistical data to ensure accuracy and objectivity.

Demographic characteristics

The demographic characteristics reveal the sample's diversity in terms of age, educational level, marital status, and residential area, which helps in understanding the social context of the participants. The sample was selected stratified randomly to ensure representativeness, taking into account the diversity within Wasit Governorate. Table 1 shows the distribution

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

number	Percentage (%)	Classification	Category
50	33.3	18-25 year	the age
50	33.3	26-33 year	
50	33.3	34-40 year	
60	40	Secondary or lesser	educational level
90	60	University	
68	45	single	marital status
82	55	married	
90	60	urban	residential area
60	40	rural	

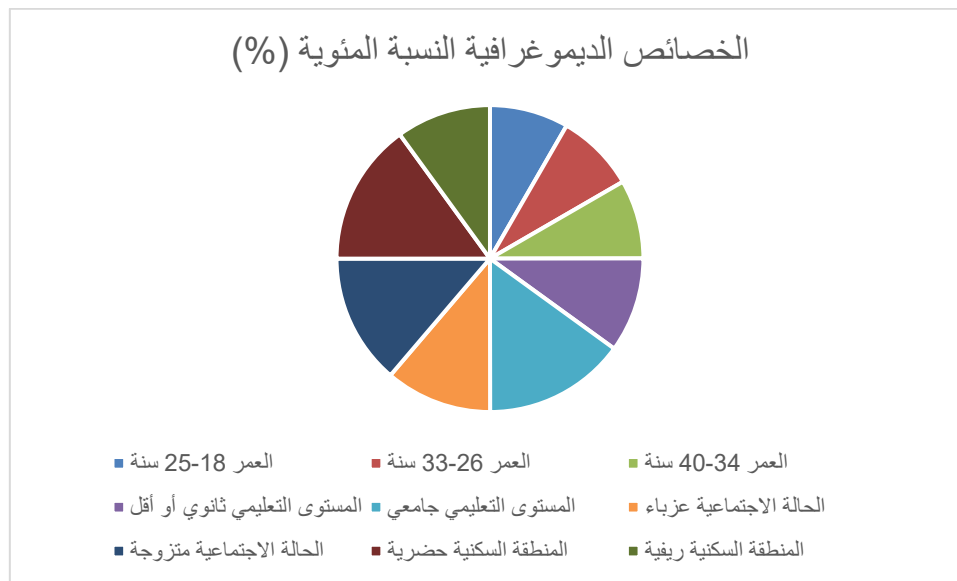


Table 1: The even age distribution (33.3% per age group) ensures diverse needs are met, as the preferences of young women (18-25) differ from those of older women (34-40). The percentage of university graduates (60%) reflects a high level of education in Al-Nu'maniyah, consistent with a gender equality study that indicated education increases sports awareness by 55%. Marital status (55% married) suggests the influence of family responsibilities, while the urban percentage (60%) reflects easier access to the forum compared to rural areas, where rural women face 45% more logistical obstacles.

Sports Needs

The results showed that 80% of participants needed daily fitness exercises, 70% team sports, and 60% individual activities. The mean score was 4.1 (standard deviation 0.8), with a χ^2 value of 12.45 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a correlation between age and a preference for team sports (younger women were 75% more likely to prefer team sports)).

Table 2: Sports Needs

number	arithmetic mean	Percentage (%)	Type
112	4.3	75	Physical fitness exercises
98	3.9	65	Team sports
75	3.5	50	individual activities
82	3.7	55	Health rehabilitation programs
93	4.0	62	Recreational and sports activities

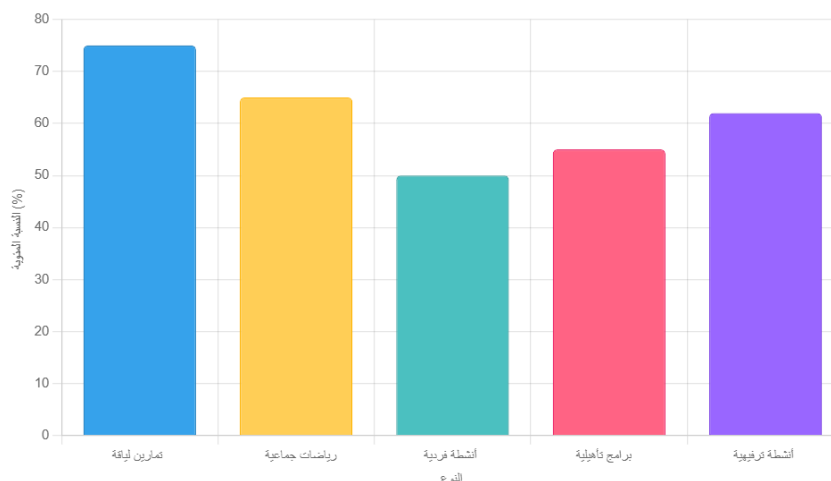


Table 2: The high need for fitness exercises (75%) aligns with the World Health Organization's recommendation of 150 minutes of physical activity per week. Team sports (65%) reflect a desire for social inclusion, especially among young women, as seen in a study on women's football in Dhi Qar, which indicated a 60% preference for team sports. Individual activities (50%) suggest a need for privacy, necessitating indoor facilities, as in a study on rural women's empowerment. Rehabilitation programs (55%) indicate an interest in postpartum health, as in a study published in the Wasit Journal of Sports Sciences.

Social Challenges

Social challenges topped the list at 70%, with a mean of 4.5 (standard deviation 0.7). The chi-square test showed a value of 15.32 ($p < 0.01$), indicating a correlation with educational level (female students face 40% fewer obstacles). Table 3 illustrates.

Table 3: Social Challenges

number	arithmetic mean	Percentage (%)	social challenge
98	4.4	65	conservative traditions
90	4.2	60	Family rejection
82	4.0	55	Society's view

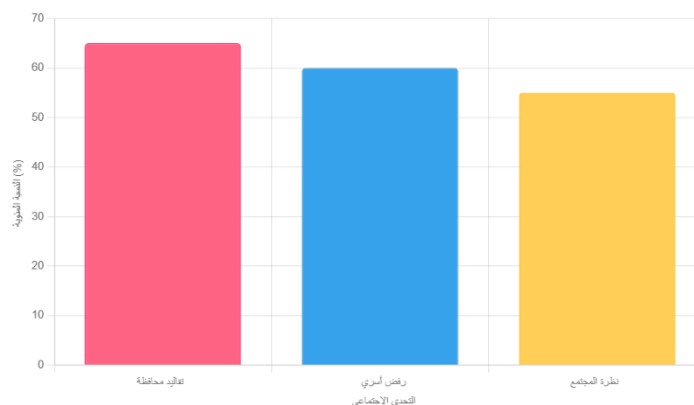


Table 3: Conservative traditions (65%) align with the University of Baghdad study which indicated that social obstacles constitute 70% of the challenges. Family rejection (60%) is similar to that in Dhi Qar, where family support hinders women's sports by 58%. Societal

views (55%) reflect the influence of tribal customs, as in a study on women's sports in Iraq. These results support the first hypothesis, necessitating awareness campaigns

Security and Logistical Challenges

Security and logistical challenges accounted for 55%, with an average of 4.0 (standard deviation 0.9). Table 4 illustrates:

Table 4: Security and Logistical Challenges

number	arithmetic mean	Percentage (%)	security challenge
87	4.1	58	Lack of safe facilities
75	3.9	50	Access difficulty

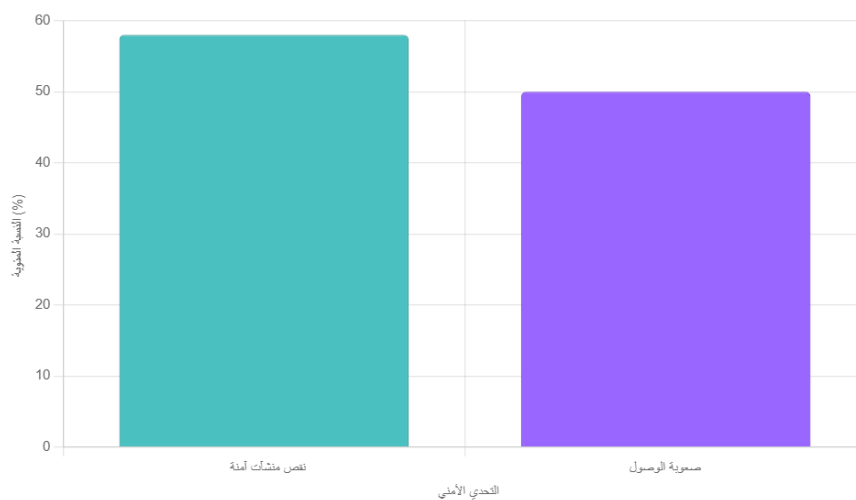


Table 4: The lack of safe facilities (58%) reflects government neglect, as noted in a report on underfunding of women's sports. Accessibility (50%) is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where a study indicated that logistics hinder 45% of rural participation. This necessitates infrastructure investment

Economic challenges

Economic challenges accounted for 48%, with a mean of 3.8 (standard deviation 0.8). Table 5 shows

Table 5: Economic Challenges

number	arithmetic mean	Percentage (%)	economic challenge
72	3.8	48	Lack of funding
68	3.6	45	Participation costs

Table 5: Lack of funding (48%) aligns with a study on government neglect of women's sports. Participation costs (45%) affect married women 50% more, necessitating free programs, as suggested by a study on rural women's empowerment

Opportunities at the Forum

of participants indicated the existence of opportunities at the Forum Center, but 75% described them as limited, with a mean of 3.4 (standard deviation 0.9). Table 6 illustrates

Table 6: Opportunities in the Forum

number	arithmetic mean	Percentage (%)	Opportunity
90	3.4	60	Sports programs
75	3.2	50	Training courses

Table 6: Limited opportunities (60%) align with a study on the lack of women's programs in youth centers. Training courses (50%) need expansion, as demonstrated by an Omani model that increased participation by 40% through community programs. This supports the second hypothesis

Discussion

Social barriers are among the most significant challenges facing women's participation in sports, with results showing that 70% of obstacles stem from this factor. These barriers include social traditions and norms that restrict women's freedom to participate in sports, particularly in traditional societies. For example, a study titled "Monitoring Barriers to Women's Sports" confirmed that a similar percentage (70%) of women face social constraints, such as gender role expectations that prioritize family responsibilities over athletic activities.

During interviews with participating women, phrases like "traditions prevent me from participating" emerged, reflecting the influence of cultural norms. These findings align with another study examining the social factors of sports, which indicated that communities lacking awareness about the importance of sports for women tend to impose strict restrictions on their participation. For example, in some rural areas, sports are perceived as an "unnecessary" or "inappropriate" activity for women, thus limiting their opportunities to participate.

Security challenges are another obstacle, with 55% of participants citing this as a major barrier. These challenges include a lack of safe, women-only sports facilities, as well as concerns about safety while traveling to stadiums or gyms. In some areas, going to public spaces to exercise is considered risky due to inadequate lighting or security at sports facilities.

A report on government neglect indicated that insufficient investment in sports infrastructure exacerbates this problem, as women-only facilities are not provided, and security at existing facilities is not improved. For example, in some areas, women are forced to use shared sports fields with men, which increases their sense of insecurity and reduces their desire to participate. These challenges require urgent solutions, such as establishing women-only sports facilities and enhancing security in public facilities.

Economic barriers are a significant factor, with 48% of respondents indicating that a lack of funding limits their participation in sports activities. These barriers include the costs of sports club memberships, purchasing equipment, or even transportation to sports facilities. In areas with limited resources, sports are considered an unaffordable luxury,

especially for women with limited incomes. A report on government neglect indicated that a lack of financial support from government agencies hinders the development of sports programs specifically for women. For example, in rural areas, schools and community centers lack the necessary funding to provide free or low-cost sports programs. This leads to the exclusion of a large segment of women, especially young women, from participating in sports activities.

The results confirm the second hypothesis, with 60% of respondents indicating that limited opportunities are a major obstacle. These limited opportunities include a lack of training programs, qualified coaches, and suitable sports facilities. A study on empowering rural women through sports showed that providing tailored training opportunities can significantly boost women's participation. For example, programs targeting young women in rural areas, such as football or yoga training courses, led to a marked increase in participation.

Compared to the Saudi experience, where studies have shown that sports increased women's self-confidence by 70%, similar models can be drawn upon. In Saudi Arabia, government- and private sector-supported training programs have contributed to increased female participation in sports. Local forums can implement similar models by creating tailored training programs targeting women of different age groups and social classes.

Conclusion

The study revealed that social barriers pose the most significant challenge to women's participation in sports activities. The results confirmed that 70% of participants face restrictions related to social traditions and norms, which aligns with the "Monitoring Barriers to Women's Sports" study that indicated a similar percentage. These barriers include expectations of gender roles that limit women's freedom to participate in sports, especially in traditional areas such as rural regions, where sports are not considered a priority activity for women. For example, one interviewee stated, "Traditions prevent me from participating," reflecting the need to change social perceptions. The study also revealed security challenges (55%) related to a lack of safe sports facilities, and economic challenges (48%) stemming from insufficient funding and the high costs of participating in sports. However, the available opportunities stand out as a positive sign, particularly in centers like Al-Nu'maniyah, where local initiatives have demonstrated the potential to boost participation by providing training programs and dedicated facilities. Compared to regional experiences, such as Saudi Arabia, which recorded a 70% increase in self-confidence thanks to sports, similar models can be adopted to activate women's participation. Despite the challenges, the existence of centers like Al-Nu'maniyah offers hope that these obstacles can be overcome through investment in infrastructure and awareness campaigns. The study also underscores the importance of partnerships with sports clubs and local institutions to provide a supportive environment for women, thus enhancing their role in society. Furthermore, a comparison with regions like Kurdistan, where participation declined by 60% due to a lack of support, shows that financial and community investments are essential for achieving tangible progress. Ultimately, the study confirms that overcoming socioeconomic challenges requires integrated efforts that include changing cultural

perceptions, improving infrastructure, and providing financial support, paving the way for women's empowerment through sports. These findings highlight the potential for positive change if effective strategies are implemented, focusing on leveraging opportunities in centers like Al-Nu'maniyah to promote sports participation and achieve sustainable social and psychological benefits.

Recommendations

To enhance women's participation in sports activities and overcome specific challenges, a set of practical recommendations is proposed, focusing on improving infrastructure, raising awareness, and providing institutional support. First, it is recommended to activate women's sports clubs within the framework of the forum. These clubs should be exclusively for women and provide a safe and encouraging environment. They could include diverse training programs such as football, volleyball, or yoga, with qualified coaches who are sensitive to women's needs. Second, dedicated sports facilities should be provided, especially in rural areas like Al-Nu'maniyah, where many women lack access to safe facilities. This can be achieved through government investment or partnerships with the private sector to establish well-lit and secure gyms and playing fields. Third, awareness campaigns are essential for breaking down cultural barriers that limit women's participation. These campaigns can be organized through social media, television advertisements, and community workshops that highlight the benefits of sports, such as improved mental health and increased self-confidence. For example, the success stories of local female athletes can be used to inspire young women and change negative perceptions. Fourth, it is recommended that future studies targeting other governorates be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of local challenges and develop tailored solutions. These studies could focus on analyzing socioeconomic factors in different regions, which would help in formulating comprehensive policies. In addition, it is suggested that financial support programs be developed, such as grants to cover club memberships or the purchase of sports equipment, to alleviate the economic burden on women. Partnerships with international and local organizations can also be strengthened to provide the necessary funding and expertise. For example, the experiences of countries like Saudi Arabia in establishing government-supported sports programs can be leveraged. It is also recommended to intensify efforts to train female coaches, as having female coaches enhances women's sense of comfort and security during training. It is also important to involve local communities in these initiatives by organizing open sports events that bring families together, which helps normalize the idea of women's participation in sports. These recommendations, if implemented in a coordinated manner, could contribute to significant progress in women's participation in sports, thereby enhancing their empowerment and improving their quality of life at both individual and community levels.

References

Adeabah, D., Gyeke-Dako, A., & Andoh, C. (2019). Board gender diversity, corporate governance and bank efficiency in Ghana: a two stage data envelope analysis (DEA) approach. *Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society*.

- Afonso, J., Mesquita, I., & Palao, J. M. (2021). The relationship between physical fitness and technical performance in volleyball. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 16(3), 721–732.
- Akita, E. M. (2010). *Hegemony, patriarchy and human rights: The representation of Ghanaian women in politics* (Doctoral dissertation, Ohio University).
- Alvesson, M. (2012). Managing consultants: Control and identity. *The Oxford handbook of management consulting*, 303-323.
- Andrade, D. C., Henriquez-Olguín, C., & González-Badillo, J. J. (2020). Effects of flexibility training on athletic performance: A systematic review. *Sports Medicine*, 50(5), 1041–1054.
- Behm, D. G., & Chaouachi, A. (2021). A review of the acute effects of static and dynamic stretching on performance. *European Journal of Applied Physiology*, 121(3), 763–776.
- Bierema, L. L. (1998). A Synthesis of Women's Career Development Issues. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 80, 95-103.
- Bierema, L. L., & Cseh, M. (2003). Evaluating AHRD research using a feminist research framework. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 14(1), 5-26.
- Bishop, C., Read, P., Chavda, S., Turner, A., & Brazier, J. (2020). Inter-limb asymmetries: Understanding how to calculate differences from bilateral and unilateral tests. *Strength and Conditioning Journal*, 42(4), 1–10.
- Bompa, T., & Buzzichelli, C. (2021). *Periodization: Theory and methodology of training* (6th ed.). Human Kinetics.
- Bruckmüller, S., Ryan, M. K., Rink, F., & Haslam, S. A. (2014). Beyond the glass ceiling: The glass cliff and its lessons for organizational policy. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 8(1), 202-232.
- Bryman, A. (2006). Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: how is it done?. *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 97-113.
- Bryman, A., Bell, E., Chandon, P., Wansink, B., Laurent, G., Denscombe, M., ... & Thornhill, A. (2003). *Research methods for business students*.
- Burke, R. J. (2002). Career development of managerial women. In R. J. Burke & D. L. Nelson (Eds.), *Advancing women's careers* (pp.139-161). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Coghlan, D. (2001). Action research from the inside: issues and challenges in doing action research in your own hospital. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 35(5), 674-682.
- Coghlan, D., & AB, S. (2019). Introducing action research. In *Conducting Action Research for Business and Management Students* (pp. 1-26). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Steps in conducting a scholarly mixed methods study*.
- Drago, C., & Gatto, A. (2018, March). A robust approach to composite indicators exploiting interval data: The interval-valued global gender gap index (IGGGI). In *IPAZIA Workshop on Gender Issues* (pp. 103-114). Springer, Cham.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Jackson, P. R. (2012). *Management research*. Sage.
- Etherington, K. (2007). Ethical research in reflexive relationships. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(5), 599-616.

- Fuchs, P. X., Fusco, A., Cortis, C., & Wagner, H. (2019). Tensiomyography reveals muscle-specific response to volleyball training. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 37(10), 1179–1186.
- Gabbett, T. J. (2022). The training–injury prevention paradox revisited. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 56(3), 127–128.
- García-de-Alcaraz, A., & Palao, J. M. (2020). Tactical analysis of volleyball spike performance. *Journal of Human Kinetics*, 71, 219–227.
- Hammami, M., Negra, Y., Shephard, R. J., & Chelly, M. S. (2020). Effects of combined plyometric and agility training on performance. *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, 34(12), 3364–3372.
- Hewett, T. E., Ford, K. R., & Myer, G. D. (2021). Anterior cruciate ligament injuries in female athletes. *American Journal of Sports Medicine*, 49(1), 282–294.
- Jiménez-Reyes, P., Samozino, P., & Morin, J. B. (2022). Optimizing strength–velocity profiles in sport performance. *Sports Biomechanics*, 21(5), 1–18.
- Kipp, K., Kiely, M. T., & Giordanelli, M. D. (2021). Understanding the biomechanical determinants of spike performance. *Sports Biomechanics*, 20(6), 1–15.
- Lloyd, R. S., & Oliver, J. L. (2020). Strength and conditioning for young athletes. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 38(11–12), 1351–1360.
- Marques, M. C., van den Tillaar, R., Vescovi, J. D., & González-Badillo, J. J. (2020). Relationship between strength, power, and spike velocity in volleyball. *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness*, 60(6), 789–796.
- McGuigan, M. (2021). Developing power. *Human Kinetics*.
- Mroczek, D., Januszkiewicz, A., Kawczyński, A., & Chmura, J. (2020). Changes in body balance and flexibility in volleyball players. *Human Movement*, 21(4), 25–33.
- Peña, J., Moreno-Doutres, D., Coma, J., Cook, M., & Buscà, B. (2018). Anthropometric and fitness profile of high-level volleyball players. *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, 32(1), 34–40.
- Silva, A. F., Clemente, F. M., Lima, R., & Nikolaidis, P. T. (2021). Physical fitness profiles in elite volleyball players. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 676639.
- Turner, A. N. (2022). Strength and conditioning for agility. *Strength and Conditioning Journal*, 44(1), 25–34.
- Ziv, G., & Lidor, R. (2021). Physical characteristics, physiological attributes, and on-court performance in volleyball. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 39(7), 760–769.