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## Gender inequalities in Polish and international sports organisations

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**Key words:** gender, sports organisations, gender discrimination.

Authors' Contribution:  
A – Study Design  
B – Data Collection  
C – Statistical Analysis  
D – Data Interpretation  
E – Manuscript Preparation  
F – Literature Search  
G – Funds Collection

### Abstract

**Background:** *The aim of this article is to check whether gender inequalities occur in Polish sports organisations and what the scale of those inequalities is in comparison to international organisations. Other aims relate to verification whether there exists a policy to align these inequalities: provisions prohibiting discrimination due to gender, rules and regulations providing women with a specified number of seats in the crucial positions of the organisation and activity of women's sports committees.*

**Material/Methods:** *The study used methods characteristic of sociology, especially methods of examining official documents: on the one hand, information generated by other empirical data from official documents of the organisation; on the other hand, the content analysis of official documents of the organisation. The sample consists of six Polish and six international sports organisations.*

**Results:** *The results of research showed that in Polish sports organisations fewer women work than in international organisations; there are also fewer women in committees and fewer women committees (if they have been established). The content analysis of official documents indicates that international organisations place more pressure on preventing discrimination by using appropriate provisions in the statutes, reserving places for women in committees or paying attention to the language used in documents.*

**Conclusions:** *The findings revealed that Polish sports organisations do not implement the strategy to reduce the degree of discrimination due to gender. They remain blind to issues connected with gender and its influence on the functioning of women in sport and in sports organisations.*

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## Introduction

More than forty years have passed since the time when gender became an important conceptual tool in sports. However, this has not changed the fact that sport remains an institution reproducing hegemonic masculinity [1]. It is organised around male values and it is cut to men's needs. Gender hierarchy occurring in sport is not only a reflection of the situation in the whole society, but it also reinforces and perpetuates the gender order. There is still a conviction that sport is the legitimacy of sex differences, and not the socially constructed relation between sexes. We look at sport not through the prism of hierarchy between sexes, which it plays. It is believed that the maintenance of the category of masculinity and femininity, like in the society, it is main goal of sport [2].

Due to the importance of physicality in sport, discrimination and sexism seem to be perfectly neutralised, and what follows, invisible [3]. The category of gender allows us to understand assumptions concerning sport of women and men and their expected behaviours, attitudes, etc. Similarly, managing sport organisations has nothing in common with biology, and only with social expectations regarding the given gender and its accepted behaviours [4].

Although analyses using gender in sport have already been conducted for a long time, this problem still remains significant and awaits results of scientific inquiries. One of these issues is certainly the matter of gender inequality in collegiate bodies of sports organisations. The second one is the legislation of sports organisations concerning the matter of equal treatment of women and men.

J. Acker indicates that organisations are never gender neutral. They are an important place of locating and reproducing the masculine dominance. "Masculinity" of the organisation is hidden by the concept of the "universal employee", disembodied and without gender [5].

Organisations are undoubtedly gendered. Patterns of behaviours in organisations, the meaning given to work, the common-sense beliefs on the well performed work, control and exploitation of employees, have a gender character. Corporality and sexuality are undoubtedly important parts in controlling work in organisations. According to Acker, the concept of both work and the hierarchy is abstract and torn away from "real" workers. Such a hypothetical worker does not exist. The concept of the disembodied worker, without other obligations and goals than work, is closer to a man, according to the stereotypes "naturally" better predisposed to work, requiring responsibility and important obligations. The described concept of the worker marginalizes women and promotes the values and behaviours characteristic of the concept of masculinity perpetuated in the society.

Rao, Stuart and Kelleher also pay attention to the fact that organisations, as a fundamental form of professional life, not only produce inequalities, but they bring them and strengthen them in other areas of life [6]. They call for changes in deep structures of organisations, without which we cannot talk about the character of organization set for gender equality. According to the authors, the following mechanisms are responsible: valuing heroic individualism, the split between work and family, exclusionary power and monocultures of instrumentality. Shaw and Frisby, accepting the above agreements, call for adding the assumptions of poststructural feminism, and mainly the constant care for the attention to diversity of attitudes and values, which is guaranteed by people from beyond the cultural circle of the Western Europe and the United States [7].

The research shows that despite the growing equality awareness and the gradual growth of the number of working women in sports organisations, efforts to implement changes encounter resistance. Berit Skirstad draws attention to the necessity of convincing men with a strong position in the boards, to their arguments. Building alliances with men, who have real power in organisations, allows the introduction of matters to the order and their proper presentation [8].

Other problems concern the conviction about the "natural" predisposition of men to undertake final decisions in organisations, which limits the influence and, as a consequence, the engagement of women not being able to "break through" with their conclusions [9]. The alleged better predispositions of men to exercise power in organisations results from stereotypes concerning masculinity and femininity. It is believed that women's engagement in work at home makes them unable to devote as much time and energy to work in sports organisations as it would be necessary. At the same time, it is assumed that men do not have so numerous and responsible house duties. This assumption, referring to the category of masculinity and femininity, is the cause of the particular

appreciation of men's work and placing them on crucial positions, with the simultaneous treatment of women's work as less valuable and eliminating them in the process of placement of important positions [10].

Eric D. Anderson shows how the concept of masculine hegemony is reproduced in sports organisations. Hegemony groups of men separate from women and non-heterosexual men are created. This takes place regardless of conducting affirmative actions, the meaning of feminism, their influence on the public sphere [3].

G. Pfister and S. Radke, examining the causes of women resigning from work in sports organisations in Germany, paid attention to the fact that not only stereotypes or official regulations are the cause of diverse career paths of women and men, but also the shaped image of the "ideal leader", for a long time engaged in work and with the competitor's career behind him [11, 12]. Such causes also included the men's unwillingness to share power with women and the men's fear of losing prestige. For this the so-called male alliances excluding women ("old boys' network") and pro-male attitudes of employees during conflict situations were used.

## Material and methods

Gender inequalities occur as a matter of fact in every area of the social life. They also occur in diverse formal organisations, in which discrimination of women and reproduction of beliefs harmful to women take place. An interesting matter is to investigate if these gender inequalities also take place in sports organisations.

The analysis will be conducted from the position of liberal feminism, which, in theory and social practice, is set towards equalising the opportunities of women and men, fair redistribution and elimination of gender inequalities in different areas of social life.

The first purpose of research is to analyze whether there are gender inequalities in the collegial bodies of Polish and international sports organizations. The second one is to analyze whether there is a strategy of reducing potential inequalities and if the existing commissions of women in sport notice the problem of inequality. Moreover, the recognition of language which is used in official documents in terms of its neutrality and the ban on discrimination due to gender were analysed.

Methods characteristic of sociology, specifically methods of researching official documents were used in the research. On the one hand, the empirical data generated by others were used, which are in official documents, reports and statistics of sports organisations. On the other hand, data obtained as a result of the content analysis of official documents (statutes, disciplinary codes, codes of ethics) of sports organisations were analysed. The content analysis was based on the assumption about the language performativity and about the fact that the language is not a neutral and transparent means of communication [13].

This paper assumes a critical approach to knowledge, concepts of the cultural and historical changeability and the assumption of social constructivism, concerning the fact that knowledge is socially constructed. This type of analysis requires great sensitivity in reference to the language of the researched text, paying attention not only to what and how it is described in documents, but also what is missing (division into manifest and latent contents). Such an approach allows us to determine the attitude of the authors of documents to the matter of gender equality.

The sample includes six Polish and six international sports organisations. These are the associations of football and basketball, boxing and ice-hockey and gymnastics and athletics. The purposive sampling considers the collision disciplines, contact and non-contact ones, as well as individual and team disciplines. This choice was dictated by the need of taking into consideration sports disciplines considered as masculine or feminine, which may cause a different look and care for matters connected with the balance of gender in sport and the functioning of sports organisations. Data were collected between September and December of 2012 based on the websites of sports organisations.\*

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\* [www.iaaf.org](http://www.iaaf.org), [www.aiba.com](http://www.aiba.com), [www.fiba.com](http://www.fiba.com), [www.fig-gymnasics.com](http://www.fig-gymnasics.com), [www.iihf.com](http://www.iihf.com), [www.pzpn.pl](http://www.pzpn.pl), [www.pzkosz.pl](http://www.pzkosz.pl), [www.pzla.pl](http://www.pzla.pl), [www.pzb.com.pl](http://www.pzb.com.pl), [www.pzg.pl](http://www.pzg.pl), [www.pzhl.org.pl](http://www.pzhl.org.pl)

## Results

### Gender inequalities in collegial bodies of the selected sports organisations

Results indicated that more women worked in international than in Polish sports organisations (Table 1). In Polish organisations the greatest number of women worked in the organisations representing a discipline considered to be feminine – the Polish Gymnastics Association (56%). The second organisation in this respect was the Polish Association of Ice-Hockey (9%). In the remaining organisations women had less than 10% of places on boards, commissions, committees or other departments having influence on the organisation's functioning.

In the international sports organisations there is also a visible difference between the percentage of the working women representing disciplines considered as feminine and those considered as masculine, although it is not too big. The greatest number of women works in FIG – 37%. In IAAF, AIBA, FIBA women exceeded the threshold of 10%.

Tab. 1. Women in collegial bodies of the selected sports organisations (in %)

Name of the organisation	Women on boards' presidium, boards and committees (in %)	Women on boards' presidium (in %)	Women on boards (in %)	Women on women's committees (in %)
1	2	3	4	5
FIFA Federation Internationale de Football Association	6	0	6	80
FIBA Federation de Internationale de basket-ball	14	0	28	27
IAAF International Association of Athletics Federations	22	0	23	86
AIBA Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur	12	0	0	87
FIG Federation Internatinal de Gimnastique	37	23	33	-----
IIHF International Ice Hockey Federation	8	0	20	50
PZPN Polish Football Association	5	0	0	23
PZKosz Polish Basketball Association	0	0	0	no committee
PZLA Polish Track & Field Association	2	0	0	no committee
PZB Polish Boxing Association	0	0	0	no committee
PZG Polish Gymnastics Association	56	40	no data	-----
PZHL Polish Ice Hockey Association	9	13	no data	40

In Polish sports organisations in presidiums of the boards and boards less women work than in their international equivalents. In international organisations only on the board of the boxing association there are no women. In Polish organisations women are only in PZG and PZHL. Taking into account that the boards are the most important collegial bodies running the organisation's activity, determining the policy and priorities, the lack of women or their small number may indicate the small influence of women on the functioning of the organisation. They are not able to propose topics characteristic of women's sport, to care for the equality politics and to prevent discrimination or sexism.

It is also essential whether women sport committees were established in the organisation. The establishment of such committees may prove the gender issues and the awareness of the fact that women's point of view does not have to coincide with the men's one. Thus they need male or female activists who will support the development of women sport and care for the women-friendly

atmosphere in sport. Because sport remains a very masculine institution of social life, performing the hegemonic masculinity, introducing men into the feeling of power and dominance [14, 15] and marginalizing women, it stabilizes the traditional, hierarchic gender order.

In the society, there is still a conflict between the traditional terms of femininity and sport. Women doing sport often meet with harmful stereotypes and trivialization of own achievements [16, 17, 18]. Therefore, it is very important that the organisation has teams responsible for the improvement of the women's situation in sport. All international organisations have committees of women's sport. FIG and PZG are not described, because they have separate committees for women's gymnastics. In other international organisations, committees of women's sport are characterised by a great number of women working there (even in comparison with the percentage of women on the boards and presidiums of the boards).

In Polish sports associations the committees of women's sport are only present in PZPN and PZHL. This may indicate a small gender awareness and the inability to notice the problems with which the women struggle in sport. In comparison with international organisations, a much smaller percentage of women sits on committees of women's sport, which may cause difficulties with forcing the "friendly" solutions for women, considered as unimportant. A part of the issues connected with the improvement of the functioning of women in sport may be easier to understand for women, who experience the objectification, sexist language or sexual harassment. Although not only women are the victims of such practices, they tend to experience them more often.

### **Gender inequalities in the legislation of the selected sports organisations**

The content analysis of the official documents placed on websites of sports organisations allows stating significant differences in the international rules and regulations (constitution, statutes, code of ethics, disciplinary codes) and Polish organisations (statutes, disciplinary regulations, sport ones). In all international documents of sports organisations one may find both sentences about the prohibition of any discrimination and about the neutrality of the organisation.

3. Discrimination of any kind against a country, private person or group of people on account of ethnic origin, gender, language, religion, politics or any other reason is strictly prohibited and punishable by suspension or expulsion.

(Statute, FIFA 2012, General provision)

3. To encourage participation in Athletics at all levels throughout the world regardless of age, gender or race.  
(IAAF Constitution, Article 3.)

4. To strive to ensure that no gender, race, religious, political or other kind of unfair discrimination exists, continues to exist, or is allowed to develop in Athletics in any form, and that all may participate in Athletics regardless of their gender, race, religious or political views or any other irrelevant factor.

(IAAF Constitution, Article 3.)

1.3. FIBA maintains absolute political and religious neutrality and does not tolerate any form of discrimination.

(FIBA Constitution, Article 1.)

d. Formulate or adopt and implement appropriate policies in relation to discrimination, sexual harassment, equal opportunity, equity, drugs and doping, health, safety, infectious diseases, and such other matters as arise from time to time as issues to be addressed in basketball;

(FIBA Constitution, Article 4, Mission and Role)

Such records occur both in statutes and constitutions of the organisations as well as in codes of ethics or disciplinary regulations. This proves the understanding of the matter and sensitivity to the gender issues. In the Polish sport organisations, only in the PZPN statute there is a relevant provision about the ban on discrimination. Neutrality was also declared.

§ 1. PZPN is the sports association, neutral in terms of politics, religion, ethics and race.

§ 2. Any discrimination of the country, unit or group of people in relation to the organisation or football due to ethics, gender, language, religion, political beliefs or any other reason is clearly forbidden under threat of disciplinary sanctions, including the suspension or exclusion from the Association.

(PZPN Statute, Article 7, Neutrality and lack of discrimination)

In no other statute can we find references to the ban on discrimination not only due to gender, but also any other inherited or acquired feature.

It is also crucial to show that organisations do not accept any forms of sexual harassment (in coach-player relations, but also within the very sports organisations). Harassment often causes somatic, mental and social ailments in people who became victims of such practices. These are often the cause of leaving work and abandoning sports careers. Due to personal and prestige reasons, a great number of harassment cases is not reported, which causes the feeling of helplessness and weakness in people who are the victims. [19]. Therefore, it is important to get a clear signal of opposition towards such offence from the organisation.

3. Nonviolence, including abstaining from any kind of pressure and harassment, whether physical, mental, professional or sexual.

(Code of ethics, Article 2, AIBA)

3. All form of harassment, be the physical, mental, professional or sexual are strictly prohibited.

(Code of ethics, Point B: Dignity, IAAF)

4. Physical, moral, professional or sexual harassment is prohibited.

(Code of ethics, Point A: Respect and human dignity, FIG)

2. Harassment is forbidden. Harassment is defined as systematic, hostile and repeated acts for a considerable duration, intended to isolate or ostracise a person and affect the dignity of the person.

A significant difference between Polish and international organisations can also be seen in the pressure which they put on the description of the values motivating their activity. Codes of ethics of all the studied international organisations draw attention to the mutual relations between the players, coaches and activists. The initial part of codes is always the explanation of the reasons for placing the specified values. Solidarity and equality is stressed several times in them.

On the websites of Polish sports associations there are no codes of ethics. There are disciplinary regulations and sports regulations, which regulate the matters of transfers and licenses. Even the regulations of rivalry (PZKosz) do not regulate the issue of the behaviours of players and coaches, and only the issues of club membership. In no regulations violations connected with gender are specified: sexual harassment, sexism, discrimination due to gender. Disciplinary punishments concern: "supposed breaches of the common law or rules of the sports rivalry" (Regulations of rivalry, Paragraph 99, PZKosz).

Disciplinary regulations of PZPN mention only "threats or violence", as the behaviours subject to punishments (Article 72, Chapter III, Non-sport behaviours), and the disciplinary regulations of PZB constitutes: "Disciplinary responsibility in boxing is taken for the breach of provisions of the Statute of the Polish Boxing Association, regulations and other rules applicable in this sport, including the rules of International Boxing Association (AIBA), European Boxing Confederation (EUBC), European Boxing Union (EBU) and other federations of professional boxing, where PZB is the member, and also resolutions, orders and decisions issued by the entitled bodies of PZB" (Paragraph 2., Chapter II, General Provisions). Describing certain violations in more detail (doping, violation of body inviolability, bribery), there is no mention of the characteristic violations connected with gender.

Another important matter refers to the language which was used to write documents of sports organisations. Accepting the assumption about the performativity of language and about the fact that it is not transparent and neutral, the attention was paid to whether the feminine gender was included in texts or whether the gender neutrality was applied. Such neutrality is only feigned, because such an expression as "sportsmen" in a clear way refers to the specified gender. This gives an impression that documents concern only men and were written while thinking only about them.

Similarly, using the expressions like “chairmen” instead of “chairperson” may suggest that these functions are reserved only for men. Using only the masculine gender in official documents of organizations may marginalize women, maintaining the stereotype that sport is the manly bastion and men are its main heroes. Writing texts only in the masculine gender makes the masculinity be perceived as universal and superior.

All the studied international sports organisations include a clause that the written language of documents refers to both genders.

Note 1: All references to the masculine gender shall also include references to the feminine and all references to the singular shall also include references to the plural.

(IAAF Constitution, Article 2, Definitions)

NB: Terms referring to natural persons are applicable to both genders. Any term in the singular applies to the plural and vice-versa.

(FIFA, Constitution, General Provisions, Definitions)

These regulations apply equally to both genders, and all references in this text to male players (he, his, and him) shall be considered to apply also to female players and shall be read accordingly.

(FIVB Internal Regulations, Chapter I, Introductory Principles, Definitions)

c) Words referring to the masculine gender shall also include the female gender

d) Words referring to persons shall include corporate bodies

(FIG, Statutes, Interpretation)

In documents of Polish organisations there are no statements proving the understanding of the problem connected with the language sexism. Documents are written in the masculine gender and make an impression as if they referred only to men. For example, chapter IV of the Regulations of the PZB health care is devoted only to women but written in a masculine gender. The only exception is the Regulations of the methodical-educational committee for women’s gymnastics, which includes feminine endings of names. This is the only document which marks that it refers to women’s sport. The PZG statute is in the masculine gender and does not include any clause concerning the equality in the written language.

The next studied issue concerns the provisions regarding the presence of women in the most important collegial bodies. If in the bodies determining the strategy of development or the division of money there are no women, then it is probable that their interests will not be properly represented. The problems of women in sport differ from problems of men, their positions and establishment in sport are not identical. So it is crucial to take care of proper representation of women on the boards, presidiums of the boards and committees. The issue of special provisions providing the women with places in organisations is very controversial.

There are positions showing that the actions aiming at the elimination of discrimination of women on the labour market do not bring the desired effect and at the same time favour the creation of stereotypes concerning the lesser resourcefulness of women. There are also positions showing that we cannot create a balanced labour market without special actions for the employment of women on crucial positions.

In 1984 the Council of Europe accepted the assumption about the promotion of affirmative action for women. Since that time there have been attempts to change the position of women, also by the introduction of quotas [20]. In sport, the traditional bastion of masculinity, such changes are difficult to conduct, which is proven for instance by the work of Skirstad on the pace of changes of the gender politics in sports organisations of Norway, the country known for a very positive relation to women in sport [8].

Four out of six international sport organisations included in their documents records about assurance of places for women in important collegial bodies.

1. The Executive Committee consists of 25 members: 1 President, elected by the Congress, 8 vice-presidents, 1 Representative of Women’s Football, elected by the Congress, and 15 members, appointed by the Confederations and Associations.

3. The Representative of Women's Football shall be elected by the Congress. The Representative of Women's Football shall be a woman. The mandate shall be for a period of four years, beginning after the end of the Congress at which the Representative of Women's Football was elected.

(FIFA Statut, V Organisation, Article 30, Composition, election of the President and the Representative of Women's Football, vice-presidents and members)

(d) Individual Members of Council

Congress shall first elect the number of female members which is needed to guarantee a minimum of six female members in the Council in accordance with Article 6.4. In order to be registered as voting, each Member shall vote for this number of female candidates, no more and no less.

Congress shall proceed to elect female members in all Committees, with the exception of the Women's Committee for which the male members shall be elected. Following the election of the Chairperson and the gender-appropriate members for each Committee, Congress shall proceed to elect the remaining individual members. There shall be a minimum of three female members in the Technical Committee and a minimum of two female members in all other Committees (with the exception of the Women's Committee). There shall be a minimum of two male members in the Women's Committee. If in the election of the Chairperson which precedes the vote for members, a female is elected, the minimum number of female individual members for which Members must vote will be reduced to two in the Technical Committee and one in all other Committees (with the exception of the Women's Committee). If in the election of the Chairperson of the Women's Committee a male is elected, the minimum number of male individual members for which Members must vote will be reduced to one.

(IAAF Constitution, Proceedings of Congress, Article 25 Elections)

15.1.5. Both genders must be represented on the Central Board and each Zone must designate at least one (1) person of each gender. Non-compliance with this provision will result in one (1) position remaining vacant.

(FIBA, Statute, Article 15, the Central Board and the Treasurer)

The Council shall consist of 13 voting members of which two must be female members incorporating: the President; three Vice-Presidents; nine other members; and the General Secretary (non-voting member).

(IIHF, Statute, Article 41. Council composition, III. Bodies of the IIHF)

After the election of President and Vice Presidents, if no female has been elected to those respective position(s), then the next ballot will elect only female candidates to meet the required minimum of two female candidates. Any female candidates not so elected are entitled to participate in the next ballot.

(IIHF, Statute, Article 44, Elections, III. Bodies of IIFH)

Although none of the quoted provisions guarantee equality in the access to the most important positions in organisations, we can interpret them as the expression of understanding that the number of women working in the organisation is important from the point of view of the efficiency of the organisation's action.

Polish sports organisations do not have appropriate provisions. Only PZPN refers to the issue of the presence of people connected with women's football in the most important collegial bodies of the organisation, granting the committee of women's football two seats for the General Assembly (118 people) and allowing the selection of one candidate to the boards and the audit committee (Article 21 and 22, PZPN Statute).

No committee of women's sport, no rules and regulations about the ban on discrimination and the ban on language sexism indicates the lack of interest in gender equality in sport. Increasing the number of women working in organisations could increase the sensitivity to gender issues, bring a different look and show the female perspective.

In international organisations we can see a greater awareness of discrimination of women in sport. On the websites of international sports organisations women were given more space for description of the history of women sport (IIHF), programs of the development of women sport (FIFA), health values of sport for women (AIBA, FIFA) and the missions and strategies of development, taking into consideration the development of women's sport (FIBA, FIFA, AIBA). Functioning of a women's sport committee is on the one hand a sign of understanding of gender issues, and on the

other hand it is a place where all characteristic problems of women may be discussed and may meet friendly acceptance.

Provisions about the ban on discrimination, sexual harassment and language sexism constitute the base of further actions and are the expression of understanding the problem as well as the point of departure for taking actions which aim at eliminating gender inequalities in all areas of sport.

Tab. 2. Gender characteristics of the legislation of the selected sports organisations

Name of the organisation	Ban on discrimination due to gender	Ban on sexual harassment	Language used in documents refers to the masculine and feminine gender	Reservation of places in collegial bodies of the organisation for women
FIFA	yes	yes	yes	yes
FIBA	yes	yes	yes	yes
IAAF	yes	yes	yes	yes
AIBA	yes	yes	yes	-
FIG	yes	yes	yes	-
IIHF	yes	-	yes	yes
PZPN	yes	-	-	-
PZKosz	-	-	-	-
PZLA	-	-	-	-
PZB	-	-	-	-
PZG	-	-	-	-
PZHL	-	-	-	-

## Conclusions

In Polish sports associations there are fewer women than in international associations. Women also take less important positions. The analysis of documents may indicate that in Polish sports organisations there is no awareness of discrimination against women in sport and of the necessity of changes in this area. Avoiding the situation of women in sport is also the choice of the specified gender politics.

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