

Soaring Beyond Limits: A Qualitative Exploration of Women's Prospects and Challenges in Paragliding

Ajay Kumar¹, Dr. Debasis Sahoo²

¹Research Scholar, SOTTHM, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala, H.P.
ajaykapoor.tourism@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9535-9061>

²Associate Professor, SOTTHM, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala, H.P.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7181-156X>

Keywords

- Paragliding
- Gender Disparity
- Women Involvement
- Motivation
- Societal Norms

Abstract

Paragliding, a thrilling recreational and competitive adventure sport, has witnessed a global surge in popularity by attracting enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds. Despite this widespread appeal, a conspicuous gender disparity exists in paragliding participation, with women notably underrepresented. This research paper endeavors to delve into the motivations that drive female solo pilots to embrace paragliding, scrutinize the hurdles they encounter in learning and practicing the sport, and pinpoint the root causes contributing to the stark contrast in participation rates between male and female paragliders. Further, the study also aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the prospects and challenges associated with augmenting women's involvement in paragliding. Following a qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with women paragliding pilots and subsequently analyzed using MAXQDA-24 software. By exploring the narratives of female paragliders, the research revealed the multifaceted aspects related to women's engagement in paragliding, such as their motivation (beauty of the sport, family engagement, etc.), challenges faced (financial and Socio-cultural challenges), and major causes behind their lesser participation (riskiness of the sport, societal norms, etc.). Ultimately, this research contributed valuable insights that can inform strategies to bridge the gender disparity in paragliding, fostering a more inclusive and diverse community within this exhilarating aero sport.

Introduction

Paragliding, a form of free-flying sport involving a lightweight, non-motorized glider, has captivated adventure enthusiasts worldwide. The global paragliders market reached US\$ 234.3 million in 2023, which is predicted to grow at a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 4.9% between 2024 to 2032, reaching US\$ 360.4 million (Reports and Insights, 2024). As far as the global paraglider market is concerned, it is segmented on the basis of type of product, kind of material, end usage, and 'region and countries. The regional segmentation includes North America, Europe, Asia Pacific, Latin America, 'Middle East and Africa'. Paragliding activities include (1) Cross-country flying over long distances, (2) acro for aerobatic tricks, (3) accuracy flying, and (4) tandem flying. Other types are (1) hiking and flying in rugged mountains, (2) speed flying with smaller wings, and (3) Powered Paragliding (PPG) with a motor for extended flights (Kumar & Kumar, 2024). These variation in paragliding attracts paragliders with diversified motivations. These motivations could be 'experiencing its challenging nature, gaining satisfaction and releasing mental pressure/stress' (Chang & Huang, 2012), 'relaxing the body and mind'(Li and Ou, 2002), 'feeling the sense of life-fulfilment & psychological well-being' (Ayazlar, 2015), 'gaining happiness and socialization' (Varol, Aksu and Demirel, 2022), and 'sensation-seeking & experiencing the state of flow' which ultimately impacts the life satisfaction level of the tourists (Ayazlar & Yüksel, 2018). Despite the exhilaration it offers, paragliding predominantly remains as a male-dominated activity as the participation of women are extremely low.

According to the 'Outdoor Participations Trends Report' by the Outdoor Foundation (2022), the participation rate of females in outdoor activities in all age groups (including childhood and adolescence) is generally lower than that of males. Factors contributing to this difference in participation rates include societal norms, cultural perceptions, access to outdoor spaces, safety concerns, psychological aspects, and personal preferences (Çetinkaya et al., 2021). This is further supported by the 'Women in the Hills' research network, which revealed that in general outdoor activities, 35% of participants are females, while in mountain sports their number is merely 20% (Women In Hills, 2024). Moreover, observations from the Paragliding Forum (2021) and the Instagram account (Paragliding Girls [@paraglidinggirls], 2024) indicate a potential disparity in interests between men and women in paragliding, with a noted desire for increased female participation. The under-representation of women is also evident across various adventure sports, with statistics from British Canoeing showing

that only 28% of their members were female (in 2018) and UK Climbing reporting just 13% female participants in their 2020 annual survey (Diversity in the Outdoors, 2024). Furthermore, in the case of paragliding world cups the above gender disparity is prominently visible in Table 1.

Table 1: Women's Participation in Paragliding World Cup

Sr. No.	Event Name	Event Date	Total	Male	Female
1	World Cup Castelo, Brazil, Castelo	18/03/2023 - 25/03/2023	127	117	10
2	Paragliding World Cup 2023 Pegalajar, Spain	06/05/2023 - 13/05/2023	121	113	08
3	Paragliding World Cup 2023 Sacele-Brasov, Romania	06/05/2023 - 13/05/2023	118	112	06
4	Paragliding World Cup 2023 Aksaray, Turkey	29/07/2023 - 05/08/2023	120	111	09
5	Paragliding World Cup 2023 Sacele, France	27/08/2023-02/09/2023	119	113	06
6	Paragliding World Cup 2023 Pico do Gaviao, Brazil	24/09/2023-30/09/2023	100	94	06
7	PWCA Asian Tour 2023 South Korea, Mungyeong	06/10/2023-14/10/2023	88	76	12
8	12th World Cup Superfinal Mexico (Valle de Bravo)Mexico, Valle de Bravo	06/12/2022 - 17/12/2022	127	113	14
9	PWCA Asian Tour 2022 South Korea,	15/10/20232 - 22/10/2022	122	109	13

	Mungyeong South Korea, Mungyeong				
10	World Cup Krushevo, Macedonia 2022 Macedonia, Krushevo	14/07/2022 - 21/07/2022	123	110	13
11	World Cup Clopotiva, Romania 2022 Romania, Clopotiv	25/06/2022 - 02/07/2022	121	111	10
12	World Cup Baixo Guandu, Brazil 2022 Brazil, Baixo Guandu	26/03/2022 - 02/04/2022	118	107	11
13	World Cup Roldanillo, Colombia 2022 Colombia, Roldanillo	06/02/2022- 13/02/2022	130	116	14

(Source: <https://pwca.org/>)

In all these Paragliding World Cup events, there is a clear gender disparity with a significantly higher number of male participants compared to their female counterparts. The percentage of male participants in these events ranges from 86.4% to 94.9% approximately, whereas female participation remains relatively low, with the highest percentage being 13.6% in the South Korea event and the lowest being 5.1% in the Romania and France events (PWCA, 2024). However, according to the research by Smith (2020) on women's experience, it was argued that women's involvement in paragliding can lead to their empowerment, improving their social, economic, physical, and political status (Ferguson, 2011). Hence, it is the need of the hour to find out the motivation, challenges, and the reasons behind the lesser participation of the female paragliders in aero sports activities.

Literature Review

In this section, literature related to women's involvement in adventure tourism were reviewed and presented under four major themes i.e. (1) Adventure and women, (2) Motivations for women's participation in adventure activities, (3) Women and gender disparity and (4) Challenges faced by women in paragliding.

Adventure & Women

Women's participation in adventure tourism has been a subject of growing interest, with research shedding light on various aspects of gender dynamics and the experiences of women in adventure sports. The existing literature highlights the value of adventure experiences for women travelers, examining behavioral diversity and the 'masculinity and femininity' of female adventure tourists (Clarke et al., 2021).

Another research investigated the impact of film festivals on the changing approach of the women towards participating in extreme sports and adventure activities. Specifically, she examined how Shextreme film screenings encouraged women to participate in outdoor adventure sports and Farrar (2020), achieving a state of improved mental well-being.

Motivations for women's participation in adventure activities

There have been several studies exploring the motives of male and female adventure seekers, which revealed a variety of reasons such as goal achievement, social motivation and connecting with the natural environment (Kerr & Mackenzie, 2012). As far as the motivations of women are concerned, it is often driven by a combination of personal and psychological factors. According to another research by Ewert, Yoon and Kweon (2008), the significant motivations among female participants for engaging in adventure activities are; gaining a sense of control, empowerment and personal growth. Similarly, adventure sports are also perceived as a way for experiencing an adrenaline rush and push personal boundaries. Further paragliding allows participants to experience a unique connection with the nature and this connection is often an appealing factor for women, who enjoy outdoor activities (Buckley, 2012).

Women and gender disparity

Researches have indicated that adventure tourists are predominantly men, with women showing a higher propensity for engaging only in soft adventures (Gross et al., 2023). Moreover, the historical exclusion of women from adventure sports has been noted, with adventure sports being predominantly represented by young white men of the middle class (Durin, 2022). This under-representation of women in adventure sports is further reflected in the reinforcement of social dynamics during participation (Reynolds & Hritz, 2012).

The reasons for the above gender disparity are multifaceted and include social, psychological and physical factors. Hence, such type of disparity is not uncommon

in paragliding and therefore, efforts are made to encourage and support female participation to achieve greater gender balance. The primary factors that contribute to the gender disparity in paragliding participation include the 'traditional gender roles' and 'societal norms', that discourage women from engaging in risky or physically demanding activities like paragliding (Baker, 2014). Further, the under-representation of women in paragliding events, media and advertisements reinforces the perception that the sport is not meant for women (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2013). Similarly, economic and geographical factors also impact women's access to paragliding, as the sport requires equipment, training and proximity to suitable flying sites (Yarnal & Frederick, 2007). Finally, despite the marked growth in women's participation in adventure sports, feminist research continues to highlight the 'enduring social issues' and existing 'inequalities' in adventure sports as the major reason behind the gender disparity (Avner et al., 2021).

Challenges faced by women in paragliding

Regardless of their motivations, women paragliders face several challenges in entering and excelling in this sport. Challenges such as the 'gendered nature of sports culture', 'safety concerns' and 'limited female role models' primarily deters women from entering the world of paragliding.

- (a) *Gendered sports culture:* The culture of adventure sports, including paragliding, has historically been male-dominated. This gendered culture creates an unwelcoming environment for women, making it difficult for them to integrate into the community (Shaw & Hoerber, 2003).
- (b) *Safety concerns:* Safety is a crucial consideration for adventure sports. Women perceive paragliding as a riskier sport than men due to their concerns about physical strength and safety issues (Freeman, 2006).
- (c) *Lack of female role models:* Role models can serve as inspiration and prove that women can excel in this sport (Skerl, 2004), but the lack of visible female role models within the sport contributes to the underrepresentation of women in paragliding.

Summary and Research Gap

From the above review of literature, a clear insight into the multifaceted nature of women's participation in adventure tourism was gained along with the motivations and challenges faced by them. However, there is hardly any research that focuses on understanding the motivation of female solo pilots arriving at Bir-

Billing in Himachal Pradesh for paragliding. Further, the challenges faced by them and the major causes behind the lesser participation of females in paragliding remains a topic of investigation. Hence, the current research has the following objectives:

Objectives

1. To analyze the motivations of female solo pilots for undertaking paragliding activity.
2. To find out the challenges faced by the female solo pilots for learning and undertaking paragliding.
3. To find out the major causes behind the lesser participation of female paragliders in comparison to male participants.

Methodology

In this research, a qualitative research approach was employed, using Inductive descriptive analysis and Content analysis techniques. The inductive analysis involves thoroughly reading the data, identifying the codes and patterns, coding the data, comparing the data and code with the codes, condensing the code to categories and then generating the themes that are emerging according to the objectives from where we can draw the findings and explain them using the theory or literature (Saldaña and Omasta, 2017; Miles et al., 2020; Bingham and Witkowsky, 2022). By following the purposive sampling techniques, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 08 female solo pilots (of varying experience levels) to generate sufficient research data (Neergaard et al., 2009 and Sandelowski, 2000). Interviews were transcribed using 'Google Journalist Studio' and analyzed in "MAXQDA24" software. We have used the open and axial coding process in the program, where coding was performed in InVivo for phrasing the sentences. Later descriptive analysis technique was chosen for its ability to incorporate direct quotations, bringing the participant's natural information directly to the eyes of readers (Sandelowski, 2000). Additionally, Thematic content analysis was used with an inductive-deductive approach for interpreting the results, whereas the graphical outputs of the results and themes were displayed using creative coding.

Questionnaire design

As a part of the study, a semi-structured interview form was developed to thoroughly explore the participants' responses, find out the reason behind their

replies and to pose supplementary questions regarding the process. Initially, 16 questions were finalised for the questionnaire after interviewing with the instructor, who had over 4 years of experience in teaching and training paragliding. Later, the questionnaire was validated through a faculty member with experience in qualitative research for evaluating and commenting on the questions in light of the study's goals, logic and philosophy of qualitative research. Following the expert evaluation, the 16 questions were categorized under three major segments i.e. (a) engagement questions (four questions), (b) exploration questions (nine questions) and (c) exit questions (three questions). Further, as per the guidance of the faculty member, 07 demographic questions introductory questions were included as a part of the introductory section.

Finally, a pilot survey was conducted with two international pilots (one male and one female) who arrived at Bir-Billing for paragliding. The interviews were lasted for approximately 12 minutes each. As there were no issues identified with the questionnaire developed for the 'semi-structured in-depth interview', the same was finalised for the final data collection. The typical questions in the questionnaire included the following:

- How and when did you start paragliding for the first time?
- What was your motivation for doing and learning paragliding
- What are the challenges you faced as a woman in learning and doing paragliding?
- Why women's participation in paragliding activity is less as compared to male participation?
- What are your expectations from the government about the paragliding sports for more women participation?

Data Collection Procedure

The primary data was collected through 'semi-structured interviews' with 08 participants (female solo pilots) using a purposive sampling technique. A total of 04 interviews of international female pilots were held in a quiet environment between 9.00 am to 11.00 am at the Billing paragliding take-off site while pilots were waiting for the perfect wind conditions for multiple days. Other four interviews were conducted with Indian female paragliders after the landing of pilots in the landing area of Tang-Narwana during the period of the Dhauladhar Accuracy Pre-World Cup 2023, out of which three women participants were taking part in the competition and one woman paraglider was a member of the judges committee of the event.

Before starting the interview, each of the participants was explained about the purpose of this research and its future uses. It was made clear to the participants that the conversation of the interview would be recorded on a voice recorder to ensure the accuracy of the information. The participants agreed to record the interview as they were satisfied with the explanations given by the researcher. On average, each of the interviews lasted for about 10 minutes. While the longest interview was of 12 minutes duration, the shortest one lasted for 6 minutes.

Working group: The analysis of demographic data revealed a diverse group of female participants with ages spanning from 26 to 40 years and belonging to several countries like India, France, Italy and Russia. Professionally, they range from adventure consultants to software developers. Paragliding skill levels vary, with some serving as instructors and others as assistant instructors or pilots. Marital statuses include single, married and divorced. Educational backgrounds vary from degrees in engineering to nursing and IT. This diversity underscores the complex interplay of factors shaping women's engagement in paragliding. Understanding these dynamics can inform strategies to foster inclusivity and promote wider participation among women in the sport, globally.

Table 2: Demography of Female Paragliding Paragliders

Sr. No.	Name	Age	Country	Education	Marital Status	Skill Level	Profession
1	R2	31	India	Diploma	Single	Adventure Consultant	P3
2	R3	30	France	Degree	Married	Tandem Pilot	P4
3	R4	35	India	BSc Nursing	Married	Nursing officer in the Indian Army	P3
4	R5	26	India	Bachelor in Engineering	Single	Paragliding Assistant Instructor	P4
6	R6	39	India	Bachelor in Lab Technology	Divorce	Medical lab Technician	P3

6	R7	27	Italy	Bachelor in IT	Single	Paragliding Instructor	P4
7	R8	39	Russia	Bachelor in IT	Single	Software Developer	P4
8	R9	40	Russia	Bachelor in Engineering	Married	Manager	P4

(Source: Based on the primary survey by the researcher)

Data Analysis

As discussed earlier, the Interview results were interpreted through ‘Inductive descriptive analysis’ and ‘content analysis’ techniques. During the Content Analysis phase, the interview data, transcribed using Google Journalist Studio, was transferred to "Microsoft Office Word 2019" for documentation and then imported into "MAXQDA24" for coding purposes. The major themes were analyzed by using Word Trends & Word Cloud Analysis. Later to ensure the code accuracy the same was thoroughly reviewed by two researchers for reaching out on a consensus regarding the code precision. Then, similar codes were grouped to form categories and these categories were later combined to create the themes. Finally, the graphical results of the themes generated were displayed using a creative coding technique for each of the objectives.

Results

Results of the above analysis were presented under the three major headings associated with each of the three objectives, i.e., **“Motivation of the Female Pilots”**, **“Challenges for doing Paragliding Activity”** and **“Cause of Lesser Participation in Paragliding”**. But prior to this ‘Word trend analysis’ and ‘Word cloud analysis’ were carried out across the 8 documents to verify whether the responses collected were in line with the research objectives.

Examination of the major themes using Word Trends & Word Cloud Analysis

Word Trends Analysis: The word trend analysis across 8 documents revealed significant frequencies. Words like ‘Paraglide’ and ‘Woman’ were consistently frequent, indicating significant discussion. The word ‘Fly’ shows fluctuation but remains prominent throughout the documents. Similarly, ‘Challenge’ fluctuates with consistent importance, but the term ‘Sport’ maintains steady relevance throughout the documents (Fig 1).

In the above word cloud, the most frequently occurring words were 'Paraglide', 'Woman', 'Fly', 'Challenge', 'Sport', 'Learn', 'Competition', 'Adventure,' and 'How', as they appeared larger in size & shape. This suggests that, the context of the dataset revolves around topics such as paragliding, women, flying, challenges, sports, learning, competitions, adventures and inquiries about how to do paragliding activities. Words like 'Paraglide' and 'Fly' indicated a focus on activities related to paragliding. Further terms like 'Woman' suggested a focus on gender & women's participation in adventure (paragliding) activity. Moreover, words like 'Challenge', 'Competition', and 'Adventure' indicated a spirit of competition and 'adventure-seeking' among the women paragliders.

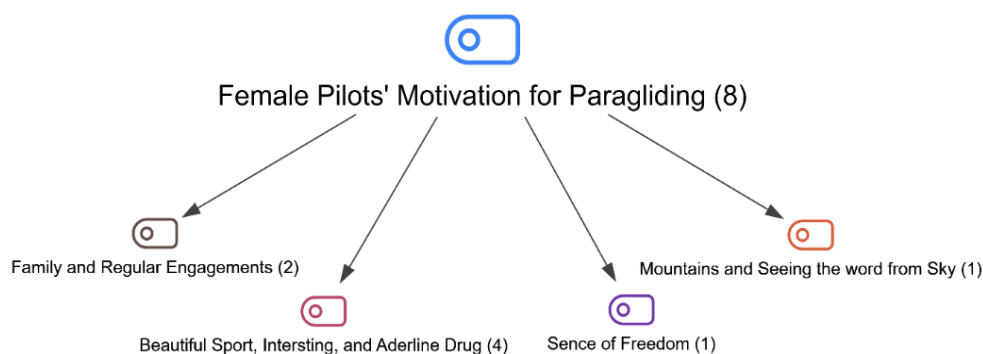
Analysing the motivation, challenges and hindrances behind the participation of female paragliders

After examining the word trend and word cloud analysis, themes were generated and objective-wise analysis was carried out through creative coding techniques and the results were presented below;

Objective -1: Motivation of the Female Pilots for undertaking paragliding

To analyse the motivations of female solo pilots for undertaking paragliding in Bir Billing, qualitative interviews were conducted to understand their personal and psychological drivers. The participants' motivations were categorically analysed to identify the recurring themes and the factors influencing their involvement in paragliding (Fig 3).

Fig 3: Motivation of the Female Pilots for Paragliding



(Source: Based on the primary survey by the researcher)

From the above analysis, it was observed that foreign pilots (R7 & R8) were motivated by their families to engage in paragliding.

“... I was a paragliding monitor with my grandfather (Tandem Instructor) since a child, and from there they saw my learning skill level and taught me paragliding”.

The Female paragliding pilots, having the codes R4, R5, R6 & R9, considered paragliding as a beautiful and interesting sport that acts as an adrenaline drug. The statement of one of the female pilots, R4 (an army nursing officer) was as follows;

“... I want to do something special and different apart from my profession, so then I selected adventure sports and found paragliding as an interesting adventure.”

Similarly, Pilot R9 stated that;

“... I was motivated for paragliding because it's a beautiful sport and it is adrenaline drugs for me.”

Likewise, paragliding pilot R3 stated her motivation for paragliding as to gain a sense of freedom. Her statement was:

“... I think paragliding sport that made me Feel Free because of the freedom in the air, yeah, it gives me a sense of freedom while paragliding.”

Another female paragliding pilot R2, took over the paragliding activity due to her motivation towards mountains and seeing the world from the sky.

“...as an adventurer, I climbed the mountains and peaks. I always liked seeing the world from up the mountain. It would be nice to see with your naked eyes when you're flying. So yeah, that's all it gives me some fun whenever I do something dangerous like paragliding.”

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that the motivations for paragliding varies widely among the women pilots. While respondents like, R4, R5 and R9 were drawn towards the sport for its beauty and adrenaline-inducing nature, others such as R3, found a sense of freedom in the open skies. Meanwhile, R2 was motivated by the desire to experience the world from a unique perspective, influenced by her love for mountainous landscapes. Conversely, R7 and R8 were introduced to paragliding at a young age by their families, indicating a generational passion for the sport. Overall, these diverse motivations highlighted the multifaceted appeal of paragliding as an adventure activity.

Objective -2. Challenges faced by the female solo pilots in learning and undertaking paragliding

As far as the challenges faced by female solo pilots are concerned, it was found to be of three major categories, i.e., financial, psychological and socio-cultural challenges (Fig 4).

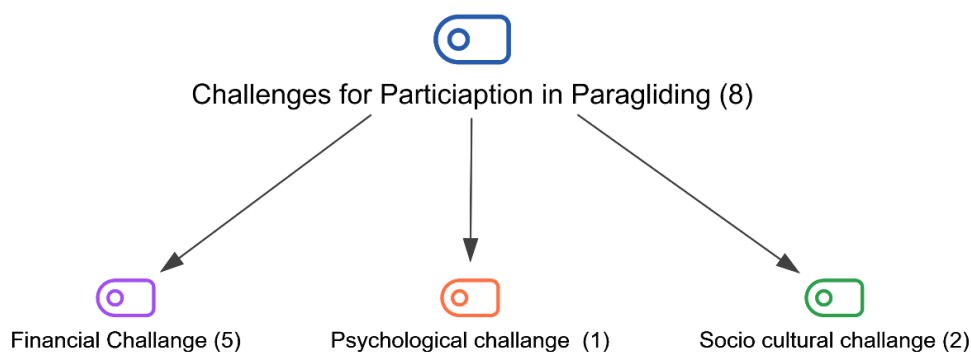
Financial Challenge: The majority of the pilots (five out of 8) highlighted that the biggest challenge for learning and participating in paragliding activity was the financial aspect. The pilots were R2, R5, R6, R8 & R9. Moreover, pilot R5 highlighted the above challenge with the following statement:

“... it is always financially challenging because you need to upgrade the paragliding kit and it's not so cheap sports. So, I need to earn well to continue flying and also, we see a lot of international Pilots doing well in three years. So, it's because they can afford expensive kits.”

Socio-Cultural Challenge: Apart from the financial challenges, the other major challenge highlighted by the participants was socio-cultural challenges. The pilots who were of the above opinion (R4 & R7) stated it as their primary challenge. In the above line, pilot R4 stated that:

“... for women, things change after marriage; they have some key we can't do if anything will go wrong like accidents.”

Fig 4: Challenges for participation in Paragliding



(Source: Based on the primary survey by the researcher)

Psychological Challenge: The only pilot (R3) mentioned that the psychological challenge of learning and participating in the paragliding activity was the major hindrance for her. She stated that:

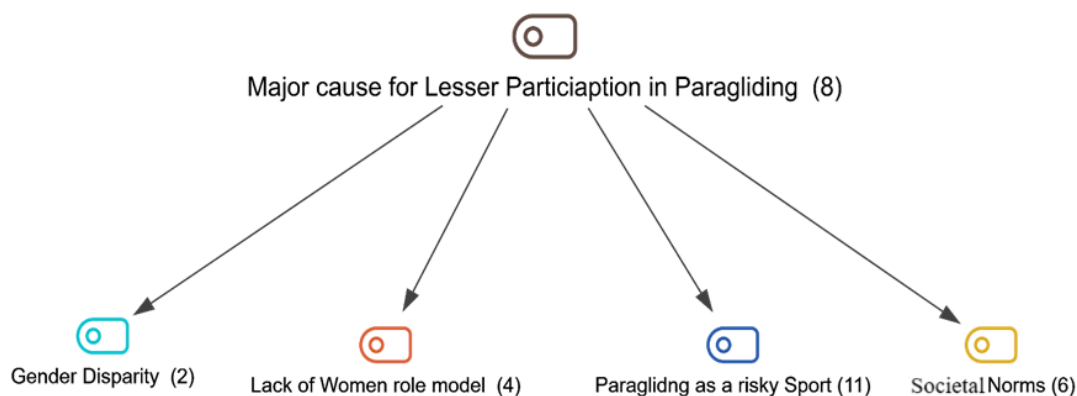
“...I think the most important challenge to it's mental because as a woman I always grew up as being safe and quiet and being the perfect little girl and my mother keeps asking me to be safe while paragliding.”

In view of the above findings, it is necessary to make efforts to mitigate the financial burdens, curb the socio-cultural dilemmas and empower women to overcome psychological barriers. Hence, the paragliding community should create a more supportive and inclusive environment for encouraging women participants along with their male counterparts.

Objective-3: Major causes behind the lesser participation of female paragliders in comparison to males

After careful generation of the codes using Invivio content analysis, the major causes behind the lesser participation of female paragliders were ‘paragliding as a risky sport’, ‘societal norms’ ‘lack of women role models and ‘gender disparity’ (Fi 5).

Fig 5: Cause for Lesser Participation of female paragliders



(Source: Based on the primary survey by the researcher)

The perception of risk among female paragliders: All the female pilots have a high-risk perception towards paragliding, as they consider it as a risky sport. This was clearly observed in their responses, where they mentioned about it multiple times. In this line, a French tandem pilot (R3) highlighted that:

“...paragliding is a risky Sport and women have usually had family and children and at the beginning, they have a pregnancy. They stop are after when they have to child. They stop and even before it's a risky Sports.”

Another pilot R4 highlighted the issue of the family as follows: *“... family background is there because it is risky sports or nobody wants their daughter what anyone to get hurt.”*

Hence, it can be concluded that the female pilots share a common perception of paragliding as a ‘risky sport’. This perception is influenced by factors such as family responsibilities, concerns about injury and societal expectations regarding safety.

Societal norms for lesser participation in paragliding: Paragliding pilots such as R2, R3, R4 R7, R8 and R9 discussed societal norms as the second

major cause for women's lesser participation in paragliding. One of the female pilots (R4) stated:

“...I think that it's a social thing because paragliding is a risky Sport and women usually have families and children and at the beginning, they have a pregnancy. They stop after when they have to child. They stop even before it's a risky Sport due to family pressure. So, as a social fact to be a woman, it's hard to take risks.”

Similarly, the paragliding pilot from Mizoram (R7) stated as follows:

“... If you're a woman and you have kids, that's different it hits back, but in India, I think fewer women do paragliding because we are kind of Patriarchal Society.”

Lack of women role models in paragliding: Pilots like R4, R5, R6 and R9 highlighted the issue of lesser role models as the third major cause for women's lesser participation in paragliding activity. For instance, the pilot from India (R6) stated that:

“... yes, it is true that we have very less role models in paragliding. Yeah, in India, especially. I cannot talk about other countries, but in India, we have very less.”

Gender disparity: One of the least mentioned causes for the lesser participation of women in paragliding was found to be the ‘gender disparity’. The two paragliders were R7 & R2, who belong to Italy and India, respectively. While the pilot R7 stated that:

“... I was the only woman and six men while working paragliding company. Between men, it's a little bit difficult to have your place because you are alone and all the people are men. They consider “Women are not as crazy as men in paragliding.”

The Indian paragliding pilot (R2) stated that:

“...the organization committee of the paragliding event, there should be more women, so when we feel secure, when there are more, we see women around right. You're always surrounded by males.”

From the above investigation, it can be argued that the lesser participation of women in paragliding is attributed to a combination of factors, such as perceptions of risk, societal norms, the lack of role models and gender disparity within the community. Addressing these issues requires efforts to challenge stereotypes, provide support and mentorship for female pilots and create inclusive environments within the paragliding community. Only

through such actions the barriers to women's participation in paragliding can be effectively dismantled.

Recommendation & Strategies

After careful examination of the responses from the female participants, the following suggestions have been made for government, policymakers and stakeholders;

1. The government should provide financial support for the women who are interested in paragliding which could be in the form of sponsorship (for kits), training programs and competition participation fees.
2. Training programs specifically tailored for women, should be organised to build confidence and improve their skills. The focus should be on training them at basic and intermediate levels, including safety practices.
3. Efforts should be made to highlight and promote successful female paragliders as role models for aspiring women pilots. This could involve showcasing their achievements, stories and contributions to the sport. In these lines, the World Air Sports Federation (2021) underscored the historical significance of women in aviation (including paragliding) as well as with the 'Women with Wings' series (celebrating women in air sports), it showcased their achievements and encouraged others to get involved (Women with Wings, 2021). Furthermore, specific women achievers in paragliding have also been recognized by paragliding equipment manufacturing companies like BGD (Bruce Goldsmith Design) for their remarkable feats (BGD, n.d.; McClanahan, 2022).
4. Paragliding associations and organizing committees should ensure a significant representation of women (both as pilots and judges) while organizing paragliding events. This will create a more inclusive environment for the female participants and provide a sense of security among them.
5. Another suggestion proposed by the Free Flight Community was to set distinct weight limits for male and female participants while conducting paragliding events. This will further encourage women's participation in the sport (USPA, 2023).
6. Paragliding should be promoted in the community to normalize women's participation, while advocating for policy changes and fostering community support, to sustain women's engagement in the sport in the long run.
7. Finally, as discussions surrounding women's performance in paragliding competitions are going on across several online platforms, including various strategies for augmenting female involvement in the sport (Paragliding Girls,

2021), hence it will also motivate the potential female paragliders for undertaking the sport.

By implementing these recommendations and strategies, the paragliding community can work towards creating a more inclusive and diverse environment that welcomes and supports women participants.

Conclusion

Since the advent of paragliding as an adventure sport, it has remained as a male-dominated activity. This study provides valuable insights into the motivations, challenges and underlying causes that are influencing female pilots' participation in paragliding activities. Utilizing qualitative interviews and content analysis, the research uncovers a range of motivations, including the pursuit of adrenaline, a sense of freedom and a passion for exploration. However, these motivations often intersect with significant challenges such as financial constraints, societal expectations, perceived risks and gender disparities within the community. The findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions to address these challenges and foster greater gender diversity within the paragliding community. Strategies to mitigate financial barriers, challenge gender norms, offer mentorship opportunities through women role models and create inclusive environments are crucial for encouraging women to engage in paragliding at a larger scale.

Limitation & Future Research Scope

As the present research is primarily based on a qualitative approach, to the current issue, future research with a mixed-method approach could explore specific strategies for overcoming these barriers, such as 'implementing sponsorship programs', conducting 'educational initiatives on safety', 'advocating for policy changes', and 'promoting gender equality'. Further longitudinal studies tracking the progression of female pilots could provide insights into the effectiveness of these interventions over the time. Through this way, we can create a more inclusive community that benefits enthusiasts of all genders.

Acknowledgement

This research is the outcome of the doctoral fellowship of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) in New Delhi. **File No. ICSSR/RFD/2023-24/456.**

Conflict of interest: There is no conflict of interest between authors

References

- Andrea J. Bingham, & Patricia Witkowsky. (2021). Deductive and inductive approaches to qualitative data analysis. In C. Vanover, P. Mihás, & J. Saldana (Eds.), *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative research: After the interview* (1st ed., pp. 117-133). SAGE Publications. <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/afr/analyzing-and-interpreting-qualitative-research/book270977#description>
- Avner, Z., Boocock, E., Hall, J., & Allin, L. (2021). 'Lines of flight or tethered wings?': A Deleuzian analysis of women-specific adventure skills courses in the United Kingdom. *Somatechnics*, 11(3), 432–450.
- Ayazlar, R. A. (2015). Flow phenomenon as a tourist experience in paragliding: A qualitative research. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 26, 792–799. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(15\)00845-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00845-X)
- Ayazlar, R. A., & Yüksel, A. (2018). Flow experience in paragliding: Effects on experience and life satisfaction. *Tourism Analysis*, 23(4), 461–473. <https://doi.org/10.3727/108354218X15391984820396>
- Baker, L. A. (2014). Gender relations in extreme sports. In P. Markula & M. Oja (Eds.), *Women and the Olympic Games: The discourses of power* (pp. 69–89). Palgrave Macmillan.
- BGD, E. (n.d.). *Emily "Milly" Wallace*. BGD. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from <https://www.flybgd.com/en/paragliders/emily-milly-wallace--pilot-142-1870-0.html>
- Brymer, E., & Schweitzer, R. (2013). The search for freedom in extreme sports: A phenomenological exploration. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 14(6), 865–873. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2013.07.004>
- Buckley, R. (2012). Rush as a key motivation in skilled adventure tourism: Resolving the risk recreation paradox. *Tourism Management*, 33(4), 961–970. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2011.10.002>
- Çetinkaya, G., & Özçelik, M. A. (2021). Death anxiety in outdoor-adventure recreation: Study of demographic variables and experience. *Kinesiology*, 53(1), 65–70. <https://doi.org/10.26582/k.53.1.9>

- Chang, D. H.-M., & Huang, Y.-T. (2012). Paragliding adventure recreation consumers' activity motivation, enduring involvement and their involved behavior. *Asian Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 7(2).
- Clarke, J., Previte, J., & Chien, P. (2021). Adventurous femininities: The value of adventure for women travelers. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 28(2), 171–187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135676672111038952>
- Diversity in the outdoors. (2024). *Outdoor learning | Educational charity | Outward Bound Trust*. Retrieved March 2024, from <https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/blog/diversity-in-the-outdoors>
- Durin, S. (2022). The influence of digital technologies on the experience of adventure among outdoor enthusiasts in Croatia. *Narodna Umjetnost*, 59(2), 103–117. <https://doi.org/10.15176/vol59no205>
- Ewert, A., Yoon, J., & Kweon, B. S. (2008). Socialization into adventure subcultures: A cross-cultural analysis. *Leisure Sciences*, 30(2), 127–144.
- Farrar, R. (2020). Shextreme: creating impact through participatory action research: a film festival framework case study (2014-2020)[REF2021 collection]. <https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.c.4763225.v1>
- Ferguson, L. (2011). Promoting gender equality and empowering women? Tourism and the third Millennium Development Goal. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 14(3), 235–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2011.555522>
- Freeman, P. (2006). Gender and risk perception: The 'fear' of adventure sports. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 9(1-2), 115–130.
- Gross, S., Sand, M., & Berger, T. (2023). Examining the adventure traveller behaviour—Personality, motives and socio-demographic factors as determinants for German adventure travel. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 33, 3307. <https://doi.org/10.54055/ejtr.v33i.2795>
- Kerr, J., & Mackenzie, S. (2012). Multiple motives for participating in adventure sports. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 13(5), 649–657. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2012.04.002>
- Kumar, A., & Kumar, A. (2024). Paragliding events & festivals: Catalyzing aero-sports tourism development in India. *Integrated Journal for*

Research in Arts and Humanities, 4(4), 169–178. <https://doi.org/10.55544/ijrah.4.4.27>

- Li, M. H., & Ou, S. H. (2002). Relationships between participants, characteristics of Para-Glider and preferences of environmental attributes. In *4th Leisure, Recreation and Tourism Processing: Leisure Theory and Recreation Behavior* (pp. 263–270). The Outdoor Recreation Association of R. O. C.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, M. A., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Neergaard, M. A., Olesen, F., Andersen, R. S., & Sondergaard, J. (2009). Qualitative description—The poor cousin of health research? *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 9, 52. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-9-52>
- Outdoor Foundation. (2022). *Outdoor Participation Trends Report* (Version 1). Outdoor Industry Foundation. <https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2022-Outdoor-Participation-Trends-Report-1.pdf>
- Paige McClanahan. (2022, October 6). *Soaring through the Swiss Alps with a champion paraglider*. AFAR Media. Retrieved May 10, 2024, from <https://www.afar.com/magazine/paragliding-in-switzerland-with-yael-margelisch>
- Paragliding Forum. (n.d.). View topic—Do you think paragliding makes ... [Online forum post]. *Paragliding Forum*. <https://www.paraglidingforum.com/viewtopic.php?t=63643>
- Paragliding Girls (@paraglidinggirls). (2024). Instagram photos and videos. [Instagram profile]. *Instagram*. <https://www.instagram.com/paraglidinggirls/>
- Paragliding Girls. (2021). *Instagram*. <https://www.instagram.com/paraglidinggirls/>
- PWCA 2024. (n.d.). *PWCA—Events 2023*. UPCOMING EVENTS CALENDAR—PWCA EVENTS. <https://pwca.org/events?season=2023>
- Reports and Insights. (2024, February). *Paragliders market*. Reports and Insights | Market Research Reports, Business Intelligence & Strategy Planning Firm. Retrieved September 1, 2024, from <https://www.reportsandinsights.com/report/paraglidersmarket#>:

[~:text=%22The%20global%20paragliders%20market%20size%20reach ed%20US%24%20234.3,a%20growth%20rate%20%28CAGR%29%20of %204.9%25%20during%202024-2032.%22](#)

- Reynolds, Z., & Hritz, N. (2012). Surfing as adventure travel: Motivations and lifestyles. *Journal of Tourism Insights*, 3(1).
<https://doi.org/10.9707/2328-0824.1024>
- Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2017). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. Sage Publications.
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health*, 23(4), 334–340.
[https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X\(200008\)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X(200008)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G)
- Shaw, S., & Hoerber, L. (2003). Negotiating risk and gender within the context of snowboarding. In L. Mansfield, P. T. Brown, & B. Hughes (Eds.), *Sport and gender identity: New perspectives* (pp. 132–149). Routledge.
- Skerl, K. L. (2014). The role of female action sport role models in college women's motivations to participate in action sports. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 49(2), 167–185.
- Smith, E. (2020). Empowerment through adventure tourism: A study of women's experiences. *Journal of Adventure Tourism*, 8(2), 123–135.
- United States Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association Inc. [USHPA]. (2019, November 1). *A transgender woman recently participated in the women's division of a paragliding event*. Facebook.
<https://www.facebook.com/ushpafreeflight/posts/a-transgender-woman-recently-participated-in-the-womens-division-of-a-paraglidin/2727181607295298/>
- VAROL, F., Aksu, H. S., & Demirel, M. (2022). Evaluation of outdoor recreation potential of destinations in terms of paragliding: The case of Konya. *Tourism and Recreation*, 4(1), 13–23.
<https://doi.org/10.53601/tourismandrecreation.1079252>
- Women with wings. (2021, March 8). *FAI | World Air Sports Federation*. Retrieved August 10, 2024, from <https://www.fai.org/women-wings>
- Women In The Hills. (2024). About us. <https://womeninthehills.co.uk/about/>. Retrieved August 3, 2024, from <https://womeninthehills.co.uk/about/>

Yarnal, C. M., & Frederick, K. (2007). Gender, risk, and extreme sport. *Leisure Studies*, 26(1), 87–107.