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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE LOCAL FOOTBALL LEAGUES

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors influencing the participation of women in the local football leagues.

Methodology: The study adopted a descriptive survey design. It was conducted in Gatundu North and Thika West. The target population for this study was the 8 and 6 women football teams in Gatundu North and Thika West districts, respectively. Focus group discussion guide, Interview schedule and Questionnaire were the instruments of data collection. The study mainly yielded qualitative data. This was sorted out, analyzed quantitatively and presented in tables.

Results: The study established that participation of women in the football leagues was influenced by several factors. Some women played football simply because they loved the game and because they found it exciting and fun. Those who were students in Thika West participated in football because they hoped that football would improve their lives in terms of keeping healthy and fit and learning especially reproductive health. Other respondents also considered it is a platform for socialization and making new friends.

Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study recommended that the National government, county government as well as the Football Kenya Federation should be keen on women football and give it the attention that it deserves in order to improve their participation in football.

Keywords: *Football leagues, Physical factors, psychosocial factors and Economic factors.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION 1.1 Background to the Study

The importance of sports is diverse and broad, ranging from its role in individual economic value, health promotion and fitness, to peace building and community regeneration in postconflict (Brady, 1998; Butler, 2010; UNESCO, 2015). The UNESCO International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport (UNESCO, 2015) acknowledges that cultural diversity in physical education, physical activity and sport forms part of humanity's intangible heritage and that these includes physical play, recreation, dance, organized, casual, competitive, traditional and indigenous sports and games. The charter recognizes that physical education, physical activity and sport can bring a variety of individual and societal benefits, such as health, social and economic development, youth empowerment, reconciliation and peace. Recently, Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus (HIV) prevention programmes have begun to incorporate sports into efforts to adopt intervention strategies. Further, HIV prevention messages are disseminated and life skills are taught during sports (Brady, 1998). Sport is also considered as part of the local culture, linking young and old and creating opportunities for young people to realize a potential that is non-academic (Nyanjom, 2010). Sports is considered as a tool in promoting gender equity and social inclusion for girls and women (Butler, 2010). Today, sport is big business, a source of youth employment and enjoyment, often keeping them away from negative influences and activities (Mwisukha et al, 2003).

The first women's football world cup was held in 1991, sixty one years after the first men football world cup. It is held after every five years though little is known about as (Alegi, (2010) argues that there are inexcusable delays by the organizers that make women football more difficult for fans and media to participate in the competitions. It is clear that women World cup is not as publicized as the Men's world cup a fact that shows that women football still has a long way to go. According to the FIFA women's world cup Report (2011), Germany and USA has won twice while Norway and Japan won the other matches. Nigeria and South Africa has represented Africa in the Women's world cup though with poor performances often losing the matches early (FIFA Africa Report, 2010).

In Africa, women football is not given much attention (Saavadra, 2007). Only Nigeria and South Africa seems to be leading as they have both made appearances in the FIFA women's world cup and has continually participated in African women championships. Both teams have played in several editions of the women football world cup though none has ever gone beyond the quarter finals (CAF, 2011). According to Alegi (2010), their performance is greatly attributed to the fact that Nigeria and South Africa have a more established league system although the countries are still struggling to get their women's national team to international level. According to Saavadra, (2003), other African countries such as Senegal, Ghana, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea have participated though unsuccessfully in Africa Cup of Nations (CAF) organized by Confederation of Africa Women Football (CAWF).

Kenya's national women football team, Harambee Starlets has been in existence since 1984 but has had dismal performance often not appearing or withdrawing from championships before end

of season. The poor performance can be attributed to lack of funds. For example, FKF in its financial report-2013/2014 financial year indicated that Ksh.101 million was spent on Men's football while only Ksh. 1.5 million was spent on women's football. Though men's football often gets the lion's share of the FKF budget, the performance of the national team is still poor as compared to other African teams but the men's football league is more established. The National women football team Harambee Starlets played in qualifying matches for the Olympics in 2006 and Africa cup of Nations in 2007. It also played in Africa Women football cup in 2010 but withdrew before the end of the season citing lack of funds. Both men and women national teams have never been in the world cup (FKF, 2011). Despite the great importance and popularity of sport for both men and women, women's participation in sport is still quite low all over the world as they face a lot of challenges that bar them from active participation (Fahmy, 2011; FIFA, 2015; Xhakaza, 2005). This was the concern of this study by investigating women participation in football in Thika Sub-county.

1.2 Statement of the problem

From the foregoing background, football is one of the leading participation and spectator sport in the world over. However, females continue to be poorly represented in football, world over including Kenya. To increase the participation in football, there is need to have a sustainable system of competitions such as leagues. In most countries, the women leagues are not regular and suffer from challenges such as inadequate funding and low motivation for players. In Kenya, the national men's football league has been ongoing since 1963, while the first National women league in Kenya was held in 2010. Worse still the women's leagues have been on and off and in some regions, the grassroots leagues are not held at all. It is out of the concern for low participation of women in football that this study was initiated. The study was conducted in an urban and a rural setting.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to investigate the factors influencing the participation of women in the local football leagues.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW 2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by Liberal Feminism theory which was advanced by Mary Wollstone craft, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Tylor in the 1960s and 1970S. The theory focuses on discrimination and exclusion on the basis of sex and gender, objectification, structural and economic inequality, power and oppression, gender roles and stereotypes (Knoppers, 1994; Olgesby, 1978). According to Liberal Feminists theorists, differences in female sport participation are as a result of socialization practices by institutions such as family, media and school (Greendorfer, 1993; Scraton, 1992).

Liberal feminism emphasizes the limitation of women's life opportunities because of socialization and social stereotypes. Girls are socialized into feminine sporting activities such as netball, gymnastics, or hockey and into a female physicality while boys are socialized into masculine sports

such as football, rugby, or cricket and into a male physicality (Scruton, 1992). Therefore, girls grow into women with the perception that football is strictly a male's game. In fact, football is perceived to be a male's game and that it is not important for the social development of women since the values of achievement, aggressiveness and competition are irrelevant to the life experience of women (Olgesby, 1978). According to liberal feminists, socialization and stereotyping which starts at birth and continues for life, has an upper hand in discouraging women and girls to participate in football.

Furthermore, discriminatory practices prevent women from having equal access to sporting opportunities including facilities and resources (Pherson, 1989). Women do not have as many opportunities to compete as their male counterparts. A number of leagues and tournaments in men football at local, national and international level are organized frequently which is not the case for women football. Therefore, the positive outcomes of sport for gender equality and women's empowerment are constrained by gender based discrimination in all areas and at all levels of sport and physical activity including football. This is fuelled by continuing stereotypes of women's physical abilities and social roles. Allocation of funds and other resources is also discriminatory as men football is awarded huge amounts of money while women football is given only a small share of the funds. The value placed on women's sport is often lower, resulting in inadequate resources and unequal wages and awards. This applies to other football resources including balls and playing grounds which are first available to men before they become available to women. Furthermore, Liberal Feminism Theory also focuses on underrepresentation of women in decision making positions in sport which includes coaching and leadership posts (Knoppers, 1994).

Men continue to dominate key decision-making posts and the percentage of women in governing and administrative organizations in the sports arena remains low. The entire management of football which includes football organizations, government and the sponsors, coaches and managers of women football teams is highly dominated by men (Talbot, 2001), who knowingly or unknowingly tend to direct resources especially funds to men's football at the expense of women football. This imbalance caused by socialization and stereotyping, discrimination, unequal distribution of resources and under-representation in decision making posts continues to edge women out of sports. Unless this is looked into, women will continue being ignored and poorly represented in sport.

Critics of this theory argue that the theory focuses on socialization and sex-role differentiation and treats women as a homogeneous group with little regard to differences between women (White, 1995). It ignores the fact that women have different interests some of which are different types of sports and that they use their interests in sports to demonstrate their feministic characters. Like education, work, religion, and family, the cultural institution of sports has the power to affect women's status in society, and not necessarily in a positive manner (Dowling, 2000). Further, liberal feminists theory ignores the fact that the sports can be used and has been by women as one of the ways leading to equality. Sport therefore, plays a major role in defining women and placing them at equal levels with men. Emphasis should therefore be on how close the gap on

discrimination, provide equal opportunities in sports including football so that women can also enjoy the sports particularly football.

2.2 Empirical Review

Reviewed literature reveals that many factors influence the participation of women in sports and particularly football (Achola & Njororai, 1999; Bailey, 1999, Brady *et al.*, 2007). They include physical, economical, psychological and social advantages.

(a) Physical

According to UNICEF report of 2010, participation in sports is associated with improving ones physical being for both men and women of all ages. Bailey (1999) also explains that regular physical activity improves quality of life, lowers risk of disease and offers numerous psychological and social benefits while physical inactivity is linked to increased risk of death, disability and reduced quality of life. In a health study by WHO in 1999, it was established that other than good nutrition and non-smoking, physical activity is one of three primary factors that influence individual and population risks of chronic, non-communicable disease worldwide, such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, and diabetes.

The study also concluded that obesity, often contributed by lack of physical activity is closely linked to cardiovascular disease and is on the rise worldwide. Football is associated with vigorous physical activity that keeps the body and the mind active and alert. Such activity offers strength and resistance exercises and can also prevent and delay the onset of osteoporosis, a disease that disproportionately affects women (80% of all cases) causing bones to become fragile and more likely to break (Kannus, 1999). Participation in sports helps women to be active, have healthier body and have a slimmer figure which is the dream of every woman. The media and societies promote the slim figure and this puts a lot of pressure on women to either maintain that smaller figure or to monitor their weight. As indicated by Prakasa-Rao and Overman (1986), sport is a form of exercise that helps women to maintain a slimmer figure and improve their self esteem and body image. This idea keeps women on toes to engage in sports such as football in order to improve their health as well as keeping a slimmer figure.

(b) Psychological and Social Factors

According to Brady and Khan (2002), participating in sports helps in fostering self esteem, facilitating social inclusion and integration, challenging gender norms and providing opportunities for leadership and achievement. Further, sport also provides girls and women with powerful role models who help them achieve leadership skills and experience that they can transfer to other domains such as their family life, civic involvement, and advocacy. This improves their self-awareness and self-confidence. As such, their self esteem is raised and they are able to stand up for themselves. Brady (1998), also notes that sport programs also benefit women and girls who have been marginalized for long by enhancing their empowerment, reducing restrictions, offering

girls and women greater mobility, access to public spaces, and more opportunities for their physical, intellectual and social development.

Sport has also been described as a powerful health information and education platform, connecting both men and women with the information, skills and strategies they need to reduce health risks in their lives, particularly in connection with their sexual and reproductive health (Brady, 1998). Saavedra and Martha (2010) argue that the NGOs that support women football use it as a platform to promote women reproductive health. Sport programme also provides safe places for women to gather and build social networks, offer social support, and connect them to education and employment information, services, and opportunities that can help to address their issues in the society. All of these social factors are self-reinforcing, and they also make sporting opportunities for girls more interesting. In fact most of the women football clubs under NGOs watch such as MYSA in Mathare and Moving the Goal post in Kilifi have really benefited the members both socially and economically. The MYSA recruits streets girls and reforms them in the name of offering them a space to show their talents in football. Football has gone an extra mile even in the rehabilitation of women whose social behaviour is unacceptable such as prostitutes and drug users.

(c) Economics Factors

The football industry is becoming hugely marketable, profitable and highly influential (Dauncey & Hare, 1999). Gone are the days when football was played and watched for the love of the game only. According to Alegi (2007), mighty clubs have grown and so has the buying and selling of global players along with merchandising rights in big-business leagues. Today, huge price tags and financial value is attached to individual players, teams, venue and channel rights. With money made from sponsorships, merchandise sales, individual player deals and brands (Hallman, 2006). Birrel and Cole (1989) argue that football today is an international business, as players are transferred frequently around the globe, international professional leagues are created, and the European Cup finals or the FIFA World Cup finals are top media events Kenyan players like Victor Wanyama and Mcolnad Mariga are some of the beneficiaries who have continued to create a lot of hope for many other individuals with the talent.

Women like Dorren Nabwire have also benefited and is currently playing for a club in Germany as well as working for an NGO which promotes women football. Nabwire won the Safaricom Sports Personality of the Year award (SOYA) in 2013 and a scholarship to Bethel University to further her studies. This is what she said as she received the award (Korir, 2013).

I am humbled with the rare opportunity to further my football career as well as study abroad. Such chances rarely come especially to women in Kenya. I want to use the full advantage.

Economic benefits are probably the most important reason why football is played and enjoyed by a large number of fans. In addition to the sports-related employment provided by the commercial, public and voluntary sectors, sporting events can provide substantial short-term and long-term economic impacts (Crompton, 1995). While men are really reaping attractive economic benefits,

women are yet to capture the eyes of their-would-be sponsors who are expected to reward them financially.

Winning the game has been cited as an important factor that may motivate sports men and women. Xhakaza (2005) argues that often, a feeling of competence may have a great effect on the motivation of different individuals. An individual who wins regularly will be more motivated to continue with the game than one who loses the game frequently. Losing also makes one feel encouraged enough to want to play the next match. According to Yan and Thomas (1995), selfconcept allows females to assess themselves by acknowledging their weaknesses and strengths. Often females compare their performance to that of other participants and with time, if their performance improves, then their self-concept also improves and the female sport participants feel competent in what they are involved in. Being competent in a game enables the girls to be self-motivated and builds self-confidence.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. It was conducted in Gatundu North and Thika West. The target population for this study was the 8 and 6women football teams in Gatundu North and Thika West districts, respectively. Focus group discussion guide, Interview schedule and Questionnaire were the instruments of data collection. The study mainly yielded qualitative data. This was sorted out, analyzed quantitatively and presented in tables.

4.0 RESULTS 4.1 Demographic Characteristics Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Thika West			Gatundu North	
Age (years)	Number	percentage	Number	Percentage
Below 19	10	20	5	16.67
19-29	40	80	25	83.33
Education	Number	percentage	Number	Percentage
Primary	2	4	6	20
Secondary	21	42	19	63.33

Post secondary	27	54	5	16.67
Age(years)	Number	percentage	Number	Percentage
Married	4	8	3	10
Single	46	92	27	90
Occupation	Number	percentage	Number	Percentage
Employed (formal)	7	14	1	3.33
Employed(Casual/self)	11	22	9	30
Unemployed	20	40	15	50
Students (college)	7	14	4	13.32
Students (secondary)	5	10	1	3.3

Majority of the women football players in the two districts were between the age of 19 and 20.

Only a few of the players were below 19 years. Those who were aged below 19 were more in ThikaWest than Gatundu North. None of the respondents was aged above 30 years. Majority of women football players have secondary education while the number of those with primary and post-primary level of education varied across the rural and urban settings. However, those who have attained post-secondary education are more in ThikaWest (54%) than in Gatundu North (16.67%). Those who were married were slightly higher in Gatundu North than in Thika West. Further, the analysis revealed that that 4(8%) in Thika West and 3(10%) in Gatundu North were married while 46(92%) in Thika West and 27(90%) in Gatundu North were single. Most of the women football players are unemployed (40%) in Thika West and 15% in Gatundu North) with most of those who are employed being in casual employment. Only a few have formal employment (7% in Thika West and 3.33% in Gatundu North). The level of unemployment is high in Gatundu North than in Thika West. However, a good number of players in Thika West (24%) and Gatundu North (14.3%) are students in college and secondary schools.

4.2 Factors Influencing the Participation of Women in Football Leagues

4.2.1 Love for the Game

Among the factors, “love for game” was mentioned as an important factor that drives women to play football. All the respondents in the three categories responded positively to this factor. The women football players just love and enjoy playing football. So, they do play as long as they have the chance. As noted by Alegi (2010), football players just love playing the game regardless of the challenges that come with it. This is what a 29 year old woman football player had to say:

.....I cannot sit and watch others play football. I feel the urge to play also, and this is what keeps me playing even at my age. Playing football is exciting. I enjoy being in the field and people cheering at me. It makes me feel important and this is what makes me love it so much.

A woman football player in Gatundu North during a focus group discussion on 21/12/2014

Savaadra (2007) also noted that women who play football are intrinsically motivated and nothing can stop them from playing the game. This is the kind of motivation that makes go beyond their means in order to meet the expenses required in terms of time and finances. As explained by the Thika Queens coach, some of the players in the team sacrifice their families in order to be in camp with the other players. He had this to say...

.... Some just play because they love the game. They just feel good in the field. That is why they put so much effort to just to be in football and to excel in it despite the many challenges.

Thika Queens coach during an interview on 23/11/2014

4.2.2 Empowering Girls and Women

Empowering girls and women is another factor that influences participation of women in football. All the respondents agreed to this. From the discussion groups, it was established that most of the women football players felt empowered since they started playing football. They argued that every time they played a game and won, their self esteem was always raised. This made them feel stronger socially and usually in a better position to solve their problems.

Participating in football has made me learn a lot on how to handle issues that affect me. I no longer fear men as I used to. Today I can argue for my rights with anybody and I cannot stand and watch anyone mistreat me simply because am a woman.

A young member of the Angaza team during a focus group discussion on 23/11/2014

Participating in football also helped them develop leadership skills. The young girls felt more courageous and in a better position to handle their male colleagues.

In addition to providing role models, sport can be a highly effective platform for teaching girls and women leadership skills and providing them with leadership experience that they can apply in other domains such as employment, civic leadership, and advocacy (Nyanjom, 2010). A similar argument was raised by Brady (1998) who noted that sport programs benefit women and girls who have been marginalized for long. It enhances their empowerment by reducing restrictions and offering girls and women greater mobility, access to public spaces, and more opportunities for their physical, intellectual and social development. This was also supported by Brady and Khan (2002), who indicated that participating in sports helps in fostering self-esteem, facilitating social inclusion and integration, challenging gender norms and providing opportunities for leadership and achievement.

As argued by Hallman (2008), affiliation with a recognized team or group provides girls with a sense of belonging, and their role as a team member offers an identity beyond the domestic realm. Further, participation in sports programs help to draw girls into a network of institutions, programs, and mentors to which they would otherwise not have access. Group membership may also serve as a protective factor.

One of the members of Thika Rangers had this to say:

.....Being in a successful team makes me have a sense of belonging. I feel important especially whenever our team does well and is appreciated in whatever way. It makes me feel proud.

A member of Thika Rangers team during a focus group discussion on 2/11/2014

The NGO official and the sports officer also explained how football has been used as a form of rehabilitation especially for slum girls who have been previously involved in dirty slum life. Through football, the girls have now settled and are back to school. They are also determined to achieve a better life. They stated that through seminars and exposure, most of the women learn how to handle issues that affected them in their day-to-day life. In conjunction with the district officials, they recently formed the Angaza team in Kiandutu slums which targets the girls who are already deeply engrossed in slum life and have involved themselves in early prostitution and drugs.

One of the slum girls had this to say:

...I am thankful to the NGO for supporting us. Before they came, our parents could not afford to keep us in school. So we were out of school most of the time and we involved ourselves with anything that could earn us a few coins. Most of us have been prostitutes at an early age, have sold drugs and illicit alcohol but with the support of the NGO, we are back in school.

Angaza team member during a focus group discussion on 9/11/2014

The argument is that as they participate in football, it is easy to guide and monitor them so that eventually the girls will be able to recollect themselves to normal life again.

4.2.3. Socialising and Making New Friends

All the respondents agreed on socialising and making new friends as one of the factors that greatly influenced women to play football because it gives them a chance to socialise and make new friends. They all agreed that being out there in the field meant more chances to meet new friends and socialise with other women. As argued by Karuru (2006), the statement „A woman's place is in the kitchen“ would appear to be still a common saying and many African cultures still firmly believe it. Women and girls therefore have fewer chances to meet and socialise. Brady (1998) also argues that sports can be a powerful education platform connecting both men and women with the information, skills and strategies they need in life. Being out in the field either training or playing football almost every evening and weekends gives them a good chance to meet and socialise.

As explained by the coaches and other key informants, socialising is an important factor as it helps them learn a lot from each other while using their leisure time constructively. According to Brady (2011), affiliation with a recognized team or group provides girls with a sense of belonging and their role as a team member offers an identity beyond the domestic realm. Some of the players had this to say....

...sometimes we make new friends as we travel for matches in different places and meet new people, It also helps us to learn so many things as women, like good things about our reproductive health and our rights, we are also able to develop our leadership skills due to the exposure that we get from participating in football.

A penta Girls team member during a focus group discussion on 21/12/2014

....Being in football exposes most of the girls to different societies. The travelling helps them a lot as they meet new and different people...

A coach in Gatundu North during an interview on 7/12/2014

Further, participation in sports programs helps draw girls into a network of institutions, programs, and mentors to which they would otherwise not have access. Group membership may also serve as a protective factor. This can be of great help to women and girls as they are usually affected by a number of issues.

4.2.4 Fun and Excitement

Football is also a source of fun and excitement. This is a factor that was agreed upon by all the three groups of the respondents. The women football players indicated that it was exciting to play football and a good way of spending their leisure time as one of the players put it:

.....I long for the evenings and weekends so that I can come here and play with my colleagues. I miss a lot when I do not manage to come to the field. Running up and down in this field gives me a lot of satisfaction.

Mataara WFC football player in Gatundu North during a focus on 28/12/2014

Coaches also agreed that the women players feel good when playing since they forget about their many other responsibilities awaiting them. The older ones agreed that it is a good chance to unwind after a long day's hard work. It is believed to be a good way of spending one's leisure time especially at young age.

.... I have too many things to do during the day, so in the evening I feel the need to relax. Playing football gives me a chance to do exactly that so that by the time I go back to my family I feel fresh and ready to serve them.

Thika Rangers team member during a focus discussion on 16/12/2014

Yan & Thomas (1995) indicated that though playing football is associated with many benefits, majority of the players just play it for fun and excitement, and this is confirmed by this study.

4.2.5. Learning Especially Reproductive Health

Seven out of the eight teams agreed on the fact that participating in football served as a platform for learning reproductive health. Coaches, Government sports officer and the NGO officer also agreed that participating in football was a good platform for learning reproductive health. The women football players argued that they acquire very important information on reproductive health from the other women whenever they meet in different forums one of them being in football. This

factor was emphasised more in Gatundu North than in Thika West probably because women football players in Gatundu North were older than those in Thika West and therefore needed reproductive health information more. It was clear that as they socialised, they did not fail to mention some of the issues affecting them in reproductive health as explained by a young woman football player:

I joined this team while I was young. I was too shy to mention anything about my reproductive health. Since then, I have gained confidence and my colleagues have taught me a lot on reproductive health and I now know how to protect myself from getting pregnant now and even when I get married.

A woman football player in Gatundu North during a focus group discussion on
30/11/2014

The younger ones always learned from the older ones. As Saavedra and Martha, (2010), argues, in platforms where women are so free with one another, such as in sports and other groups, they tend to talk freely about issues affecting them, one of which is the reproductive health. Karuru (2006), while looking at The Mathare youth Association Girls football team indicated that sport offers multiple avenues to address health challenges and can promote good health for girls and women while providing an important venue to share critical health information and education and a safe and neutral space where women can discuss sexual and reproductive health issues and strategies to address them. From the discussions, it emerged that they felt free enough to discuss anything.

The NGO official also explained that the football field has been a good platform where they meet women and talk to them about the issues affecting them, key among them being reproductive health. The NGO official stated that this is the primary goal of any NGOs supporting women football, "to simply give them a chance to meet and chat" They argued that, since they have developed confidence through football, they participate in any other discussions freely without fear. Some NGOs facilitate the availability of well-trained and informed sport facilitators to convey accurate and appropriate health information. They approach sensitive topics in an age and culturally appropriate way, while using their counselling skills to provide effective support to girls and women who ask for guidance in dealing with specific issues, including sexual abuse and HIV and AIDS. The young women confessed that though they were so "green" before they joined the teams, they have learnt a lot from the impromptu discussions and seminars usually organised by their leaders.

.....I have learnt so many things since I joined this team. For instance, I never used any family planning method before but now I know the best method for me thanks to my fellow team mates.

A woman in Nyamathumbi team in Gatundu North during a focus group discussion on
23/11/2014

Some of the coaches who disagreed on this factor argued that the main business of the teams is to play football. They noted that there are so many other forums from where the women learn reproductive health practices citing the media as one of them. They believed that reproductive health is taught in schools and therefore, the girls usually leave school while completely aware of most of the issues affecting them especially on reproductive health and how to handle them. However, some coaches confessed that they spare sometimes during their meetings with the women to talk to them on such issues. Some also facilitated discussions where the women talked freely about issues affecting them. All the three key informants agreed that it is in such forums that women get chances of sharing any issues affecting them among them being reproductive health. As NGO and government officers, they were really concerned about women's lack of knowledge on very important issues in their lives.

4.2.6. Hope for a Better Future

Hope for a better future is also an important factor that motivates women to play football. Most of the respondents agreed to the fact that football improves the life of women. They hoped that their teams will move to greater heights or as individuals, they may be picked by advanced clubs which may eventually be a paying job as explained the captain of Thika Queens.

....one of my team mates was picked to play for Thika Queens (national team). She is now enjoying good allowances. This was so encouraging for all us because we all hope that we will get such chances.

Captain Thika queens during a focus group discussion on 23/11/2014

As noted by Crompton (1995), sports-related employment provided by the commercial, public and voluntary sectors and sporting events can provide substantial short-term and long term economic impacts to individuals. He argues that football is one of the sporting events with the highest economic benefits. They also hoped that through football, they may get a chance to travel and get better chances in life such as good jobs. Members of some of the teams involved in the research such as Thika queens and Angaza have already benefited. Their school and college fees are already being paid. Others get scholarships for colleges abroad.

....Our school fees is sometime paid by well-wishers when they see us so determined to play football. In fact, some of our colleagues get admissions to good colleges where they are fully sponsored while some get good jobs.

A young member of the Angaza team during a focus group discussion on 21/11/2014

This information was reaffirmed by the coaches who also responded positively to this factor. They stated that their wishes are that the teams are promoted to higher levels which would really benefit the players both as individuals and as a team; they would play with larger teams which would eventually increase their opportunities. Such opportunities would include sponsorships, more openings for individual players and even scholarships.

.....there are many benefits out there if only we can excel as a team. Good players are being bought by national and even international teams. So, the teams need to rise up so that they can be noted.

One of the women football players in Thika queens on 23/11/2014

Playing football is also a good way of keeping the women especially the young ones busy. This keeps them away from unbecoming behaviour which they would have involved themselves with if they were idle. In many ways, this would definitely improve their lives. As Brady (1998) notes that sport programs also benefit women and girls who have been marginalized for long by enhancing their empowerment, reducing restrictions and offering girls and women greater mobility, access to public spaces, and more opportunities for their physical, intellectual and social development. This is what an NGO officer had to say....

.....the young girls here are at a risk getting into bad behavior such as prostitution, drugs early pregnancy and marriage. Playing football keeps them away from such behavior so they are able to complete school and college and eventually improve their lives.

NGO officer during an interview on 21/11/2014

The key informants also agreed on this factor. The NGOs whose main interest is to improve the lives of women and girls are keen on women football as they believe it is a good way of keeping the women busy. This was also noted by Brady (1998), who argued that the NGOs that support women sports mostly football use it as a platform to promote women reproductive health. Dauncey and Hare (1999), also noted that, sport programs also provides safe places for women to gather and build social networks, offer social support, and connect them to education and employment information, services, and opportunities that can help to address their issues in the society. Evidently, playing football improves the life of women both economically and socially.

4.2.7. Keeping Fit and Lowering the Risk of Diseases

Majority of the women football players who participated in the focus discussion groups agreed to the fact that women played football in order to lower the risk of diseases and to keep fit. This factor was also supported by the coaches and the key informants. They argued that the increase in the number of people affected by lifestyle diseases is largely attributed to poor eating habits and lack of physical activity. The media and societies also promote the slim figure and this puts a lot of pressure on women to either maintain that smaller figure or to monitor their weight. It is therefore important for women to engage themselves in sports so as to try and reduce the risks of getting some of the diseases. Since Football is associated with vigorous physical activity that keeps the body and the mind active and alert, it is therefore deemed as good exercise to counter the lifestyle diseases and to promote a slim figure. One of the players had this to say.

.... ...I was so big before I started playing football. If it was not for this game, then I would be so fat and unfit like so many women of my age. Participating in football helps me maintain this slim figure which I love so much these days I don't struggle with my weight any more. I also feel healthy.

A woman football player in Nyamathumbi during a focus group discussion on 15/11/2014.

It is evident that participating in football promotes good health and fitness. According to Kannus (1999), participation in sports helps women to be active, have a healthier body and a slimmer figure which is the dream of every woman. Prakasa-Rao and Overman (1986) also indicated that sport is a form of exercise that helps women to maintain a slimmer figure and improve their self esteem and body image. Regular physical activity improves quality of life, lowers risk of disease and offers numerous psychological and social benefits while physical inactivity is linked to increased risk of death, disability and reduced quality of life (Bailey et al., 1999).

From the focus group discussions with the women football players, the interviews with the coaches and the questionnaires with the key officials, the study established that there are several factors that influence and likewise motivate women to play football. As a conclusion, the captain of the Angaza team had this to say.

And what has football done for me? Well a lot of things because it helps me to forget things that are sad and all the problems that are occurring. Also it prevents me from getting into the many problems we have in this country. For example, becoming pregnant at my age or getting into prostitution or something like that. It helps me avoid problems. And also I am having a lot of fun. Football is really good for me.

Angaza captain during a focus group discussion on 21/11/2014

As such, women who play football continue to enjoy and also benefit a lot from football activities.

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 5.1 Summary of Findings

The study established that participation of women in the football leagues was influenced by several factors. Some women played football simply because they loved the game and because they found it exciting and fun. Those who were students in Thika West participated in football because they hoped that football would improve their lives in terms of keeping healthy and fit and learning especially reproductive health. Other respondents also considered it is a platform for socialization and making new friends.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, women continued to play football because they simply loved the game, for fun and hope that football will improve their lives. Some played as they wanted to remain healthy and fit while others found it as a platform for socialisation and learning. Generally, women who played football felt empowered.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, several recommendations have been made to both national and county government, Football Kenya Federation (KFF), non-governmental organizations (NGOS) and the media as follows:

(a) National Government

The national government is one of the key stake holders in the sports industry. It should therefore be keen on women football and give it the attention that it deserves in order to improve their participation in football.

These are some of the recommendations to the national government;

- Set aside funds to support women football leagues from the grassroots level to the national level
- It should oversee and control all including the women leagues through the ministry of sports at all levels in order to minimize mismanagement.

(b) County Government

The county government is an important body in the women football especially at the local level. It should therefore;

- Provide adequate funding for women football activities
- Organise and manage leagues, tournaments and championships at the county levels in order to provide more opportunities for women to participate in football
- Provide incentives and rewards to women football teams and individuals who excel in football.
- Involve the media in publicising and promoting women football at the county level.
- Work with Non-Governmental and other community based organisations to sensitize the community on the benefits of women football.
- Improve and manage the existing playgrounds to ensure that women have access to these facilities whenever they require them.

(c) Football Kenya Federation

The FKF main mandate is to organise and manage football leagues for both women and men from grass roots level to the national level. It should therefore;

- Ensure that women leagues are organised and run smoothly
- Consider introducing the leagues in secondary schools and colleges since most of the women football players are young and still in school.
- Manage and maintain the available playing grounds to ensure that they remain in good condition.
- Include women in their leadership position who would represent other women.
- Publicise the women leagues through the media and other avenues.

- Recognise and reward women who excel in football so that they can be role models to other women.

(d) Media

The can help promote a positive attitude towards women football through publicising and promoting it. This can be achieved through

- Screening women matches with a view of reporting in the local media
- Highlighting profiles of women football players who have excelled before
- Sensitising the community on the benefit of playing football in order to change the negative attitude towards women football players.

(e) Non-Governmental Organizations

NGOs have continued to play an important role in empowering women financially and socially. Sport is one of the avenues that have been used to do this. NGOs should therefore.

- Organise women football activities at grassroots level especially in poverty stricken areas.
- Offer rewards and incentives to women who participate in football
- Seek funds from sponsors and well wishers to boost women football
- Organise sensitization meetings and exhibition matches at school and community level in conjunction with other stakeholders as a way of encouraging girls and women to participate I football activities.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the focus of this study and its findings, the following are the recommended as possible areas for further research:

- A study on factors that determine men's and women's participation in football activities in the entire county.
- Comparative studies on factors influencing women participation in football activities in different counties across Kenya.

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