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## A Comparative Analysis of Men's and Women's Sports Coverage in Pakistani Dailies

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### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine and compare the representation of men's and women's sports coverage in prominent Pakistani newspapers. The primary objective was to identify patterns of gender bias in the quantity, tone, framing, and visual portrayal of athletes and to assess whether media narratives reinforce traditional gender roles. It aimed to determine how media institutions in Pakistan present male and female athletes differently, and what implications such portrayals carry for gender equity in sports journalism and the broader public perception of female athletes.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The research focused on three widely circulated Pakistani newspapers: Dawn (English), Jang (Urdu), and The News International (English). A total of 32 sports-related articles were selected over a three-month period, covering October to December 2024. Theoretical frameworks including Framing Theory, Feminist Media Theory, and Social Role Theory were applied to critically assess how media constructs gender roles through sports coverage.

**Keywords:** Sports Journalism, Gender Representation, Pakistani Media, Male vs. Female Athletes

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### INTRODUCTION

Physical activities play a vital role in people's emotional, mental, psychological, social, and physical development. Despite general agreement with this concept, many societies have not yet guaranteed equal rights and opportunities for men and women in sport and exercise. Due to cumulative and diverse working

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environments, sports professionals need to understand how different social and cultural factors can influence individuals. Scholars emphasize that the consequences of not participating in physical activities are not acceptable globally Ahmed Laar, R., Shi, S., & Ashraf, M. A. (2019).

Newspapers have an important role in establishing the position of sports in journalism. However, there is a difference of opinion among the scholars as to which magazine published the sports news first. The history of modern sports journalism began in the early 1800s. However, the first mentions of sports news in publications were found in the seventeenth century (Shiva Gautam, 2024).

A paradox exists at the heart of sports journalism. On one hand, it has over the years often been viewed as the poor relation within journalism, lacking the integrity that journalists often like to associate with their self-image. Sports journalism has been characterized as a form of “soft” journalistic practice, without the rigour and credibility of other forms of “hard” journalism. It was an area of journalism that was viewed as an uncritical booster and promoter of sport and its culture rather than a sector that called the powerful in sport to account. It was a journalism that was more often going to ask the easy and banal question, rather than the penetrating and pertinent one Boyle, R. (2017).

The longitudinal analysis of news coverage of women’s sports to provide a window into how sexism operates during a postfeminist sociohistorical moment. As the gender order has shifted to incorporate girls’ and women’s movement into the masculine realm of sports, coverage of women’s sports has shifted away from overtly denigrating coverage in 1989 to ostensibly respectful but lackluster coverage in 2014. To theorize this shift, we introduce the concept of “gender-bland sexism,” a contemporary gender framework that superficially extends the principles of merit to women in sports. Televised news and highlight shows frame women in uninspired ways, making women’s athletic accomplishments appear lackluster compared to those of men’s. Because this “bland” language normalizes a hierarchy between men’s and women’s sports while simultaneously avoiding charges of overt sexism, it contributes to gender theory by illuminating how women can be marginalized in male-dominated, male-controlled settings via individualized merit-based assessments of talent Musto, M., Cooky, C., & Messner, M. A. (2017).

Women's participation in sports has increased significantly over the years, yet they still face various challenges and barriers that limit their full participation and representation in sports. Gender analysis of women's sports is necessary to identify and address these challenges and to promote gender equality in sports Tabasum, T., Khan, S. A., Khan, B. B., Kazim, N., & Kazim, A. (2024). In Pakistan, sports have not been accorded due importance, which has had a negative impact on the country’s youth. Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) is a popular way to address variety of social issues, especially in regions afflicted by negative tendencies. Pakistan is globally tagged for negativity since there is a dearth of literature that corroborates its positive aspects. This country has been a world champion in four sports, and its gloom-ridden image has overshadowed such positive aspects of Pakistan Khan, M.

W., Shafi, D. K. M., & Niaz, M. T. (2024).

The marginalization of women in sports media does not only affect female athletes and women's sports. As North (2012) noted, the same newsroom culture that ignores women's sports similarly privileges male reporters over female reporters. This is apparent when considering the low employment rates of women in sports media Schmidt, H. C. (2017). Sports journalism departments routinely promote and reinforce a bias in favor of men and male sports (Hardin & Shain, 2005). The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) recorded the fourth consecutive "F" for gender hiring practices at APSE (Associated Press Sports Editors) newspapers and websites in its 2014 Associated Press Sports Editors Racial and Gender Report Card Laucella, P. C., Hardin, M., Bien-Aimé, S., & Antunovic, D. (2016).

According to Fink (2015), "female athletes and women's sport are still woefully underrepresented in all types of media". Women are 40% of all sport participants, but receive only 4% of all sports media coverage Laucella, P. C., Hardin, M., Bien-Aimé, S., & Antunovic, D. (2016).

This study investigated the development of the legacies of the five World Conferences on Women and Sport that have been convened by the International Working Group on Women and Sport from 1994 to 2010. In particular, it examined the ways in which gender is constructed in these legacies in relation to gender equality in sport leadership (Johanna & Claringbould, 2016).

Patriarchal language, gendered stereotypes and person-profiling still persist, resulting in specific emotional and practical challenges for women in sports leadership positions. The reflective panel recognised an over-representation of studies from a liberal 'Western' tradition that conceptualises gender inequity in a specific socio-cultural and political way (Adam, 2020).

Women's participation in sports and physical activities lags behind that of men, particularly among members of underrepresented or marginalized groups. Pakistani women from the rural areas of southern Punjab represent one such group. The aim of this study was to examine how traditional sports that are less well-known outside the Indian subcontinent offer opportunities for marginalized Pakistani women from Southern Punjab to participate in physical activities Hussain, U., & Cunningham, G. B. (2021). Women's participation in physical activities has always been characterized as "problematic." Muslim women's participation is often considered to be limited by their culture and religion, which also affects their attitude toward physical activities. The purpose of this study is to explore the news coverage of participation and perceived constraints of Pakistani female students in physical activities, using a feminism-in-sports approach Ahmed Laar, R., Shi, S., & Ashraf, M. A. (2019).

### **Research Objectives**

- To Analyze the implications of the findings for gender equity in sports media.
- To Determine how the coverage patterns might influence public perceptions of female athletes and the broader issues related to gender equality in sports.

- To Investigate whether there have been any noticeable trends or changes in the coverage of women's sports over time. This includes examining if there have been improvements or worsening in the representation of female athletes in recent years.

### **Research Hypotheses**

H0: There is no significant difference in the coverage of men's and women's sports in Pakistani dailies.

H1: There is significant difference in the coverage of men's and women's sports in Pakistani dailies.

Ho: Pakistani dailies don't perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes in their coverage of men's and women's sports.

H1: Pakistani dailies do perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes in their coverage of men's and women's sports.

Ho: The tone, language, and content of sports news articles do not differ significantly between men's and women's sports in Pakistani dailies.

H1: The tone, language, and content of sports news articles do differ significantly between men's and women's sports in Pakistani dailies.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Sports journalism is a vital constituent of any news media association. Socio-political importance of sports journalism is always very obvious. Since the beginning of the 21st century, media convergence has been one of the most studied topics among journalism and mass communication scholars Ittefaq, M., Ejaz, W., & Sheikh, A. M. (2022). In the context of Pakistan, Jamil (2020b) argues journalism practice has been overwhelmed with the effects of technological innovations. Challenges include limited technical and financial resources and strict legal frameworks.

Through a case study of the International Olympic Committee from 1995-2015, trace how the organization came to define gender equity primarily in terms of accommodating women's segregated athletic participation. This enhance the key to this was the construction of women's bodies as athletically able but inferior to men, an arrangement formalized in codified rules and procedures and legitimized by external stakeholders (Madeleine Pape,2020).

In Pakistan, many religious scholars do not encourage female participation in sporting activities, especially when events are in public or together with male participants. It is regarded as disgraceful and immodest if a female participant competes publicly with male participants in any sporting activity (Iqbal & Rajput, 2008). However, Islam does not condemn such activities, as long as women are in proper attire and there is no intermingling of the sexes Ahmed Laar, R., Shi, S., & Ashraf, M. A. (2019).

### **Sports Coverage In European Events**

Sports have always played an important role in society, notably in establishing a sense of fairness and harmony among warring nations. The 1896 Olympic Games were intended to unite war-torn nations and reject the concept of

harming one's fellow human beings. "Forward, Together, and Stronger" is the motto of the Olympic Games Khan, M. W., Shafi, D. K. M., & Niaz, M. T. (2024).

In the United States, women's sports coverage accounts for just 1.5% of televised sports programming and 5.7% of newspaper sports articles. Similarly, in other countries with large English-language media markets, like the United Kingdom and Australia, less than 10% of television sports reports, and even fewer newspaper sports articles, focus on women's sports Schmidt, H. C. (2017).

The women's liberation movement in the early 1970s helped launch significant changes in women's positions in American society. The fight for gender equity resulted in a number of anti-discrimination laws, access to previously male-dominated professions, and increased opportunities for career advancement. Yet even with such progress, media representation of female athletes and employment opportunities for female sports journalists still do not fully reflect the sizable growth in participation rates Laucella, P. C., Hardin, M., Bien-Aimé, S., & Antunovic, D. (2016).

Men's club football as an "extremely gendered" organization to explain the underrepresentation of women leaders within the industry. By analyzing women's leadership work over a 30-year period, we find that women's inclusion has been confined to a limited number of occupational areas. These areas are removed, in terms of influence and proximity, from the male players and the playing of football Bryan, A., & Rankin-Wright, A. J. (2021).

Women face gender stereotypes and are considered to be weaker and submissive. Allowing women to participate in sport seemed as a challenge for male dominance (Messner 1988). Therefore, to ensure male superiority, women were not allowed to the stadium to view the Ancient Greek Olympics. Most modern day ideology regarding inequality stems from Ancient Greece Ahmed Laar, R., Shi, S., & Ashraf, M. A. (2019).

The international newspaper coverage the 2013 European Basketball Championship for men. Generalist broadsheet newspapers in 13 countries on five continents to understand the amount and content of coverage dedicated to this major event. The host country, Slovenia, dedicated the most extensive coverage to the EuroBasket, followed by Croatia, a neighboring country. Media interest in other countries was very limited and focused almost exclusively on competitive aspects of the tournament (as opposed to organizational, tourist, or cultural angles). As setters of the public agenda, mainstream broadsheets exhibit very limited interest in the myriad major sports events organized worldwide. Hosting such events are not by default the promotional and economic boon organizers argue and the public believes Ličen, S., Lončar, M., & Jakubowska, H. (2017)

### **Sports Coverage In Asian Events**

Journalism began to evolve in South Asia in the 18th century. The first newspaper in this region was published in 1780 as Bengal Gazette. James Augustus Hicky was the publisher of the newspaper and it was also known as Hicky Bengal Gazette or Calcutta General Advertiser (Shiva Gautam, 2024).

In Pakistan, it is ridden with challenges for the youth. As per the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, only 7% of Pakistani youth take part in sports, whereas 93% are denied access to sports facilities Khan, M. W., Shafi, D. K. M., & Niaz, M. T. (2024).

Newspapers' coverage of sports events often extends beyond just reporting matches to include broader "narratives of nationalism and identity." This phenomenon is particularly evident in the context of the ACC Asia Cup 2023, where cricket matches involving teams from Nepal, India, and Pakistan are not just sporting contests but also vehicles for "national pride and political sentiment." The issue at hand is how newspapers from these countries The Kathmandu Post (Nepal), The Times of India (India), and Dawn (Pakistan), frame their coverage of the tournament. This framing can either foster a spirit of sportsmanship or exacerbate jingoistic tendencies among readers (Shiva Gautam, 2024).

Kho-Kho is also a contact team sport; however, it is mostly played indoors by women. Further, Kho-Kho is perceived as a recreational sport. Nine players from each team take the field in a Kho-Kho match. Out of nine players, one player is an active chaser, whereas others are defenders. In Kho-Kho, the active chaser knocks out other team opponents by touching them, whereas the defenders have to avoid being touched while trying to move the active chaser out of the defined field. Kho-Kho was also played even before the Mahabharata (one of the oldest religious Hinduism books) was written Hussain, U., & Cunningham, G. B. (2021).

Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Brunei did not introduce women into their teams until the 2012 Olympic Games, because of Islamic dress codes. Kuwaiti women are influenced by their culture, which prevents them from participating in sport activities and leading a public life Ahmed Laar, R., Shi, S., & Ashraf, M. A. (2019). The media industry in Pakistan is diverse in nature. It provides information and entertainment and is a source of livelihood to more than 2.5 million people (Rehmat, 2019). Pakistan has more than 88 television channels, 209 radio stations, and around 1,800 newspapers in 8 different languages Ittefaq, M., Ejaz, W., & Sheikh, A. M. (2022). Cricket's rise in East Bengal was gradual until the 1950s and 1960s when first-class and Test cricket were introduced in East Pakistan. Bangladesh gained independence in 1971, but it took some time for people to become interested in cricket.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A mixed-method content analysis was employed to assess sports news coverage over a three-month period (October–December 2024). The study focused on articles, editorials, and sports columns that featured men's and women's sports.

### **Sample Newspapers**

1. Dawn – English-language daily with nationwide readership
2. Jang – One of Pakistan's most widely circulated Urdu newspapers
3. The News International – A major English daily

The sample selection ensured linguistic and regional diversity, allowing insights into whether language and cultural context affect gender portrayal in sports journalism.

### Units of Analysis

Each article was coded based on:

- Gender focus (male/female)
- Article length and placement
- Tone (positive/neutral/negative)
- Language (performance-based or appearance-focused)
- Presence and type of images
- Framing techniques

The data collection process will involve the systematic gathering of articles from the selected newspapers. Using the archives of the newspapers, articles related to sports events within the three-month period will be selected. The criteria for selection will include the presence of sports-related content, specifically articles that focus on either male or female athletes or both.

### Coding the Articles

Each selected article will be assigned a code based on the categories in the coding scheme. Two researchers will independently code the articles to ensure inter-coder reliability. Discrepancies between coders will be resolved through discussion and consensus.

### Categorizing Data

Once the articles are coded, the data will be organized into categories for both quantitative analysis (such as frequency counts, article length, prominence of coverage) and qualitative analysis (such as tone, framing, and language).

To ensure **reliability**, the coding process will be conducted by two independent coders who will follow the coding scheme to categorize the data. The inter-coder reliability will be tested using **Cohen’s Kappa coefficient**, which measures the agreement between the two coders. A Kappa value of 0.80 or above will be considered acceptable for this study. To ensure **validity**, the coding scheme will be reviewed by a panel of experts (including professors in media studies) to ensure that it accurately captures the key elements needed to address the research questions. Any adjustments to the scheme will be made based on their feedback.

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Findings of my Articles, Columns and Editorials are given below, here firstly we find frequency of Articles, Columns and Editorials . All variables are categorical. So, we find only percentage.

**Table 4.1: Finding Percentage**

	Category			Cumulative Percent
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Valid	8	25.0	25.0	25.0

15 male squad	1	3.1	3.1	28.1
20 man and 10 woman participated	1	3.1	3.1	31.3
4 team, 12 matches	1	3.1	3.1	34.4
7-nation tournament	1	3.1	3.1	37.5
8 man won and 10 women won	1	3.1	3.1	40.6
86 men and 79 women participated	1	3.1	3.1	43.8
Female category	1	3.1	3.1	46.9
In man 10 category, while in woman 9 category	1	3.1	3.1	50.0
Male and Female category	1	3.1	3.1	53.1
Male and female category	1	3.1	3.1	56.3
Male category	9	28.1	28.1	84.4
Male Category	1	3.1	3.1	87.5
Male Category	1	3.1	3.1	90.6
Man and woman category	1	3.1	3.1	93.8
Man category , 19-match	1	3.1	3.1	96.9
Men's includes 64 players while 32 women	1	3.1	3.1	100.0
Total	32	100.0	100.0	

A total of **32 cases (articles, columns, editorials)** were analyzed. Of these, the majority focused on **male sports categories**:

- **Male category only:** 28.1% (9 out of 32 articles)
- **Mixed male and female:** Around 15.6% collectively
- **Female-only coverage:** Very limited, with just **one instance**

This confirms the first hypothesis (H1): **There is a significant difference in the coverage of men's and women's sport**

<b>Table 4.2: Chi-Square Tests</b>			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	488.296 <sup>a</sup>	448	.092
Likelihood Ratio	145.167	448	1.000
N of Valid Cases	32		

- a. 493 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5.
- b. The minimum expected count is .03.

The results shows:

- **Pearson Chi-Square Value:** 488.296
- **Degrees of Freedom (df):** 448
- **P-value (Asymptotic Significance):** 0.092

According to the hypothesis perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes and coverage of men's and women's sports. There is an insignificant association between these two variables. Since the p-value > 0.05, the result is **not statistically significant** at the 5% level. However, the **assumptions of the Chi-square test were violated, 100% of cells** had expected counts less than 5. This makes the statistical result **unreliable** or **inconclusive**. Meaning: While the Chi-square test didn't find statistical significance, the data quality (small sample size) affected the outcomes.

## DISCUSSION

This study reveals a persistent gender imbalance in the coverage of sports news within Pakistani print media. Male athletes overwhelmingly dominate newspaper sports sections, both in terms of frequency and prominence. Female athletes, by contrast, are either underrepresented or portrayed through stereotypical and less serious lenses. These findings are in line with global research that shows women's sports continue to receive minimal and often biased media attention.

Framing Theory helps explain how the media shapes perceptions by presenting male athletes as heroic and competitive, while female athletes are framed in emotional or aesthetic terms. Language used in reporting reinforces these frames—men are described with performance-based terms ("strong," "strategic"), while women are often associated with emotional or personal traits ("graceful," "inspirational").

Feminist Media Theory further highlights how such portrayals reflect patriarchal values embedded in journalistic practices. Even when female athletes achieve success, their stories are framed as exceptions or curiosities, rather than as legitimate sports accomplishments. This marginalization is compounded by a lack of visual equity, as images of female athletes often emphasize appearance over athletic action.

Differences were also found across newspapers based on language. English-language papers like Dawn and The News International showed relatively more balanced portrayals compared to Urdu dailies like Jang, where cultural conservatism influenced the framing of women's roles in sports. This supports Intersectionality Theory, which suggests that factors like language, culture, and region intersect with gender to shape media representation.

Importantly, the study supports Social Role Theory, as media coverage continues to reflect traditional gender roles portraying men as dominant and career-focused, while women are shown as nurturing or exceptional for participating in public life. Overall, this study demonstrates that a Pakistani sport journalism does

not merely report on gender disparities. It actively contributes to their continuation. To move toward equity, the media must not only increase the volume of coverage of women's sports but also improve the quality and fairness of its representation.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the representation of male and female athletes in leading Pakistani newspapers, aiming to identify the scope and nature of gender disparities in sports journalism. Through a comprehensive content analysis of Dawn, Jang, and The News International, it became evident that Pakistani sports media overwhelmingly favors male athletes in both quantity and quality of coverage. This underrepresentation of female athletes is not simply a numerical issue. It is deeply rooted in the way media frames, presents, and prioritizes men's sports over women's.

The findings reinforce longstanding global patterns, where women in sports are not only less visible in the media but are also frequently framed in stereotypical roles that diminish their athletic identity. While male athletes are presented as powerful, competitive, and deserving of national admiration, female athletes are often reduced to symbols of emotional resilience or physical appearance. This trend reflects broader societal gender norms and underscores the media's role in reinforcing patriarchal values.

The study also found that the language and tone of reporting further deepen these inequalities. Descriptions of male athletes typically center on achievement, power, and professionalism. In contrast, narratives about female athletes often incorporate personal hardships, emotional journeys, or family responsibilities. Such framing not only marginalizes their athletic success but also subtly communicates that women's participation in sports is exceptional rather than normalized. Additionally, visual content analysis revealed a significant imbalance: male athletes were consistently shown in dynamic, action-oriented images, while female athletes were more likely to appear in passive or celebratory poses, reinforcing gendered perceptions of athleticism.

Importantly, the study highlighted variation across newspapers based on language and cultural context. English-language newspapers provided slightly more balanced coverage of women's sports, while Urdu-language dailies like Jang showed stronger patterns of exclusion and gender stereotyping. This suggests that linguistic and regional factors play a significant role in shaping media narratives about gender and sport in Pakistan, an insight aligned with intersectional media theory.

These findings have important implications. Media does not merely reflect public interest; it actively shapes it. When the media consistently ignores or underrepresents women in sports, it not only limits public awareness of female athletes but also restricts their opportunities for recognition, sponsorship, and professional growth. The argument that "audiences are less interested in women's sports" becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when media outlets fail to give these athletes the visibility they deserve.

Therefore, this research strongly advocates for a more equitable and inclusive

approach to sports journalism in Pakistan. Media organizations must revise editorial policies to promote fair representation of female athletes, provide training on gender sensitivity, and create more opportunities for women journalists in sports departments. Only through conscious and sustained effort can the Pakistani media move toward a landscape where sports journalism serves as a platform for equality, not exclusion.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations are proposed to improve gender equity in Pakistani sports journalism. These recommendations target media organizations, journalists, educators, policymakers, and future researchers, aiming to foster a more balanced and inclusive media landscape. Editorial and Policy Reform Media houses must implement gender-sensitive editorial policies that mandate fair and equitable coverage of women's sports. Editors should adopt specific quotas or targets for female athlete representation and regularly audit content to assess progress

There is a pressing need to increase the representation of women in sports journalism, both in reporting and editorial roles. Media organizations should actively recruit, train, and mentor female journalists and provide them with opportunities to cover high-profile sports events. Journalism schools and professional training institutions should integrate gender sensitivity modules into their curricula. Workshops and training programs for working journalists should focus on identifying and challenging gender bias in sports reporting. Sports federations, NGOs, and media organizations should collaborate on public campaigns that promote the visibility of female athletes. Initiatives such as "Equal Play, Equal Coverage" can highlight the achievements of women in sports and challenge prevailing stereotypes.

To counter the argument that there is low public interest in women's sports, media organizations must proactively engage audiences by promoting female sports content through social media, newsletters, and push notifications. As traditional print readership declines, online platforms offer an opportunity to diversify sports coverage. Media outlets should invest in creating dedicated sections for women's sports on their websites and ensure equal visibility on homepages and social media feeds. Researchers should conduct long-term studies to monitor changes in gender representation over time. Comparative studies across different countries in South Asia or the Muslim world could provide insights into regional trends and inform cross-border policy dialogue.

Policy-level interventions can support gender equity in media. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and Press Council of Pakistan can issue guidelines promoting fair representation of women in media content. Regular monitoring and data collection are essential for accountability. Civil society organizations and academic institutions can establish independent watchdog groups to track gender representation in sports media. Annual reports and scorecards can highlight best practices and hold media organizations accountable for equitable

coverage. Corporate sponsors and advertisers play a major role in shaping media content. Brands that support sports events should be encouraged to invest in women's sports and insist on equal media coverage as part of their sponsorship agreements.

### **Limitation of the study**

While this study provides critical insights into gender disparities in Pakistani sports journalism, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualize the findings and suggest avenues for improvement in future research. Firstly, the scope of the research was limited to three national newspapers The News, Jang, and Dawn which, although representative of English, Urdu, language media respectively, do not cover the full spectrum of Pakistani print journalism.

Secondly, the time frame of three months (October to December 2024) is relatively short and may not fully capture long-term patterns, trends, or seasonal variations in sports coverage. Thirdly, while the study employed a rigorous coding scheme to analyze tone, framing, and visual representation, qualitative interpretation of media content inherently involves some degree of subjectivity. Finally, the study was limited in its ability to consider intersectionality in full depth. While language and region were considered to some extent through the selection of newspapers, other intersecting identities such as class, ethnicity, religion, and urban-rural dynamics were not systematically analyzed.

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