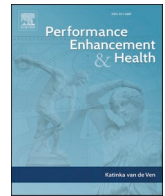


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Review Article

A scoping review of research about women in sport: A perspective from the island of Ireland

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ABSTRACT

Women remain under-represented in many sport settings, including as research participants. Additionally, there is often a lack of collective thinking and action across universities and the sport sector in research about women in sport, including on the island of Ireland. To support the strategic development of research within this region, we conducted a scoping review to systematically identify, analyse, and synthesise existing literature about women in sport on the island of Ireland. Following searches of electronic databases (APA PsycINFO, MEDLINE, SportDiscus, SocINDEX with Full Text) and manual searches up to December 2024, we included 274 peer-reviewed outputs. Research about women in sport in Ireland has grown significantly over the last five years, with 57.7 % of included studies published in print or online in the five years prior to the search (2020–2024). Following analysis of each study, we organised primary topics investigated into five main areas: injury ($k = 86$), sport performance ($k = 72$), sport, health and wellbeing ($k = 65$), society and culture ($k = 38$), and coaching and professional practice ($k = 13$). We identified numerous trends, including the dominance of cross-sectional research designs and quantitative methods, tendency to conduct research through a monodisciplinary lens, and inconsistent reporting of sex/gender in published literature. While this review highlights research priorities specific to the island of Ireland, it offers a template for other regions to replicate and some relevant learning for researchers worldwide in their respective and collective efforts to improve the experiences of women in sport.

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, women¹ are underrepresented in sport as leaders, coaches, officials, administrators, athletes, and in the media (Cooky et al., 2021; Leabeater et al., 2023). Gender inequality in sport has long been critiqued, particularly by sport sociology and psychology researchers (Coakley et al., 2009; Fraser & Kochanek, 2023; Krane, 1994, 2001; Liston, 2005), and more recently by other sport science disciplines (Costello et al., 2014). Despite calls for more research about women and girls, only 34 % of participants in sport and exercise science studies published worldwide between 2014 and 2020 were female (Cowley et al., 2021), with this figure slightly higher at 46 % in sport and exercise psychology research published in 2010, 2015 and 2020 (Walton et al., 2024). There is also a gap in research focused solely on women; only 13 % of publications in sports medicine (Paul et al., 2023), 9 % in talent development (Curran et al., 2019), 7 % in sport and exercise psychology (Walton et al., 2024), and 6 % in sport and exercise science (Cowley et al., 2021) included women participants only. Alongside this underrepresentation, there is growing awareness among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike of the need for systemic, interdisciplinary, and holistic approaches to address gender inequality (Lebel et al., 2021; Parsons et al., 2021; Thorpe et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is also important to consider cultural, jurisdictional, and contextual features when developing initiatives to improve participation, experiences, performances, and wellbeing in and through sport for women and girls (Fasting et al., 1997).

1.1. Women in sport on the island of Ireland

This article focuses on women's sport on the island of Ireland, where there are two overarching agencies for sport: Sport Ireland in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) and Sport Northern Ireland (NI) in NI. Women's engagement in sport on the island of Ireland is a key focus (Sport NI, 2022; Sport Ireland, 2018), as reflected in a bespoke women in sport policy in the RoI (Sport Ireland, 2023). More than half of the sports played by women on the island do not recognise the north and south boundary, but there remains a lack of coherent and collective activity among and between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers across this border (Liston & Maguire, 2022). Initiatives such as the Female Sports Forum in NI, the 20 × 20 and Her Moves campaigns in the RoI, and gender quotas for management/executive committees (RoI only) have raised discourse and activity around gender equality in sport, with women now comprising 42 % of board members of national sporting bodies (Sport Ireland, 2024). However, women remain underrepresented and under-supported in administration, coaching, officiating, the media, and as participants in sport (Crosson & Ni Chumhaill, 2023; Free, 2024; Liston & O'Connor, 2020; McCallion, 2021; Sport Ireland, 2019; Tiernan, 2023).

In relation to research about women in sport on the island of Ireland, there are pockets of expertise in sub-disciplines across higher education institutes, but no overall policy, practice, or dissemination strategy, which limits collaboration and knowledge translation (Lebel et al., 2021). This is not uncommon and reflects trends in other disciplines and countries (Jones & Weinrib, 2022). With increased discourse, visibility, and activity around women in sport on the island of Ireland, an opportunity exists to harness interest in research about women in sport across the island. Such an endeavour could help to scope gaps in existing research and promote more collaborative, high-quality,

interdisciplinary research that can inform policy and practice.

To support this strategic development, we sought to identify, analyse, and synthesise existing literature about women in sport on the island of Ireland, specifically using 'women' as an inclusive term, covering the entire life course. We used a scoping review methodology, which is well suited to broad, exploratory research questions (Sabiston et al., 2022), establishing trends within an evidence base (Daubt et al., 2013), and identifying knowledge gaps for future research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Munn et al., 2018; Tricco et al., 2018). We sought to address the following question: *What published, peer-reviewed research exists about women in sport on the island of Ireland?* We focused on three specific questions: (a) what are the characteristics of studies (e.g., authorship, samples, settings, methods)?; (b) what topics and disciplines have been studied?; and (c) what are the gaps for future research? By mapping this research landscape about women's sport in Ireland, we sought to clarify what is known and offer suggestions for future research. While this review focuses on the island of Ireland, it may serve as a case study relevant to other national contexts and could provide an exemplar for countries or regions seeking to build coherent research programmes addressing challenges faced by women in sport.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Research context

This research project was developed through the establishment of 'míde' (www.mideresearch.com), an all-island, collaborative, interdisciplinary research consortium formally launched on the island of Ireland in early 2025. The consortium's aim is to advance interdisciplinary and impactful research about women in sport, physical activity (PA), exercise, and health across the lifespan, generating insights that shape and inform policy, enhance practice, and foster inclusivity and equality for women and girls. An all-island approach is important to mitigate the jurisdictional, cultural, and organisational barriers in Irish sport, including for researchers (Liston & Maguire, 2022). Harnessing the expertise of researchers in and from both the RoI and NI, the research team consists of specialists in their discipline, with academic and personal experience in women's sport and a shared commitment to its advancement. This collective, interdisciplinary approach is essential, as each discipline is individually valued but significantly enhanced when considered through an interdisciplinary lens. While this is challenging, given different epistemological and ontological approaches, interdisciplinary work is increasingly adopted and advocated within women in sport research (Thorpe et al., 2023). The research consortium has two main objectives: (a) to design, conduct, and support high-quality research on the island of Ireland, and (b) to facilitate the translation of research into policy and practice. Guided by the knowledge to action framework (Graham et al., 2006), this scoping review represents an important foundational step for the consortium, helping to inform future research and present a coherent overview of existing evidence to benefit policy and practice.

2.2. Review protocol

Our scoping review followed Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) 5-step framework for scoping reviews and recommended enhancements to this framework (Levac et al., 2010). The review is reported in line with the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) (Tricco et al., 2018 - Appendix A). We deposited a protocol on the Open Science Framework prior to searches and documented any modifications (https://osf.io/caq42/?view_only=eeb0a3619f6949f5aac01b9ff1fe3ee3).

2.3. Eligibility criteria

We included outputs in this review if they: (a) were original studies using any study design; (b) were published in print or online ahead of

¹ Sex and gender are often used interchangeably in sport research, reflecting assignment of sex from birth (female) or the socially constructed concept of gender (women). In this review, while we have included research that reported sex and gender, for the sake of parsimony, we have chosen to consistently use the term 'woman'/'women' as a noun and adjective given the breadth of disciplines being reviewed, and variation in terminology therein.

print as peer-reviewed journal articles, books or book chapters in the English language; and (c) presented data about women in sport on the island of Ireland, including participants involved in women's sport in Ireland (i.e., the RoI and NI) and/or those of Irish, Northern Irish, or British nationality living in or originating from the RoI or NI. Eligible participants included, but were not limited to, women athletes, coaches, practitioners, parents/guardians (of women or who were women), and volunteers involved in women's sport within these jurisdictions and/or of eligible nationalities. We defined sport as a goal-directed physical activity (PA) governed by rules and involving competition (Kent, 2006). For studies mixing eligible and ineligible participants (e.g., other genders, locations, or non-sport participants), we only included outputs with data or findings specific to women's sport on the island of Ireland. Given the multi-disciplinary and exploratory nature of our review, we adopted an eclectic perspective to research approaches, including studies with: eligible participants; media analyses of women in sport; or original conceptual, theoretical, or historical contributions to understanding women's sport on the island of Ireland. We excluded studies that: (a) did not contain original data (e.g., reviews); or (b) recruited participants involved in non-competitive PA (e.g., exercise, leisure activities, adventure).

2.4. Information sources and search strategy

We employed several strategies to identify relevant outputs. First, systematic searches of four electronic databases (APA PsycINFO, MEDLINE, SportDiscus, SocINDEX with Full Text) were conducted by the first author on three occasions (May–December 2024), with the final search conducted on December 31st, 2024. The search string was developed collaboratively by the authors and refined through piloting. Following recommendations for scoping reviews (Pollock et al., 2023), our search string contained blocks pertaining to the population, concept, and context: (a) girl* OR woman OR women OR female*; (b) sport OR athlete* OR coach*; and (c) Ireland OR Irish. A line was added to exclude ineligible records (e.g., meta-analyses). The search string was adapted for each database, with subject terms added where relevant (Appendix B for full search strings). Second, we searched Google Scholar for review papers about sport on the island of Ireland (Appendix B) and screened the reference lists to identify additional eligible records. Third, we drew on our team's research experience to identify records not captured in the database searches. All records were uploaded to Covidence (2024), where we managed the screening and data extraction process. Covidence's automatic de-duplication feature was used to remove duplicate records.

2.5. Study selection

The study selection process had two stages. First, two of 10 authors (PCJ, NNC, KL, MMM, TJH, MF, CM, NK, BE, AL) independently screened the title and abstract of each record against the eligibility criteria. Any conflicts were resolved by the first author. Second, the first author screened all remaining records at the full-text stage, with one of three other authors (NNC, CM, NK) independently screening approximately 30–40 % of the records each (i.e., each record was assessed by the first author and one of the three other authors). If an article lacked sufficient information for decision-making, we contacted the corresponding authors. Any conflicts were resolved through discussion between the two reviewers assessing eligibility, and agreement was reached on reasons for excluding ineligible records.

2.6. Data charting

After team collaboration, we identified data needed to answer our research questions. We extracted data on: *output information* (i.e., author [s], publication year, gender composition of authors, affiliation, journal/book title, funding source); *sample* (i.e., description of group,

proportion of women in mixed-gender samples, age, ethnicity, disability, health status); *context* (i.e., location, performance level); *research methods* (i.e., approach, study design, methods, discipline, disciplinary perspective); and *key findings* (i.e., summary of quantitative and/or qualitative findings/results). Each output was reviewed and charted by a single author with relevant expertise (i.e., subject or sport-specific knowledge), and a second author verified the extracted information, discussing any necessary edits with the original extractor. Further details on data coding are detailed in Appendix C.

2.7. Collating, summarising, and reporting findings

After data extraction, the first author collated and synthesised information on the outputs, samples, contexts, and research methods. An additional inductive content analysis was undertaken to synthesise the topics covered within included studies. This approach aligned with scoping review guidelines, as the purpose of this methodology is to map the extent, range, and nature of literature on a topic (Tricco et al., 2018). While initially led by the first author, five other authors (ESC, NNC, KL, CE, AL), each with different disciplinary expertise, contributed as critical friends during the analysis process (Smith & McGannon, 2018), with this collaborative approach leading to further development and refinement of the analysis. Initially, the first author reviewed each article and labelled the primary topic of focus with a code. The codes were then reviewed and revised where necessary (e.g., where an alternative code could be used) following critical discussions with the aforementioned authors. Subsequently, similar codes were grouped into broader categories and crafted into a narrative (Popay et al., 2006).

3. Results

After screening the 10,168 records identified through our searches, 274 articles were included in the review (see PRISMA flow diagram in Appendix D). While multiple reasons often led to study exclusion, the most common primary reasons were related to location (e.g., wrong location, i.e. not in the RoI or NI, or insufficient information on location/nationality; $k = 529$), participants (e.g., men-only samples or women's data not separated from men's or other genders; $k = 343$), or context (e.g., mixing sport and exercise; $k = 140$). References for included studies are detailed in Appendix E and extracted information for each study is presented in Appendix F.

3.1. General characteristics of included studies

3.1.1. Output information

Our review demonstrates a rapid increase in publications about

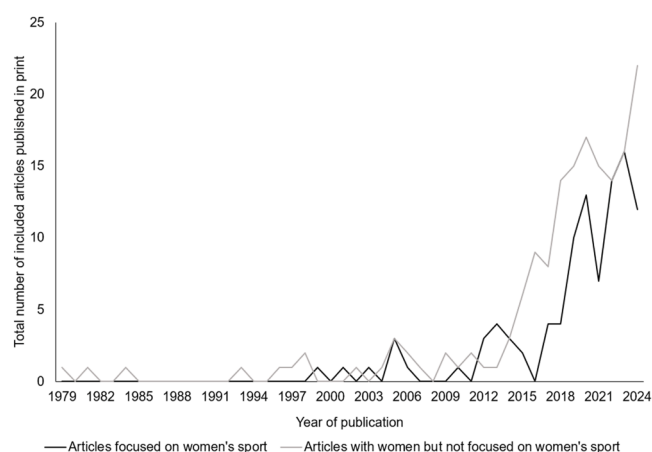


Fig. 1. Publication trends for outputs about women in sport on the island of Ireland published in print from 1979 to December 2024.

women's sport on the island of Ireland, especially over the last five years (Fig. 1). In total, 38.7 % ($k = 106$) of the included articles focused on women's sport or women in sport, referred to hereafter as women-only, with the majority of these published since 2020 ($k = 68$, 64.2 %). The most common authorship composition was "co-authored, mixed gender, first author woman" ($k = 100$, 36.5 %), followed by "co-authored, mixed gender, first author man" ($k = 78$, 28.5 %), "co-authored, all men" ($k = 47$, 17.2 %), and "co-authored, all women" ($k = 24$, 8.8 %), with only a small number of sole-authored articles by women ($k = 10$, 3.6 %) and men ($k = 10$, 3.6 %). We found no notable differences in the gender distribution of first authors (men $k = 137$, 50.0 %; women $k = 134$, 48.9 %; uncertain $k = 3$, 1.1 %), but for co-authored articles, there was a gender difference in last authorship, with most last authors being men ($k = 149$, 58.7 %) and fewer being women ($k = 98$, 38.6 %). In addition, women first authors more commonly co-authored with men (80.6 %) than men first authors co-authored with women (62.4 %). The journals that published articles most frequently were *The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* ($k = 17$), *Physical Therapy in Sport* ($k = 13$), and *The International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance* ($k = 10$). Funding was reported in 35.80 % of articles ($k = 98$), suggesting a large amount of unfunded research. Similar proportions of women-only studies ($k = 38/106$, 35.8 %) and mixed-gender studies ($k = 60/168$, 35.7 %) reported funding. The most common funding sources were internal-university funding ($k = 25$, 25.5 %), research councils on the island of Ireland ($k = 17$, 17.3 %), and single or multiple government/state agencies (e.g., government departments; $k = 14$, 14.3 %). Of the 38 funded women-only studies, support was sourced primarily from joint-funding arrangements involving a research council and at least one other funder ($k = 12$, 31.6 %), universities ($k = 11$, 28.9 %) and research councils ($k = 4$, 10.5 %). We noted a trend towards more women-only studies being funded recently, with 84.2 % ($k = 32$) of such articles published since 2020.

3.1.2. Participant information

Within the 274 included studies, there were 241 independent samples, due to some studies reporting data for the same participants across ≥ 2 articles and others not recruiting participants (e.g., historical accounts) or using publicly available sources (e.g., print media). The independent samples recruited included 32,584 women athletes, 11,101 women presenting with injuries (i.e., the same participant could have been included multiple times), 1286 patients who were women athletes, 693 coaches (472 women, 87 men, 134 gender unspecified), 377 young people commenting on women's sport (221 men, 156 women), 258 sport professionals (e.g., journalists, physiotherapists; 95 women, 42 men, 121 gender unspecified), 238 parents of sportswomen (1 man, 237 gender unspecified), 181 sport officials (142 men, 39 women), 22 women who were sport fans, 13 academics (3 women, 10 gender unspecified), six disability activists (6 gender unspecified), four women administrators, two women coach developers, two men who were retired athletes commenting on women's sport, and two unknown stakeholders. In addition, eight studies combined participant information for eligible and ineligible participants (e.g., general population studies that reported the total sample size but did not provide information on the sex/gender breakdown or the sport versus non-sport split), making it difficult to separate (a) sporting versus non-sporting women participants ($N = 20,015$) and (b) women in mixed-gender samples ($N = 124$). However, as these studies presented findings for samples that were eligible (e.g., analysis involved comparison of women and men), they were included. Sixteen studies also included non-athlete women participants ($N = 10,582$), mostly from the general population. Among the 168 independent samples of athletes recruited exclusively on the island of Ireland (i.e., excluding multi-nation studies), 32.7 % ($k = 55$) recruited women athletes only. For the remaining 113 samples, most ($k = 75$, 66.4 %) had <50 % women, while 9.7 % ($k = 11$) had an equal balance, and 23.9 % ($k = 27$) were mostly women athletes.

The terms 'sex' and/or 'gender' were used appropriately and

consistently throughout 144 articles ('sex' $k = 11$, 'gender' $k = 25$, both terms used appropriately $k = 7$, and not applicable $k = 1$), but 130 outputs (47.5 %) used the terms interchangeably (e.g., using 'gender' in article or table titles but categorisation of participants by sex). Only 14 articles (5.1 %) reported ethnicity information for eligible participants, and most described participants as White. A total of nine articles (3.3 %) reported recruitment of disabled people. For studies that reported age information (e.g., mean age, age range, minimum age; $k = 221$, 80.7 %), most were conducted with adults ($k = 152$, 68.8 %) rather than under 18s ($k = 41$, 18.6 %), with 28 studies combining adults and adolescents (12.7 %). In single-sport studies ($k = 149$), most participants were from Gaelic games ($k = 76$, 51.0 %; mixed Gaelic games $k = 32$, 42.1 %; ladies Gaelic football $k = 29$, 38.2 %; camogie $k = 15$, 19.7 %), followed by athletics ($k = 19$, 12.8 %), soccer ($k = 16$, 10.7 %), and rugby ($k = 14$, 9.4 %). Multi-sport samples ($k = 86$) tended to include participants from Gaelic games ($k = 44$, 51.2 %), soccer ($k = 35$, 40.7 %), and rugby ($k = 34$, 39.5 %).

3.1.3. Contexts

Most articles ($k = 254$, 92.7 %) involved studies conducted on the island of Ireland, while the remainder were international studies featuring eligible participants ($k = 20$, 7.3 %). In terms of specific locations, most studies mentioned Ireland or the recruitment of Irish people but offered no further detail ($k = 99$, 36.1 %). The remainder were located in the RoI ($k = 95$, 34.7 %), both the RoI and NI (i.e., all-island, $k = 69$, 25.2 %), or in NI only ($k = 11$, 4.0 %). Most studies focused on multiple performance levels ($k = 141$, 51.5 %), with the most frequently reported levels being community/club ($k = 110$, 40.1 %), national/inter-county ($k = 83$, 30.3 %), and international ($k = 64$, 23.4 %).

3.1.4. Research methods

More than two-thirds of studies used quantitative methods ($k = 187$, 68.3 %), with qualitative ($k = 68$, 24.8 %) and mixed methods ($k = 19$, 6.9 %) employed less frequently. The cross-sectional design was the most widely adopted by researchers ($k = 98$, 35.8 %). The most common data sources were questionnaires ($k = 102$, 37.2 %), measures of physical performance (e.g., physical tests, assessments of movement; $k = 65$, 23.7 %), and interviews ($k = 48$, 17.5 %). Only 10 studies (3.6 %) reported engagement with non-academic partners, typically involving consultation with coaches, players, or sport agencies when developing study materials. Among studies where power calculations were relevant ($k = 183$), 154 did not report a power calculation (84.1 %). Of the 29 studies that did, two studies did not reach the required sample size. No power calculations reported in studies comparing women and men accounted for gender comparison, potentially resulting in inadequate statistical powering of these comparisons. Gender/sex was considered in the interpretation of data in 74.1 % ($k = 203$) of studies, primarily comparing women to men. Only four studies reported consideration of menstrual cycle stage in data collection or analysis.

3.2. Key findings

3.2.1. Discipline overview

We classified most studies as monodisciplinary ($k = 248$, 90.5 %), with a smaller proportion labelled as multidisciplinary ($k = 19$, 6.9 %) or interdisciplinary ($k = 7$, 2.6 %). The most commonly featured disciplines were medical sciences (including sports medicine, injury, health, physiotherapy, athletic therapy, sport therapy; $k = 85$, 31.0 %), physiology ($k = 61$, 22.2 %), psychology ($k = 55$, 20.0 %), sociology ($k = 39$, 14.2 %), and biomechanics and motor control ($k = 27$, 9.9 %).

3.2.2. Topic summaries

The primary topics examined in the included studies were clustered into five categories. While some articles could arguably be categorised into multiple codes and categories, we made final decisions based on the

main outcomes relevant to the review. A brief overview of each category is provided in the following sub-sections, with a full summary presented in Table 1.

3.2.2.1. Injury. Almost one-third of the included articles ($k = 86$, 31.4 %) focused on injury. The most examined areas were: injury incidence; concussion incidence, knowledge and management; and injury prevention and management. Studies specifically addressing injuries often

focused on anterior cruciate ligament reconstructions and other lower-limb injuries, with less-frequently studied topics including the psychology of injury, upper limb and spinal injuries, and injury burden. Over 90 % of studies on injury were monodisciplinary, with a smaller number classified as multidisciplinary. The dominant discipline was medical sciences, with most studies using quantitative methods. Over one-third of injury studies focused specifically on women's sport, approximately a quarter recruited women only, and just under half were

Table 1
Summary of primary topics in research about women in sport on the island of Ireland.

Category (k ; proportion)	Code (k of all articles/ k for women-only articles)	Research approach (k)	Disciplinary approach (k)	Representation of disciplines (k)	Woman first author k (proportion)	Focus on women's sport k (proportion)	Only recruit women k (proportion)
Injury (86; 31.4 %)	• Injury incidence (24/7) • Injury prevention and management (16/11) • Concussion incidence, knowledge and management (18/4) • Anterior cruciate ligament injury (8/5) • Lower limb injury (10/3) • Psychology of injury (5/0) • Spine and upper limb injury (3/2) • Injury burden (2/1)	• Quantitative (65) • Qualitative (18) • Mixed methods (3)	• Mono-disciplinary (79) • Multidisciplinary (7)	• Medical sciences (76) • Psychology (7) • Biomechanics and motor control (7) • Physiology (2) • Sociology (1) • Nutrition (1)	40 (46.5 %)	33 (38.4 %)	22 (25.6 %)
Sport performance (72; 26.3 %)	• Sport demands, performance testing and competition (33/23) • Performance psychology (10/0) • Training and preparation (10/2) • Movement analysis (9/3) • Motor control and skilled performance (6/1) • Recovery drinks (4/3)	• Quantitative (67) • Qualitative (3) • Mixed methods (2)	• Mono-disciplinary (63) • Multidisciplinary (6) • Interdisciplinary (3)	• Physiology (40) • Biomechanics and motor control (20) • Psychology (12) • Nutrition (3) • Medical sciences (4) • Performance analysis (3) • Sociology (1)	29 (40.3 %)	32 (44.4 %)	32 (44.4 %)
Sport, health and wellbeing (65; 23.7 %)	• Sport participation and physical activity (16/2) • Nutrition status, education, and literacy (16/5) • Correlates, determinants and benefits of sport (11/2) • Mental health (8/0) • Recovery strategies (6/0) • Risky behaviours (4/0) • Menstrual cycle (1/1) • Pelvic health (1/1)	• Quantitative (50) • Qualitative (7) • Mixed methods (8)	• Mono-disciplinary (58) • Multidisciplinary (6) • Interdisciplinary (1)	• Psychology (25) • Physiology (19) • Physical activity (15) • Sociology (5) • Medical sciences (5) • Nutrition (4) • Motor control (2) • Economics (1)	38 (58.5 %)	11 (16.9 %)	11 (16.9 %)
Society and culture (38; 13.9 %)	• Media, fandom, and journalism (16/11) • Gender relations and sport (8/5) • Activism and representation (5/1) • History of women's sport in Ireland (5/4) • Intersectionality (4/2)	• Qualitative (28) • Quantitative (5) • Mixed methods (5)	• Mono-disciplinary (37) • Interdisciplinary (1)	• Sociology (28) • History (5) • Psychology (4) • Physical activity (1) • Management and governance (1)	18 (47.4 %)	23 (60.5 %)	18 ¹ (47.4 %)
Coaching and professional practice (13; 4.7 %)	• Athlete support services (4/0) • Coach reflective practice (3/1) • Experiences and development of women coaches (3/3) • Coach education in women's sport (2/2) • Coaching women (1/1)	• Qualitative (12) • Mixed methods (1)	• Mono-disciplinary (11) • Interdisciplinary (2)	• Psychology (7) • Coaching (5) • Sociology (4)	9 (69.2 %)	7 (53.8 %)	5 (38.5 %)

Note: Studies that did not recruit participants but focused on women in sport (i.e., media representation of a woman athlete) were included in this figure.

first authored by a woman.

3.2.2.2. Sport performance. The second highest proportion of articles were classified as sport performance ($k = 72$, 26.3 %). Most articles focused on physical performance, particularly the demands of a sport (i. e., physical), performance testing and competition. Other common topics included performance psychology, training and preparation, and movement analysis. Researchers less frequently focused on motor control and skilled performance, and the effects of recovery drinks. Most studies were monodisciplinary, with only a few being multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary. The most prominent disciplines were physiology and biomechanics. Most studies used quantitative methods and recruited both women and men, with less than half focused specifically on women's sport and just over two-fifths first authored by a woman.

3.2.2.3. Sport, health and wellbeing. This category encompassed 65 articles related to health and wellbeing in the context of sport participation. Almost one-quarter of these articles examined nutrition in relation to health and wellbeing, usually exploring nutrition status, education, and literacy among athletes. Another common topic was the contribution of sport participation to PA, including associations between sports club membership and PA. Several studies focused on correlates, determinants, and benefits of sport, addressing aspects like parental influence and motivation. Few studies examined mental health, risky behaviours (e.g., alcohol use, gambling), the menstrual cycle or pelvic health. Most studies employed quantitative methods and were monodisciplinary, with the main disciplinary perspectives underpinning studies in this category were psychology, physiology, and PA. Less than one-fifth of studies focused on women's sport or women in sport. Most studies tended to recruit mixed-gender samples, and the first author was a woman in more than half of the articles in this category.

3.2.2.4. Society and culture. Of the 38 articles categorised as society and culture (13.9 %), the majority focused on media, fandom, and journalism. These articles tended to explore topics like media coverage of women athletes (e.g., volume and representation), experiences of women who were sports fans, and the involvement of women in sports media. Other topical areas included gender relations in sport, primarily addressing gender biases and stereotyping, historical accounts of women's sports on the island, activism and representation, and intersectionality (e.g., relationships between gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, and sport). Although studies in this category often spanned sport and other domains, particularly the media, most were classified as monodisciplinary, with sociology being the main discipline. Most studies in this category used qualitative methods and focused on women's sport or women in sport, with nearly half first authored by a woman.

3.2.2.5. Coaching and professional practice. Thirteen studies (4.7 %) presented findings related to coaching and professional practice among women in sport. These studies addressed various aspects, including athlete support services (e.g., career transition and mental health support), coaches' use of reflective practice, the experiences and development of women coaches, coach education, and coaching of women. Almost all studies used qualitative methods and were monodisciplinary, with psychological, coaching, and sociological perspectives adopted. Most participants were coaches or support personnel and only five studies exclusively involved women. Over half of these studies focused specifically on women's sport, and over two-thirds were first-authored by a woman.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this review was to systematically identify, analyse, and synthesise existing literature about women in sport on the island of

Ireland. Using a scoping review methodology, we identified 274 relevant studies and found rapid growth in recent years, with 57.7 % of included articles published in print or online in the five years prior to our search (2024–2020). Since the first, women-only focussed article was published 26 years ago (Syed & O'Flanagan, 1999), a further 105 articles focused on women in sport have been published, although most included studies were mixed-gender samples. Mapping the research landscape of women's sport on the island of Ireland has implications for research, policy and practice within this jurisdiction and could be relevant elsewhere. We discuss key findings from our review below to offer policy-makers, sport organisation, coaches and sport professionals, athletes, and researchers in other contexts an opportunity to reflect on similarities and differences in their own regions, and to stimulate relevant, high-quality research programmes aimed at addressing gender inequality in sport. Ultimately, consideration of findings and recommendations related to representation, research design, funding, and inclusivity could help to increase the likelihood that future research programmes meet the needs and priorities of women in sport.

4.1. Representation of women as participants and authors in research

Our findings show significant growth in studies including women across the island of Ireland, which might in some way be linked to developments related to the Athena Swan Charter (Advance HE, 2005), increased internal funding in higher education (Science Foundation Ireland, 2021), and bespoke policies for women in sport (Sport Ireland, 2018, 2023). However, women were in the minority in most mixed-gender studies and just over one-third of included studies focused exclusively on women's sport. While comparisons are limited, other researchers have noted that calls for more women to be involved in sport research have not yet resulted in changes in participation numbers amongst women (Cowley et al., 2021). Potential contributors to the underrepresentation of women as participants in research might include recruitment difficulties, which can be amplified due to the costs of undertaking research that is women-specific in some disciplines (e.g., biologically-oriented research - Elliott-Sale et al., 2021), the high proportion of women with caring responsibilities (Rodriguez-Torres et al., 2021), and smaller numbers of women compared to men across all facets of sport (Leabeater et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the scientific community in sport has a responsibility to champion change and address the inequalities that marginalise women in research, to ensure that more inclusive, socially-just research agendas and practices are enacted.

In terms of the representation of women among authorship teams, we found an almost equal balance of women and men as first authors across all included studies, and a higher proportion of men as last authors, reflecting previous findings in sport and exercise science (Cowley et al., 2023). It is positive that men are actively conducting research with women rather than this being an exclusive responsibility of women researchers. Men can be instrumental in promoting gender equality in sport (Adriaanse & Claringould, 2016) and should participate as equal partners in gender equality initiatives (Flood et al., 2017). At the same time, women offer valuable lived experience, particularly in the context of gender/sex-specific research, highlighting the importance of women leading and collaborating in projects led by men. In addition, some evidence suggests women researchers tend to conduct higher-quality research in sport science and are often first authors on women-only publications (Cowley et al., 2023), which were in the minority in this review.

4.2. Methodological considerations for research about women in sport

Our review revealed several methodological trends in research about women in sport on the island of Ireland. A significant proportion of the evidence base stems from cross-sectional studies. Additionally, over one-third of studies used questionnaires, with power calculations reported in a minority of quantitative studies, none of which considered

comparisons of women and men. Most research was monodisciplinary, failing to represent the trend towards interdisciplinary working in applied sports settings (Sporer & Windt, 2018) and calls for more expansive interdisciplinary research (Glazier, 2017; Piggott et al., 2019). While Piggott (2019) observed progress in interdisciplinary research within exercise physiology, motor control, and functional anatomy, this focus has largely overlooked broader societal, historical, contextual, and cultural factors central to research design and analysis in the humanities and social sciences. Going forward, we call for researchers to increase efforts to bridge these disciplinary divides and foster collaboration across disciplinary boundaries, which could ultimately lead to a more holistic understanding of the complex challenges facing women in sport and the development of more innovative solutions that progress women's sport.

Our review also showed a lack of engagement with non-academic partners and limited use of participatory methods. This absence of public involvement can contribute to a persistent 'gap' between research and both policy and practice in sport science (Barlett & Drust, 2021). To address this, there are growing calls for researchers to disrupt unequal power relations and to collaborate equitably with individuals with relevant lived experience, thereby ensuring research addresses real-world issues (Smith et al., 2023). Involving partners with lived experience enhances research relevance to public contributors and communities, enabling marginalised voices to shape research agendas, outcomes, and methods (Martin, 2005). By co-producing research focused on women's sport on the island of Ireland, relevant groups could meaningfully influence and lead a national research agenda that supports women in sport. This co-production model not only fosters impactful research but also allows partners to identify relevant and timely research priorities, with clear pathways to impact from the outset (Smith et al., 2023). While this approach may necessitate more time and financial support, actively engaging with a wide variety of people with an interest in women's sports throughout the research process can ultimately lead to more impactful and applicable research.

4.3. The funding context for research about women in sport

Most outputs did not report funding sources; among those that did, support often came from internal university grants (e.g., PhD studentships) rather than external research and innovation funding agencies. Notably, few women-only studies received such funding, suggesting a lack of engagement or success with applications to larger national and international funding streams. Increased funding could enhance research quality, for example, by: facilitating the use of gold-standard measures; strengthening research environments and building research capacity (e.g., via research groups, targeted recruitment, fellowships, training schemes and bursaries, and support infrastructure); fostering collaborations across disciplines and sectors; enabling the recruitment of larger sample sizes; and equipping researchers with resources to conduct more ambitious projects, which could include collaboration with non-academic (e.g., for co-production) and academic partners (e.g., for scaling-up for multi-site studies). Ultimately, greater financial investment would significantly strengthen the robustness, quality, and real-world impact of evidence about women in sport.

4.4. Bridging the evidence gap in research about women in sport

Our review showed that on the island of Ireland, there is a need for further research on topics specific to women in sport. For instance, the menstrual cycle, breast movement, pelvic floor health, pregnancy, motherhood, or menopause were either absent as topics or only addressed in single studies. Given the policy commitment and ongoing discourse around increasing women's engagement in sports (Sport Ireland, 2024; Sport NI, 2022), research investigating these unique sex and gender experiences of women is urgently needed to inform policies and practices that support safe and healthy engagement in sport across

the life course. When designing, conducting, and reporting research to fill this evidence gap, it is vital for researchers to consider both sex (e.g., female biology, physiology, and anatomy; Ansdell et al., 2020) and gender (e.g., the socially constructed norms, stereotypes, and expectations of women and girls; Parsons et al., 2021). Without considering both dimensions, future research risks either failing to thoroughly understand female adaptations, performance, and health, or may overlook the lived experiences of women in sport and how these are shaped by gendered environments. Ultimately, high-quality and impactful research must integrate these perspectives to capture the full complexity of women's participation in sport.

While projects focused on topics specific to women in sport are ongoing in international settings (e.g., Elliott-Sale et al., 2023; McHugh & Davenport, 2024), culture and contextual factors in research about women in sport are important. This is captured well in a quote from one study included in this review where an international coach working in Ireland said, "I don't discuss [menstruation] with females in Ireland as it is a catholic country...but in Denmark there would be absolutely no problem" (de Haan & Sotiriadou, 2019, p. 316). As portrayed here, cultural norms and practices influence women's involvement in sport; neglecting these factors risks oversimplifying or silencing essential viewpoints and issues that could be fundamental to involvement (or lack thereof) of women in sport. Consequently, this further emphasises the importance of integrating the skills and expertise of different disciplines in future research about women in sport.

4.5. Inclusivity in conducting and reporting research

Our analysis of the outputs revealed issues with the reporting of participant characteristics. Approximately half (50.82 %) of included articles consistently referred to 'sex' or 'gender', while the remainder used these terms interchangeably. While biological sex and socially constructed gender can align, conflating the two can exclude individuals and lead to inaccurate conclusions (Collier & Cown, 2022). Furthermore, a substantial number of studies were excluded from this review because the results were not disaggregated by sex/gender. This lack of disaggregation hinders the identification of sex/gender specific outcomes (Antequera et al., 2022; Peters & Woodward, 2023), which could be important for advancing research and improving the experiences, health, and performance of women in applied settings. There was also limited research in disability sport, with just nine studies recruiting disabled people, while the small number of studies that did report ethnicity data indicated a lack of diversity, with most participants described as White. This dominant framing through a White, non-disabled lens limits our understanding of the experiences of women from diverse backgrounds in sport (Sherry et al., 2024). The island of Ireland has a rich multicultural society (Central Statistics Office, 2023), which is not reflected in existing research about women in sport. Addressing this gap is needed for achieving greater diversity in research and sport participation, and exploring the unique challenges faced by individuals with intersecting marginalised identities at various life stages, such as early years and later life. Many journals (e.g., British Journal of Sports Medicine) and funding programmes (e.g., Horizon Europe) have clear expectations regarding equality, diversity and inclusion concerning gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability. The results of this scoping review suggest a need for further progression in these areas.

4.6. Limitations of the review

Despite our efforts to maximise the quality of this review (e.g., using a strict definition of sport, reporting the review process transparently), we note several limitations. The strict eligibility criteria (e.g., excluding studies that combine sport and exercise or PA, or combine participants on the island of Ireland with other countries) led to the omission of some potentially relevant data, but this was unavoidable due to how data were

presented in the articles. The review is susceptible to publication bias as only peer-reviewed outputs were included. However, unpublished studies tend to represent a small proportion of relevant studies in a field (e.g., Hartling et al., 2017) and were unlikely to significantly impact the review, given the high number of studies included.

5. Conclusion

To our knowledge, this is the first, region-specific review of women in sport research across a broad spectrum of sport science disciplines. In sum, our review confirms a recent upsurge in women in sport research on the island of Ireland, but there are a number of key findings and learnings that could be beneficial in this region and elsewhere. While further research is needed about women in sport, we call for researchers to focus on quality rather than quantity and to address unanswered research questions and knowledge gaps. Based on our findings, we suggest research quality and prioritisation can be enhanced through interdisciplinarity, more rigorous designs, co-production, and more inclusive sampling. While this scoping review is a valuable undertaking for the island of Ireland, we believe it a worthwhile endeavour for other regions, not only to identify research priorities but perhaps, equally importantly, to unite researchers representing many disciplines based in different higher education institutions around a collective commitment to build a better evidence base to enhance the experiences of women in sport.

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Data availability statement

Data that support the findings of this study are available within the appendices.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Patricia C. Jackman: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Emma S. Cowley:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Niamh Ní Chéilleachair:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Katie Liston:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Mary Margaret Meade:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Tandy Jane Haughey:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Maria Faulkner:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Carla McCabe:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Niamh Kitching:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Brendan Egan:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Siobhán O'Connor:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Rebecca M. Hawkins:** Writing – review & editing, Validation. **Wesley O'Brien:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Niamh Murphy:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ollie Williamson:** Validation, Data curation. **Matthew D. Bird:** Writing – review & editing, Validation. **Anthony J. Gorman:** Writing – review & editing, Validation. **Angela Carlin:** Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ciara Everard:** Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis. **Denise Martin:** Writing – review & editing,

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Supplementary materials

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