

SHORT REPORTS

East African women runners' perceptions of differences in sport. A short report from a pilot study

Jeferson Roberto Rojo¹, Giovanna Xavier de Moura¹, Fernando Augusto Starepravo¹

¹State University of Maringá, Department of Physical Education, Maringá, PR/Brazil

Abstract

The present manuscript brings some discussions about the perception of women runners in East Africa about the differences in treatment for them and men in situations related to sport. The academic literature reveals that the fight for women's rights in this context has intensified and gained a voice in recent years. The women interviewed for this short report pilot point out that, at least in the road running scenario, their perceptions regarding treatment do not show significant distinctions. However, in dialogue with the literature, one realizes the possible hypothesis that they are living the result of years of struggles experienced by their ancestors.

Keywords: *sport, road running, woman, track and field*

Introduction

The presence of women in the sports field has always been surrounded by barriers and difficulties. Sport is a genderyfied field, that is, it is considered a space for men and masculinity, creating and recreating the ideological support of the superiority of men to the detriment of women based on the fragility and incapacity of women (Njororai, 2015). In Brazil (1941), this myth of the weaker sex was represented by law, through the prohibition of the practice of sports incompatible with its maternal nature and care for the home by the Decree-law 3.199 (Brasil, 1941). Farias (2008) points out that athletics was among the sports, as it was considered harmful and dangerous for women's bodies due to constant shocks and repetitive movement of the hips and lower limbs. Over the years, some practices have become more socially accepted, such as athletics, in which Brazilian women have participated in the Olympic Games.

In this context, Moura (2022) argues that Brazilian women's participation in sports was conditioned not only by biological determinism, but also by the cultural construction of gender and political issues of various actors who reaffirmed the supposed male hegemony over certain bodily practices. Despite advances over the years, women still face barriers in the 21st

century that limit their participation, professional development, and visibility in a wide range of sports. Despite the history of difficulties with the sport practiced by women, Brazil has become a fertile ground for the entry and home of foreign athletes, who come in search of better financial conditions, mainly coming from the African continent, in which the sport is presented as national identity. In the international environment, these women present themselves as heroines of their countries in the face of medal conquests (Njororai, 2015). Although they also face cultural patterns in their countries of origin and challenging the male world, what would it be like to come to another country, enter a different culture and practice a sport that for years has been forbidden to them?

In this way, we also present the concept of intersectionality, which seeks to understand the dynamics of society based on the interaction of two or more social markers or axes of subordination, creating inequalities for women, races, ethnicities, class, etc (Crenshaw, 2002). This concept helps us understand how these athletes, due to their gender, race and immigration status, face specific challenges that may remain invisible in some analyses. Even Brazilian female athletes already navigate their careers under the marks of prejudice, lack of investment

Correspondence:

**Montenegro
Sport**

Jeferson Roberto Rojo
State University of Maringá, Department of Physical Education, Colombo Avenue, 5790, Maringá, PR, Brazil
E-mail: jeferson.rojo@hotmail.com

and masculinized expectations (Moura, 2018), which can be intensified in the case of black, migrant women who enter Brazilian sports culture. Because of the restlessness imposed by the aforementioned questioning, the present manuscript seeks to carry out some discussions on the perception of women runners from East Africa who migrated to Brazil about the differences in the treatment aimed at them and men in situations related to sport.

Methods

The present study is characterized as qualitative, in which it seeks to analyze from the perspective of women runners from East Africa who migrated to Brazil the differences perceived by them concerning the treatment intended for men and women. For this, semi-structured interviews were used as a research instrument.

In semi-structured interviews, although there is a script,

it allows the interviewee's speech to become more flexible (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2002). According to Sparkes and Smith (2014), semi-structured interviews have the benefit of providing a deeper knowledge about the experiences and meanings of the participant's social conditions. Therefore, for this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with women athletes from East Africa who work in road running in Brazil, in 2020. The interview was based on open-ended questions about the perception of women runners in East Africa about the differences they perceive. The present study was evaluated and approved by the Ethics Committee of the State University of Maringá, Brazil, under the registration number CAAE: 24963419.6.0000.0104. Furthermore, the study complied with the research standards established by the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants signed an informed consent form prior to agreeing to take part in the study.

Table 1. Profiles of (the) interviewed athletes

Athlete	Age	Origin	practice time	World Ranking Position *
Woman 1	32 years	Uganda	10 years	593
Woman 2	28 years	Kenya	6 years	609

*World Ranking Road Running (2020)

Results and discussions

In this pilot study, two road running race athletes from East Africa who resided in Brazil at the time of the interviews were interviewed. One athlete is of Kenyan origin and another Ugandan. Both are not among the best in the world ranking of the sport. This fact shows that they have a median income in the context of road running at an international level.

Considering that gender differences in sport are not restricted to symbolic aspects, but also appear through unequal access to participation and training structures, especially for women from the global south (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; Knijnik, 2015; Moura, 2022), the questions directed to athletes were from three fronts: a) perception of difference in treatment between men and women; b) whether there is a difference in remuneration between men and women; c) if there are perceived differences in the migratory process between men and women.

Answers to questions about a general perception of treatment point out that there are no significant differences between men and women. The same happens when addressing the issue of remuneration, as can be seen in the interviewee's speech "no differences because we receive the same salary" (Woman 2). When asked about the immigration process, one of the athletes reports that she feels that women receive fewer opportunities than men.

Sometimes, in some races, the selections might be: "we want two men and one lady". We do not know what happens, but we only accept it the way they choose (Woman 2).

In this regard, the study by Njororai (2015) shows that since Kenya's sports boom, which occurred in the 1960s, women have remained the shadow of men representatives on the international stage. However, in recent decades women have gained visibility, even being responsible for the largest number of medals in the country.

Regarding salary conditions, it is important to note that in the case of the women interviewed, their financial gains are the result of sports performance, that is, their remuneration comes from the prizes provided by the competitions. And in the Brazilian context of street racing, most events pay the same price for men and women with the same classification. However, the two realities are different, in Brazil, this is a particularity of road running events, and cannot be extended to other sports. An example of this was

the need to create articles on parity in awards in the new law that regulates sports in Brazil. Since 2023, sports institutions, whether public or private, that receive federal funding must, obligatorily, guarantee equality in awards between men and women (Brazil, 2023).

Even so, as highlighted by Henne & Pape (2018), the apparent parity in prize money does not eliminate structural asymmetries, given that women tend to have lower access to sponsorships, contracts with sports brands, and media visibility, compromising their long-term economic security in comparison to men. Regarding the African context, more specifically in Kenya, a study shows that there is a limitation of financial resources for women, as well as a lack of administrative support, as well as marginalized media coverage (M'baha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2019).

By weaving connections between opportunities and obtaining awards, it is clear that the limited opportunities for women in street racing directly impacts their earning potential. If they do not participate in competitions, they cannot access cash prizes, which makes it difficult to maintain an athletic career, especially when living outside their country. This scenario highlights how inequality of opportunities manifests itself in a structural way, impacting not only sports participation, but also women's economic autonomy and permanence in sports. This is reinforced by Cooky & Messner (2018), who point out that the limitation of competition opportunities directly impacts women's long-term participation in high-performance sports.

Furthermore, these findings should be viewed from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989), recognizing that the challenges faced by these East African women runners are not solely due to gender, but are compounded by racial identity and immigration status. The combination of these factors creates unique barriers to participation, mobility, and economic stability within the sport. Collins (2015) emphasizes that intersectionality is not simply the addition of social markers, but rather the understanding that systems of oppression operate simultaneously to maintain inequalities even when formal rules appear to guarantee equality. For example, women living in Brazil may have greater access to road running competitions than East African women, as the latter rely on invitation and selection to participate. Thus, their experiences exemplify how structural inequalities operate at multiple and intersecting levels.

Conclusion

The present manuscript aimed to reflect on women in sport. For this, the perception of women runners of East African origin who migrated to Brazil was evidenced. From the results exposed, it can be understood that there have been advances in the guarantee of similar conditions in relation to male and female athletes,

this when questioning the athletes' general perception of the treatment and also of their financial gains. However, when asked about the recruitment and migration process, it appears that the opportunities for women are still less than those for men, even when women are considered the country's main references in the world athletics scene.

Received: 17 June 2025 | **Accepted:** 15 August 2025 | **Published:** 15 October 2025

References

- Adriaansem J.; Schofield, T. (2014). The impact of gender quotas on gender equity in sport governance. *Journal of Sport Management Review*, v. 28, p. 485-497.
- Brazil. (1941). Decreto-Lei nº 3.199, de 14 de abril de 1941 [Decree-law n. 3.199 of april 14, 1941]. Rio de Janeiro, RJ. Retrieved from: <http://www6.senado.gov.br/legislacao/ListaPublicacoes.action?id=152593>
- Brazil. (2023). Law No. 14,597, of June 14, 2023: Establishes the General Sports Law and provides other measures. Official Gazette of the Union.
- Collins, P. H. (2015). Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41, 1–20.
- Cooky, C., & Messner, M. A. (2018). No Slam Dunk: Gender, Sport, and the Unevenness of Social Change. Rutgers University Press
- Crenshaw, K. (2002). Documento para o encontro de especialistas em aspectos da discriminação racial relativos ao gênero. *Estudos Feministas*, 10, 171–188.
- Farias, C. M. de (2008). Projeção e emancipação das mulheres brasileiras no esporte, 1932 - 1968. XIII Encontro de História, ANPUH. Rio de Janeiro.
- Henne, K. & Pape, M. (2018). Dilemmas of gender and global sports governance - an invitation to southern theory. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 35(3), 216-225.
- Knijnik, J. D. (2015). Femininities and Masculinities in Brazilian Women's Football: Resistance and Compliance. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3), p. 53-70.
- M'mbaha, J. M., & Chepyator-Thomson, J. R. (2019). Factors influencing career paths and progress of Kenyan women in sport leadership. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(3), 316-333.
- Moura, G. X. (2018). *De in-goal a in-goal: a trajetória de mulheres no Rugby no Brasil*. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação Física) – Centro de Ciências da Saúde. Universidade Estadual de Maringá, Maringá.
- Moura, G. X. (2022). *Por que não se importam com elas? O Esporte de mulheres na agenda governamental do Brasil*. Tese (Doutorado em Educação Física) – Centro de Ciências da Saúde. Universidade Estadual de Maringá, Maringá.
- Njororai, W. W. S. (2015). Women athletes emerging from the shadow of men in Kenya: evidence from the Commonwealth, Olympic and World Athletics Championships. *Sport in Society*, 19(7), 1066-1082.