A qualitative analysis of motives and challenges in professional female soccer

M.J. SWANEPOEL[1], J. SURUJLAL[1] AND A.K. ISABIRYE[2]

[1]*Faculty of Economic Sciences and Information Technology, North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa.*
E-mail: 10544100@nwu.ac.za
[2]*Faculty of Management Sciences, Vaal University of Technology, Private Bag X021, Vanderbijlpark 1900, South Africa*

Abstract

This study investigated the motives and challenges experienced by professional female soccer players in South Africa. It used a qualitative research approach in which data were collected from eleven purposively selected participants code-named R1 to R11 through in-depth interviews. During the data analysis process, participants' responses were synthesised into themes and sub-themes that revealed the challenges faced by professional female soccer players as well as factors that motivated them to play. The results of the study revealed that female participation in professional soccer is influenced by factors such as *supportive family and friends*, *available time to practice*, good *sports facilities*, and *supportive male and female relationships*. However, scarcity of *career opportunities*, *inadequate funding and time*, together with *negative attitudes* towards women entering soccer as a male-dominated sport were major challenges that discouraged their participation. In order to attract more females to soccer, the study recommends that sports administrators should understand motivation factors as well as challenges to participation in the sport. It further recommends that understanding the needs, attitudes and experiences of females may enable soccer administrators to put systems in place to address barriers to their participation in soccer. A need still remains for the formulation and implementation of policies focusing on women's soccer funding, enforcement of professional development of women's soccer and the creation of a comfortable environment to support female participation.

Keywords: Challenges, motives, professional soccer, female participation.

Introduction

In these modern times, soccer has evolved into a multi-billion dollar global industry which generates huge revenues for private individuals, clubs as well as national and international organisations (Buyukbaykal & Kesgin, 2014; Mantzaris & Pillay, 2014; Bummer, 2015). This phenomenal rise has compelled economists to direct an interest in the economic value of soccer (Morgan & Whitehead, 2015).

Generally, soccer is regarded as the most popular sport in the world (Kruschewsky, 2014). According to the world governing body for soccer Fédération Internationale de Football Association's (FIFA) big count, four per cent of the world's population are actively involved in soccer; either as players, referees or officials (FIFA, 2015). In South Africa, soccer attracts more participants and spectators than any other sport (Surujlal & Dhurup, 2011). Furthermore, during the 1990s, football became one of the fastest growing sports for women around the world (Lopez, 1997; Hong & Mangan, 2004). Through the increased interest and participation of females in soccer, new opportunities in professional soccer leagues emerged, and transnational governing bodies finally encouraged the international development of women's football through regional and world championships. The first official women's World Cup sponsored by FIFA was held in the People's Republic of China in 1991 in which the final match at the Cuanzhou's Tianhe Stadium was attended by a crowd of 65 000 spectators. Women's soccer eventually became a full medal sport at the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996 (Pelak, 2006). Thus, the growth of women's soccer recently gained momentum and continues to develop at a rapid pace.

According to Egunjobi (2000), the governing body of African Soccer; Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF) started to sponsor the Women's African Cup of Nations, the qualifying tournament for the FIFA World Cup in 1991. Pelak (2006) notes that women's soccer was included for the first time at the All-Africa Games in 2003 - a Pan-African multi-sports event held since 1965. However, as observed by Alegi (2004), the growing popularity of women's soccer in Africa raised new questions about the Africanisation of the sport. Keim and Qhuma (1996) identified the increase in television coverage as an important factor in the development of African women's soccer. Still, in the context of South Africa, as South African women observed other African women playing international soccer, they were inspired and began to imagine new possibilities in the sport (Pelak, 2006). For instance, after watching Nigerian and Ghanaian women in World Cup events, South African women more likely dreamt about travelling and making money by participating in the sport. Since these matches were broadcast through television, it can be mentioned that television coverage provided evidence that soccer was no longer just for African boys and men or European women (Pelak, 2006). Taking the afore-mentioned into account, the increased interest of females in participating in soccer is understandable.

As suggested by Sabo and Veliz (2008), although evidence suggests that females experience greater benefits of sports participation than males, females still lag behind males in sports involvement at all levels. Females enter sports at a later age (7.4 years) compared to their male counterparts (6.8 years); thus providing them with a narrower window of opportunity in sports. This late entry age appears to be an albatross, given that the entry age of athletes

influences the initial development of football talent (Hoffmann, Ging & Ramasamy, 2002). Sabo and Veliz (2008) further argue that the late entry of females into sport may set them up for failure. This situation is exacerbated by the view that females generally tend to drop out of sport sooner and in greater numbers than males. These gender differences flow from an array of interconnected factors that may involve family income, race and ethnicity, type of community as well as the school attended (Sabo & Veliz, 2008).

Time constraints is another factor hampering the participation of females in soccer. A study conducted by Keathley, Himelein and Srigley (2013) found time constraints to be one of the most dominant factors for women athletes discontinuing their participation in sport, thereby reducing their tenure in sport. The same study further reports that negotiating the rigorous time demands of competitive soccer is highly stressful on females. Accordingly, females may not be able to dedicate the required time necessary for them to play soccer at a high level.

While time concerns seem to be prominent among all athletes, another reason for discontinuing the sport - especially for females - was the coach (Keathley et al., 2013). This may perhaps be attributed to the view that females place greater emphasis on relationship issues when sizing up the overall merits of their sports experience (Keathley et al., 2013). Smoll and Smith (1989) suggest that coaching behaviours are perceived and given meaning by each athlete, which results in an attitude toward both the coach and the sport experience. The coaching scenario continues to be dominated by male coaches and this could be a reason for the reluctance of females to participate in soccer. For instance, in a study on coach leadership in women's soccer by Surujlal and Dhurup (2011), participants indicated that they were not entirely satisfied with their coach. There were various reasons for this – they had no role in the choice of their coach, their expectations were not met, results of competitions were not encouraging and their own potential was not being exploited. This then attracts the supposition that if females are given autonomy in the choice of their coach and their expectations are met, their attitude to soccer would be positive and their satisfaction levels higher.

In sport, females tend to experience decreasing levels of support in terms of infrastructure and financial resources to participate. As revealed in a research by Tesnear and Surujlal (2012) various challenges, such as insufficient financial, equipment, medical care and human resources, are continuously being experienced by female rugby players in South Africa. In sync, Black (2010) asserts that because of the low status of their sport, female rugby players seldom enjoy the same support afforded to the male version of the game. Furthermore, Pelak (2006) states that although South African women enjoyed new opportunities to represent their local communities and nation in sports, they did

not really become sport symbols of their communities or nation as commonly happens to their male counterparts. The author also opines that because of its vast popularity and political significance to masculinity, nationalism, and capitalism, women's entrance into the world's most popular sport – soccer – has the potential for radically changing local gender relations around the world.

In their comparative study of women's football in Europe, Scraton, Fasting, Pfister and Buneul (1999) argue that women's access to football can be seen as a political outcome of a liberal feminist discourse that centres on equal opportunities, socialisation practices and legal institutional reform. In South Africa, the rise of a mass women's movement during the early 1990's is a prime example of emerging gender politics on the African continent (Hassim, 2005). Almost two decades ago, Hargreaves (1997) stated that scholars started to explore how the recent democratisation of South Africa opened up space for women to participate in sports. The new political opportunity structures have meant that young South African women, especially black women, are now imagining new possibilities and raising their expectations. As such, their interest and participation in soccer is on the increase.

Problem statement

Pelak (2006) argues that race is a salient feature in South Africa and that competitive sport is an important site for negotiating racial categories and meanings. A 1997 national survey of South African women estimated that 65000 women participated in recreational and competitive soccer. The national survey also estimated that 87% of the participants were identified as Black/African, 5.9% as White, 4.8% as Coloured, and 2.5% as Indian/Asian. Comparing these estimates with national census data, it appears that Black/African women are over-represented, Whites and Coloureds are under-represented, and Indians/Asians are proportionately represented (Pelak, 2006). This discursive re-construction of women's soccer as a 'Black game' is consistent with the dominant view of who owns soccer in South Africa (Alegi, 2004) and demonstrates that the dismantling of apartheid has not meant the deconstruction of essentialist notions of race.

According to Sabo and Veliz (2008), custom, gender stereotypes and men's traditional control of athletic organisations combined to keep girls outside the athletic opportunity mainstream. Pelak (2006) states that, traditionally, in South African culture, the man is viewed as the head and is the 'money-maker', and the woman belongs in the kitchen. Similarly, football is a male-dominated sport and is run by males.

The increased exposure to international women's soccer via satellite television had a positive impact on women's interests and contributed to their recruitment

into the sport. On the contrary, promoting women's soccer was a business strategy that transnational giants adopted in the hope of maximising profits. During the 1990's, corporate capital was also directed toward women's football albeit miniscule amounts compared to what the men's game enjoyed (Pelak, 2006). Although there is an emerging gender equality discourse within South African sport, women are extremely under-represented in decision-making positions at all levels (Hargreaves & Jones, 2001). Hence, the conflicts over the administrative control of women's football in South Africa are not unique, but have long been a part of women's sporting histories elsewhere (Scraton et al., 1999; Hargreaves, 2000; Hong & Mangan, 2004). Hargreaves (2000) argues that South African women in soccer feel intensely that they do not have power and they seek to share an equal footing with men in democratic processes.

Research has shown that women are motivated to play soccer, not only for recreation but also as a way of keeping fit and making new acquaintances. In a 16 week study of recreational soccer led by Peter Krustrup at the University of Copenhagen it was established that when choosing a sport to play, women tended to favour cardiovascular training to strength training. But soccer as a sport integrates both cardio and strength training; making it a very favourable choice of exercise training for women (University of Copenhagen, 2009). Apart from recreational motives and the need to keep fit, playing soccer has been identified as a great way for women to make friends who stand by them on and off the field in case of social problems they face in their daily lives. It also boosts the participants' self-esteem; as they become confident and empowered due to the feeling of accomplishment on the field.

African women playing international soccer inspired South African women to imagine new possibilities and television coverage provided evidence that women's soccer was on the rise. Although soccer continues to be a male-dominated sport in South Africa, it is currently increasingly attracting female participants (Surujlal & Dhurup, 2011). However, according to Oglesby (2007), female participation in sport has a long history which is marked with division and discrimination but at the same time with major accomplishments, important advances in gender equality, and empowerment of women. Although women were systematically excluded in the past from many social institutions including sport (Howe, 2001). Pelak (2006) notes that female soccer has increased in popularity. Indeed, the game has developed into one of the fastest growing sports around the world and South Africa. With the increased interest and participation of females in soccer and the potential threat that it poses to the male version of the sport, professional female soccer players are faced with various challenges. Soccer was - and still is - a male-dominated sport, with males participating, coaching, administrating and supporting it. Even professional female soccer is coached, administered and supported by males. As a result female soccer players continue to be subjected to stereotyping.

Taking into account the scarcity of research focussing on motives and challenges in professional female soccer, the purpose of this study was to qualitatively investigate the motives and challenges experienced by South African professional female soccer players.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative design using semi-structured in-depth interviews with current and former professional female soccer players was applied. This approach has been found to be highly appropriate in research aimed at generating new, rich knowledge associated with a phenomenon (Greenbaum, 1998). Furthermore, this approach helps in gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being researched, through first-hand experience and receiving truthful and reliable information (Woods, 2006; Maseko & Surujlal, 2011).

Sample

Participants for this study comprised eleven professional female soccer players, code named R1 to R11, who were purposefully recruited to participate in the study. All selected participants had been soccer players at a professional level for a minimum of two years.

Instrument and procedures

Arising from the literature study, an interview guide was developed to explore the motives and challenges experienced by professional female soccer players. The interview guide was pre-tested with two professional female soccer players who were not part of the actual study and two senior researchers to ascertain its content validity. While the interview guide provided structure, the semi-structured nature of the interviewing process allowed for flexibility in how questions were asked and followed up, providing for depth of exploration.

Within different content areas, broad questions were followed by more narrowly focussed follow-ups. Scant responses to open ended questions were followed with specific probes, noted in the interview protocol (e.g., "Can you give me an example?" or "Can you tell me a little more about that?").

Professional female soccer players, who were identified through snowball sampling, were approached, briefed on the purpose of the study and requested to participate in the study. Those who granted permission to be interviewed were also requested to identify other professional female soccer players with a minimum of two seasons playing experience to participate in the study. Interviews took place at a time and location convenient to the participants. To ensure consistency in the data collection and to avoid any bias, a former

professional female soccer player conducted all the interviews. During the interviews responses of the participants were written down.

Ethical issues

This study was guided by a number of ethical principles. Such principles included obtaining participants' informed consent (respect to participants), beneficence and justice (Maritz & Visagie, 2010). To ensure respect, participants' consent was sought, ensuring that they participated in the study voluntarily. Their privacy and confidentiality were also protected (Kumar, 2005; Maritz & Visagie, 2010); and their right to withdraw from research participation without penalty was guaranteed (Kumar, 2005; Tobin, 2009). To adhere to the principle of beneficence, the study was designed so that risks are minimised and potential benefits maximised (Maritz & Visagie, 2010). While there were no risks involved in this study, there was an undertaking to avail the results of the research to all participants if they requested them. In order to give opportunity to professional soccer players with the required information to participate in the study and therefore ensure justice (Amdur, 2003), participants were purposively selected using the snowballing technique.

Data analysis

The interview transcripts were made available to all the researchers. Data were analysed using an inductive approach suggested by Cote, Salmela and Russell (1995). All researchers read the transcripts several times independently before proceeding with the analysis of the data. Similar ideas were clustered and specific quotes allocated to them. These were then categorised into themes to which descriptive labels were given. Once the researchers were satisfied that they had explored all possibilities regarding the analysis of the data, they came together to compare the emergent themes. Where there were differences of opinion, these were debated and discussed until consensus was reached that the themes accurately reflected the content of the data set.

Trustworthiness

Identification and labelling of themes were conducted independently, but followed by collaborative discussions with the two senior researchers so that any discrepant interpretations could be resolved. In addition, member validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was utilised by sending the transcripts as well as the emergent themes to two participants within convenient access to the researchers to verify that the transcripts were an accurate reflection of the interviews. The feedback revealed that the transcripts were indeed an accurate reflection of the interviews.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the challenges facing professional female soccer players and their motives to play soccer. Participants indicated that they liked soccer as a sport and were also passionate supporters of different soccer clubs in the Premier Soccer League (PSL). Both similarities and differences were found between the current and former players in their views of challenges facing them. Furthermore correlations were found between the challenges facing professional female soccer players and the reasons for discontinuing participation.

Whilst female participation in professional soccer is influenced by a broad range of factors that include supportive family and friends, enough time to practice, good sports facilities, and supportive male and female relationships, a number of barriers to their participation were identified. These included very few career opportunities, inadequate funding and time, and negative attitudes towards women entering soccer as a male-dominated sport. The participants often expressed concerns about the lack of advancement with regard to career opportunities and the negative attitude towards them as women in a male-dominated sport. Participants further expressed the opinion that the South African media was not supportive of female soccer. This coupled with the scarcity of opportunities for females to play soccer in the country, were the major reasons for their diminished interest in the game; acting as barriers that limited their participation in the sport.

After consensus was reached between the researchers, two overarching themes, namely *motivation to play* and *barriers and constraints*, were identified. Emanating from these themes, a number of sub-themes were established. These included why they were motivated to play soccer, support that they received as female soccer players, the stereotyping that was involved, and barriers and constraints associated with playing soccer at professional level. Emanating from these themes were several sub-themes as illustrated in Figure 1.

Motives to play

Responses of participants revealed different motives to play. Three main reasons were provided for playing soccer. These were a passion for the sport, love for competition and influence of family members. It is interesting to note that the lure of lucrative playing contracts and a career with high earning potential did not emerge as motives to play.
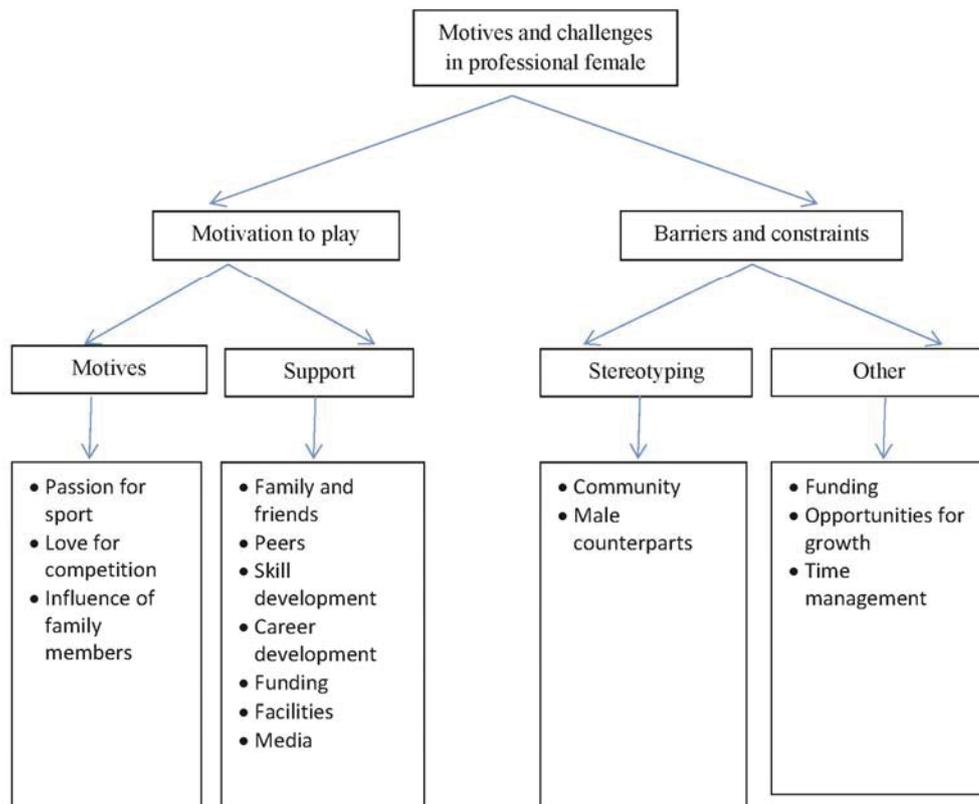
Figure 1: Themes and sub-themes

Participants' *passion for sport* is aptly encapsulated in R1's comment that "*It is interesting and fun.*" Similarly R3's comments that she "*loved competition and working together with her colleagues.*" demonstrated the participants' passion for soccer. These results are supported by Johnstone and Millar's (2012) report on psycho-social factors that can either contribute or discourage participation of women in sports.

The report notes that women's positive perception of their own skills and abilities in sports, positive self-perception of physical appearance (competitiveness), enjoyable and satisfying experiences.

With regard to *influence of family members* the authors also assert that the feeling of emotional support from peers and family members goes a long way in motivating female soccer players. This is emphasised in R10's comment that "*Dad's influence [on] playing soccer.*" motivated her to start playing soccer. Women in Sport (2015) also emphasised support, especially from family as a critical factor that ensured female's participation in sports. Therefore it is important to take cognisance of the significant role that psycho-social factors play in motivating females to play soccer.

Participants' *love for competition* as demonstrated by R7's comment ("*It is competitive.*") mirrors Beaudoin's (2006) finding that competitiveness was positively related to intrinsic motivation among women professional football players. Smith (2010) also found challenges and love for sport to be motivating factors for professional athletes.

Support

Support emerged as an important sub-theme in the study. Support was associated with *family and friends, peers*, *skill development*, *career development*, *funding*, *facilities* and *media*. Participants revealed that they enjoyed immense support from *family and friends* as well as *peer support*. This was aptly illustrated in R1's ("*Very supportive – especially family and friends.*") and R3's ("*Yes, they are supportive. They attend my practice sessions and matches.*") responses. This support was exhibited through both family and friends, and peers attending either training sessions to see them practise or attending games in which they played.

With regard to *skills development* participants indicated that they also received support through funding of workshop attendance or provision of workshop or coaching sessions. Some of the skills which were developed included communication (R5: "*Good communication and learning new skills on the field.*") and soccer and related skills (R7: "*Improving game quality, education in coaching and officiating.*"). The soccer skills which they acquired improved their game quality. One significant positive character trait which they developed was discipline and commitment (R8:"*Discipline, sense of commitment and punctuality.*"). Tesnear and Surujlal (2012) who investigated challenges faced by female rugby players also identified discipline as an important character trait which was developed through support by the organisation. In addition, Howe (2001) reported that playing rugby at a professional level likewise contributes to players exercising strict discipline. The spinoff from the supportive environment was increased commitment and dedication. This finding corroborates those of Shockley (2006) who also found that a supportive environment contributed to dedication and commitment to sport.

In terms of *career development* opportunities the responses of participants differed. Only two of the participants (R6: "[There are] *few coach, technical team member, team owner* [opportunities]."; R8: "*few things, coaching team manager, fitness coach.*") perceived that there were opportunities for them to pursue a career in soccer. The other participants were of the opinion that not enough opportunities existed. It is important to note that availability of career development opportunities is a strong motive for women to stay and develop careers in soccer. For females to continue rising in the ranks of the games, they have to understand and participate in the game early. This will not only make them better coaches but players as well. Developing females into soccer coaches

will also provide players with strong female role models, and coaches, but also open their eyes to higher possibilities as soccer administrators. Nevertheless, participants in this study decried the absence of opportunities to become team managers, coaches or members of technical committees. Participants in this regard clearly indicated that since they could not advance to the ranks of coaching or technical managers, they experienced no enthusiasm to pursue careers as professional soccer players. This finding corroborates Johnstone and Millar's (2012) and Women in Sport's (2015) observations. According to Women in Sport (2015), giving females realistic goals and a sense of direction, and ensuring that they progressed helps sustain their participation. In a similar vein, Johnstone and Millar (2012) argue that females' progress in masterly and refinement of their soccer playing skills immensely contributed to their motivation and love for the game.

Participants in the study perceived that the *facilities* which were provided to them were excellent and available at times which were suitable to them. This is a positive finding considering that according to the Women's Sports Foundation (2012) the lack of access to adequate playing facilities near their homes makes it extremely difficult for females to participate in sports. This finding is in contrast to the finding of Tesnear and Surujlal (2012) who found that facilities for female rugby players were made available to them only after the male players had finished their training sessions. This demonstrates why female participation in soccer appears to be flourishing compared to rugby.

Participants also lamented the lack of *media* coverage of women's soccer. In this study participants felt that portrayal of women's soccer in the media was treated very differently from that of men. Six of the eleven participants felt that women's soccer was not as adequately portrayed in the media as that of men (R1: *"Not supportive, not enough coverage."*; R8: *"Not enough exposure."*; R11: *"Does not give enough attention to women soccer."*). The participants' responses implied that more exposure was given to male soccer than theirs (R3: *"Not balanced between men and women"*). This finding is, however, not unique to soccer. Coverage of women's sport, in general, is poorly portrayed in the media. Govender (2010) argued that despite the huge strides that women have made in sport coverage of women in sport remains inferior to that given to men in sport across all media. The author posits that the unfair coverage of women's sport displays gender-biased attitudes which disadvantage women's position in society. Elling (2015) opines that media reports on sporting activities act as a motivation for individuals to participate in such activities as more coverage in newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations generally encourages individuals to participate. This implies that greater media coverage of women's sport may motivate more women to participate. This finding resonates that of Tesnear and Surujlal (2012) who reported that women's rugby received too little media attention. The finding is also in line with Cooky, Messner and Musto's

(2015) finding which revealed that in 2014, ESPN, a SportsCenter media dedicated a mere two per cent of its on-air time to covering women's sports. The study further found that though they did better, three local Los Angeles news networks devoted only 3.2 per cent of their sports coverage to female athletes. It is this poor coverage coupled with the traditional gender-typing of soccer as a masculine sport that has negatively impacted on the overall female participation in soccer and other sports activities.

Barriers and constraints

Within the *barriers and constraints* sub-theme were *stereotyping* by *male counterparts* and *community*, and *other* which included *funding, opportunity for growth* and *time management*. With regard to *stereotyping,* some participants' responses indicated that the attitude of *males* and members of the *community* regarding their playing soccer was negative. In the words of Respondent R1, "*some guys think soccer (is) not a woman's sport.*". In the same vein, while R3 indicated that "*men think that women cannot play soccer…*", R5 indicated that "*men think they are better than females.*" at soccer.

Historically, women have been systematically excluded from many social institutions including sports, particularly contact sports, and have been channelled into others that concur with societal norms of femininity and heterosexuality (Birrell & Cole, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994). Scholars have attributed this to inequitable gender relations within society as a whole and sport in particular.

According to Davis-Delano, Pollock and Vose (2009), the negative stereotyping of females as inferior to male athletes allow the development of sexist assumptions which contribute to the subordination of women. It is such attitudes that that are bound to dissuade women from participating in soccer. Joseph and Schuhmann (2015) assert that the South African public climate tends to undervalue women's soccer compared to men's, thereby side-lining female soccer players and contributing to their struggle to making their mark in soccer.

Inadequate funding emerged as an important barrier to females playing soccer. All eleven participants conceded that inadequate funding of female soccer was a major challenge. Female soccer teams do not only have inadequate funding to buy appropriate training equipment but also lack money for players' basic expenses during trips. It was indeed confirmed from the participants' responses that compared to men's soccer, female's soccer received just the bare minimum of funds. R7's ("*Not adequate funding compared to men's soccer.*") and R8's ("*Not enough. Budget is limited when it comes to women's soccer.*") responses to a question that solicited their opinions regarding the issue of funding. This finding is in line with the results of a survey carried out by FIFA. Waldron

(2015) reported that the survey that detailed some of the biggest problems facing the females' game discovered that the shortage of funds was a major problem that contributed, among several other things, to the absence of youth development programmes for females. The inadequate funding and eventually poor interest has not only discouraged females from playing soccer, but has also closed the door for them becoming soccer coaches and administrators.

Opportunities for growth

A team sport like soccer normally equips participants with leadership skills. Indeed, as individual women emerge among their teams as good organisers and as they lead their teams to victory they learn a lot in terms of leadership (Mamiverse Team, 2014) and aspire to become national coaches and soccer administrators. However, most of the participants in this study lamented the absence of a supportive development environment, a factor that hindered their opportunities for growth.

The participants revealed that as a result of few growth opportunities, there were hardly any females at all at soccer decision making levels, including executive committees. Indeed, the respondents agreed that due to the lack of growth opportunities, women's football was at a lower level compared to that of men. In a comment related to the availability of growth opportunities, R2 indicated that there were*" few opportunities and limited."*. While R1 too mentioned that such opportunities were *"not many",* R6 noted the absence of *"...skills development programmes where.".* R6 went further to elaborate that the absence of such programmes led to a sad situation where there are only a *"few (women) coaches, technical team members,* (and) *team owners.".*

Time management

The ability to manage time and balance the needs of a professional and personal life is perceived as an important issue among professionals globally (Bell, Rajendran & Theiler 2012; Clark, 2000). Within the context of this study it important that female soccer players are able not only to manage their time but also to balance their personal lives with the training and playing demands of soccer. Participants in this study indicated that whilst they trained two to three times per week, family demands and their other social roles as mothers and wives acted as a discouragement to their continued participation in soccer activities. R7, for instance, indicated that one of the challenges she encountered was *"managing time constraints."* and though she would have liked to attend more training sessions, she was only able to attend *"three training sessions a week."* in order to achieve a balanced life between the profession and her family life. In the same vein, R9 indicated that she would have liked to put all her attention on training but unfortunately she was a woman who had to *"attend to*

other family matters that were not soccer-related.". It is this juggling of demands of soccer and family that has in many cases discouraged female participants from continuing with their careers.

Strengths, limitations and future research

The current study is not without strengths, limitations and implications for further research. The strength of the study lies in the use of a purposive sample, which meant that data was collected only from those participants who experienced the phenomenon being researched (Sooful, Surujlal & Dhurup, 2010).

An important limitation of this study is its limited scope in the sense that the views of a small number of participants who were based in a limited geographic context were elicited. This has the impact of reducing the transferability of the results of this study to other contexts and settings.

The use of in-depth interviews also enhanced the study's susceptibility to bias. In order to provide a more detailed analysis regarding the challenges facing professional female soccer players, similar studies in the future could be conducted on amplified sample sizes and using the mixed method approach. Future research possibilities could include but should not be limited to focus on certain factors explored by the current study and to elaborate on some of these through empirical research. The current study could also be replicated in other geographical locations, which provides a basis for empirical comparisons. Other professional female sports could also be examined in the future, which would extend the results of the current study.

Recommendations

Arising from the results of the study are a few recommendations. In order to attract more females to soccer, administrators should cultivate a core comprehensive understanding of both the motivators and de-motivators to participation in soccer amongst females. Soccer administrators should also endeavour to understand the individual needs, attitudes and experiences of females as this facilitates the generation of mechanisms for addressing the barriers to female soccer participation.

For example, to address the fear of limited career development possibilities, systems could be put in place to ensure that females are engaged in soccer right from primary school level through to high school and university levels; and that they are eventually trained and promoted into leadership positions provincially and nationally.

It is further recommended that government, in conjunction with soccer administrators, crafts relevant policies and provides adequate funding for soccer programmes in order to enhance the quality of the sport. This, coupled with the enforcement of professional development of female soccer administrators and soccer coaches in educational institutions and at a national level, is bound to provide young female soccer players with role models they need for motivation.

Finally, the South African Football Association (SAFA) can play an instrumental role in the development of women's soccer by establishing an enabling environment for female participation. In this regard, it is recommended that SAFA provides adequate financial, physical and human resources to promote women's soccer.

Conclusion

The findings of this exploratory study provide a variety of motives and challenges for women participating in professional soccer. Despite the numerous challenges that were raised regarding women's participating in professional soccer, the unanimous opinion among participants was that it is still a popular sport amongst professional women soccer players to participate in and show their passion and pride for the game. The findings illustrated the need to encourage female soccer participation by solving the individual, societal, cultural, financial and environmental barriers that impede their participation.

References

Alegi, P. (2004). *Laduma! Soccer, Politics, and Society in South Africa*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Amdur, R. (2003). *Institutional Review Board Member Handbook*. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett.

Beaudoin, C.M. (2006). Competitive orientations and sport motivation of professional women football players: An internet survey. *Journal of Behavior*, 29, 210-212.

Bell, A.S., Rajendran, D. & Theiler, S. (2012). Job stress, wellbeing, work-life balance and work-life conflict among Australian academics. *Electronic Journal of Applied Psychology*, 8(1), 25-37.

Birrell, S. & Cole, C. (Eds.) (1994). *Women, Sport and Culture*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Black, K. (2010). *Motivational processes involved in the recovery of female athletes from injury*. Unpublished Masters Dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

Bummer, S. (2015). History on the Pitch: The Social and Economic Impact of Soccer in Post-War London. Available at: http://scholarworks. umt.edu/cgi/viewcontent .cgi?article= 1065&context=utpp. Accessed on 2015/08/24.

Buyukbaykal, G. & Kesgin, Y. (2014). Concurrence of Sports and Entertainment Industries: Super Bowl. *Handbook of Research on the Impact of Culture and Society on the Entertainment Industry*. Available at: https://books.google.co.za/books? hl=en&lr=&id=laB_ BAAAQBAJ &oi=fnd&pg=PA72&dq=Buyukbaykal,+G.,+%26+Kesgin,+Y.+(2014).+Concurrence+of+Sports +and+Entertainment+Industries:+Super+Bowl.+Handbook+of+Research+on+the+Impact+of+Cu lture+and+Society+on+the+Entertainment+Industry&ots=QCQ43TfJ0I&sig=QKupmreAOjp76_ CHENagN7F5uaw#v=onepage&q&f=false. Accessed on 2015/08/24.

Clark, S.C. (2000). Work/family border theory: A new theory of work/family balance. *Human Relations*. 53(6), 747-770.

Cooky, C., Messner, A.M. & Musto, M. (2015). "It's Dude Time!" A quarter a century of excluding women's sport in televised news and highlight shows. *Communication & Sport*, 3(3), 261-283.

Cote, J., Salmela, J.H. & Russell, S. (1995). The knowledge of high performance gymnastic coaches: Methodological framework. *The Sport Psychologist*, 9, 65-75.

Davis-Delano, L.R., Pollock, A. & Vose, J.E. (2009). Apologetic behavior among female athletes: A new questionnaire and initial results. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 44/2–3, 131-150.

Egunjobi, S. (2000). Now women get chance of glory: Nations Cup opens window of opportunity for African stars. *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 12 November.

Elling, A. (2015). Assessing the sociology of sport: On reintegrating quantitative methods and gender research. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50(4-5), 430-436.

FIFA (2015). Big Count. Available at: http://www.fifa.com/worldfootbaal/bigcount. Accessed on 2015/08/24.

Govender, N. (2010). The influence of the print media in portraying women in sport: A case study of The Independent on Saturday. Available at: www.genderlinks. org.za/ attachment. php?aa_id=15461. *Accessed on 2015/10/20.*

Greenbaum, T.L. (1998). *The Handbook for Focus Group Research*. CA: Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Hargreaves, J. (2000). *Heroines of Sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity*. London: Routledge.

Hargreaves, J. (1997). Women's sport, development, and cultural diversity: the South African experience. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 20, 191-209.

Hargreaves, J. (1994). *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in The History and Sociology of Women's Sports*. New York: Routledge.

Hargreaves, J. & Jones, D. (2001). South Africa. In K. Christensen, A. Guttman & G. Pfister, (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Women and Sports* (pp. 1084-1089). New York: MacMillan Reference.

Hassim, S. (2005). Voices, hierarchies and spaces: Reconfiguring the women's movement in democratic South Africa. *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 32(2), 175-193.

Hoffmann, R., Ging, L.C. & Ramasamy, B. (2002). The Socio-economic determinants of international soccer performance. *Journal of Applied Economics,* 2, 253-272.

Hong, F. & Mangan, J.A. (2004). *Soccer, Women, Sexual Liberation: Kicking Off a New Era.* London: Frank Cass.

Howe, P.D. (2001). Women's rugby and the nexus between embodiment, professionalism and sexuality: An ethnographic account. *Football Studies*, 4(2), 77-92.

Johnstone, L. & Millar, S. (2012). Actively engaging women and girls: addressing the psycho-social factors. Available at: http://www.caaws.ca/ ActivelyEngaging/ documents/ CAAWS_ CS4L_Engaging_Women.pdf. Accessed on 2015/06/07.

Joseph, K. & Schuhmann, A. (2015). Shifting bodies and boundaries. Representation of female soccer players and the shortfall within South African press. In S.P.C. Borrego & M.I.R. Ruiz (Eds.), *Identities on the Move: Contemporary Representations of New Sexualities and Gender Identities* (pp. 179-192). London: Lexington Books.

Keathley, K., Himelein, M.J. & Srigley, G. (2013). Youth soccer participation and withdrawal: Gender similarities and differences. *Journal of Sport Behavior,* 36(2), 171-188.

Keim, M. & Qhuma, W. (1996). Winnie's ladies soccer team: Goals for the Gugulethu home side. *Agenda*, 31, 81-85.

Kruschewsky, G. (2014). Wake Up, America: Here's Why Soccer Is The World's Best Sport. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/14/soccer-worlds-best-sport_n_ 5248061. html. Accessed on 2015/07/06.

Kumar, R. (2005). *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners.* London: Sage.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lopez, S. (1997). *Women On the Ball: A Guide to Women's Football.* London: Scarlet Press.

Mamiverse Team (2014). 10 reasons girls should play soccer too. http://mamiverse.com/ reasons-girl-playing-soccer-62695/. Accessed on 2015/10/30.

Mantzaris, E. & Pillay, P. (2014). Free Enterprise and Corruption: The South African Construction Cartel Case Study. Paper presented at the European Conference on Management, Leadership & Governance.

Maritz, J. & Visagie, R (2010). *Methodological Rigour and Ethics of Accountability within a Qualitative framework*. Paper presented to academic staff at Unisa. Pretoria.

Maseko, J. & Surujlal, J. (2011). Retirement planning among South African professional soccer players: A qualitative study of players' perceptions. *African Journal for Physical, Health, Education, Recreation and Dance,* September (Supplement), 157-171.

Morgan, A.O. & Whitehead, J.C. (2015). Willingness to pay for soccer player development in the United States. Available at: http://econ.appstate.edu/RePEc/pdf/wp1503.pdf. Accessed on 2015/11/01.

Oglesby, C.A. (2007). Women 2000 and beyond. Available at: http://www.un .org/womenwatch/ daw/public/w2000.html. Accessed on 2013/08/12.

Pelak, C.F. (2006). Local-global processes: linking globalization, democratization, and the development of women's football in South Africa. *Africa Spectrum,* 41(3), 371-392.

Sabo, D. & Veliz, P. (2008). Go out and play: Youth sports in America. Available at: http://www.womens- sportsfoundation.org/-/media/Files/Research% 20Reports/Go%200ut%20 and%20 Play%20report%209%2018%2008.pdf 23. Accessed on 2013/08/15.

Scraton, S., Fasting, K., Pfister, G. & Bunuel, A. (1999). It's still a man's game? The experiences of top-level European women footballers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 34, 99-111.

Shockley, M.T. (2006). Southern women in the scrums: The emergence and decline of women's rugby in the American Southeast, 1974-1980's. *Journal of Sport History*, 33(2), 127-155.

Smoll, F.L. & Smith, R.E. (1989). Leadership behaviours in sport: A theoretical model and research paradigm. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology,* 19, 1522-1551.

Smith, A. (2010). *A qualitative analysis of motivation of elite female triathletes*. Unpublished Masters dissertation. San Jose, Califonia: San Jose State University.

Sooful, A. Surujlal, J. & Dhurup, M. (2010). Dance and music as mediums for the social integration of children with intellectual disabilities into mainstream society. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*. 16(4), 681-697.

Surujlal, J. & Dhurup, M. (2011). Athlete perceptions and preferences of coach behaviour: A qualitative study of female soccer players. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance,* 17(1), 22-36.

Tesnear, S. & Surujlal, J. (2012). Women's rugby: A qualitative study of female players' experiences. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, December (Supplement 1:2), 354-368.

Tobin, M. (2009). The principle of caveat emptor: confidentiality and informed consent as endemic ethical dilemmas in focus group research. *Bioethics Inquiry,* 6, 99-108.

University of Copenhagen (2009). "Women's soccer: Get fit while having fun. *Science Daily*, 6 October 2009. Available at: <www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/10/091002093807.htm>. Accessed 2015/10/30.

Waldron, T. (2015). World Cup Champion Julie Foudy: Women's Soccer Is A Major 'Untapped Market'. Available At: Http://Thinkprogress.Org/Sports/2015/03/05/3628410/Wheres-Funding-Womens-Soccer/. Accessed On 2015/06/07.

Woods, P. (2006). Qualitative research. Available at: http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/qualitative%20methods%202. Accessed on 2013/08/02.

Women in Sport (2015). Women and Coaching in 2015 (Infographic). Available at: http://www.sportscoachuk.org/resource/women-and-coaching-2015-infographic. Accessed on 2015/08/20.

Women's Sports Foundation (2012). Factors influencing girl's participation in sports. Available at: http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/en/sitecore/content/home/support-us/do-you-know-the-factors-influencing-girls-participation-in-sports.aspx. Accessed on 2015/10/20.