

Women in Powerlifting – Is it really just ‘You vs You’?

Reviewing the literature detailing how the physiological and psychosocial pressures faced by Female Raw Powerlifters are obstacles to them excelling in the sport.

Introduction

There are many obstacles affecting women in Powerlifting, but but very little research in how to improve things. From the physiological implications of weight fluctuations, to the psychosocial implications of being a strong woman in todays society, women are facing greater opposition to their success than their male counterparts.

Aims and Method

The aim of this review was to find and critique evidence of women in Powerlifting being at an unfair disadvantage in their sport, due to many external and internal factors. To do this, a methodical search was conducted across various libraries and journals, using key phrases and words to discern relevance. The authors own bias was also addressed, ensuring actual hard evidence found to support or reject lived experience.

Findings

Very little research on women in sport at all, even less on strength sports and even less again on women in Powerlifting. Even sources on ‘How to Powerlift’ were based on the functions of men. In light of this, some peer-reviewed and seminal works were referenced with nuance; papers that studied weight categorised sports were analysed for physiological relevance, and typically male-coded sports were analysed for psychosocial relevance. The research showed no need for intentional weight fluctuations due to no improvement in game-day performance, and in studies that did include women in Powerlifting, the mean weight of participants was less than 70kg. Research has shown that taller and bigger women are already more likely to feel the societal pressures of not having a ‘feminine body’, with Powerlifters being the athletes most likely to exhibit obsessive tendencies with food, so arguably this is a huge blind spot in research.

Conclusion

The historical research paints a bleak picture of oppression for women in male-dominated sports; a reflection of the wider attitude of society on the policing of women’s bodies. Through the lack of research on women in Powerlifting, women are being short changed in guidance on how to best excel in the sport, whilst also potentially being of detriment to their physical and mental health long term.

Reflections

All is not lost! More recent research (within the last 18 months) is showing evidence that times are changing for the better. Women in strength-based sports are gradually being more socially accepted and even celebrated. Through greater advocacy amongst peers, improved knowledge of the physiological functions of women at various stages of engaging with their sport, and greater understanding of the mental interactions female athletes have with food, there is no limit to what women can achieve.

References

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