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Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Sports Participation in Rural vs Urban Areas in Southern Rajasthan

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on the level of sports participation among individuals living in both rural and urban regions of southern Rajasthan. Employing a quantitative research design, the investigation utilized statistical analysis to examine and compare how people from low, middle, and high socioeconomic backgrounds engage in sports activities within these two environments. Data were gathered from a total of 300 participants through a stratified random sampling method to ensure balanced representation. The analysis revealed a noticeable difference between rural and urban populations, with urban residents showing greater involvement in sports and physical activities. Additionally, socioeconomic status emerged as a key factor affecting the extent of participation across both settings. Individuals from higher SES backgrounds tended to have better access to sports facilities, equipment, and opportunities, whereas lower SES groups faced economic and infrastructural limitations. The research highlights the importance of addressing these disparities through inclusive and community-based sports initiatives. It emphasizes the need for government and institutional interventions to promote equal access to physical education and recreational programs, ultimately encouraging wider participation and fostering a culture of fitness and well-being across all social and economic groups.

Key Words: Sports participation, socioeconomic status, rural vs urban, Rajasthan, statistical analysis etc.

Introduction

Sports serve as a powerful medium for enhancing both physical development and social harmony among individuals. Engaging in athletic activities not only improves strength, endurance, and overall fitness but also nurtures teamwork, discipline, and mutual respect. Despite these well-known benefits, participation in sports is far from equal across different sections of society. A range of socioeconomic and geographical factors—such as income level, access to facilities, educational awareness, and cultural attitudes—shape how and to what extent people get involved in sports.

In this context, Rajasthan presents a particularly interesting case. The state's landscape is marked by a blend of vast rural regions and rapidly growing urban centers, each with distinct lifestyles and opportunities.

While urban areas often provide better access to sports infrastructure, coaching, and organized competitions, rural communities may struggle with limited resources, lack of facilities, and traditional constraints. Understanding these disparities is essential for developing inclusive sports policies and programs. By examining the intersection of social and geographical influences in Rajasthan, this study aims to reveal patterns of participation and identify strategies to promote equitable access to sports opportunities for all, ensuring balanced growth in both physical and social dimensions of life.

Statement of the Problem

Despite government initiatives promoting sports, there is limited empirical evidence explaining how socioeconomic background influences participation levels, especially across rural and urban divides in southern Rajasthan. This

study addresses this gap by systematically analyzing sports engagement across different SES groups.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the overall level and pattern of sports participation among rural and urban populations in southern Rajasthan.
2. To evaluate the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) — including income, education, and occupation — on the extent and frequency of sports participation.
3. To compare differences in sports participation across various SES groups in both rural and urban settings.
4. To analyze gender-based disparities in sports involvement within rural and urban populations.
5. To assess the availability and accessibility of sports infrastructure and facilities in different socioeconomic and geographic contexts.
6. To identify sociocultural factors (family support, peer influence, and community attitudes) that affect participation in sports.
7. To investigate the role of educational institutions and government initiatives in promoting sports participation among different SES groups.
8. To suggest strategies and policy recommendations for improving equitable access to sports opportunities in southern Rajasthan.

Hypotheses

1. **H₀₁ (Null Hypothesis):** There is no significant difference in sports participation based on socioeconomic status (SES) between rural and urban populations of southern Rajasthan.
2. **H₁₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):** There is a significant difference in sports participation based on socioeconomic status (SES) between rural and urban populations of southern Rajasthan.
3. **H₀₂:** There is no significant difference in sports participation between males and females in rural and urban areas.
4. **H₁₂:** There is a significant difference in sports participation between males and females in rural and urban areas.

Research Methodology

Area of Study

The present study was conducted across four districts of southern Rajasthan, namely Udaipur, Banswara, Dungarpur, and Chittorgarh. These districts were purposefully chosen because they represent a diverse socio-economic and cultural mix of both urban and rural populations, providing a comprehensive understanding of regional variations in physical education awareness and sports participation. The region also exhibits a range of infrastructural facilities and community engagement levels in sports, making it an ideal context for comparative analysis.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study sample consisted of 300 respondents, comprising 150 individuals from rural areas and 150 from urban settings across the selected districts. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation of participants from different socio-economic strata (SES) and geographical locations. The strata were defined based on parameters such as income, education, and occupational status. This approach minimized sampling bias and enhanced the representativeness of the data by including diverse socio-economic backgrounds and regional characteristics.

Tools Used for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was designed and standardized for data collection. The instrument consisted of two major sections:

1. **Sports Participation Scale:** Participants' involvement in sports and physical activities was assessed using a 10-point Likert-type scale, where scores ranged from 1 (very low participation) to 10 (very high participation).
2. **Socio-Economic Status (SES) Index:** SES classification was derived from respondents' family income, educational attainment, and occupational category, following standard SES classification frameworks widely adopted in social and educational research.

The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small pilot group to ensure content validity, clarity, and reliability before large-scale administration. Responses were collected through both in-person interviews and self-administered formats, depending on literacy levels and accessibility of participants.

Statistical Tools Used

To analyze the collected data, both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed using SPSS (Version 26.0).

- **Mean and Standard Deviation (SD):** Used to describe the central tendency and dispersion of participants' responses related to sports participation and SES variables.
- **Independent t-test:** Applied to examine mean differences between **urban and rural groups**, highlighting disparities in sports involvement and attitudes toward physical education.
- **Analysis of Variance (ANOVA):** Conducted to evaluate variations among different SES groups and to determine whether socio-economic status significantly influenced levels of physical activity participation.
- **Bar Charts:** Used for **graphical representation** of comparative results, facilitating visual interpretation of trends and group differences.

The combination of these statistical techniques provided a robust analytical framework to draw meaningful inferences regarding the role of socio-economic and geographical factors in shaping sports participation and physical education engagement.

Literature Review

Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized cultural and economic capital as key determinants in shaping individuals' lifestyle preferences, including participation in sports and recreational activities. His theory posits that sports engagement is not solely a matter of personal choice but is significantly mediated by one's social position and access to resources. Individuals from affluent backgrounds often use sports as a means of reinforcing social identity and distinction, whereas those with limited capital may view participation as less accessible or secondary to economic survival.

Expanding on this sociological perspective, Bailey et al. (2005) empirically established a robust link between socio-economic status (SES) and youth participation in sports. Their research revealed that children from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to access structured sports programs, quality coaching, and better facilities. Conversely, youth from disadvantaged families encounter economic barriers, lack of equipment, and minimal institutional support, all of which restrict their sports engagement.

Kumar and Yadav (2019) examined the Indian context and identified stark regional disparities influencing sports development. Their findings emphasized that unequal distribution of infrastructure, insufficient government funding, and policy imbalances between urban and rural areas contribute to uneven progress. As a result, while metropolitan regions thrive with advanced sports ecosystems, rural and backward areas remain underdeveloped, limiting talent identification and grassroots participation.

Meena (2021) further deepened this discourse by focusing on tribal communities in Rajasthan, revealing that geographical isolation, socio-economic marginalization, and cultural perceptions act as key inhibitors of sports participation. The study emphasized that without targeted interventions—such as community sports initiatives and inclusive policies—tribal youth are likely to remain excluded from mainstream sporting opportunities.

Complementing these studies, Coalter (2013) highlighted the role of sports as a social inclusion tool, arguing that equitable access to sports can foster community cohesion and social mobility. Similarly, Green (2008) discussed the institutional and policy frameworks necessary to promote sports development, suggesting that national sports strategies must integrate educational and social policies to bridge participation gaps.

In the South Asian context, Singh and Sharma (2020) explored gender-based disparities in sports participation, showing that cultural norms and traditional attitudes often discourage female involvement in physical activities. Their findings stress the need for gender-sensitive programs that empower women and girls through sports. Likewise, Reddy and Thomas (2022) examined the intersection of sports, caste, and social stratification in rural India, emphasizing that caste-based discrimination continues to hinder equal participation and access to resources.

Recent research by Gupta and Banerjee (2023) also points toward the increasing influence of digital platforms and media exposure in shaping young people's interest in sports. They argue that the growing visibility of sports through online channels is gradually democratizing

access, allowing youth from marginalized regions to aspire toward athletic careers.

Likewise, Ahmed and Roy (2023) examined the impact of government sports schemes on rural participation rates in India. They noted that while initiatives such as *Khelo India* have expanded opportunities, inadequate implementation, lack of monitoring, and infrastructural deficits continue to limit effectiveness. Their study highlighted the need for transparent governance and equitable policy enforcement to achieve long-term development goals.

Finally, Singh and Banerjee (2024) explored the intersection of gender and social inclusion in community-level sports. Their research emphasized that societal attitudes, safety concerns, and traditional gender norms remain key obstacles for women and girls in sports participation, especially in rural and conservative settings.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Descriptive Statistics Table

Socioeconomic Status	Rural Mean Participation	Urban Mean Participation
Low	3.2	4.8
Middle	5.4	6.9
High	7.1	8.3

Fig. 1

As shown, individuals from low-SES backgrounds in rural regions report the lowest mean participation score (3.2), whereas those belonging to high-SES urban groups demonstrate the highest mean score (8.3). This clear gradient suggests that both location and economic status jointly influence engagement levels in sports activities.

A graphical representation of these values (Figure 1) highlights a distinct upward trend across SES categories, with the urban curve consistently positioned above the rural curve, reinforcing the disparity in participation levels between the two population segments.

ANOVA Results

The results of the one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) further substantiate these descriptive findings.

- **F-value (Urban):** 15.23
- **F-value (Rural):** 12.67
- **p-value:** < 0.05 (statistically significant)

The obtained *p*-value below 0.05 confirms a statistically significant difference in mean sports participation among the three SES groups in both urban and rural contexts. The F-values indicate that the variance between groups is considerably higher than the variance within groups, thereby validating the hypothesis that SES exerts a meaningful influence on participation rates.

Interpretation

The ANOVA results suggest that socioeconomic status has a significant and positive relationship with sports participation levels. Participants from higher SES

backgrounds are considerably more engaged in sporting activities compared to their lower SES counterparts. Moreover, the consistent difference between rural and urban groups indicates that location amplifies this relationship — urban residents, irrespective of SES, participate more frequently than those living in rural areas.

This disparity can be attributed to several structural and contextual factors. Urban regions typically offer better access to sports infrastructure, coaching facilities, and organized programs. They also tend to foster greater awareness about the health, educational, and social benefits of sports. Conversely, rural populations, particularly those in low-SES brackets, often lack such opportunities due to inadequate infrastructure, financial limitations, and lower prioritization of recreational activities.

Summary of Findings

The overall analysis demonstrates a clear and consistent association between socioeconomic status and sports participation across both rural and urban environments. Participation rates increase proportionally with improvements in SES, indicating that financial stability, education, and social exposure significantly shape individuals' engagement in sports.

Furthermore, urban residents consistently exhibit higher participation levels across all SES groups, underscoring the advantages conferred by urban settings in terms of accessibility, facility availability, and institutional support. In contrast, rural populations — especially those from low-income backgrounds — remain underrepresented due to limited infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, and lower levels of awareness regarding the benefits of sports participation.

These findings highlight the need for targeted policy interventions aimed at enhancing rural sports infrastructure, providing financial incentives, and promoting awareness programs that encourage participation across all social strata. Ensuring equitable access to sporting opportunities is crucial not only for talent development but also for fostering social inclusion and overall community well-being.

Conclusion

The study concludes that socio-economic status (SES) and geographic location play a crucial role in shaping sports participation in southern Rajasthan. Individuals from urban, high-SES backgrounds exhibit greater involvement in organized sports due to better access to infrastructure, coaching facilities, and supportive community environments. Their participation is often driven by both opportunity and awareness, reflecting how privilege and urbanization intersect to promote engagement.

Conversely, rural populations with lower SES face significant barriers, including inadequate facilities, lack of professional guidance, and limited financial resources. For many, sports remain secondary to daily livelihood concerns, leading to restricted participation and underutilization of potential talent.

This evident disparity underscores the urgent need for inclusive policy measures that enhance sports accessibility for rural and economically disadvantaged groups.

Strategic investments in local infrastructure, community-based training programs, and awareness campaigns can help bridge the existing divide. Promoting equitable opportunities in sports is essential not only for regional athletic development but also for fostering social inclusion and overall community well-being.

Recommendations

- ❖ Improve sports infrastructure, especially in rural and underprivileged areas, to ensure fair participation for everyone.
- ❖ Build accessible sports complexes, community playgrounds, and training centers to discover and develop local talent while reducing regional inequalities.
- ❖ Create sports programs that consider different socio-economic backgrounds, offering incentives, scholarships, and equipment support to include marginalized groups.
- ❖ Encourage collaboration between the government, schools, and private organizations to establish sustainable funding for sports initiatives.
- ❖ Launch awareness campaigns to highlight how sports can improve health, education, and social connections, particularly in low-income communities.
- ❖ These efforts will not only increase participation but also strengthen social bonds, promote empowerment, and support overall community growth.

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