

# DISABILITY-BASED INEQUALITIES IN ELITE SPORT: THE PERSPECTIVE OF DEAF FEMALE ATHLETES IN CROATIA

# NEJEDNAKOSTI U VRHUNSKOM SPORTU TEMELJENE NA INVALIDITETU: PERSPEKTIVA GLUHIH SPORTAŠICA U HRVATSKOJ

ANA VULJANIĆ

Croatian Institute of Public Health, Zagreb, Croatia  
Association of Sports Recreation and Kinesitherapy Kinesis, Zagreb,  
Croatia

Hrvatski zavod za javno zdravstvo, Zagreb, Hrvatska  
Udruga sportske rekreacije i kineziterapije „Kinesis“, Zagreb,  
Hrvatska

## Correspondence:

PhD Ana Vuljanić

Croatian Institute of Public Health, Zagreb, Croatia,  
[ana.vuljanic@hzjz.hr](mailto:ana.vuljanic@hzjz.hr)

Association of Sports Recreation and Kinesitherapy Kinesis, Zagreb,  
Croatia, [anavuljanic.studiokinesis@gmail.com](mailto:anavuljanic.studiokinesis@gmail.com)

## Korespondencija:

dr. sc. Ana Vuljanić

Hrvatski zavod za javno zdravstvo, Zagreb, Hrvatska,  
[ana.vuljanic@hzjz.hr](mailto:ana.vuljanic@hzjz.hr)

Udruga sportske rekreacije i kineziterapije „Kinesis“, Zagreb,  
Hrvatska, [anavuljanic.studiokinesis@gmail.com](mailto:anavuljanic.studiokinesis@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** Many factors contribute to the disadvantage of women in sports, which are certainly even more pronounced when considering the position of women with disabilities. Hearing impairment is mostly defined as “hidden disability”, not only due to lack of visible symptoms, but also due to long-term stigmatisation and political neglect. The research problem of paper was to study possible inequality in the gender distribution between top Croatian athletes with disabilities (deafness) and without disabilities, and to direct further analysis towards the specificities of deaf female athletes. The sample of respondents consisted of 322 athletes of both gender who had a valid decision on allocating the athlete to the first category by the Croatian Olympic Committee and the Croatian Deaf Sports Association. The main results show that there are differences in gender distribution among top Croatian athletes with regard to the sports system. The difference obtained is in line with the assumption that there will be significantly fewer top deaf female athletes compared to top female athletes without disabilities. Special attention was given to the analysis of the specifics of deaf female athletes (age, region of residence, and number of sports with regard to classification, Olympic status and category). Women of all ages with any type of disability are generally among the more vulnerable and marginalized populations in society, therefore their problems need to be taken into account in all strategic processes in order to protect and promote their human rights and, where necessary, eliminate inequalities between women and men.

**Keywords:** female athletes, top-level sport, disability, specificities, deaf sport.

**Sažetak:** Nepovoljnom položaju žena u sportu doprinose mnogobrojni čimbenici koji su zasigurno još naglašeniji ukoliko se promatra položaj žena s invaliditetom. Oštećenje sluha pretežno se definira kao “skriveni invaliditet”, ne samo zbog nedostatka vidljivih simptoma, već i zbog dugotrajne stigmatizacije te strateškog i političkog zanemarivanja. Istraživački problem ovog rada bio je proučiti moguću nejednakost u raspodjeli spolova između vrhunskih hrvatskih sportaša s invaliditetom (gluhocom) i bez invaliditeta te daljnju analizu usmjeriti prema specifičnosti gluhih sportašica u odnosu na sportašice bez invaliditeta. Uzorak od 322 ispitanika činili su sportaši oba spola koji su u trenutku provođenja istraživanja imali važeće rješenje o kategorizaciji za sportaša I. kategorije izdano od strane krovnih sportskih udruženja, odnosno Hrvatskog olimpijskog odbora i Hrvatskog sportskog saveza gluhih. Glavni rezultati s potvrdom značajnosti uz  $\chi^2$  test pokazuju da postoje razlike u raspodjeli spolova između vrhunskih hrvatskih sportaša s obzirom na sustav sporta. Dobivena razlika u skladu je s pretpostavkom da će vrhunskih gluhih sportašica, u odnosu na vrhunske sportašice bez invaliditeta, biti značajno manje. Posebna pažnja posvećena je analizi specifičnosti gluhih sportašica (dob, regija prebivališta te broj sportova s obzirom na klasifikaciju, olimpijski status i kategoriju). Osobe ženskog spola svih dobi s bilo kojom vrstom invaliditeta općenito su među vulnerabilnijim i marginaliziranim populacijama društva, stoga je potrebno uzeti u obzir njihove probleme i specifične potrebe te ih riješiti u svim strateškim procesima kako bi se zaštitila i promicala njihova ljudska prava i, prema potrebi, eliminirale postojeće nejednakosti između žena i muškaraca s invaliditetom.

**Ključne riječi:** sportašice, vrhunski sport, invaliditet, specifičnosti, sport gluhih osoba.

## INTRODUCTION

Disability is considered a social consequence of the interaction between an individual impairment and the social environment (World Health Organization, 2001; United Nations, 2006). There is strong evidence that women with disabilities face numerous barriers in their daily lives that can prevent them from fully and effectively participating in society on an equal basis with others. These barriers create a context of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women with disabilities, particularly in relation to equal access to education, economic opportunities, social interaction and justice, equal recognition before the law and the ability to participate in the strategic planning of their own lives in a variety of contexts (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).

Women of all ages with any type of disability are generally among the most vulnerable and marginalized populations in society, and their problems and specific needs should be taken into account and addressed in all policy processes to protect and promote their human rights and, where appropriate, eliminate existing inequalities between women and men with disabilities. One of the actions that should be taken at the national and international levels by governments, regional and international organizations is to ensure equal opportunities for women in cultural, recreational and sporting activities, as well as in participation in sports and physical activities at the national, regional and international levels, such as access, training, competition, compensation and rewards (United Nations General Assembly, 2000).

Many factors contribute to the disadvantage of women in sports, such as an unsupportive educational and cultural environment for the inclusion of girls and women in sport, lower involvement of women in sports and physical activities, underrepresentation of women in sport at all levels (for example female athletes, workers and journalists), underrepresentation of women's sports in the media, widespread gender stereotypes about the inappropriateness of sports activities for girls and women, insufficient investment in the development of women's sports, lower incomes of female athletes compared to male athletes, lower levels of competitiveness, lower levels of motivation and interest of women in sports, poorer conditions for sports (including access to sports infrastructure) and the risk of exposure to sexism or gender-based violence (including sexual harassment) (The Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, 2021; The Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, 2022; The Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, 2023). The above-mentioned negative social characteris-

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Invaliditet se smatra društvenom posljedicom interakcije između pojedinačnog oštećenja i socijalnog okruženja (World Health Organization, 2001; United Nations, 2006). Postoje snažni argumenti koji upućuju na to da se žene s invaliditetom susreću s brojnim preprekama u svakodnevnom životu koje mogu sprječavati njihovo potpuno i djelotvorno sudjelovanje u društvu na ravnopravnoj osnovi s drugima. Navedene prepreke razvijaju okolnosti višestrukih oblika diskriminacije protiv žena s invaliditetom koje se međusobno isprepliću, a posebice u pogledu jednakog pristupa obrazovanju, gospodarskih prilika, socijalne interakcije i pravde, jednakosti pred zakonom te mogućnosti sudjelovanja u strateškom planiranju vlastita života u brojnim kontekstima (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).

Osobe ženskog spola svih dobi s bilo kojom vrstom invaliditeta općenito su među vulnerabilnijim i marginaliziranim populacijama društva, stoga je potrebno uzeti u obzir njihove probleme i specifične potrebe te ih riješiti u svim strateškom procesima kako bi se zaštitila i promicala njihova ljudska prava i, prema potrebi, eliminirale postojeće nejednakosti između žena i muškaraca s invaliditetom. Jedna od radnji koje se trebaju poduzeti na nacionalnoj i međunarodnoj razini od strane vlada, regionalnih i međunarodnih organizacija, jest osigurati jednake mogućnosti za žene u kulturnim, rekreacijskim i sportskim aktivnostima, kao i u sudjelovanju u sportskim i tjelesnim aktivnostima na nacionalnoj, regionalnoj i međunarodnoj razini, kao što su pristup, trening, natjecanje, naknade i nagrade (United Nations General Assembly, 2000).

Nepovoljnom položaju žena u sportu doprinose mnogobrojni čimbenici, poput nepoticajnog odgojno-obrazovnog i kulturološkog okruženja za uključivanje djevojčica i žena u sport, manje uključenosti žena u sportske i fizičke aktivnosti, podzastupljenosti žena u sportu na svim razinama (primjerice sportašice, djelatnice i novinarke), podzastupljenosti ženskog sporta u medijima, raširenosti rodni stereotipa o neprimjerenosti sportskih aktivnosti za djevojčice i žene, nedovoljnog ulaganja u razvoj ženskog sporta, nižih primanja sportašica u odnosu na sportaše, snižene razine konkurentnosti i kompetitivnosti, snižene razine motivacije i interesa žena za bavljenjem sportom, lošijih uvjeta za bavljenje sportom (uključujući pristup sportskoj infrastrukturi) te rizika za izloženost seksizmu ili rodno utemeljenom nasilju (uključujući spolno uznemiravanje) (Pravobraniteljica za ravnopravnost spolova, 2021; Pravobraniteljica za ravnopravnost spolova, 2022; Pravobraniteljica za

tics are certainly even more pronounced when considering the position of women with disabilities.

One of the causes of a person's disability can be hearing impairment, which belongs to the category of sensory impairment. It is predominantly defined as a "hidden disability", not only due to the lack of visible symptoms, but also due to long-term stigmatization and strategic and political neglect (World Health Organization, 2021). People with hearing impairments can participate in a separate sports system – deaf sports, which is legally equal to the regular sports system, respectively with the association of athletes who do not have disabilities (Sports Act, 2022). Highlighted implies the absence of differences in the evaluation of the achieved results between deaf athletes and athletes without disabilities, which represent the basis for the achievement of a certain category of athletes (from the 1st to the 6th category) in accordance with the rules of the main sports associations.

The research problem of this paper was to study the possible inequality in the gender distribution between top Croatian athletes with disabilities (deafness) and without disabilities, and to direct further analysis towards the specificities of deaf female athletes in comparison to female athletes without disabilities. A review of the existing scientific bibliography revealed a lack of publications on the topic (Gaweł et al., 2024), and for the purpose of reflecting on the issue, one of the special goals of the National Sports Program as a strategic document on the development of sports in the Republic of Croatia is highlighted – the promotion of gender equality in sports (The Croatian Central Office for Sport, 2019).

## METHODS

The sample of respondents consisted of athletes of both gender who, at the time of the research, had a valid decision on allocating the athlete to the 1st category by the corresponding main sports associations, namely the Croatian Olympic Committee and the Croatian Deaf Sports Association. These are all categorizations whose application begins before July 2024 and are valid until the end of May 2028 at the latest. This criterion was met by 271 athletes and 51 deaf athletes.

The sample of variables used to analyze the specific characteristics of top female athletes with regard to the sports system consisted of data on gender, date of birth (determined age data as of 1 July 2024), county of residence (determined region of residence in accordance with the classification of spatial units for statistics – HR NUTS 2 (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2024)), sport (de-

ravnopravnost spolova, 2023). Navedene negativne društvene karakteristike zasigurno su još naglašenije u sportu ukoliko se promatra položaj žena s invaliditetom.

Jedan od uzroka invaliditeta osobe može biti i oštećenje sluha koje pripada kategoriji senzornih oštećenja. Pretežno se definira kao "skriveni invaliditet", ne samo zbog nedostatka vidljivih simptoma, već i zbog dugotrajne stigmatizacije te strateškog i političkog zanemarivanja (World Health Organization, 2021). Osobe s oštećenjem sluha mogu participirati u odvojenom sustavu sporta – sportu gluhih, koji je zakonski izjednačen s redovnim sustavom sporta, odnosno s udruženjem sportaša koji nemaju invaliditet (Zakon o sportu, 2022). Istaknuto podrazumijeva nepostojanje razlika u vrednovanju postignutih rezultata između gluhih sportaša i sportaša bez invaliditeta, a isti su temelj za ostvarivanje određene kategorije sportaša (od I. do VI. kategorije) u skladu s pravilnicima krovnih sportskih udruženja.

Istraživački problem ovog rada bio je proučiti moguću nejednakost u raspodjeli spolova između vrhunskih hrvatskih sportaša s invaliditetom (gluhocom) i bez invaliditeta te daljnju analizu usmjeriti prema specifičnostima gluhih sportašica u odnosu na sportašice bez invaliditeta. Pregledom postojeće znanstvene bibliografije uočen je nedostatak publikacija s izloženom tematikom (Gaweł et al., 2024), a u svrhu promišljanja o problematici ističe se jedan od posebnih ciljeva Nacionalnog programa sporta kao strateškog dokumenta o razvoju sporta u Republici Hrvatskoj – poticanje spolne ravnopravnosti u sportu (Središnji državni ured za sport, 2019).

## METODE

Uzorak ispitanika činili su sportaši oba spola koji su u trenutku provođenja istraživanja imali važeće rješenje o kategorizaciji za sportaša I. kategorije izdano od strane pripadajućih krovnih sportskih udruženja, odnosno Hrvatskog olimpijskog odbora i Hrvatskog sportskog saveza gluhih. To su sve kategorizacije čija primjena počinje prije srpnja 2024. godine, a vrijede najkasnije do kraja svibnja 2028. godine. Navedeni kriterij zadovoljio je 271 sportaš i 51 gluhi sportaš.

Uzorak varijabli kojim su se analizirale specifičnosti vrhunskih sportašica s obzirom na sustav sporta činili su podaci o spolu, datumu rođenja (određen podatak o dobi s danom 1.7.2024. godine), županiji prebivališta (određena regija prebivališta u skladu s klasifikacijom prostornih jedinica za statistiku – HR NUTS 2 (Državni zavod za statistiku, 2024)), sportu (određen podatak o kategoriji i klasifikaciji s obzirom na strukturu) te olimpijskom statusu sporta.

terminated category and classification data with regard to the structure), and the Olympic status of the sport.

The research was conducted during July 2024. From the Register of Categorized Athletes, which is available on the website of the Croatian Olympic Committee, data on the first and last name of athletes of the 1st category, sport, Olympic status of the sport and county of residence were extracted, and the Croatian Deaf Sports Association was requested to provide the same data via e-mail. Additional internet searches collected data on competition in the female or male category and date of birth.

For the purposes of the research, both inferential and descriptive statistical methods were applied, depending on the size and characteristics of the subsamples. Since the main aim of the research was to determine whether there is unequal gender representation among top athletes with respect to the sports system, the  $\chi^2$  test was used to verify the statistical significance of the observed differences. Although the research was conducted on the entire available set of categorized athletes of the 1st category, the application of inferential statistics allows for additional confirmation of patterns that may have broader social and strategic implications. However, in the analysis of the specificities of deaf female athletes, descriptive methods were preferred for greater interpretative clarity and avoidance of incorrect conclusions given the small subsample. This ensured a methodological balance between the precision of the inferential analysis and the appropriateness of the descriptive presentation of the data.

The specificities of deaf female athletes were analyzed through descriptive methods in the context of age, region of residence, type of sport, classification, and Olympic status. Although the research did not include primary qualitative methods such as interviews, a previously conducted structured questionnaire (Vuljanić et al., 2024) served as a basis for contextualizing quantitative findings and interpreting the life experiences of deaf female athletes. The collected responses were analyzed using the qualitative descriptive analysis method, identifying thematic units that included hearing status, communication habits, educational path, sports initiation, family support, relationship with coaches, and preferences towards competitive systems. Thematic patterns obtained from the questionnaire analysis enabled a deeper interpretation of the experiences of deaf female athletes in relation to the social, organizational, and communication barriers they face, and served as a basis for developing recommendations aimed at improving their sports inclusion.

SPSS 20.0 (for Windows) was used for statistical data processing, and the significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

Istraživanje je provedeno tijekom srpnja 2024. godine. Iz Registra kategoriziranih sportaša koji je dostupan na internet stranici Hrvatskog olimpijskog odbora prikupljeni su podaci o imenu i prezimenu sportaša 1. kategorije, sportu, statusu sporta i županiji prebivališta, a od Hrvatskog sportskog saveza gluhih su putem elektroničke pošte zatraženi istovrsni podaci. Dodatnim pretraživanjem interneta prikupljeni su podaci o natjecanju u ženskoj ili muškoj konkurenciji te datumu rođenja.

Za potrebe istraživanja primijenjene su i inferencijalne i deskriptivne statističke metode, ovisno o veličini i karakteristikama poduzoraka. Budući da je glavni cilj istraživanja bio utvrditi postoji li nejednaka spolna zastupljenost između vrhunskih sportaša s obzirom na sustav sporta,  $\chi^2$  test korišten je kako bi se provjerila statistička značajnost uočenih razlika. Iako je istraživanje provedeno na cjelokupnom dostupnom skupu kategoriziranih sportaša 1. kategorije, primjena inferencijalnih statistika omogućava dodatnu potvrdu obrazaca koji mogu imati šire društvene i strateške implikacije. Međutim, u analizi specifičnosti gluhih sportašica prednost su dobile deskriptivne metode radi veće interpretativne jasnoće i izbjegavanja netočnih zaključaka budući se radi o malom poduzorku. Time je osigurana metodološka ravnoteža između preciznosti inferencijalne analize i prikladnosti deskriptivnog prikaza podataka.

Specifičnosti gluhih sportašica analizirane su kroz deskriptivne metode u kontekstu dobi, regije prebivališta, vrste sporta, klasifikacije i olimpijskog statusa. Iako istraživanje nije uključivalo primarne kvalitativne metode poput intervjua, ranije provedeni strukturirani upitnik (Vuljanić et al., 2024) poslužio je kao temelj za kontekstualizaciju kvantitativnih nalaza i interpretaciju životnih iskustava gluhih sportašica. Prikupljeni odgovori analizirani su metodom kvalitativne deskriptivne analize, pri čemu su identificirane tematske cjeline koje su uključivale slušni status, komunikacijske navike, obrazovni put, sportsku inicijaciju, obiteljsku podršku, odnos s trenerima i preferencije prema natjecateljskim sustavima. Tematski obrasci dobiveni analizom upitnika omogućili su dublju interpretaciju iskustava gluhih sportašica u odnosu na društvene, organizacijske i komunikacijske prepreke s kojima se suočavaju te su poslužili kao osnova za izradu preporuka usmjerenih na poboljšanje njihove sportske uključenosti.

Za statističku obradu podataka korišten je program SPSS 20.0 (for Windows), a razina značajnosti određena je na  $p < 0.05$ .



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to answer the first part of the research problem, namely the problem of the existence of differences in the gender distribution among top athletes with respect to the sports system, a  $\chi^2$  test was conducted (Table 1), which showed that there are gender differences between top athletes with disabilities and athletes without disabilities ( $\chi^2$  (1, N=322)=4.86;  $p<.05$ ). The difference obtained is in line with the expectation, namely with the assumption that there will be significantly fewer top deaf female athletes compared to top female athletes without disabilities.

**Table 1.** Analysis of gender differences among top athletes with regard to the sports system

| TOP ATHLETES WITH REGARD TO THE SPORTS SYSTEM / VRHUNSKI SPORTAŠI S OBZIROM NA SUSTAV SPORTA |                                                                         |                                                                   |                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| GENDER / SPOL                                                                                | Disabled (Deaf Athletes) N (%) / S invaliditetom (gluhi sportaši) N (%) | Non-disabled (Athletes) N (%) / Bez invaliditeta (sportaši) N (%) | Total (All athletes) N (%) / Ukupno (svi sportaši) N (%) |
| Male / Muški                                                                                 | 41 (80,4)                                                               | 175 (64,6)                                                        | 216 (67,1)                                               |
| Female / Ženski                                                                              | 10 (19,6)                                                               | 96 (35,4)                                                         | 106 (32,9)                                               |
| Total / Ukupno                                                                               | 51 (100)                                                                | 271 (100)                                                         | 322 (100)                                                |

The main results with confirmation of significance using the  $\chi^2$  test show that in the Republic of Croatia, out of the total number of categorized top athletes of the 1st category, separately for each sport system, 19.6% are top deaf female athletes, and 35.4% are top female athletes without disabilities.

The structure of the sample of female athletes with regard to the sport system and their specificities are shown in Table 2. Given the very small number of deaf female athletes in the sample ( $n=10$ ), the differences between them and female athletes without disabilities were presented primarily using descriptive statistics.

The median age of deaf female athletes was 29.5 years (range 19-50), while for female athletes without disabilities it was 26 years (range 17-52). In both groups, approximately half of the participants resided in the City of Zagreb. Deaf female athletes compete in a total of 5 individual sports. 7 deaf female athletes are involved in Olympic deaf sports: chess (3), taekwondo (2), athletics (1) and shooting (1), and 3 deaf female athletes are involved in non-Olympic sports (classic bowling). According to structural complexity, there are three monostructural sports (5 athletes) and 1 polystructural (2 athletes) and 1 mental sport (3 athletes). Female athletes without disabilities compete in a total of 25 sports, most of which are individual (78 female athletes in 23 sports). Olympic sports are played by 54 female athletes (11 sports): handball (17), taekwondo (10), athletics (8), judo (6), sailing (4), kayaking-canoeing (2), rowing

## REZULTATI I RASPRAVA

U svrhu odgovora na prvi dio istraživačkog problema, odnosno na problem postojanja razlike u raspodjeli spolova između vrhunskih sportaša s obzirom na sustav sporta proveden je  $\chi^2$  test (Tablica 1), koji je pokazao da ima razlike u spolu između vrhunskih sportaša s invaliditetom i sportaša bez invaliditeta ( $\chi^2$  (1, N=322)=4,86;  $p<.05$ ). Dobivena razlika je u skladu s očekivanjem, odnosno s pretpostavkom da će vrhunskih gluhih sportašica, u odnosu na vrhunske sportašice bez invaliditeta, biti značajno manje.

**Tablica 1.** Analiza spolnih razlika vrhunskih sportaša s obzirom na sustav sporta

Glavni rezultati s potvrdom značajnosti uz  $\chi^2$  test pokazuju da je u Republici Hrvatskoj, od ukupnog broja kategoriziranih vrhunskih sportaša 1. kategorije, zasebno za svaki sustav sporta, 19,6% vrhunskih gluhih sportašica, a 35,4% vrhunskih sportašica bez invaliditeta.

Struktura uzorka sportašica s obzirom na sustav sporta i njihove specifičnosti prikazane su u tablici 2. S obzirom na vrlo mali broj gluhih sportašica u uzorku ( $n=10$ ), razlike između njih i sportašica bez invaliditeta prikazane su prvenstveno deskriptivnim statistikama.

Medijan dobi gluhih sportašica iznosio je 29,5 godina (raspon 19-50), dok je kod sportašica bez invaliditeta bio 26 godina (raspon 17-52). U obje skupine približno polovica ispitanica imala je prebivalište u Gradu Zagrebu. Gluhe sportašice natječu se u ukupno 5 pojedinačnih sportova. Olimpijskim sportovima gluhih bavi se 7 sportašica: šah (3), taekwondo (2), atletika (1) i streljaštvo (1), a neolimpijskim sportom (kuglanje) bave se 3 gluhe sportašice. Prema strukturalnoj složenosti tri su monostrukturalna sporta (5 sportašica) te po jedan polistrukturalni (2 sportašice) i mentalni sport (3 sportašice). Sportašice bez invaliditeta natječu se u ukupno 25 sportova, od kojih je većina pojedinačnih (78 sportašica u 23 sporta). Olimpijskim sportovima bave se 54 sportašice (11 sportova): rukomet (17), taekwondo (10), atletika (8), judo (6), jedrenje (4), kajak-kanu (2), skijanje (2), veslanje (2), boks (1), gimnastika (1) i tenis (1), a neolimpijskim sportovima 42 sportašice (14 sportova):

(2), skiing (2), boxing (1), gymnastics (1) and tennis (1). Non-Olympic sports are played by 42 female athletes (14 sports): karate (9), kickboxing (9), bocce (5), diving (4), savate boxing (3), wushu (3), nanbudo (2), body building (1), bowling (1), bridge (1), darts (1), ju-jitsu (1), rock and roll (1) and sambo (1). According to structural complexity, there are 11 polystructural (46 female athletes), 10 monostructural (30 female athletes), 2 conventional-aesthetic (2 female athletes) and 1 complex (17 female athletes) and 1 mental sport (1 female athlete).

**Table 2.** Structure of the sample of female athletes with regard to the sports system

karate (9), kick-boxing (9), boćanje (5), ronjenje (4), savate boks (3), wushu (3), nanbudo (2), body building (1), bridž (1), ju-jitsu (1), kuglanje (1), pikado (1), rock and roll (1) i sambo (1). Prema strukturalnoj složenosti 11 je polistrukturalnih (46 sportašica), 10 monostrukturalnih (30 sportašica), 2 konvencionalno-estetska (2 sportašice) te po jedan kompleksni (17 sportašica) i mentalni sport (1 sportašica).

**Tablica 2.** Struktura uzorka sportašica s obzirom na sustav sporta

| VARIABLE / VARIJABLA                                                                                   | Deaf female athletes /<br>Gluhe sportašice (n=10) | Female athletes /<br>Sportašice (n=96) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <b>Age (years) / Dob (godine)</b>                                                                      |                                                   |                                        |
| Median / Medijan                                                                                       | 29.5                                              | 26                                     |
| Range / Raspon                                                                                         | 19-50                                             | 17-52                                  |
| <b>Region of residence / Regija prebivališta</b>                                                       |                                                   |                                        |
| City of Zagreb / Grad Zagreb                                                                           | 5                                                 | 47                                     |
| Other (Adriatic, Pannonian and Northern Croatia) /<br>Ostalo (Jadranska, Panonska i Sjeverna Hrvatska) | 5 (3, 2 and 0)                                    | 49 (37, 4 and 8)                       |
| <b>Sports classification / Klasifikacija sportova (n=30)</b>                                           |                                                   |                                        |
| Monostructural / Monostrukturalni                                                                      | 3 sports (5)                                      | 10 sports (30)                         |
| Polystructural / Polistrukturalni                                                                      | 1 sport (2)                                       | 11 sports (46)                         |
| Complex / Kompleksni                                                                                   | 0 sports (0)                                      | 1 sport (17)                           |
| Conventional-aesthetic / Konvencionalno-estetski                                                       | 0 sports (0)                                      | 2 sports (2)                           |
| Mental / Mentalni                                                                                      | 1 sport (3)                                       | 1 sport (1)                            |
| <b>Olympic status of sport / Olimpijski status sporta (n=30)</b>                                       |                                                   |                                        |
| Olympic / Olimpijski                                                                                   | 4 sports (7)                                      | 11 sports (54)                         |
| Non-Olympic / Neolimpijski                                                                             | 1 sport (3)                                       | 14 sports (42)                         |
| <b>Sports category / Kategorija sporta (n=30)</b>                                                      |                                                   |                                        |
| Individual / Pojedinačni                                                                               | 5 sports (10)                                     | 23 sports (78)                         |
| Team / Ekipni                                                                                          | 0 sports (0)                                      | 2 sports (18)                          |

An analysis of gender differences in factors influencing participation in sports by top deaf athletes showed that there were no significant differences between male and female deaf athletes. The results of a questionnaire survey on a sample of 31 top deaf athletes (11 female athletes, 35%) showed that the majority of Croatian deaf athletes had hearing impairment at birth or developed within the first two years of life (9/11) and that the majority had hearing parents (9/11) and hearing siblings (8/11). Given the high frequency of using hearing aids or cochlear implants (9/11) to facilitate communication and better perception of sounds from the environment, the majority of deaf ath-

Analiza spolnih razlika među čimbenicima sudjelovanja vrhunskih gluhih sportaša u sportu ukazala je da nema značajnih razlika između gluhih sportaša i gluhih sportašica. Rezultati anketnog upitnika na uzorku od 31 vrhunskog gluhog sportaša (od čega 11 sportašica, 35%) pokazali su da se oštećenje sluha kod većine hrvatskih gluhih sportašica javilo pri rođenju ili se razvilo unutar prve dvije godine života (9/11) te da većina ima čujuće roditelje (9/11) i čujuću braću i sestre (8/11). S obzirom na visoku učestalost korištenja slušnih pomagala ili umjetne pužnice (9/11) zbog olakšane komunikacije i bolje percepcije zvukova iz okoline, većina gluhih spor-

letes rely on their ability to communicate using all communication (9/11). This is highlighted by the fact that deaf athletes who use sign language also rely on their ability to communicate through speech, facial and lip reading, and manual alphabet. Most deaf female athletes attended preschool for the deaf or in combination with regular preschool (8/11), primary school for the deaf or in combination with regular primary school (8/11) and regular secondary school (9/11). 4 top deaf female athletes have a higher education. The results of this study confirm the positive role of parents in supporting and developing their child's desire to participate in sports. Most parents of deaf female athletes were active in sports (8/11) and they make the largest contribution to their sports initiation (5/11). Most deaf female athletes have hearing coaches, which seems to be a key factor in providing support during their integration into the regular sports system. For Croatian elite deaf female athletes, the priority is not the coach's hearing status (10/11), but his professional competence, understanding and care he shows towards them, and his information and knowledge of how to communicate with deaf people. The results of the study indicate the desire of deaf female athletes for greater opportunities to practice their chosen sport, which often requires their integration into the standard sports system. All deaf female athletes who participated in the study compete in the regular competition system, and one of the main reasons for this could be the lack of domestic sports competitions for deaf female athletes. Several deaf female athletes (3/11) stated their preference for a separate competition system, which indicates negative socialization, as they believe that in a segregated competition system there are better conditions with regard to communication, as well as fair conditions for all athletes. Although deaf female athletes prefer to compete with other deaf female athletes due to the socialization and communication opportunities that arise, they also appreciate the opportunity to participate in a regular competition system with hearing female athletes. They believe that this helps them improve the quality of their training and preparation for domestic and international deaf competitions, and that it provides them with the opportunity to evaluate their sporting achievements during the competition season, as well as promote and increase the recognition of deaf athletes.

The total population of top deaf athletes who met the criteria for the study of factors influencing participation of top deaf athletes in sport consisted of 53 athletes, of which 16 were deaf female athletes (30%) (Vuljanić et al., 2024). 12 female athletes were members of clubs that only gather deaf athletes, 2 female athletes were members

tašica oslanja se na sposobnost komuniciranja koristeći cjelokupnu komunikaciju (9/11). Navedeno je istaknuto činjenicom da se gluhi sportaši koji koriste znakovni jezik također oslanjaju na svoju sposobnost komunikacije putem govora, očitavanja govora s lica i usana te ručne abecede. Većina gluhih sportašica pohađala je dječji vrtić za gluhe ili u kombinaciji s redovnim vrtićem (8/11), osnovnu školu za gluhe ili u kombinaciji s redovnom osnovnom školom (8/11) i redovnu srednju školu (9/11). Visoki stupanj obrazovanja imaju 4 vrhunske gluhe sportašice. Rezultati ovog istraživanja potvrđuju pozitivnu ulogu roditelja u podupiranju i razvoju djetetove želje za sudjelovanjem u sportu. Većina roditelja gluhih sportašica bila je sportski aktivna (8/11) i oni čine najveći udio u njihovoj sportskoj inicijaciji (5/11).

Većina gluhih sportašica ima čujuće trenere što se čini ključnim čimbenikom u pružanju podrške tijekom njihove integracije u redovni sustav sporta. Hrvatskim elitnim gluhim sportašicama nije prioritet slušni status trenera (10/11), već njegove stručne kompetencije, razumijevanje i briga koju pokazuje prema njima te informiranost i znanje kako komunicirati s gluhim osobama. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na želju gluhih sportašica za većim mogućnostima bavljenja odabranim sportom, što često zahtijeva njihovu integraciju u standardni sportski sustav. Sve gluhe sportašice koje su sudjelovale u navedenom istraživanju natječu se u redovnom sustavu natjecanja, a jedan od temeljnih razloga za to mogao bi biti nedostatak domaćih sportskih natjecanja za gluhe sportašice. Nekoliko gluhih sportašica (3/11) navelo je svoju preferenciju prema odvojenom sustavu natjecanja, što upućuje na negativnu socijalizaciju, jer smatraju da su u segregiranom sustavu natjecanja prisutni bolji uvjeti s obzirom na komunikaciju, kao i poštenu uvjeti za sve sportaše. Iako se gluhe sportašice radije natječu s drugim gluhim sportašicama zbog socijalizacije i komunikacijskih mogućnosti koje se javljaju, one također cijene mogućnost sudjelovanja u redovnom sustavu natjecanja s čujućim sportašicama. Vjeruju da im to pomaže u poboljšanju njihove kvalitete treninga i pripreme za domaća i međunarodna natjecanja gluhih, zatim da im pruža mogućnost vrednovanja sportskih postignuća tijekom natjecateljske sezone, kao i promicanje i povećanje prepoznatljivosti gluhih sportaša.

Ukupnu populaciju vrhunskih gluhih sportaša koji su zadovoljavali kriterije istraživanja čimbenika sudjelovanja vrhunskih gluhih sportaša u sportu činilo je 53 sportaša, od čega je bilo 16 gluhih sportašica (30%) (Vuljanić et al., 2024). U klubove koji okupljaju samo gluhe sportaše učlanjeno je 12 sportašica, u klubove re-

of clubs with a regular competition system, and the other 2 female athletes had dual registration, respectively they were simultaneously members of a deaf sports club and a regular competition system sports club. Only 7 out of 16 deaf female athletes had access to training preparation and instruction from a coach, while 20 out of 37 deaf athletes had this opportunity. All 4 female athletes who trained in clubs with a regular competition system had a coach (a hearing coach).

The sports and life experiences of top deaf female athletes do not differ significantly from those of deaf male athletes, suggesting the need for further research into the specific factors that contribute to the disadvantage of deaf women in sport. A review of gender equality research in sport reveals that the majority of the literature has examined the experiences, participation and representation of adult athletes in elite contexts. Inequalities in participation and experience have been noted, often influenced by the intersection of notions of ableist and masculinity (Culver et al., 2022).

Disability has only recently been included as a relevant identity category in the discussion of intersectionality, which is usually oriented towards identities such as race and gender. Everyone has multiple identities with different statuses, and there are differences within groups, so not all people with disabilities will experience the same level of stigma within the community. Disability, like other identities, is subject to misrepresentation and is separated from other issues and experiences, and so someone's identification as a person with a disability may not be recognized as related to other identities. An intersectional approach helps to understand the situation of individuals or groups and how their lives are shaped by these interwoven factors. If someone is a member of several disadvantaged groups, their experience of exclusion may be exacerbated. It is clear that the opportunities and challenges for women and men with disabilities echo those within the general population, where women are often disadvantaged, but arguably when someone has a disability as an identity too, such inequalities are magnified and the unequal power gradients between men and women and between non-disabled and disabled people combine and interact powerfully. People who self-identify or are labelled as disabled by others seem to be at risk of two opposing misunderstandings that can put them at a disadvantage. Either their disability status is overemphasized and other aspects of their identity are neglected (e.g. giving too much attention to a child's difficulties). Or they are forgotten and under-recognised and therefore not included when other groups of which they are members are considered (e.g. women

dovnog sustava natjecanja 2 sportašice, a ostale 2 sportašice imaju dvojni registraciju, odnosno istodobno su učlanjene i u sportski klub gluhih te sportski klub redovnog sustava natjecanja. Samo 7 od 16 gluhih sportašica ima dostupnu trenažnu pripremu i poduku od strane trenera, dok kod gluhih sportaša navedeno ima priliku njih 20 od 37 sportaša. Sve 4 sportašice koje treniraju u klubovima redovnog sustava natjecanja imaju trenera (čujući trener).

Sportsko i životno iskustvo vrhunskih gluhih sportašica ne razlikuje se značajno u odnosu na gluhe sportaše što ukazuje na potrebu provedbe dodatnih istraživanja određenijih čimbenika utjecaja na nepovoljniji položaj gluhih žena u sportu. Pregledno istraživanje rodne ravnopravnosti u sportu otkriva da je većina zapisa ispitivala iskustva, sudjelovanje i zastupljenost odraslih sportaša u elitnim kontekstima. Zabilježena je nejednakost u sudjelovanju i iskustvu, često pod utjecajem raskrižja pojmova ableizma i maskuliniteta (Culver et al., 2022).

Invaliditet je tek nedavno uključen kao relevantna kategorija identiteta u razmatranju interseksionalnosti, koja je obično orijentirana na identitete poput rase i spola. Svatko ima višestruke identitete s različitim statusima, a postoje i razlike unutar skupina, tako da neće sve osobe s invaliditetom doživjeti istu razinu stigme unutar zajednice. Invaliditet je poput ostalih identiteta podlozan pogrešnom predstavljanju i razdvojen od drugih problema i iskustava, pa tako nečija identifikacija kao osobe s invaliditetom možda neće biti prepoznata kao suodnos s drugim identitetima. Interseksijski pristup pomaže u razumijevanju situacije pojedinaca ili skupina i kako su njihovi životi oblikovani tim čimbenicima koji se međusobno isprepliću. Ako je netko član nekoliko skupina u nepovoljnom položaju, njegovo iskustvo isključenosti može biti pogoršano. Jasno je da mogućnosti i izazovi za žene i muškarce s invaliditetom odjekuju onima unutar opće populacije, gdje su žene često u nepovoljnom položaju, ali nedvojbeno kada netko ima i invaliditet kao identitet, tada se takve nejednakosti povećavaju i nejednaki se gradijenti moći između muškaraca i žena te između osoba bez invaliditeta i osoba s invaliditetom međusobno kombiniraju i snažno djeluju. Čini se da su ljudi koji se sami identificiraju ili ih drugi označavaju kao osobe s invaliditetom izloženi riziku od dva suprotna nesporazuma koji ih mogu dovesti u nepovoljan položaj. Ili je njihov status osobe s invaliditetom previše naglašen, a drugi aspekti njihova identiteta su zanemareni (npr. pridavanje previše pozornosti djetetovim teškoćama). Ili su zaboravljeni i nedovoljno priznati te stoga nisu uključeni kada se razmatraju druge skupine čiji su



with disabilities during women's events). Thus, one identity is privileged over others, and people's complex and changing identities and roles are not recognised. There is still a tendency for policy makers and practitioners to compartmentalise disability issues into separate activities rather than introducing a comprehensive approach that includes disability. Policy and practice planning should not shy away from the complexity of people's multiple identities, but should address them systematically. Otherwise, for some individuals, their subject position (if they are seen as having one identity rather than several) could make them ineligible for certain interventions. This can lead to various forms of segregation. Although this aspiration is still considered a difficult intention to achieve and will cost resources that have not been allocated for this purpose, it indicates the need for a major shift in thinking (Wickenden, 2023).

There is relatively little empirical research that uses a broader intersectional approach to gender inequalities in sport and physical activity (DePauw, 1999 and Sparkes et al., 2018, according to Richard et al., 2023). The participation of women with disabilities in sport creates a complex structure. As sport is a stronghold of masculinity, there are still numerous forms of discrimination that women can experience in the field of sport (Terret 2005, according to Richard et al., 2023). Research on femininity tests illustrates the complex and sometimes symbolically very violent connections between sport and femininity (Bohuon, 2008, according to Richard et al., 2023). Generally, female athletes face the paradox of being successful in a 'masculine' environment, while adhering to norms of femininity in order to be recognized as women (Richard et al., 2017, in Richard et al., 2023). Intersectional analysis has revealed that disability and sport are two elements that can undermine femininity, thus female athletes with disabilities redouble their efforts to 'prove' their femininity, while maintaining their legitimacy in the eyes of other athletes and the public (Schell & Rodriguez, 2001, in Richard et al., 2023).

A systematic literature review identified eight types of barriers (personal, physical, psychological, managerial, coach role, economic, others attitudes and social support) that women with disabilities face when engaging in sports (Olasagasti-Ibargoien et al., 2023). The main practical implications of the analysis of relevant factors for the engaging women in various sports in Croatia are that women like sports and want to engaged in sports, which in turn enables personal growth and offers them a sense of achievement, and the main barriers to their engagement and retention in sports are obligations related to work and

članovi (npr. žene s invaliditetom tijekom ženskih događaja). Tako je jedan identitet privilegiran u odnosu na druge, a složeni i promjenjivi identiteti i uloge ljudi nisu priznati. Još uvijek postoji tendencija da kreatori politika i praktičari dijele pitanja invaliditeta u zasebne aktivnosti umjesto da uvode sveobuhvatan pristup koji uključuje invaliditet. U planiranju politika i praksi ne bi trebalo bježati od složenosti višestrukih identiteta ljudi, već bi se njima trebalo sustavno pozabaviti. U protivnom, za neke pojedince, njihov položaj subjekta (ako se smatra da imaju jedan identitet, a ne nekoliko) mogao bi ih učiniti neprihvatljivim za određene intervencije. To može dovesti do različitih oblika segregacije. Iako se navedena težnja još uvijek smatra teško ostvarivom intencijom i koja će koštati sredstva koja nisu dodijeljena za tu svrhu, ukazuje na potrebu za velikim promjenama u razmišljanju (Wickenden, 2023).

Postoji relativno malo empirijskih radova koji koriste širi intersekcijski pristup spolnim nejednakostima u sportu i tjelesnoj aktivnosti (DePauw, 1999 i Sparkes et al., 2018, prema Richard et al., 2023). Bavljenje sportom žena s invaliditetom kreira složenu strukturu. Kako je sport uporište muskuliniteta još uvijek postoje brojni oblici diskriminacije koje žene mogu doživjeti u području sporta (Terret 2005, prema Richard et al., 2023). Istraživanje testova femininiteta ilustrira složene i ponekad simbolično vrlo nasilne veze između sporta i femininiteta (Bohuon, 2008, prema Richard et al., 2023). Općenito se sportašice suočavaju s paradoksom da budu uspješne u 'muškom' okruženju, dok se pridržavaju normi ženstvenosti kako bi bile prepoznate kao žene (Richard et al., 2017, prema Richard et al., 2023). Intersekcijaska analiza otkrila je da su invaliditet i sport dva elementa koji mogu dovesti u pitanje ženstvenost, tako sportašice s invaliditetom udvostručuju svoje napore kako bi 'dokazale' svoju ženstvenost, istovremeno održavajući svoj legitimitet u očima drugih sportaša i javnosti (Schell & Rodriguez, 2001, prema Richard et al., 2023).

Sustavni pregled literature identificirao je osam vrsta prepreka (osobne, fizičke, psihološke, upravljačke, uloga trenera, ekonomske, stavovi drugih i društvena podrška) s kojima se susreću žene s invaliditetom prilikom bavljenja sportom (Olasagasti-Ibargoien et al., 2023). Glavne praktične implikacije analize relevantnih čimbenika za angažman žena u različitim sportovima u Hrvatskoj su da žene vole sport i žele se njime baviti, što zauzvrat omogućuje osobni rast i nudi im osjećaj postignuća, a glavne prepreke u njihovom bavljenju i zadržavanju u sportu su poslovne i obiteljske obveze (Sindik et al., 2016).

family (Sindik et al., 2016).

The intersection of gender inequality and the social and communication barriers of deafness exacerbates the discrimination faced by deaf women. Research on the level of participation of deaf female athletes and the reasons for their continued underrepresentation has highlighted the following barriers and challenging issues such as negative stigma towards deafness or hearing loss, lack of opportunities and programs for participation, training, sports instruction and competition, lack of financial support from local, regional and national authorities to help organize training and workshops, lack of research and documented facts about deaf/hard of hearing women at all levels in sport and lack of national policy and legislation in sport by organizers and decision-makers at all levels for athletes with hearing impairment (Clark & Mesch, 2018). The above characteristics emphasize that participation in sports practice does not depend only on the participant but that society must be aware of all the difficulties in order to provide more specific support and guidance to women with disabilities.

The findings of this research are important from the aspect of awareness and information and can be applied in the design and implementation of policies and programs to overcome the specific needs of deaf women and girls in order to ensure their equal access to sports at all levels.

Although there are legal and strategic frameworks that seemingly promote equality and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in sports activities, a critical analysis reveals a number of shortcomings in their implementation, particularly when it comes to deaf female athletes. The Sports Act (2022) nominally equalizes the rights and obligations of athletes with disabilities with those without disabilities, but in practice, this equality remains largely declarative. The system for evaluating achievements, access to funding, and the visibility of female athletes with disabilities in the public sphere remain significantly less favorable compared to female athletes without disabilities.

The National Sports Program 2019-2026 (The Croatian Central Office for Sport, 2019) recognizes the promotion of gender equality as one of its goals, but it lacks a focus on multiple marginalized groups, such as women with disabilities. The program does not contain specific implementation mechanisms (e.g. quotas, performance indicators, monitoring and reporting), nor does it specifically address the challenges of "hidden" disabilities such as deafness, which escape traditional models of categorization and support. Such an approach reflects a lack of intersectional sensitivity, that is, it does not take into account the overlap of gender and disability inequalities. In

Međusobno ispreplitanje spolne nejednakosti i društvenih i komunikacijskih prepreka gluhoće pogoršava diskriminaciju s kojom se suočavaju gluhe žene. Istraživanje o razini sudjelovanja gluhih sportašica i razlozima njihove kontinuirane podzastupljenosti ukazalo je na sljedeće prepreke i izazovna pitanja poput negativne stigme prema gluhoći ili gubitku sluha, nedostatka mogućnosti i programa za sudjelovanje, treniranje, sportsku poduku i natjecanje, nedostatka financijske potpore lokalnih, regionalnih i nacionalnih vlasti za pomoć u organiziranju treninga i radionica, nedostatka istraživanja i dokumentiranih činjenica o gluhim/nagluhim ženama na svim razinama u sportu te nedostatka nacionalne politike i zakonodavstva u sportu od strane organizatora i donositelja odluka na svim razinama za sportaše s oštećenjem sluha (Clark & Mesch, 2018). Navedene karakteristike i čimbenici naglašavaju da sudjelovanje u sportskoj praksi ne ovisi samo o sudioniku, već se društvo mora upoznati sa svim teškoćama kako bi se pružila određenija podrška i usmjerenje ženama s invaliditetom.

Dobivene spoznaje ovog istraživanja važne su s aspekta osvješćivanja i informiranja te se mogu primijeniti u osmišljavanju i provedbi politika i programa za prevladavanje specifičnih potreba gluhih žena i djevojaka kako bi se osigurao njihov jednak pristup sportu na svim razinama.

Iako postoje zakonski i strateški okviri koji naizgled promiču jednakost i uključivanje osoba s invaliditetom u sportske aktivnosti, kritičkom analizom uočava se niz nedostataka u njihovoj provedbi, osobito kada je riječ o gluhim sportašicama. Zakon o sportu (2022) nominalno izjednačava prava i obveze sportaša s invaliditetom s onima bez invaliditeta, no u praksi ova jednakost ostaje deklarativna. Sustav vrednovanja postignuća, pristup financiranju i vidljivost sportašica s invaliditetom u javnom prostoru i dalje su znatno nepovoljniji u odnosu na sportašice bez invaliditeta.

Nacionalni program sporta 2019. - 2026. (Središnji državni ured za sport, 2019) prepoznaje poticanje spolne ravnopravnosti kao jedan od svojih ciljeva, ali pritom izostaje fokus na višestruko marginalizirane skupine, poput žena s invaliditetom. Program ne sadrži konkretne mehanizme provedbe (npr. kvote, indikatore uspješnosti, praćenje i izvještavanje), niti se posebno osvrće na izazove "skrivenih" invaliditeta poput gluhoće, koji izmiču tradicionalnim modelima kategorizacije i podrške. Takav pristup odražava nedostatak intersekcionalne osjetljivosti, odnosno ne uzima u obzir preklapanje rodne i invaliditetne nejednakosti. U tom kontekstu nužno je istaknuti vulnerabilnost osoba s invaliditetom i njihovo često suo-

this context, it is necessary to highlight the vulnerability of people with disabilities and their frequent encounter with barriers, which can cause significant negative impacts, therefore a complex approach is needed to implement changes in the current situation in order to increase the base of female athletes with disabilities.

A particular challenge is the lack of participation in the process of adopting sports policies. Deaf athletes, as well as women with disabilities in general, are rarely included in advisory bodies, research and evaluation of sports programs. In this way, the value of their direct experience is ignored, while solutions are shaped without the active participation of those they affect, which often results in measures that do not meet the real needs of female athletes. Ultimately, these obstacles not only limit access to sports, but also further reinforce the social marginalization of deaf women. In order to systematically address the above challenges, it is necessary to develop concrete action plans with clear goals, measures and indicators, which include the mandatory participation of representatives of the target population in all phases – from policy formulation to implementation. Without concrete changes, there is a real danger that normative frameworks will remain disconnected from reality, further deepening the gap between legal rights and real opportunities for deaf athletes.

All stakeholders need to integrate a gender perspective and an intersectional approach into their actions due to the overlapping causes of inequality (European Commission, 2022). The findings of this research imply the implementation of concrete strategies and measures to increase the participation of deaf women in sport, such as gender-responsive funding where sports organizations allocate budgets for gender equality and the inclusion of the male population as partners to contribute to change. Deaf sport has been strongly dominated by men at all levels for years, especially in decision-making positions, and in the Republic of Croatia only 4 (27%) women are in positions that enable decision-making in the main sports federation of the deaf (two women in the executive and supervisory boards). This is significantly less than the European Commission's proposal to set a 50% representation quota for women in all decision-making bodies. Gender equality is considered one of the fundamental principles of good governance in European sports organizations (European Commission, 2022).

Given the results obtained and the observed systemic, organizational and social obstacles that affect the inclusion and retention of deaf women in top-level sports, it is necessary to propose specific recommendations that can serve as a basis for shaping public policies aimed at

čavanje s preprekama, a koje mogu prouzročiti značajnije negativne utjecaje, stoga je potreban kompleksni pristup pri realizaciji promjene trenutnog stanja kako bi se povećala baza sportašica s invaliditetom.

Poseban izazov predstavlja i nedostatak participativnosti u procesu donošenja sportskih politika. Gluhe sportašice, kao i žene s invaliditetom općenito, rijetko su uključene u savjetodavna tijela, istraživanja i evaluacije sportskih programa. Na taj se način zanemaruje vrijednost njihovog neposrednog iskustva, dok se rješenja oblikuju bez aktivnog sudjelovanja onih na koje se odnose, što često rezultira mjerama koje ne odgovaraju stvarnim potrebama sportašica. U konačnici, ove prepreke ne samo da ograničavaju pristup sportu, već dodatno učvršćuju društvenu marginalizaciju gluhih žena. Kako bi se navedeni izazovi sustavno rješavali, nužno je razviti konkretne akcijske planove s jasnim ciljevima, mjerama i indikatorima, koji uključuju i obavezno sudjelovanje predstavnica ciljane populacije u svim fazama – od oblikovanja do provedbe politika. Bez konkretnih promjena, postoji stvarna opasnost da normativni okviri ostanu odvojeni od stvarnosti, čime se dodatno produbljuje razlika između zakonskih prava i stvarnih prilika gluhih sportašica.

Svi dionici u svoja djelovanja moraju integrirati rodnu perspektivu i intersekcionalni pristup radi preklapanja uzroka nejednakosti (European Commission, 2022). Nalazi ovog istraživanja impliciraju na provedbu konkretnih strategija i mjera za povećanje sudjelovanja gluhih žena u sportu, kao što su rodno osviješteno financiranje gdje sportske organizacije namijenjuju proračunska sredstva rodnoj ravnopravnosti i uključivanje muške populacije kao partnera kako bi pridonijeli promjeni. Sportom gluhih osoba već godinama snažno dominiraju muškarci na svim razinama, a posebno na pozicijama donošenja odluka, pa se tako u Republici Hrvatskoj samo 4 (27%) žene nalaze na pozicijama koje omogućuju donošenje odluka u krovnom sportskom savezu gluhih (po dvije žene u izvršnom i nadzornom odboru). Navedeno je značajno manje u odnosu na prijedlog Europske komisije o postavljanju kvote zastupljenosti od 50% za žene u svim tijelima koja donose odluke. Ravnopravnost spolova smatra se jednim od temeljnih načela dobrog upravljanja u europskim sportskim organizacijama (European Commission, 2022).

S obzirom na dobivene rezultate te uočene sustavne, organizacijske i društvene prepreke koje utječu na uključivanje i ostanak gluhih žena u vrhunskom sportu, nužno je predložiti konkretne preporuke koje mogu poslužiti kao temelj za oblikovanje javnih politika usmjerenih na

achieving greater representation of deaf female athletes:

- *Development of targeted sports programs for girls and young women with hearing impairments.* It is necessary to ensure systematic and coordinated co-operation between educational institutions, sports clubs and associations/unions of persons with disabilities in order to create early opportunities for the inclusion of deaf girls in sports.
- *Financial incentives for organizations that actively include deaf female athletes.* In order to encourage inclusion, it is recommended to allocate additional funds, benefits or points advantages when applying for competitions to clubs and sports associations that include deaf women and girls in their work.
- *Education of sports workers on the specifics of working with deaf people.* Professional training and awareness-raising of sports professionals on the specificities of communication with deaf people, on accessibility and on intersectional challenges arising from the intertwining of gender and disability is essential for creating a more supportive sports environment.
- *Reducing regional disparities and ensuring equal access to sports opportunities throughout Croatia.* It is necessary to encourage stronger promotion and inclusion of girls and young women with hearing impairments in sports in all Croatian regions, and not only in urban centers such as the City of Zagreb. It is recommended to conduct information and educational campaigns for parents and sports experts about the possibilities of inclusion in the dual system of sports and to ensure the availability of experts (kinesiologists and coaches educated to work with people with disabilities) from the earliest stage of initiation all the way to the level of top sport.
- *Actively involving deaf female athletes in the processes of adopting sports policies and programs.* It is recommended to institutionalize the participation of deaf female athletes in advisory and program bodies responsible for the development of sports at the local, regional and national levels, in order to ensure that measures respond to the real needs of target groups.
- *Developing indicators for monitoring progress in the field of equality.* In order to evaluate the effectiveness of public policies and programs, it is recommended to establish specific and measurable performance indicators, such as the number of deaf female athletes involved, the number of educated coaches, the level of accessibility of sports content and visibility in the media.
- *Encourage cooperation with international organizations, such as International Committee of Sports for the Deaf and European Deaf Sports Organi-*

postizanje veće zastupljenosti gluhih sportašica:

- *Razvoj ciljano usmjerenih sportskih programa za djevojčice i mlade žene s oštećenjem sluha.* Neophodno je osigurati sustavnu i koordiniranu suradnju između obrazovnih ustanova, sportskih klubova i udruga/saveza osoba s invaliditetom radi stvaranja ranih prilika za uključivanje gluhih djevojaka u sport.
- *Financijski poticaji za organizacije koje aktivno uključuju gluhe sportašice.* U svrhu poticanja inkluzije, preporučuje se dodjela dodatnih sredstava, olakšica ili bodovnih prednosti pri prijavama na natječaje klubovima i sportskim udrugama koje u svoj rad uključuju gluhe žene i djevojke.
- *Edukacija sportskih djelatnika o specifičnostima rada s gluhim osobama.* Stručno usavršavanje i senzibilizacija sportskih djelatnika o specifičnostima komunikacije s gluhim osobama, o pristupačnosti te o intersekcionalnim izazovima koji proizlaze iz ispreplitanja roda i invaliditeta ključno je za stvaranje poticajnijeg sportskog okruženja.
- *Smanjenje regionalnih razlika i osiguranje ravnopravnog pristupa sportskim mogućnostima u cijeloj Hrvatskoj.* Potrebno je poticati snažniju promociju i uključivanje djevojčica i mladih žena s oštećenjem sluha u sport na području svih hrvatskih regija, a ne samo u urbanim središtima poput Grada Zagreba. Preporučuje se provođenje edukativnih kampanja za roditelje i sportske stručnjake o mogućnostima uključivanja u dvojni sustav sporta te osiguranje dostupnosti stručnjaka (kineziologa i trenera educiranih za rad s osobama s invaliditetom) od faze inicijacije pa sve do razine vrhunskog sporta.
- *Aktivno uključivanje gluhih sportašica u procese donošenja sportskih politika i programa.* Preporučuje se institucionalizacija participacije gluhih sportašica u savjetodavnim i programskim tijelima nadležnima za razvoj sporta na lokalnoj, regionalnoj i nacionalnoj razini, kako bi se osiguralo da mjere odgovaraju stvarnim potrebama ciljanih skupina.
- *Razvoj pokazatelja za praćenje napretka u području ravnopravnosti.* U cilju evaluacije učinkovitosti javnih politika i programa, preporučuje se uspostava konkretnih i mjerljivih indikatora uspješnosti, poput broja uključenih gluhih sportašica, broja educiranih trenera, razine dostupnosti sportskih sadržaja i vidljivosti u medijima.
- *Poticati suradnju s međunarodnim organizacijama, poput International Committee of Sports for the Deaf i European Deaf Sports Organization, u cilju razmjene dobrih praksi i jačanja međuna-*



zation, in order to exchange good practices and strengthen international support for the inclusion of deaf sportswomen. Involvement in international networks and platforms enables the exchange of good practices, access to modern models of inclusion, and improves the ability of national organizations to effectively implement inclusive measures.

The implementation of the above recommendations requires a multisectoral approach and continuous institutional support, and their implementation can significantly contribute to reducing existing inequalities and ensuring equal access to top-level sport for all women, regardless of the presence of disability.

## CONCLUSION

The main finding of this research on gender inequality in elite deaf athletes and athletes without disabilities contributes to the indicators of the disadvantaged position of the female population in sport, especially women whose disability is hearing impairment. Accordingly, it is necessary to facilitate understanding of the issues unique to deaf female athletes in order to encourage the creation of favorable and equal conditions in the sports environment. The research confirms that deaf female athletes remain marginalized in multiple ways and points to the necessity of systematic and inclusive policies that will ensure the active participation of women with disabilities in all segments of sport – from initial inclusion to strategic decision-making.

rodne podrške inkluziji gluhih sportašica. Uključivanje u međunarodne mreže i platforme omogućuje razmjenu dobrih praksi, pristup suvremenim modelima inkluzije te poboljšava sposobnost nacionalnih organizacija za učinkovitu provedbu inkluzivnih mjera.

Primjena navedenih preporuka zahtijeva multisektorski pristup i kontinuiranu institucionalnu podršku, a njihova provedba može značajno doprinijeti smanjenju postojećih nejednakosti te osigurati ravnopravan pristup vrhunskom sportu za sve žene, neovisno o prisutnosti invaliditeta.

## ZAKLJUČAK

Glavni nalaz ovog istraživanja o nejednakosti u spolnoj raspodjeli kod vrhunskih gluhih sportaša i sportaša bez invaliditeta doprinosi pokazateljima nepovoljnog položaja populacije žena u sportu, posebice žena čiji uzrok invaliditeta je oštećenje sluha. U skladu s tim, potrebno je omogućiti razumijevanje problematike jedinstvene za gluhe sportašice kako bi se potaknulo stvaranje povoljnih i ravnopravnih uvjeta u sportskom okruženju. Istraživanje potvrđuje da gluhe sportašice ostaju višestruko marginalizirane te ukazuje na nužnost sustavnih i uključivih politika koje će osigurati aktivnu participaciju žena s invaliditetom u svim segmentima sporta – od početnog uključivanja do strateškog odlučivanja.

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