

FINANCIAL STABILITY AND PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN’S’ RUGBY IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The Sri Lankan women’s rugby team has not achieved the same level of international success as the Sri Lankan men’s rugby team. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the financial stability of female rugby players in Sri Lanka and assess their accomplishments in rugby. Employing a qualitative research design, a thematic analysis is conducted through one-to-one, open-ended telephone interviews. The sample comprised 12 women rugby players who had participated in at least two provincial-level tournaments in Sri Lanka. Among them, four players represented military forces, while the remaining eight played for rugby clubs in Sri Lanka. Five key themes emerged from the data analysis: (1) purchasing ability and the use of nutritional supplements for rugby; (2) access to infrastructure facilities for women’s rugby; (3) quality of coaching and support from team officials for women rugby players; (4) structure of payments for women’s rugby; and (5) acquisition of high-quality rugby gear. All participants confirmed that their current financial situations do not allow them to support their rugby endeavors adequately. The lack of financial support impedes women rugby players’ ability to purchase nutritional supplements, sports equipment and cover domestic travel expenses for accessing better training facilities. However, respondents noted that the support they receive from their rugby coaches motivates them to continue playing despite their financial challenges. In conclusion, ensuring the financial stability of female rugby players would provide them with essential resources, including the ability to purchase nutrition supplements, access better infrastructure facilities, and acquire high-quality rugby gear. This support is crucial for ensuring their performance in rugby.

Keywords: Rugby, Sports finance, Women’s rugby, Women’s sports, Women’s performance

Introduction

The author intends to continue the research related to poverty factor, the first goal under the Sustainable Development Goals. Accordingly, the topic the author chose is ‘Financial stability and performance of women’s rugby in Sri Lanka’. Sustainability Development Goals (SDG) were introduced by the United Nations Organization in 2015 and are called ‘Agenda 2030’. There are seventeen goals in these SDGs, and the United Nations hopes to achieve them

collectively by 2030. They committed to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions, ‘economic, social, and environmental’, in an integrated manner (Sustainable Development Goals.,2015).

Sports performance not only depends on the few factors. Through this study, the author pays attention on finance factor. Due to financial status, sports performance may be affected by several factors. It may affect mental and physical

health, nutrition, and education. All those factors directly affect sports performance. Reduced the financial instability through sports programs and reduced performance by financial instability are interrelated (Hudson, 2022.). According to EX Sports (Sports, 2022), to be successful in any game or event, most importantly the athlete needs money to fund the required things.

Research on women’s rugby performance or women’s rugby participation in Sri Lanka is at a very minimal level, and accordingly, it is intended to conduct this study for the body of knowledge of further searchers.

Problem Statement

‘The relationship between financial stability and the performance of female rugby players and how financial status affects on the performance’. Since a decade ago, Sri Lanka women’s rugby team has participated in international-level tournaments. Few of them are the Hong Kong Women’s Sevens, Asian Women’s Sevens Championship, Women’s Sevens Olympic Qualifier, etc. From the very beginning to nowadays, Sri Lankan women’s rugby could not reach any international level winning (Asia Rugby Women’s Sevens Series, 2022). There are no different results in other contexts, such as Asian Women’s Sevens Championship and Women’s Sevens Olympic Qualifiers. Sri Lankan team could not move for higher achievement in any of those tournaments (Sri Lanka Rugby Sevens 2022, 2022).

According to the Rugby Roar, in England, female rugby player earns 24,000 GBP per year and male rugby player earns 20,000 GBP per tournament (How Much Do England Women’s Rugby Players Get Paid?, 2019). In Sri Lanka, the procedure is same as international level. Female athletes get paid much lower than male players. Sometimes payments are not enough to meet their requirements. So, in this study, the

author hopes to find the relationship between financial status and women’s rugby performance and how financial status affects performance.

Objectives of the Study

Major Objective

To determine the impact of financial stability on the performance of women’s rugby.

Significance of the Study

When compared to other countries in the world, Sri Lankan women’s rugby has not had that much higher international achievements. Lack of facilities, lack of participation, and several other factors affect the situation. Even though there are several studies in other countries regarding the topic, in Sri Lanka, it is very difficult to find research regarding this topic.

When discussing the performance of any sport, it is very important to pay attention to the facilities, nutrition, and several other factors. For all of those factors, financial status is very important. Through this study, the author is willing to find the relationship between financial status and performance of Sri Lankan women’s rugby players. According to the (Sri Lanka Women’s Squad for Asia Rugby Sevens Series, 2019), Sri Lankan women’s rugby has had a low performance at the international level for a long time. So it is very important to find out if there is any relationship between performance and other factors that affect performance. From the results of this research, anyone can get an idea of whether there is any impact of financial status on the underachievement of Sri Lankan women’s rugby performance.

Scope of the Study

Financial stability and performance of women’s rugby in Sri Lanka is the topic of this research. For this the author use to collect the data from the female rugby players who participate provincial level or above that level. The author uses twelve

female athletes as the sample of this study. Even though there are many other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Agenda 2030, such as zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education and so on, in this study the author is willing to pay attention to the first goal, which means poverty factor (Sustainable Development Goals, 2023). The data collection method is one-on-one interview via Zoom and face-to-face meetings.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation is the lack of literature which regarding this topic. Even though there is much research for the finance and sports, it is very difficult to find research on Sri Lankan female rugby performances. And the lack of women's rugby players who participate at the provincial level or above was also a limitation for this research. Due to the data collection method was interview, sometimes the data gathered from the sample may not reflect the exact feelings of them; some athletes may not talk about their real feelings with someone else. That is also a limitation of this study.

Literature review.

Economy and Sports

People who live below 3.65 USD income per day are considered below the poverty line in Sri Lanka. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy of Sri Lanka has been critically damaged, and due to that, poverty among the people has also increased. In 2019, the percentage of people in poverty was 11.3 and it gradually increased into 12.7, 13.1 and 25.0 in 2020, 2021 & 2022 respectively (Poverty & Equity Brief Sri Lanka, 2023).

In Andreff's study, they present that the main sponsor of sports is the government in developing countries. Also, the financial and budgetary support for most of sporting events and games are very low in those countries. Due

to no poverty, that means the richer countries have the opportunity to reach good nutritional supplements, good infrastructure facilities as well as more qualified coaches while a player in a developing country really cannot achieve such benefits (Andreff, 2008).

According to Heaney et al., (2008), there are a number of barriers for the athletes in good nutritional support in sports. The study revealed that there is a significant problem in financial constraints for the athletes who participate in any sport because most of them were studying and do not work full-time and stay without any support from their families. This may affect on the food access, nutrition supplements, and travel (Heaney et al., 2008)

For any kind of sporting event the economic impacts are immense. According to Cristea [2022], U.S. spent \$500 million on tournament hosting in 1994 and France and Japan spent \$2.3 and \$26.6 billion respectively in 1998 and 2002. In 2022, Qatar allocated \$220 billion for infrastructure facilities of FIFA (Cristea, 2022). But according to Maxwell Levine, lack of sports facilities and financing support limits the upcoming athlete's performance. This is much worse when it comes to rural areas because most of times they have very limited infrastructure facilities. Even though there are national federations and local municipalities, most of them are not supposed to make any priorities on sports. That may cause for lack of performance and low participation in sports by novice athletes (Levine, 2021).

Gender and Sports

There are still gender discriminations in sports even though there are so many limitations for the discrimination. Most of female athletes tend to drop out of team sports as well as individual events because they feel unfeminine about themselves. In most of team sports, gay, lesbian

or bisexual people get discriminatory comments from the team. Due to that, they either dropped out of the team even though their performance level is high or they do not reveal the reality to the community. Those factors are mainly affect on the participation in sports for female as well as gay, lesbian or bisexual people (Sexuality and Gender Perspectives on Sports Ethics, 2022).

Also, Harrison and Lynch conducted a study to examine the influence of athletic roles upon the perceived gender role orientations of male and female athletes. Through that, they present that the female participation is much lower than male participation when it comes to the administration sector of sports. In positions such as athletic directors, coaches, trainers, information directors and etc. female participation is low when compared to the male participation (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). And according to the (Sport, 2014), there is a significant difference in female participation in athletic trainers, sports information directors, strength and conditioning coaches, and athletic directors.

Women’s Rugby

Before the 2016 Rio Olympics, the amount of tournaments was very low for women’s rugby and even the women’s rugby was not treated as a competitive sport. Even though there was the Hong Kong women’s sevens, that also was not that much popular among the sports field. After 2009, most of nations tend to involve with women’s rugby sevens and they incorporate the women’s rugby into their strategic plans from 2011 onwards. And after that very first Women’s Rugby World Cup was held in Russia 2013. The Australian women’s team was the first world cup winners (The Evolution of Women’s Rugby, 2018).

According to Louise Lawless, most of female rugby players have not provide travel costs for their practices. They have to travel all the way by

spending entirely their own money. According to him, there may be athletes who cannot afford that much expenses and there may be athletes and performances which could not achieve their best. Also he said that if they truly need to give women equality in participation on provincial level, then they have to pay those expenses, and athletes should not pay to play games (Lawless, 2021).

Sri Lanka Rugby and SLRFU

When it comes to the Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan Rugby Football Union is the governing body of the country. Sri Lankan national rugby union team was founded in 1908 and joined with the world rugby in 1988. According to Mr. A. Senevirathna (former president of SLRFU) Sri Lankan rugby cannot get any further improvement without any scientific training and to fulfill that requirement the SLRFU planned to invest for the first Scientific High Performance Center in 2016 (Marlon Dale Ferreira, 2015).

In Sri Lankan context, there was never had any role model in women’s rugby. Sri Lankan women’s rugby is still on its early stages in performance (Davy, 2023). Actually about 10-15years ago, Sri Lanka had not any interest about women’s rugby. But with the time change, Sri Lankan female athletes who interest for rugby also tend to Women’s rugby and their parents also give the support to their sports career. According to the Rasika Warakagoda, before the covid-19 pandemic, there were 1500+ school girls who engaged with the women’s rugby (World Rugby, 2023; Ramakrishnan, 2020).

Sri Lankan women’s rugby team mainly participate for the Asian women’s sevens championship as international level and they have participated Hong Kong women’s sevens, Women’s sevens Olympic qualifiers and Commonwealth Games too (Sri Lanka Rugby Union, n.d.). Follow are the performances which they have achieved until 2023.

Table 1: Sri Lankan female rugby tournament results from 2004-2015 in international context

| Tournament | Year | Achievement |
|-----------------------------------|------|--|
| Hong Kong Women's Sevens | 2004 | 4 th in pool, 9 th in overall |
| | 2006 | 9 th in overall |
| | 2016 | 4 th in pool, 10 th in overall |
| Asian Women's Sevens Championship | 2015 | 1 st leg- 4 th in pool, 8 th in overall 2 nd leg- 3 rd in pool, 8 th in tournament |
| | 2016 | 1 st leg- did not participate 2 nd leg- 3 rd in pool, 6 th in tournament Final leg- 3 rd in pool, 6 th in tournament, lost Plate final |
| Women's Sevens Olympic Qualifiers | 2015 | 1 st leg- 5 th in pool, 6 th in tournament 2 nd leg- 5 th in pool, 5 th in tournament, won Bowl final, failed to qualify |

In 2014, they participated to the Asian sevens at Hong Kong along a very difficult way. They finished the tournament as overall fifth place. Also they suffer from limited resources and lack of sponsorships. They can improve for good level with the financial support and improving facilities of the field. Also women's team need a proper nutritional plans and the financial support for those nutritional plans. As well as nutrition, they need a permanent team of officials such as team coach, strength and conditioning coach and others (Jaleel, 2014).

Methodology

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of the financial status for the women's rugby performance in Sri Lanka. To address this gap, a qualitative survey will be used. Through this chapter methodology of the research may present. And it includes data gathering techniques, population, sample and data analysis method.

Data Gathering Techniques

In this research, the author used the 'Interview' method to collect data from the sample. This was one-on-one interview, and the interview involved only two people in every time of each interview. Those were the author who conducted the interview and the participant. Although there are

several types of interviews which used in research, the author used 'semi-Structured interview' to collect data in her research. In these semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has a general plan, and there are predetermined questions that relate to the topic of the research. The researcher can ask any other questions for further clarification from the participant other than predetermined questions. Also, these semi-structured interviews were open-ended. Asking predetermined questions in the interview is much beneficial to compare the responses and find patterns in the responses when analyzing the data. Semi-structured interview results may lead to higher reliability and validity.

Population

The population of this study is female athletes who involve with the rugby in any level in Sri Lanka.

Sample of the study

The sample of this study was the female athletes who were involved with the rugby at least for two provincial rugby tournaments (National Sports Festival) and/or national-level female athletes in Sri Lanka. The author used the 'Purposive sampling method' as its sampling method for the study. Because, the author wanted to conduct the study on female players who are involved in sport

under very clear and similar environmental conditions. The sample size was twelve and four of them represented the Sri Lankan military forces, while the rest eight were from rugby clubs in Sri Lanka. There was no age limit, income limit or geographical limitation for the athletes who participated in the study.

Data analyzing method

In this study, the author used the ‘Thematic analysis’ as the data analyzing method. Thematic analysis is most commonly used in qualitative researches because it is more flexible than other methods. Thematic analysis is usually used on interviews, set of text or transcript. Through this thematic analysis, the author closely examined the data which she gathered from the interviews to identify some common themes, topics, ideas or any patterns that showed repeatedly. Then the conclusion and discussions may finalize. Via thematic analysis, the author can approach large datasets easily by sorting them into broad themes.

As the very first step, the author may familiarize with the data which collected from the interviews. Here the author translated the interviews in to English without harming the exact meaning of the participants’ statements and then transcribed the audio interviews. And then reading the text or hearing for the audio of the interview and taking initial notes were also in this step. Then author had to code those data according to several points. Author carefully coded the data in to similar statement. After that, themes were generated according to the codes and reviewed the themes. There were five main themes and two sub themes which overlapped with the main five themes. Finally, defined and named the themes and wrote up the results which were found out from the analysis.

Results/ Findings

The author conducted interviews as its data gathering method, using twelve female rugby players with a minimum of two years’ experience at the provincial or national level. The author conducted interviews, asking participants to share their relevant experiences about rugby playing as a female. Subsequently, the author transcribed and thoroughly reviewed the interview records to identify specific and common data. Through a manual, inductive analysis, the author coded the transcripts line by line, reducing the data into meaningful chunks. This process, completed by hand with pens and highlighters, led to the generation of initial codes. The second step involved creating a set of codes from the entire dataset obtained through the interviews.

In the third step of thematic analysis, the author identified themes using the codes generated in the second step as mentioned before. Initially, 7 themes were identified based on the codes:

1. Purchasing ability and the use of nutritional supplements for rugby;
2. Access to infrastructure facilities for women’s rugby;
3. Quality of coaching and support from team officials for women rugby players;
4. Structure of payments for women’s rugby; and
5. Acquisition of high-quality rugby gear.
6. Performance
7. Financial influence

Upon further review in the fourth step, the author found that two themes, Performance and Financial influence, overlapped with the remaining 5 themes. Consequently, the author finalized the themes as 5 main themes, with Performance and Financial influence discussed as sub-themes within the main five themes. The final themes derived from the data are;

1. Purchasing ability and the use of nutritional supplements for rugby;
2. Access to infrastructure facilities for women’s rugby;
3. Quality of coaching and support from team officials for women rugby players;
4. Structure of payments for women’s rugby; and
5. Acquisition of high-quality rugby gear.

Purchasing ability and the use of nutritional supplements for rugby

The results of theme one show that there is a direct link between nutritional supplements, financial stability, and female performance. The athletes’ statements reveal dissatisfaction among athletes with the nutritional supplements provided by national and provincial pools, often received shortly before tournaments. Professional rugby players are recommended to consume 1.2g to 1.7g of protein per kilogram daily for muscle maintenance and recovery (Rucker, 2023). Despite the acknowledged importance of such supplements, participants in the study stated an inability to meet these requirements due to financial constraints. Limited support from national and provincial pools leads to challenges in affording essential supplements, impacting the nutritional intake crucial for female rugby players. Many participants struggle to afford supplements like Omega-3 fish oil, Whey protein, Creatine, and Caffeine, hindering their ability to enhance performance, build muscle, and recover quickly, as suggested by Andrew Woolfenden (2017). Financial instability emerges as a significant barrier to meeting essential nutritional needs in this context. Below are some statements from the participants.

“Requirement of the nutritional supplement is different from each other. When it comes to me, sometimes the supplements are not enough to recover. There are other players

too. So, I think it would be good if something else was added.”- Participant 08

Access to infrastructure facilities for women’s rugby

When discussing the results of theme two, most of the players highlighted that they could not reach the best facilities during the practice session. But the facilities, such as good ground conditions, well-facilitated gymnasiums, proper changing rooms, and other facilities around the Colombo area are much better than those in the rural area according to the participants of the study. The findings indicate that financial status is a main factor to the lack of facilities and which directly affects the poor performance of the athletes. According to the findings of Muhammad Sanni et al. (2018), the lack of facilities may lead to the poor performance of primary school players in Bwari (Muhammad Sanni et al., 2018). Also, Voss et al. (2008) have revealed that low income directly affects the less use of good facilities and less use of good facilities may lead to poor performance (Voss et al., 2008).

“Really it is not enough. We have not either a recommended rugby ground. We had to share the same ground with football players, cricket players and athletes... As the days of matches approach, we have to come to Colombo to do one or two last practices.” – Participant 06

Quality of coaching and support from team officials for women rugby players

Coaches and team officials may also affect the performance of the players. Findings indicate that almost all of the provincial female players in this study never experienced separate physiotherapists, doctors, etc. But, in the national pool, they have separate officials for the female rugby team. But if the injury occurs outside of the national pool, then the Rugby Union will not be responsible for it. Due to that, the athlete has to bear the expenses of the treatments. Most athletes

stop the treatments due to the high charges of the treatments. Due to that, several players had to leave the rugby field. Most likely, they would not face such difficulties if they had a doctor or physiotherapist on their team. So, finally, the finding shows that financial instability may affect performance directly.

“Three members of our team were injured in a tournament last year... They went for treatments for a few sessions because the expenses were high and they had to end the treatments before fully recovery. Out of those three, only one player is still playing. Rest two are not engaging on rugby now.”- Participant 07

Structure of payments for women’s rugby

The findings of the study revealed that although payments are made to the female athletes who represent the national squad in other countries, Sri Lankan players have not paid for their participation on the national squad. Newton (2023) has reported that a female player who plays for National Rugby League earns about minimum \$30,000 (AUD) per season in 2023 in Australia (Newton., 2023). Also, Dean (2022) revealed that a Black Fern (New Zealand Female National Rugby Players) earns salary range about \$60K to \$130K (NZD). Also, they own a pension plan as well as medical insurance (Dean, 2022). Although those players own such salaries, in Sri Lankan context, SL female national players do not own such payments. Due to that, their financial level is quite low. Orton & Lose have shown that supplements and nutritional intake is very important for rugby players (Orton & Lose, 2015). Although supplements are an important factor in performance enhancement, Sri Lankan players cannot afford for those nutritional supplements due to financial barriers. They do not have enough money to buy the best quality supplements to cover the aforementioned nutritional supplements or to fulfill their daily nutritional needs. So, the performance of those players may be reduce.

“I have been playing in the national squad for about 3 years now. But until today, no such payment was made as a salary... but travelling allowances are given...” – Participant 04

Acquisition of high-quality rugby gear

SL female rugby players cannot easily afford the best-quality sports accessories either. Wearing high quality mouth guards and headgear helps prevent orofacial injuries in the field. High quality headgear helps to prevent scalp lacerations and abrasions in rugby while mouth guards help to prevent concussion injuries and orofacial injuries (Cusimano et al., 2010). Also, most of the female athletes wear football boots, because they don’t have enough money to buy boots that are suitable for rugby. Rugby shoes are made of the harder rubber than football shoes. So, due to that the protection, stability, and support for the foot is high on the rugby field (Rizzo, 2023). But those rugby cleats are much more expensive than football shoes. They indicated that a pair of good-quality rugby boots, headgears, and mouth guards cost approximately LKR 30,000 or more and most athletes cannot afford them. So, finally it says that may also lead to the poor performance of the athletes because the risk of injury is high when they cannot wear high-quality safety equipment.

“Rugby players have specialized boots for different positions. A high quality pair of boot is quite expensive. Many players do not have enough assets to use such things in practices.” - Participant 09

In Sri Lankan context, female rugby has not received that much recognition in other countries like New Zealand and Australia. In these countries, female rugby is a recognized and well-compensated profession with benefits such as medical coverage, maternity allowances, insurance, and pension plans ((Dean, 2022); (Newton., 2023)). In contrast, Sri Lankan female athletes are not paid for representing national or

provincial teams, leading them to maintain alternative professions to cover expenses. A fact that was discovered during the interview is that the monthly income of most female players is between LKR 45,000-LKR 65,000, and those female players play under the military forces. Also, most of the other players are still engaged in studies or focused on other sources of income. Sometimes they don't even get as much monthly income as mentioned above. The impact of budget cuts from local governments on sports provision, as noted by Power (2019), further exacerbates the financial challenges faced by female rugby players in Sri Lanka. The results highlight the negative effect of financial constraints on performance, with examples such as the inability to afford high-quality sports accessories, reliance on repaired cleats, incomplete coverage of nutritional supplements, and the skipping of necessary medical treatments due to financial instability. The results of the twelve interviews show that low income may directly affect the performance of female rugby players in Sri Lanka. (Nelson et al., 2022) show that families with the low incomes cannot afford sports accessories, facilities, or entry fees for events or games. Despite the talent of the players, financial limitations hinder their ability to meet needs, whether it be for high-quality accessories or essential nutritional supplements like Whey protein, Creatine, and Omega 3 fish oil.

In summary, the study's findings underscore the direct impact of financial instability on the performance of female rugby players in Sri Lanka, affecting key aspects such as nutritional supplements, sports accessories, payments, coaching, and training facilities.

Conclusion

It has been nearly two decades since the establishment of the women's rugby team in Sri Lanka, but in the matches so far, Sri Lanka's female rugby performances have not been able to

perform very well at the international level. It can be clearly seen that there is an underachievement in female rugby team's performance. The main objective of the study was to determine the impact of financial stability on the women's rugby performance in Sri Lanka. And also to find out if there is any relationship between financial instability and the performance of female rugby players. For that, the author conducted twelve interviews, and by doing so, the author gathered the information for the study. The findings of the study show that there are some problems with nutritional supplements, sports facilities, sports accessories, payments for the athletes as well as the coaches and team officials. According to the results of the study, it was found that the nutritional supplement is not available enough, and the athletes do not have enough financial status to fully meet the additional nutritional needs required for those deficiencies. It was also found that there is no positive growth in the performance of female athletes due to playing with such low-nutritional supplements. Also, the findings indicate that, lack of quality accessories and insufficient training facilities also affect the underachievement of this performance by female rugby players in Sri Lanka. According to the results, financial instability is the main reason for low quality accessories and insufficient facilities among female athletes. Another factor identified by the author through the results is that female rugby players in Sri Lanka do not receive any salary or payment for representing the provincial team or national team. And it was found that there are no separate coaches and team officials on provincial teams. When comparing their income and expenses, it can be clearly identify that they have difficulties spending on good nutritional supplements, sports accessories, medical facilities, and other needs.

All above-mentioned factors are the main factors that affect the underachievement of performance.

When considering all the findings of the study, it was clearly identified that this has negatively affected the female players of Sri Lanka to reach higher achievements at the international level. It was also identified that the financial instability affects them negatively.

Finally, as a conclusion, the author found there is a relationship between financial instability and performance. Also, at the end, the author has proved the main objective of the study. It has been confirmed that the financial instability negatively affects the performance of Sri Lankan women’s rugby.

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