

# Chapter 37

## An International Perspective: Gender Equity in Sport in Palestine

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### ABSTRACT

*Historically, Palestinian girls and women have faced many obstacles that barred them from sport, which has had negative consequences. This chapter is intended to address the empowerment of girls and women and to help them to achieve gender equity in sport in Palestine. The author focuses first on the cultural and religious obstacles that girls and women face in sport in Palestine. Second, the author discusses occupation practices and discrimination Palestinians girls and women have faced in sport. Finally, the author concludes with recommendations on how to use education and policy to achieve gender equity in sport in Palestine. These recommendations could also be applied to help Muslim women and girls to engage more in sport worldwide.*

### INTRODUCTION

In 1978, as part of its international charter of physical education and sport, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Sport (UNESCO) recognized sport and physical activity (PA) as a human right.

*One of the essential conditions for the effective exercise of human rights is that everyone should be free to develop and preserve his or her physical, intellectual, and moral powers and that access to physical education and sport should consequently be assured and guaranteed for all human beings.*

Laws and policies have been adopted by different countries in achieve gender equity through increasing girls' and women's participation in sport and physical activity (PA). Despite these efforts, gender discrimination in sports is still an issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Gender discrimination in sports has long been a debatable topic as more women compared to men have experienced a gap in pay and a lack of viewership, media coverage, and opportunities. Further, statistics suggest that women face discrimina-

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tion in different aspects in sport. For example, women make up approximately 40 percent of sport and physical activity participants, yet they receive only 4 percent of all sports media coverage. Women-only sports stories made just 3.5 percent of all sports stories in four major newspapers in the United States (USA Today, the Boston Globe, the Orange County Register and the Dallas Morning news) (Lilit, 2018). Women also face a wage gap in sport. The U.S. Women's National Soccer team earned \$2 million for their 2015 Women's World Cup Soccer victory while the U.S. men's team earned \$9 million, coming in 11th in 2014. The most interesting and potentially surprising news is that the earnings of both teams were not based on the viewership as, according to Forbes, the women's final game was the most-watched soccer match in U.S. history. Likewise, the gender wage gap for coaches is tremendously high. At Duke University, the women's basketball coach makes approximately \$700,000 while the men's basketball coach makes almost \$10 million annually (Lilit, 2018). In addition, gender is typically never mentioned in men's sports, while gender is very often mentioned in women's sports. Women's sports tend to be always verbally and visually set apart (e.g., Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) vs National Basketball Association (NBA) and FIFA Women's World Cup vs FIFA World Cup) (Lilit, 2018).

In Palestine, girls and women suffer frequent discrimination in their access to, and practice of, both amateur and professional sport. This discrimination can be found in the persistence of stereotyping, the lack of structure and financial support for sportswomen and, the lack of media coverage of women's sport, and, for girls who show potential in their sport, the difficulty of incorporating work/sport into family life. In addition to these common obstacles, Palestinian women face discrimination as they relate to sport, and the consequences are greater than for most women across the globe. The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate Palestinian women's struggle for equity in sport and PA as a result of the gender, cultural, and religious issues that Palestinian females face in sport. To help the reader better grasp the importance of this chapter, the author provides:

1. A brief history about women's sports in Palestine;
2. A discussion of how Palestinian women's engagement in sport progressed over time; and
3. A brief history about the occupation in Palestine.

The author, who grew up in Palestine, will share her personal experience with gender discrimination as an adolescent before moving to the United States in 2004. Finally, the author will provide recommendations on how Palestinian girls and women can address barriers in achieving gender equity in sport. The author will also explain how these barriers are, to some degree, shared by Muslim females worldwide and, in particular, women who wear a hijab (headscarf). A better understanding of Muslim women's desire to engage in sport without violating religious requirements, including their choices to wear a hijab, is needed in schools and sport fields globally. Thus, some of recommendations to create more gender equity could be applied to help Muslim women engage more in sports in Western countries like the United States. Finally, this chapter will provide a platform for readers to think about cultural and religious requirements not as obstacles to prevent girls and women from engaging in sport but as something to better understand and embrace.

## **Women's Sport in Palestine**

Between 1948-1967, a school setting was the only venue to engage in sport for girls in the Middle East, including Palestine. Women's sports clubs did not exist during that time. In the early 1970's, some or-

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