



Opinion

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# Inequity in Mexican Sports Seen from the Challenges of Inclusion for Transgender Athletes

**Mariela Flores-Cruz, Marina Medina Corrales and Rosa María Cruz-Castruita\***

*Faculty of Sports Organization, Autonomous University of Nuevo León, Mexico*

**\*Corresponding author:** Cruz-Castruita Rosa María, Facultad de Organización Deportiva, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, San Nicolás de los Garza, Nuevo León, México

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## Introduction

In Mexico, results of the National Survey on Sexual and Gender Diversity estimated that there are 5 million people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or with another sexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTI+), of which 316,558 are transgender people, however, so far there is no registry of transgender athletes (TAs) in Mexico that can provide an actual panorama of the situation of this population. To have a better approach to the needs of the TAs in the country, is important to analyze the limitations they face when wanting to develop within a sports discipline and the lack of adequate policies to promote the inclusive participation of TAs in sport at a competitive level since there are currently statutes. Because of that, it is necessary to carry out both qualitative research that allows knowing the experiences and needs of athletes in Mexico, as well as quantitative research in the field of sports sciences.

The term transgender refers to those people who have incongruity between the gender they were assigned at birth in dependence on the physical characteristics of their genitals, and the gender identity with which they conceive themselves, unlike cisgender people, who do not conceive incongruity between the gender assigned to them and their identity [1]; in Mexico, results of the National Survey on Sexual and Gender Diversity were recently published, where it is estimated that there are 5 million people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or with another sexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTI+), of which 316,558 are transgender people [2], on the other hand, Ceballos-Gurrola et al. [3] conducted a survey of 317 athletes in Mexico, in which they identified that 16.25% of the respondents identify themselves in one of the LGBTI+ spectrums, however, so far there is

no registry of transgender athletes (TAs) in Mexico that can provide an actual panorama of the situation of this population.

The figures mentioned in the previous paragraph are essential to have a better approach to the needs of the TAs in the country, since studies have been carried out that analyze the limitations they face when wanting to develop within a sports discipline, one of the main ones being discrimination by peers, coaches or multidisciplinary team since according to Ceballos-Gurrola et al. [3] heterosexual men showed more significant discomfort and rejection towards athletes who call themselves LGBT, while women showed less rejection towards people with different sexual orientation or gender identity, so this behavior is strongly associated with the cultural machismo of Mexico, which can hinder the participation of athletes in some sports discipline, however, the example of other Latin American countries can be followed to counteract these behaviors, as in the case of Argentina, where the Mocha Celis school provides a safe and inclusive space for global development, including sports for transgender students [4].

Likewise, another problem faced by TAs is related to the lack of knowledge by colleagues and coaches about the processes and changes they experience throughout their lives. As reported by Maureira Cid et al. [5] where, when interviewing 324 undergraduate students related to physical activity and sports in Mexico found that there is a lack of knowledge about the biological development of the LGBTI+ people, concluding that it is necessary to integrate subjects that deal with issues such biology and gender identity in order to prepare professionals who promote inclusion within their work environment.

On the other hand, Eberman et al. [6] interviewed coaches from the National Collegiate Athletic Association. They identified that 66% of the coaches surveyed did not know the correct definition of terms such as transgender and transition and reported not having enough information about the physiological changes that occur during hormone replacement, which can represent a challenge to properly address the workouts during this process.

This is related to the lack of adequate policies to promote the inclusive participation of TAs in sport at a competitive level since there are currently statutes, such as the one provided by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which does not restrict the participation of transgender men. At the same time, women are asked to present evidence of testosterone levels below 10nmol/L at least during the 12 months before the competition [7], and this is a widely distributed discourse that lacks sufficient evidence to affirm that testosterone levels are the main determinants of athletic performance [1,8].

That is why, in order to counteract discrimination, it is necessary to carry out both qualitative research that allows knowing the experiences and needs of athletes in Mexico, as well as quantitative research in the field of sports sciences that does not focus only on hormonal levels, where physiological aspects such as the development of capacities are also included to characterize beyond comparing them with cisgender athletes, reduce the lack of information and create appropriate policies that allow inclusive participation of TAs.

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