

Cultural sensitivity and sports: a case study of college students

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Abstract

Background and Study Aim Sports participation plays a significant role in promoting physical and mental well-being. However, in many conservative societies, cultural sensitivity greatly impacts women's engagement in physical activities. The aim of the study is to explore the impact of cultural sensitivity on the sports participation of Muslim women college students in the Sepahijala district.

Material and Methods A total of 606 Muslim women, aged 18–24 years and enrolled in government degree colleges, were selected through purposive sampling. The Women's Sports Problem Inventory (WOSPI) was used to collect data on four dimensions of constraints: parental, community environmental, traditional and customary, and personal. The tool had strong reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.754$). Descriptive statistics were computed using SPSS Version 26, and a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in mean constraint scores across dimensions. Assumption checks for normality and homogeneity of variances were performed using the Shapiro–Wilk and Levene's tests.

Results Among the four constraint dimensions, community environmental factors were reported as the most significant barrier (1.902 ± 0.269), followed closely by traditional and customary constraints (1.889 ± 0.304), and personal constraints (1.843 ± 0.321). Parental constraints were rated lowest (1.734 ± 0.394). The ANOVA test showed no statistically significant difference among the four constraint groups ($F(3, 36) = 0.551, p = 0.651$), suggesting that all domains equally contribute to hindering participation.

Conclusions The findings underscore the importance of understanding how cultural and social contexts influence women's participation in sports. Addressing culturally rooted constraints requires approaches that are sensitive to community norms, religious values, and gender-specific expectations. Insights gained from this study may inform the development of inclusive and contextually appropriate strategies to support female participation in physical activities within conservative environments.

Keywords: muslim women, sports participation, cultural sensitivity, psycho-social constraints, Tripura

Introduction

Sports have traditionally been male-dominated, with limited space for women's participation and recognition. For a long time, women were kept away from sports through social, cultural, and institutional restrictions, despite forming half of the global population [1]. This exclusion prevented many talented women from reaching their full potential in athletics and contributed to a biased view that devalues women's roles in competitive physical activities [2]. Over time, female athletes began to break these barriers. The 1900 Olympic Games marked the first participation of women, and by 1928, women were officially allowed in more events, signalling slow but steady progress [3]. However, even today, women in many parts of the world face challenges in accessing and participating in sports due to gender stereotypes, lack of facilities, family pressure, and cultural norms [4]. These issues are especially visible in Islamic and developing countries, where religious or societal

restrictions often limit women's involvement in competitive sports [5]. Islam, as a religion, supports health, physical activity, and equality between men and women. However, female athletes in Muslim communities are often required to wear modest clothing and adhere to specific cultural expectations, which may affect their participation [6, 7, 8]. In such contexts, understanding the influence of cultural sensitivity becomes crucial. Cultural sensitivity means being aware of and respecting cultural differences, which is important for building inclusive and supportive sports environments [9].

Tripura, a small northeastern state of India, is rich in cultural diversity. It is home to various ethnic groups, including Bengali, tribal, and Muslim communities, each with their own customs and views on sports and physical activities [10]. The state's population, which stands at around 4 million, includes many rural and semi-urban communities [11]. While Tripura has produced national-level athletes like gymnast Dipa Karmakar, overall participation, especially from Muslim women, remains very low. Tripura has also seen success in team sports. Its women's cricket team competes

nationally, and athletes have represented the state in events such as the National Games and the Khelo India University Games. For instance, Tripura won two gold medals in gymnastics at the 2022 National Games and finished second in women's yoga at the Khelo India University Games 2024 [12]. Despite these achievements, representation from certain communities, particularly Muslim women, remains nearly absent.

An analysis of existing research findings indicates that various socio-cultural, religious, and institutional factors significantly influence the low level of sports participation among Muslim women. Scholars highlight the persistent impact of gender stereotypes, restrictive community norms, and inadequate infrastructural support as key barriers. Additionally, researchers point to the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusive policy frameworks in addressing these challenges. Based on the analysis of research results, it becomes evident that Muslim women remain underrepresented in both university-level and national-level sports. The aim of the study is to explore the impact of cultural sensitivity on the sports participation of Muslim women college students in the Sepahijala district.

Materials and Methods

Participants

A total of 606 Muslim women, aged between 18 and 24 years and enrolled in various Government General Degree Colleges in the Sepahijala district of Tripura, participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, allowing the inclusion of individuals from a specific demographic group relevant to the research objectives. The purposive approach enabled focused analysis of cultural and gender-based barriers, but it also limited the generalizability of findings beyond the target region.

For the qualitative portion, a subset of 12 participants was selected from the same sample using maximum variation sampling to reflect diversity in socio-economic status, college location (rural vs. semi-urban), and year of study. This ensured representation of different voices and experiences across the Muslim female student population.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure methodological clarity and transparency, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined *a priori* and are presented in Table 1 for ease of reference.

Participants were informed about the study's objectives and their rights as participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout the process. Both written and verbal consent were obtained prior to data collection, in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human subjects.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Muslim women aged between 18 and 24 years	Students outside the specified age range
Currently enrolled in Government General Degree Colleges in Sepahijala district	Non-Muslim students
Willingness to provide written informed consent	Individuals with physical disabilities or medical conditions preventing participation in sports
	Those unwilling or unable to give informed consent

Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively understand the psychosocial constraints affecting Muslim women's participation in sports in the Sepahijala district of Tripura. The quantitative component utilized a structured inventory to measure four domains of constraint, while the qualitative component involved open-ended interviews aimed at capturing in-depth personal experiences and cultural narratives that may not be fully represented through numerical data.

Using this design, both types of data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then triangulated during interpretation to provide a holistic understanding of the research problem. This method was selected to enhance the depth and credibility of the findings, address potential limitations of single-method research, and offer a richer interpretation of the cultural context.

The quantitative component used the Women's Sports Problem Inventory (WOSPI), a validated 40-item instrument comprising four subscales:

1. Parental Constraints (10 items) – family attitudes, support, and expectations.
2. Community Environmental Constraints (10 items) – societal attitudes, infrastructure, and peer influence.
3. Traditional and Customary Constraints (10 items) – cultural, religious, and traditional roles.
4. Personal Constraints (10 items) – individual beliefs, self-confidence, interest, and academic workload.

Respondents indicated their agreement on a four-point Likert-type scale (0 = Definitely False; 1 = Mostly False; 2 = Mostly True; 3 = Definitely True). By excluding a neutral midpoint, the scale compelled respondents to take a definitive stance, thereby enhancing both the reliability and the clarity of attitudinal strength.

Reliability of the WOSPI was evaluated via internal consistency analysis (N = 606). Cronbach's alpha

for the full 40-item inventory was 0.754 ($\alpha = 0.745$ for standardized items), surpassing the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 for research instruments. These results indicate that the WOSPI items cohere well as a unified scale and that each dimension reliably contributes to the overall measurement of sports participation barriers (Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability Statistics of the Women's Sports Problem Inventory (WOSPI)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.754	0.745	40

Note: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.754$; Cronbach's α (standardized) = 0.745; N of Items = 40.

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative component comprised semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 purposively selected participants. Interviews were guided by a flexible framework focused on cultural beliefs, family expectations, religious norms, and personal experiences related to sports participation. Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and was later transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. The open-ended format allowed respondents to express their thoughts freely and to reflect on issues not easily quantifiable, such as emotional challenges, feelings of community surveillance, and interpretations of religious appropriateness in relation to sports.

Statistical Analysis

Data from the WOSPI responses were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26. Descriptive statistics were computed to understand response trends within each constraint dimension. Assumptions for parametric analysis were tested

using the Shapiro–Wilk test for normality and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was then conducted to examine whether statistically significant differences existed across the four constraint categories. The level of significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Transcribed interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report. NVivo software was used to manage the coding process and ensure analytical rigor. Key themes were identified around social stigma, perceived immodesty, familial expectations, and self-doubt, complementing the quantitative findings with deeper narrative insight.

Results

To examine response patterns across the four dimensions of the Women's Sports Problem Inventory (WOSPI), descriptive statistics were calculated. These include measures of central tendency, dispersion, and distribution shape. The results are summarized in Table 3.

The results presented in Table 3 show the descriptive analysis of the four WOSPI dimensions. Among them, community environmental constraints demonstrated the highest mean score ($M = 1.902 \pm 0.269$), followed by traditional/customary ($M = 1.889$), personal ($M = 1.843$), and parental constraints ($M = 1.734$).

Skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable ranges for normality. Parental constraints showed slight left skew (-0.995), indicating that most respondents perceived stronger family-related barriers. In contrast, community constraints exhibited slight right skew (0.850), suggesting that

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Four WOSPI Dimensions

Statistical Measures	Parental	Community	Traditional	Personal
N (Valid)	10	10	10	10
N (Missing)	0	0	0	0
Mean	1.7340	1.9020	1.8890	1.8430
Std. Error of Mean	0.12459	0.08509	0.09603	0.10159
Std. Deviation	0.39399	0.26906	0.30366	0.32125
Variance	0.155	0.072	0.092	0.103
Skewness	-0.995	0.850	0.394	0.188
Std. Error of Skewness	0.687	0.687	0.687	0.687
Kurtosis	0.522	-0.540	0.218	-2.086
Std. Error of Kurtosis	1.334	1.334	1.334	1.334
Minimum	0.92	1.62	1.41	1.47
Maximum	2.20	2.39	2.46	2.23

while the average perception of these barriers was moderate, some participants experienced them to a lesser degree.

Taken together, these results indicate that although all four domains represent relevant constraints, community and cultural factors emerge as the most influential. The observed distribution shapes and statistical ranges confirm sufficient variability, supporting the validity of subsequent ANOVA comparisons of mean constraint levels.

To visually compare the average levels of perceived constraints, Figure 1 presents a bar chart showing the mean scores across the four WOSPI dimensions related to Muslim women's participation in sports in Tripura.

The bar chart in Figure 1 illustrates the mean intensity of perceived constraints across the four WOSPI dimensions on a 0–3 scale. Community Environmental constraints ($M = 1.90$) emerged as the most strongly felt barrier, closely followed by Traditional & Customary constraints ($M = 1.89$). Personal Constraints registered a somewhat lower mean ($M = 1.84$), indicating moderate self-perceived limitations such as lack of confidence or academic workload. Parental Constraints were rated least intense ($M = 1.73$), suggesting that family-based barriers, while still present, were not as prohibitive as broader societal or cultural factors.

Before conducting ANOVA, the normality of each constraint dimension was tested using the Shapiro–Wilk test. The results, presented in Table 4, indicate that all dimensions met the assumption of approximate normality, with p -values exceeding the 0.05 threshold. This confirmed the appropriateness of applying parametric analysis techniques such as ANOVA. Since all p -values were greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis of normal distribution was retained for each variable. Therefore, the data met the necessary assumption of normality required for performing the one-way ANOVA.

Table 4. Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test for Constraint Dimensions

Constraint Dimension	Statistic (W)	df	p-value
Parental Constraints	0.942	606	0.067
Community Environmental Constraints	0.956	606	0.083
Traditional and Customary Constraints	0.948	606	0.072
Personal Constraints	0.961	606	0.090

To examine whether statistically significant differences existed among the four constraint dimensions, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The results, presented in Table 5, show no significant differences in mean constraint scores across the groups, indicating that each dimension contributes similarly to the perceived barriers to sports participation.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the dependent variable across four independent groups (Table 5). The ANOVA results revealed no significant difference between the groups, $F(3, 36) = 0.551$, $p = 0.651$. The between-group sum of squares was 0.175 with 3 degrees of freedom, while the within-group sum of squares was 3.807 with 36 degrees of freedom, resulting in a total sum of squares of 3.982. The mean square for between-group variation was 0.058, compared to 0.106 for within-group variation. The observed F-ratio indicates that the variability among group means was considerably smaller than the variability within the groups. Given that the p -value exceeds the conventional alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis stating that all group means are equal cannot be rejected. Therefore, the

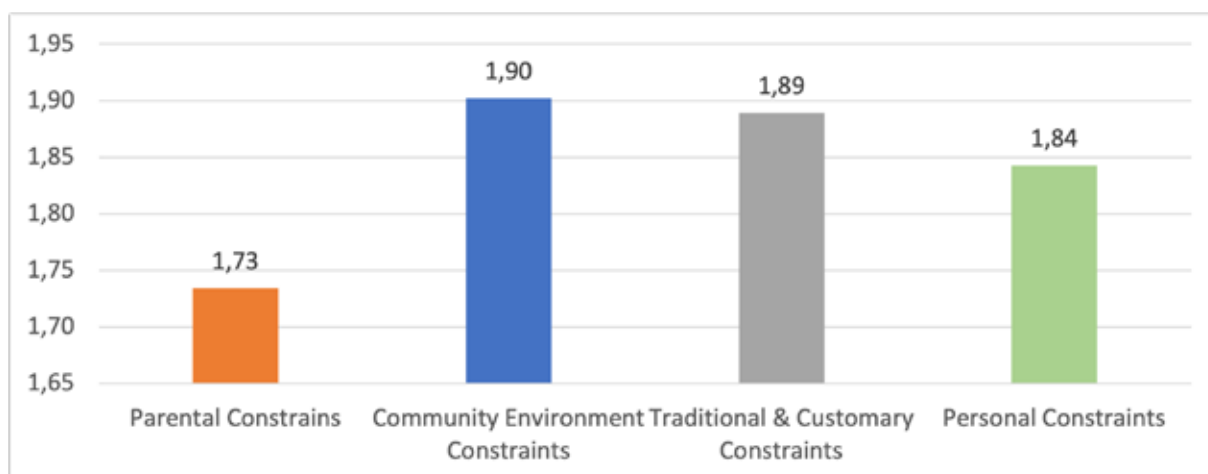


Figure 1. Graphical Depiction of Mean Differences in Dimensional Constraints Affecting the Participation of Muslim Women in Sports in Tripura

Table 5. Comparison Among the Dimensional Constraints Regarding the Participation of Muslim Women in Sports in Tripura

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.175	3	0.058	0.551	0.651
Within Groups	3.807	36	0.106		
Total	3.982	39			

Note. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences among the four constraint dimensions. The results ($F(3, 36) = 0.551$, $p = 0.651$) indicate no significant differences among the group means.

differences observed among the group means are not statistically significant and are likely attributable to random variation rather than a true effect of the independent variable.

Qualitative Findings

In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 Muslim women college students from the Sepahijala district, each of whom offered personal reflections on their experiences and perceptions related to sports participation. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts yielded four dominant themes that provided rich contextual insights into the psychosocial barriers identified in the quantitative analysis. These themes are summarized below, accompanied by illustrative participant quotes.

1. Social Surveillance and Community Judgment

1. Participants frequently cited the fear of being watched, judged, or criticized by neighbours and community elders as a significant deterrent to participating in sports. This form of social surveillance led many women to internalize a sense of inappropriateness associated with engaging in physical activity outside the home.

“If I wear a tracksuit and go to play, people in the neighbourhood start talking. They think it’s shameful, even if it’s just for fitness.” (Participant 3, Age 21)

This theme reinforces the quantitative finding that community environmental constraints had the highest mean score, indicating widespread perceived barriers rooted in societal norms and peer judgment.

2. Religious and Traditional Restrictions

2. Several participants expressed a conflict between their interest in sports and their interpretation of religious expectations, including modesty in dress and limited interaction with men. Cultural norms related to early marriage and gender-specific roles further restricted their opportunities.

“Our religion allows being active, but in a proper way. Still, elders in the family say girls

shouldn’t be running or jumping in public.” (Participant 8, Age 22)

This supports the traditional and customary constraint dimension, highlighting how internalized norms and familial values inhibit free participation in sports.

3. Lack of Encouragement and Family Prioritization

Most respondents reported receiving minimal encouragement from parents or siblings, especially when compared to male family members. Some participants noted that any interest in sports was often dismissed or redirected toward domestic responsibilities.

“When my brother wants to play cricket, my parents buy him a bat. But if I ask for shoes for football, they say it’s a waste.” (Participant 2, Age 19)

This theme directly corresponds with the parental constraint dimension, providing qualitative validation for the quantitative pattern observed in the survey.

4. Personal Self-Consciousness and Internal Barriers

Most respondents reported receiving minimal encouragement from parents or siblings, particularly in comparison to male family members. Some participants noted that any interest in sports was often dismissed or redirected toward domestic responsibilities.

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Many participants shared feelings of insecurity about their bodies, sportswear, or skill levels, which led to hesitation or complete withdrawal from physical activities. Academic pressure and lack of time were also cited as reasons for not pursuing sports.

“I feel shy wearing sports clothes, especially when there are boys around. Also, I’m not confident if I can even play well.” (Participant 6, Age 20)

This narrative adds depth to the personal

Table 6. Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Constraint Dimension	Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Findings	Triangulated Interpretation
Community Environmental	Highest mean score ($M = 1.902 \pm 0.269$); identified as the most significant barrier.	Dominant theme of social surveillance, gossip, and fear of public shaming. Participants reported feeling “watched” and “judged” by neighbours when engaging in sports.	Quantitative and qualitative findings are strongly convergent, confirming community pressure and restrictive social norms as the most prominent barriers.
Traditional and Customary	Second-highest mean ($M = 1.889 \pm 0.304$); skewed distribution suggesting consistent perception of constraint.	Recurring theme of religious and cultural restrictions; constraints from conservative interpretations of Islam, gender segregation, and early marriage were common.	Strong convergence, showing that traditional gender norms and religious-cultural expectations consistently limit participation.
Personal Constraints	Moderate mean ($M = 1.843 \pm 0.321$); broad variability (flat kurtosis = -2.086) indicating diverse personal experiences.	Themes of self-consciousness, lack of confidence, and academic pressure. Participants noted discomfort with attire and anxiety about judgment or performance.	Findings are complementary—survey shows diversity of experiences, while interviews reveal root causes (e.g., modesty, academic load).
Parental Constraints	Lowest mean ($M = 1.734 \pm 0.394$); skewed leftward, indicating most respondents agreed to high parental restriction, but with more variability.	Clear theme of lack of encouragement and prioritization of sons’ sports needs over daughters. Some noted being actively discouraged or denied resources.	Findings converge; while not the most intense constraint quantitatively, qualitative data confirm that many families show passive or active discouragement toward girls’ sports involvement.

constraints category, illustrating how internalized gender norms and lack of self-confidence affect participation.

Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

To strengthen the credibility and depth of the research, a triangulation process was conducted, comparing findings from the quantitative data obtained through the Women’s Sports Problem Inventory (WOSPI) and the qualitative data collected via semi-structured interviews. The integration of both data sets offered a comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial barriers limiting Muslim women’s participation in sports in the Sepahijala district of Tripura. The results of this triangulated analysis are presented in Table 6.

The triangulated analysis confirms strong convergence between the quantitative and qualitative findings, particularly in the domains of community and traditional constraints, which consistently emerged as the most significant barriers to sports participation (Table 6). While personal and parental constraints were ranked lower in the quantitative data, the qualitative narratives revealed the nuanced emotional and familial dynamics that contribute to these barriers. Together, these results highlight the multifaceted nature of psycho-social constraints and underscore the value of using mixed methods to capture both the scope and depth of the challenges faced by Muslim women in Tripura.

Discussion

This research sought to explore the impact of cultural sensitivity on the sports participation of Muslim women college students in the Sepahijala district. The results indicate that Muslim women students in Tripura perceive multiple overlapping barriers to sports, with community norms and traditional values emerging as the most salient constraints. Participants consistently pointed to conservative societal expectations, such as strict modesty norms and gender segregation, as major deterrents to engaging in athletics. These socio-cultural constraints were experienced more strongly than personal or family factors, reflecting previous reports that Muslim women in conservative settings often face pronounced cultural resistance to public sports participation [13]. Notably, while parental and family constraints were rated lowest on average, the distribution of responses suggests that many students still perceive some degree of familial limitation, such as an emphasis on academics or conservative dress, even if families are not as prohibitive as the broader community. In summary, all four barrier domains were relevant, but community and traditional influences appeared to be the most intense and pervasive.

Socio-Cultural Constraints (Community and Tradition)

Participants’ comments and response patterns suggest that community and cultural pressures are

dominant. Most respondents described a fear of community disapproval or gossip if women pursued sports, indicating that local norms effectively regulate female mobility and public presence. This finding aligns with recent research showing that Muslim women in traditional communities often struggle to find sports environments compatible with their religious and cultural values [14]. In the present study, community-related barriers had the highest perceived intensity. Although a minority of respondents reported very low community constraints, a sizeable proportion experienced high levels of social pressure. This positive skew, reflected by a long tail of higher values, implies that while some women live in more permissive communities, many still face enforcement of strict gender norms. These norms have been consistently highlighted by other scholars as key barriers to participation, including requirements for modest attire and gender-segregated spaces [15].

Traditional and customary influences likewise emerged as a dominant theme. Most students reported pressure to conform to traditional roles, such as expectations to remain home-oriented, marry young, or avoid activities considered “unladylike.” The roughly symmetrical distribution of traditional constraints in our sample indicates that these norms are widely experienced but vary in intensity. Some participants perceive them strongly, while others report them as moderate. This pattern suggests that for many women, the tension between tradition and sport is a routine concern. In comparable populations, studies have shown that when institutions provide culturally sensitive resources, such as women-only teams or modest sportswear, participation increases [16]. Our participants echoed this finding. They frequently mentioned the need for women-only classes, female coaches, and greater community awareness to make sports more acceptable.

Personal and Familial Factors

By comparison, personal and parental barriers were less uniformly felt. Personal constraints, such as lack of confidence, time management, or motivation, showed the flattest response distribution. In practical terms, this means that personal experiences varied greatly. Some women cited workload or shyness as real obstacles, whereas others felt that self-motivation was not an issue. Such diversity suggests that personal factors are not a universal barrier. Instead, they affect individuals differently depending on their circumstances or sense of self-efficacy. This is consistent with qualitative findings, which indicate that intrapersonal barriers like low motivation or time scarcity appear in some cases but are not as structurally imposed as cultural norms [17]. Parental or family constraints, although lowest in mean intensity, were consistently present

for many respondents. The left-skewed distribution implies that most students acknowledged some form of family-driven limitation, such as parental insistence on modest dress, academic prioritization, or protection of reputation. These familial expectations often overlap with community norms, as families tend to internalize local cultural values. In our sample, several interviewees mentioned supportive but cautious parents, illustrating a broad consensus that family concerns exist even if they are not perceived as the most restrictive barrier. Similar patterns have been identified in other studies. For instance, Indonesian Muslim students reported that lack of family support and strong religious expectations, including modest clothing and traditional gender roles, were significant barriers. They suggested interventions such as female-only spaces and female instructors to help mitigate these challenges [18]. Thus, parental constraints represent an important, though somewhat secondary, facet of the overall picture.

The shape of each domain’s response distribution offers insight into how commonly these barriers are experienced relative to each variable. The community and traditional dimensions showed moderate skewness and near-normal kurtosis, indicating a broad spread of experiences. In practical terms, many women agreed that these were barriers, although individual differences remained evident. The left skew in the parental domain suggests that most women rated parental pressure on the higher side, even though the absolute mean scores were lower. This implies that parental restraint is a widely shared expectation. In contrast, the personal domain’s very flat (platykurtic) distribution indicates no clear consensus. Respondents were almost evenly distributed across the full range of perceived personal constraints, from low to high.

Community and tradition-related barriers tended to cluster at higher levels, highlighting them as common obstacles, while personal barriers were more unevenly distributed, reflecting varied individual circumstances. These patterns suggest that interventions must be broad in scope. Since community and traditional constraints are frequently rated as high, community-wide and culturally targeted strategies are essential. The observed variability also underscores that not all Muslim women in Tripura share the same experience. Some may already feel relatively free of constraints, while others continue to face severe limitations. Recognizing this diversity is important for designing and tailoring effective intervention programs. Our findings are consistent with recent literature on Muslim women’s sports participation [17]. For example, [19] notes that in conservative communities, women often struggle to find sports settings that respect religious values. Similarly, [16] emphasizes that when cultural or religious barriers are addressed through supportive

environments, Muslim women exhibit more positive attitudes toward sports. Several studies also highlight the importance of culturally sensitive interventions. Dedicated women-only facilities and community-based fitness programs that incorporate traditional practices have been shown to help bridge participation gaps.

In fact, [20] report that Muslim women's likelihood of engaging in sports increases significantly when they have access to venues and programs tailored to their preferences. Additionally, qualitative studies with Muslim students highlight the influence of family and community norms. As in our study, Indonesian nursing students identified the lack of family support and religious dress codes as barriers, but also proposed solutions such as private exercise rooms and female coaches [17]. These findings suggest that Muslim women in Tripura might similarly benefit if the sporting environment accommodates their cultural and religious requirements. Overall, the literature supports our interpretation that external socio-cultural factors are the primary inhibitors of participation. Addressing these barriers requires community-centered, rather than exclusively individual-focused, approaches.

Limitation

This study focuses exclusively on Muslim women aged 18 to 24 who are enrolled in government degree colleges in the Sepahijala district. This narrow demographic may not represent the broader population of Muslim women across Tripura or in other regions. Data collection was based on self-reported responses to the Women's Sports Problem Inventory (WOSPI), which may be influenced by social desirability bias or by participants' subjective interpretations of the questions. Limiting the study to a single district reduces the generalizability of the findings to other areas of Tripura or regions with different socio-cultural dynamics. Although the study acknowledges the role of cultural and religious constraints, it does not provide a detailed analysis of how these factors intersect with economic or educational influences that may also shape sports participation. The study identifies perceived barriers but does not include an intervention to address them. It also does not compare regions or communities with different levels of participation among Muslim women. The reliance on quantitative data restricts the depth of insight into the personal and complex experiences of the participants. Incorporating a more comprehensive mixed-methods approach could have strengthened the findings. In addition, the study organizes constraints into four broad dimensions. However, other potentially relevant influences, such as peer dynamics, media exposure, or access to female role models, were not directly examined and may warrant further research.

Conclusions

This study investigated the psychosocial constraints influencing sports participation among Muslim college women in Tripura, using a mixed-methods approach to examine perceived barriers across four dimensions: community environmental, traditional and customary, parental, and personal. Although no statistically significant differences were observed between these domains, descriptive patterns and qualitative narratives consistently identified community norms and traditional values as the most prominent obstacles. Distributional analysis further revealed that, while familial and personal constraints were generally perceived as less intense, they remained meaningful. This was particularly evident in the consistent left-skew in parental responses and the high variability in personal experiences. These findings suggest that all domains contribute to the overall constraint profile, but community and cultural influences are the most widely shared and deeply embedded.

The inclusion of qualitative data added essential context, illustrating how social surveillance, expectations of modesty, and traditional gender roles influence women's decisions to disengage from sports, even in the presence of personal interest. Despite the absence of statistically significant differentiation, the combined evidence highlights the need for multi-level interventions that address both structural and cultural barriers. This study offers important implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and community leaders working in culturally conservative contexts. However, its generalizability is limited by the regional scope and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should expand on this work through comparative, longitudinal, and intervention-based designs to better capture the evolving dynamics of gender, culture, and physical activity among underrepresented populations. By centering the lived experiences of Muslim women, this study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for culturally sensitive approaches to sports. It underscores the importance of aligning program design with both empirical findings and the socio-cultural realities that shape athletic participation.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research was conducted independently, without any financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could be perceived as influencing the outcomes or interpretations presented in this study.

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