


Influence of Socioeconomic Factors on Wage Remuneration in Liberia Women Football

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Abstract

Women's football has often experienced low wage remuneration compared to men's, and research has primarily associated this disparity with gender inequality, however, this study explored other equally significant factors that contribute to low wage remuneration in women's football. The study examined how economic and sociodemographic factors impact wages in women's football in Liberia. It explored and evaluated the influence of sociodemographic factors (family, media, years of experience, level of play) on the wage remuneration of female footballers in Liberia and how economic factors (income, employment) have influenced wage remuneration in women's football in Liberia. The descriptive study design was employed for this research. Participants were given questionnaires to fill across various sociodemographic, and economic profiles to obtain information on women footballers in Liberia. The inferential statistical tools, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and Multiple regression techniques were used in analyzing the data to identify the relationships between sociodemographic and economic variables on wage remuneration. In this sample of 550 participants (100%female, predominant age range – 20-24 years), social factors such as media and family structure ($\beta = -0.084$, $t = -2.043$, $P = 0.042$), and sociodemographic factors such as years of experience and level of play ($\beta = -0.168$, $t = -4.117$, $P = 0.000$) had significant influence on women's football wages in Liberia. However, Economic factors such as income, and employment ($\beta = -0.008$, $t = -0.183$, $P = 0.855$) did not contribute significantly to wage remuneration in women's football in Liberia. Sociodemographic factors were significant determinants of wage remuneration in women's football in Liberia. Specifically, sociodemographic variables, such as media, family, years of experience, and level of play, were major determinants of remuneration and wage levels in women's football in Liberia.

Keywords: Liberia Women Football, Sports, Wage Remuneration, Wage Inequality, Socioeconomic, Sociodemographic, Gender Wage Gap.

Introduction

Women's football is one of the rapidly expanding sports globally, with more than 30 million female players (Oonk, 2023). From its first official inception in the 1910s and 1920s in

England (Historic England, 2023), to other undocumented historical origins of the game in Africa (Malhlmann, 1988, Leseth, 2013, Cleveland et al., 2020), now over the past decade, women's football has seen significant political, social, and economic changes, leading to a global surge in interest by women who desire to participate in female football, fans, as well as football audience in general. Its fame among spectators is rising, demonstrated by the record-breaking turnouts recorded at the 2019 World Cup, which attracted over a billion viewers and set attendance records at an unprecedented high number (BBC, 2019). Progress across the sport has continued, and women's football has now become an occupation or career path for women in many countries across the world (Bowes et al., 2023). However, despite this surge in reputation and prominence of women's football, it has not resulted in or impacted their pay experience; female footballers still earn substantially lower wages than male players. According to the 2017 Sporting Intelligence Global Sports Salary Survey (Sporting Intelligence, 2017), the pay gap between male and female football players is severe, compared to other sports, with up to a 100% low disparity ratio for female players as against the salaries of male players. Hence, one of the most visible discussion points among female footballers has been the gender-equitable payment of players. Historically, women have often been regarded as a socially disadvantaged group and have a long history of consistent mistreatment in every sphere of society, sports inclusive. For instance, in football history, the global national association of footballers banned women from playing football for approximately 50 years - the 1920s to 1970s (Killilea, 2021). This action by the association in Europe and other sports associations in different regions is believed to have been a deliberate attempt to oppress and exclude women (Archer, 2018) and perhaps, a measure of jealousy for the large crowd of men the game attracted at its burgeoning stages (FMHE, 2021, Wrack, 2022) while the men's game experienced unhindered progress. However, by the 1970s, women were permitted to play but received little support, continuing a different form of discrimination – wage discrimination. Since women were incorporated into the labor force, they have been paid less than men (Hellman, 2008, Moreau 2010, Lippert, 2014) due to the historical gendered perception that men were husbands (breadwinners) and so deserved higher pay than women (Oelz, et al., 2013). However, it has been argued that women deserve equal pay because their effort is often equal to that of men. Fawcett (1918) for instance advocated women deserved equal pay with men because of their effort and participation in the then world war. Edgeworth also questioned whether men and women should receive equal pay for equal work Edgeworth (1922), yet, to this day, women continue to earn less than men on average in nearly every single occupation for which there is adequate earning info (Gould, 2024, IWPR, 2024); football is no exception. According to the International Labor Organization's (ILO) introductory guide on Equal Pay (Watkins, 2015), women and men have the right to receive equal remuneration for work of equal value, it is also a recognized human right law (Oelz et al., 2013). According to Section 206(d) of the Equal Pay Act (1963), gender-based wage discrimination is prohibited, while Title VII, Section 703 of the Civil Rights Act (CRA, 1964) bans employment discrimination based on gender, belief system, color, or national origin.

Yet, the culturally imperialistic practices that enforce male norms and justify unequal access to investments and facilities by female footballers abound (Federico et al., 2023). We can aver that from the 1920s to the 1970s, women in football experienced direct and open discrimination and exclusion while the 1970s to the 2010s were a period of indulgence - women were allowed to play, but without significant support or investment and since the 2010s, women's football has seen some encouragement and support, although, it has been limited and conditional, with evident inequalities in the provision of resources and facilities (Birrell, 1984). Iris Marion Young's theory (1990) and account of the five faces of oppression – exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence, resonates in arguing the extent of women's oppression in society. Young's concept reflects the degrading way women are treated generally in society and particularly in sports, suggesting, according to Young's teaching: one disadvantage never occurs 'alone': if there is a financial disadvantage, then other forms of disadvantage abound as well. This implies, indirectly, as identified by Archer and Prange (2019), that "unequal pay is not only a financial disadvantage, but also a way of marginalizing women and depriving them of professional respect".

To narrow down the issue of pay disparity between men and women, research establishes that the median annual income for full-time female workers in the US in 2022 was \$52,360, while male workers earned \$62,350 which means that women earned approximately 83% of what men earned (Economic Daily, 2023, Guzman & Kollar, 2023). In the UK, the median annual earnings for full-time female employees were £30,197, while for full-time male employees, it was £36,569. This indicates a notable gender pay gap, with women earning about 82.6% of what men earn on average (ONS, 2022). For African countries as well, the median income for women working full-time significantly falls below that of men. Data shows that on the average, women in sub-Saharan Africa earn about 30% less than their male counterparts (Ortiz-Espina et al., 2024). For instance, in South Africa, the median monthly income for women was about 7,460 ZAR compared to 8,820 ZAR for men in 2022, with similar trends observed in other African countries. Hence, it is not strange for African women football players to advocate for equal pay alongside their counterparts on the global scale (Rott, 2016). For instance, the United States Women's National Team (USWNT), is considered the best female football team in the world yet as identified by Bowes, Culvin, and Carrick (2023) "This long history of international success has not automatically translated into the USWNT being a financially secure domestic league". Only recently - in 2022, did the USWNT obtain its much-advocated historic equal pay agreement after a public, high-profile remuneration dispute that commenced in 2016 (Archer & Prange, 2019, Bowes, et al., 2023). Interestingly, after the USWNT launched their Equal Pay debate in 2016, national football associations in other countries came under pressure to reassess their wage systems for female footballers, so some began to endorse equal pay for men and women football players starting with the Norwegian FA in 2017 (Reuters, 2017, Archer & Prange, 2019). 2019 saw the Argentine (Nicholson, 2017), and Australian FA making

significant strides towards equal pay for women's and men's national football teams (FFA & PFA, 2019). Between 2020 and 2021 also, the English FA declared equal pay for match fees and bonuses for both teams, and the Brazilian FA (CBF) achieved pay parity in prizes and daily rates in March 2020 (Glass, 2020). Nepal announced pay equality for their men's and women's football teams (Oli, 2020, Goal Nepal, 2020), Ireland Football Association declared equal match pay for both men's and women's teams (FAI, 2021), and Wales announced a five-year plan to achieve equal pay for women footballers by 2026 (CBBC, 2023). Some African countries also experienced positive developments. For example, in South Africa, the South African Football Association (SAFA) has taken significant steps to narrow the pay gap between male and female footballers with the Banyana Banyana women's national team receiving equal bonuses with the men's team for major tournaments (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2024). In Nigeria as well, the active protests of Super Falcons (Nigeria's women's national team), against pay disparities have resulted in some improvements in their compensation (BLS, 2024). Cameroon also has kickstarted efforts to address her female players' demands for better pay and working conditions. However, in Liberia for instance, according to a report carried out by Sporting Intelligence (AAUW, 2018), women soccer players still have low wages, therefore many often resort to playing football voluntarily without pay or with meager wages; the remuneration is too low to sustain an average lifestyle.

Literature Review

Women football has been an interesting area of research for many have examined its evolving, development, progress and prospects while others have assessed the challenges the game encounters. The literature study in this section focuses on examining research works that have assessed the challenges women football encounter – bordering on gender disparity, family system, and media coverage. From inception, the 'ownership' of football has been a major area of debate as football is often regarded as inappropriate for the female gender. Despite the growing popularity of the sport, it is still dominated by men and classified as a 'men's sport', watched primarily by men, and reserved for male football players (Europie Prawie, et al., 2016). In many African and sometimes European nations, women are seen as subordinate to men, so are relegated to the roles of mother and wife (Inglehart and Norris, 2003), expected to look after the home and children. This is corroborated by Peeters & Elling (2015), Pfister (2015), Bruce (2016), and Ravel & Gareau (2016) who noted that although the coverage of women's football is improving, its reportage retains certain frames of femininity and heterosexuality. Men's football is seen as the norm against which women's football is measured, often regarded as 'gendered', with explicit emphasis on femininity and beauty. The gender gap in equal opportunities between the genders also widens considerably, unable to meet the European Union (EU) standards on women's rights (EIGE, 2022, Hidri Neys and Juskowiak, 2024:5). Hence, making it impossible for women to have equal playing grounds as well as men. Very similar to this is another factor – the low coverage of female football, which makes female soccer

less popular and consequently less lucrative for both players and investors. Financial benefit is one of the reasons football becomes viable for both players, and sponsors and one way to boost female football's 'lucrative-ness' is via high and standardized media coverage. It is vital for women football to have high media coverage to boost sponsorship opportunities. Sponsorships are ways football players, clubs or teams make earnings (Smith & Stewart 2015:200). Bruce (2016) and Cooky et al., (2021) for instance identify a variety of patterns regarding the media coverage of female athletes. He highlights that these patterns have included persistently low rates of reporting, representational annihilation of women's sport, and sexualization of women athletes. In some cases, journalists display inconsistency towards female players performances, often juxtaposing their sporting achievements with irrelevant information that depicts women as mothers or girlfriends, thereby relegating their function as professional footballers. In another instance, in Pitts & Zhang (2018) research on *The Global Football Industry: Marketing perspectives*, two FIFA tournaments - The FIFA U-20 World Cup (men's) and the FIFA women's World Cup were examined side-by-side and it was discovered that the men's U-20 World Cup gained a wider ratio of spectators - 1 195 239 live audience and 469,5 million TV audience, and of course, a higher amount of sponsorship deals, against the women's - 1 353 506 live spectators, and 45 million TV viewers; a difference that occurred as a result of variance in the media coverage of both events. (Pitts & Zhang 2018, 242-246). Media coverage and sponsorship opportunities are intertwined, for wide media coverage makes sports popular enough to attract sponsors who benefit, especially economically from the sponsored teams or clubs. This is why most football teams desire to bag sponsorship contracts to boost their prominence. For example, in the 2019 women's world cup, sponsored players in the winning team received a bonus from Adidas that was the same amount for the men's competition (Väisänen 2019:5). High media coverage also reduces players stress levels which are often due to financial burdens. As Lie (2017) opines in his research, because the male football teams he examined at the national team level earned an average of 640,000 euro more every year than women, the stress level on men in attending to financial demands was drastically reduced as against women's. Bjerksæter and Lagestad (2022) also conducted a study on female footballers who stay or dropout of elite women's football, examining the reasons for this rate. Nine elite female players; five who had ended their career and four who were active players were adopted as participants for the study and by exploring the elite female players' opinions attitudes, and experiences, the researchers were able to establish certain factors responsible for the stay-ins or dropouts, such as low level of internal and external motivation, poor financial circumstances leading to high levels of stress, lack of sufficient playing time, among others. The results of the research showed that the level of internal (joy of playing football) and external (wages and recognition) motivation between the elite players who ended their football career and those who continued theirs varied wildly. Still active elite players reported higher level of internal and external motivation, better financial circumstances in football—and thereby lower stress levels. They had no serious injuries,

ample playing time, and more. On the other hand, players who dropped out had challenging financial situations and high level of stress factors. Taru, Kalliovaara (2024), also examined the development and commercialization of women's football in Finland where he identifies that the key challenges women football in the nation face are gender inequality and risks of commercialization. The study examines the marketability of women's football as against men, highlighting the fact that "an enhanced commercialization, especially sponsorship marketing's role in revenue generation and visibility of women football leads to many positive offspring", including improved player wellbeing and the development of strong sports identity for women footballers, thereby establishing the core of this study. The reviewed research papers identify family, gender discrimination, role of media as challenges women footballers encounter and succinctly emphasize that gender plays a major role in determining the wages of female footballers. However, the research studies were limited in sufficiently establishing a nexus between family and media as contributory factors to wage remuneration level of female footballers. Hence, this study will further buttress and establish the crucial impact of family and the media on the wage remuneration of female footballers.

Statement of the Problem

Liberia has a rich history in football, yet the advancement of Liberia women's soccer does not have ample attention; some roadblocks in its development have halted its growth. For instance, since its inception in 1988, Liberia's women's team has not qualified for any World Cup or African Games (Saveedra, 2009), which is a result of the significant gap that exists in wages, infrastructure, media attention, and support for the female players compared to male players. In Liberia, although many females actively play football for teams in the country, they continue to struggle due to lack of finances. The dreams of talented female players becoming professional footballers often dies for they remain at lower play levels arising from the need to cater for the financial lapses created by the system. Hence, many players are compelled to take on extra jobs to cater for their individual and family needs. Moreso, minimal publicity is done on female sports. Another issue the Liberian Female football teams face is low remuneration which is insufficient to sustain an average-level lifestyle. The transfer fees of female soccer players in Liberia stands at a meagre amount of L\$10,000.00 (Ten Thousand Liberian Dollars) (AAUW, 2018). Additionally, female players in Liberia lack training materials like jerseys and boots. With these unbearable socio-economic situations, many female footballers end up in early marriage or teenage pregnancy (UNDESA, 2022).

In previous research, the afore identified factors are often regarded as isolated challenges women football encounter, with minimal reference made to how they result in the other, especially how the sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors identified in this research impact on the wages and remuneration of the women footballers. The symbiotic relationship between the challenges women footballers face has not been the focus of much research. Currently in Liberia, research has not been carried out on the influence of

socioeconomic factors on wage remuneration in women's football. It is therefore imperative to identify the socioeconomic factors and research how these factors which can be categorized under these three aspects: (Limited investment - women's football in many African countries receiving less funding than men's, thereby leading to lower salaries, fewer resources, and less support for female players (Saveedra, 2009), Sponsorship and Media Coverage - women's football attracting less funding and media attention than men's, causing reduced revenue opportunities and, consequently, lower player salaries (Fifpro, 2017); Cultural and Social Barriers - the cultural attitudes and gender norms of most African communities that inhibit the development of women's football thereby exposing female athletes to discrimination and lack of encouragement to pursue sports professionally (CBBC, 2023)) influence the wages and remuneration of the female footballers in Liberia. This study, therefore, examines the influence of the identified socioeconomic factors on the wage remuneration of female footballers in Liberia. Hence, the research is intended to assess and bridge the knowledge gap of the socioeconomic factors that influence wage remuneration in women's football in Liberia to improve women's soccer in Liberia.

Objectives

The objectives of this study include:

- i. To evaluate the influence of socioeconomic factors (family, media) on wage remuneration in Liberia's women football.
- ii. To determine the impact of sociodemographic factors (years of experience and level of play) on the wages and remuneration of female footballers in Liberia's women football.
- iii. To analyze the impact(s) of economic factors (income, and employment) on the wages and remuneration of female footballers in Liberia's women football

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to drive this study:

- i. Do social factors influence wage remuneration in women football in Liberia?
- ii. Do sociodemographic factors have an influence on wage remuneration in women football in Liberia?
- iii. Do economic factors influence wage remuneration in women football in Liberia?

Methods

Study Location

This is a descriptive study of female soccer players in Liberia, licensed under the Liberia Football Federation (LFF), Liberia. The Liberia Football Association (LFA) has 1,503 registered female players - 258 play in the Upper League, 175 in the community Lower League, 22 in the Regional League, 198 players each in Maryland County and Nimba, 132 in

Lofa, and 256 in Grand Gedeh. The research was carried out in four counties in Liberia: Monrovia, Nimba, Lofa, and Grand Bassa.

Sampling and Data Collection

For three months, 550 active female football players in Liberia were administered questionnaires. Of the 1,503 members of the LFA, 550 participants were selected for the study. The participants included 550 active female literate and illiterate football players in Liberia who had rich information relating to the study and were directly affected by wage remuneration in Liberia. Using the simple random sampling procedure, 10 female soccer players were selected from the National team, 200 from the Upper League, 99 from the Lower League, 22 from the Regional League, 99 from Nimba, and 120 from Lofa; no participants were selected from Maryland County and Grand Gedeh because the locations were inaccessible to the researcher. Data was collected using questionnaires administered by the researcher alongside five trained research assistants who were undergraduates in universities. The questionnaires were administered in participant's training centers; each participant was approached at leisure or at the end of their training sessions. Ethical approval was obtained from the Liberia Football Federation (LFA) in the selected regions, having presented an introduction letter received from the office of the Coordinator of Pan African University (PAULESI) Sport Management and Policy Development Program, University of Ibadan. The researcher also acquainted the participants with the benefits of the research, and the consent of the respondents was sought in writing. Participation was solely voluntary, and all information the respondents provided was handled confidentially.

Instrument

A standardized questionnaire - Determinant of Socioeconomic Factors on Wages Remuneration on Women Football in Liberia Questionnaire (DOSEFWRWFLQ), created by the researcher, was used to obtain information on three factors: demographic, socio and economic, to determine the impact on the wage remuneration of the selected female footballers. All items in the questionnaire are close-ended questions. Section A deals with the demographic characteristics of the respondents, containing six questions while section B contains the socio-economic factors scale (SFC). Information or data was gathered on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D), and Strongly Disagreed (SD). In the current study, we examined the influence of sociodemographic and economic factors on the wage remuneration of female footballers in Liberia.

Data Analysis

All data were entered into SPSS and analyzed using version 27.0. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to examine the relationship between wage remuneration and demographic variables. The relationship between wage remuneration and socio-economic variables was also examined using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The study used $\alpha = 0.05$ to determine significance.

Results

Sociodemographic Characteristics

The results showed that a large number (42.2%) of the respondents were less than twenty years old, more than half of the respondents (69.3%) were Christians and many of the respondents (77.5%) were single. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Variables

Variables	Description	N = 500, N (%)
Age	Less than 20	232(42.2)
	21-24	152(27.6)
	25-29	109(19.8)
	30-34	39(7.1)
	35-39	18(3.3)
Religion	Christian	381(69.3)
	Muslim	169(30.7)
Marital Status	Single	426(77.5)
	Married	124(22.5)
Education	High School diploma or equivalent	266(48.4)
	B. A/B.SC/B. ED	26(4.7)
	M.A/M.SC/M. ED	4(0.7)
	Others	254(46.2)
Years of Experience	3-Jan	214(38.9)
	6-Apr	170(30.9)
	9-Jul	105(19.1)
	10 above	61(11.1)
Level of Play	National Team	64(11.6)
	County Team	3(0.5)
	Club Team	483(87.9)

Source: Field Study, 2024

Sociodemographic Influence on Wages Remuneration

The results of this study show that there is a strong and significant relationship between Age ($r = 0.078$; $p = 0.05$) and wage remuneration in women's football in Liberia. Moreover, years of experience had a significant influence on wage remuneration ($r = 0.147$; $p < 0.05$). There is also a significant association between the level of play of respondents ($r = -0.873$; p

< 0.05) and wages remuneration in Women's football in Liberia, showing that the level of play of a player can influence their wages remuneration. Additionally, the correlation matrix revealed that a significant relationship exists between media and wage remuneration in women's football ($r = -0.112$; $p = 0.006$). This implies that the media had a very high influence on wages and remuneration in women's football. Similarly, family structure ($r = -0.091$; $p = 0.026$) had a moderately significant relationship with wages remuneration in women's football, although, economic factors – income ($r = -0.037$; $p > 0.05$), and employment ($r = -0.021$; $p > 0.05$) did not significantly influence wage remuneration in Women's football in Liberia.

Table 2: The Relationship between wage remuneration and sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors using Pearson Product Moment Correlation

	Sig (2-Tailed)	Remuneration	Age	Marital Status	Education	Year of experience	Level of play	Family Structure	Media	Income	Employment
Remuneration		1									
Age	0.05	0.078	1								
Marital Status	0.899	0.005	.383**	1							
Education	0.08	-0.071	0.032	0.029	1						
Year of experience	<0.001	.147**	.469**	.237**	0.053	1					
Level of play	<0.001	-.873**	-0.026	0.013	.081*	-.081*	1				
Family Structure	0.026	-.091*	.094*	0.022	-0.019	0.070	0.056	1			
Media	0.006	-.112**	-0.034	0.013	0.006	0.064	.102*	.174**	1		
Income	0.324	-0.040	-0.050	-0.055	0.002	-0.054	0.010	.085*	0.073	1	
Employment	0.667	-0.018	-0.026	-0.045	-0.065	-0.047	-0.011	0.078	.128**	0.077	1
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).											
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).											

Source: Field Study, 2024

Discussion

In this study, we determined that sociodemographic structures such as family, media, level of play, and years of experience play significant roles in the level of wages women footballers in Liberia receive. The study revealed that a strong, and significant relationship exists between media and wage remuneration in women's football ($r = -0.098$; $p < 0.05$). The Media play an important role in sport, with football being a well-covered sport, although men's football gets the main part of the media attention (Wensing & Bruce, 2003; Biscomb & Matheson, 2017) as against women's. In the same way, the media constructs programmes to suit their schedules or attract viewers to heighten their revenues

and audience base as media organisations; hence, only 'lucrative' sporting activities are given priority (Farrington et al., 2012; Weedon et al., 2018). As Pfister, (2015:639) explains, "all over the world, media sports play an important part in people's everyday lives, but it is men's sport that is at the centre of public interest...produced by men, for men and about men" Moreover, media reporting, unlike many believe is not predominantly objective and neutral, as it is influenced by both the values of the media organization(s), and a desire to sell (directly or indirectly) content to readers or viewers. The media, therefore, construct coverage relating to specific themes and messages. Historically, research has demonstrated a mismatch in the coverage of men's and women's sport (Bruce, 2008), with little changes over decades (Bruce, 2016; Cooky et al., 2021). Excluding mega events such as the Olympic Games, the vision of sport as a male space where women are outsiders is one that has been preserved and reinforced by the mass media, both in terms of the quantity and quality of coverage. For instance, in Skogvang's (2006) thesis on Elite football – a field of changes, journaled in Pfister and Sisjord's *Gender and Sport: Changes and Challenges* (2013:113-114), the importance of high media coverage for football was examined and it was discovered that the media does not only determine the popularity of the sport, it also influences many other aspects such as – people's (fan's) interest, journalists' and coaches' job decisions, players' attainment of status among contemporaries in their locality and internationally. The greater the media attention, the more attractive female football is to spectators who desire to watch what is popular; the more news-worthy it becomes for journalists whose choices determine the media's selection of events; the more lucrative it becomes for coaches who desire to give people what they want, and the more the players' status and recognition at the local and national level increases. All these aspects are vital and serve as essential determinants of the economic value of female football, and they are all hinged on the media. However, professional men's sport is often presented in the media as the pinnacle of sporting value and achievement (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). For instance, Pitts & Zhang (2018) examined side-by-side two FIFA tournaments - The FIFA U-20 World Cup (men's) and the FIFA women's World Cup which were hosted in Canada. The researchers highlighted that a total of 1 195 239 spectators viewed the games live, TV audience stood at 469,5 million. On the other hand, the women's game had 1 353 506 cumulative spectators, and 45 million television viewers; and the difference between the turnouts was - media coverage. The two tournaments were broadcasted using different national branding and target market strategy. While the FIFA men's Cup had clear national branding, the women's tournament had no national branding. The men's tournament was marketed for football enthusiasts, while the women's was marketed more for women, girls and the upper class families. Consequently, the FIFA U-20 Men's World Cup was able to secure higher wages and more sponsorship deals than the FIFA women's World Cup (Pitts & Zhang 2018, 242- 246). To corroborate this, Manoli (2020) states that sports benefits considerably, especially in economic terms, from increased media investment.

This vital role of the media is further underscored in the FIFPRO (2020) Raising our Game article which highlights the working conditions of women in football. The report emphasizes that the crowd is an essential component of the commercial success of professional football, hence, larger live match attendances generate sponsorship opportunities, enhance brand awareness, foster long-term fan engagement, and increase revenue from ticket sales, food and beverages, parking, merchandise, and other sources. Sponsorships are common ways football players, clubs or teams get earnings, benefiting both the sponsoring and sponsored parties (Smith & Stewart 2015:200). Sponsorships can take different forms - one-way personal sponsorship where the sponsor provides athletes with equipment and clothing meant to be marketed via social media postings (Hakala 2020:51) or a company paying an agreed sum of money in exchange for inscribing their logo on players' playing kit. In either of these instances, sponsorship is mutually beneficial to both players and sponsoring parties. This is why most football teams desire to bag sponsorship contracts to boost their prominence but without media attention, sponsorship organisations cannot be attracted because sponsors seek public attention to improve brand image and create valuable business networks (Hakala 2020:18). However, as Alegi (2010) states, it is quite challenging for the media to engage women's football competitions because it is still invariably less visible than men's football (Coche, 2021). Gitonga et al, (2010), and Wangari et al, (2017) buttress as well the cascading effects low media publicity has on women's football, emphasizing that without adequate publicity, women miss out on gaining fans, leading to low or no gate collection fees, and sponsorship opportunities. Coche (2021), looking at online media coverage in Europe of the same tournament, found that women received 20% of coverage, more than the typical 4%, but still less prominent than the reporting on men's off-season club football. This lack of media visibility for women football also causes the society to overlook women's football and show less interest whenever a women's football match takes place. About 60% of the respondents in this research agree that low media coverage during female football competitions affects how female football is being assessed in Liberia, with 99.6% agreeing that with adequate media promotion of female football, wage remuneration disparity, and gender discrimination will be reduced in Liberia, thereby establishing the fact that inadequate media coverage negatively impact and result in low wages for women footballers in Liberia.

The findings also reveal that Family had a moderately significant relationship with wage remuneration in women's football accounting for ($r = -0.091$; $p = 0.026$) of the overall sample examined. Most respondents (61.82%) agreed that wage remuneration influences how a family will be structured and family responsibilities also inadvertently impact wages. As a result of the low wages received from football engagements, most women footballers, single and married, need to take on extra jobs to support their families. Many (77.5%) of the respondents were single and did not hail from an 'authority' family, but rather, low-income families, so they had to cater to the needs of their family members⁴⁸, thereby dividing their attention and focus on their football careers. As Fasting (1987) opines: *an African woman, whether married or not, is burdened with numerous responsibilities that make it extremely*

difficult for her to have any free time. Those who are not employed have domestic chores to manage, and even if they are available in the evenings, they are usually too exhausted to train properly. Consequently, it is not easy for women to be available as it is for the male counterparts. In a place where women's roles are reduced to catering for men's needs and performing domestic duties, it is extremely difficult for female players who do not fit into this gender order to play sport and even more difficult to play the 'men's game' which has an effect of impeding the development of women's football. The same is true for all top decision-making positions in sports federations, where female participation in 2015 averaged 14 per cent in EU Member States, ranging from 3 per cent in Poland to 43 per cent in Sweden (EIGE, 2017). For instance, Cameroonian girls and women inherit most of the tasks in the domestic sphere which are added to the productive activities outside the home that also contribute to the economic viability of the household. So, it is believed that the time taken by these women to play football is time wasted, which should have been used on more serious things or household chores (Hidri Neys & Juskowiak 2024:9).

This is significantly related to Bjerksæter and Lagestad's (2022) research where they identified that most of the female footballers in Norway who ended their career had very low wages so needed to combine football with work in order to augment their financial circumstances while those who continued their football career had better pay offers from their clubs, although that needed to be augmented as well with a state-sponsored study loan or additional income from a second job. Hence, pressure on the female footballers' finances abound although in varying measures, resulting in the dropping out of many of the female footballers. McGreary et al. (2021) in their study among female football players in the United Kingdom also identified that elite female footballers found it challenging to balance all aspects of their lives since the overall stress burden on female footballers is huge. Combining education, with work to cater for their personal, as well as family's needs triggered high stress levels for the female footballers. It is pertinent for players to have free times to train, get sufficient rest and focus on their career as footballers. Although, this is often impossible for women, however, that is the experience of many men in Skogvang's (2006) research, journaled in Pfister and Sisjord (2013:110). The study sampled three male and three female elite football teams. Five of the male footballers interviewed have full-time employment paid by clubs and sponsors, four have part-time jobs and two combine elite football with other jobs. Two female players had fulltime football employment with money from club sponsors, but most (5) had fulltime jobs outside football. In addition, the male footballers' wages stood at between 80,000 to 300,000 euros annually while women earned between 5,000 to 30,000. Being employed as football players gave the male players more free time (with family and friends) and recovery time after training unlike their female counterparts who had lower income. This establishes our findings for the subjects in our research had little or no participation in training sessions because of financial pressure and the need to cater to their family's needs. Many respondents find it difficult to participate in football activities regularly, making it impossible to increase their level of play, for a

measure of professionalism is required for that. Hence, the female footballers this study examined remained at a low wage level for long periods with most of the participants (38%) having between 1-3 years of experience and only a very minimal number were within 6-10 years experience; playing more at the club team level than the national level. To further corroborate the triad link of family, play level and wages remuneration among female footballers, Zmuda and Abouna's (2023) article about female football in Poland is relevant. The authors highlight the fact that the development of women's football in the country was considerably slower due to the country's historical structure and family model which is associated with the traditional division of roles between men and women that views football as a male sport and women as subordinated to men.

Taken together, the findings of this research suggest that the identified sociodemographic factors have a huge impact on the wages of women footballers in Liberia, and each of these factors create a nexus which results in low wage remuneration for Liberian women footballers. Therefore, as other studies have identified gender discrimination, limited access to facilities, poor governance, and cultural and social bias as challenging factors impacting women footballers, sociodemographic factors like the media, family, level of play, and years of experience are contributory factors that impact on the wage level of female footballers in Liberia.

Our results should be interpreted in the context of some limitations. This is a cross-sectional survey of the impact of sociodemographic and economic factors on the wages of a selected sample of women footballers in Liberia which limits the ability to generalize our findings. It is unknown whether similar results apply in other African countries. In addition, not all geographical regions in Liberia were used for the study as they were not all easily accessible. Despite these limitations, our study provides crucial information on the impact sociodemographic and economic factors have on the wages of women footballers in Liberia in an underresearched population. To our knowledge, no other study in Liberia has reported on the influence of sociodemographic and economic factors on the wages of women footballers in Liberia. Another strength of this study is the selection of the sample population size taken from significant counties with large populations in Liberia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, low wage remuneration is prevalent among female footballers in Liberia and the results indicate that sociodemographic factors such as level of play, years of experience, media coverage, and family structure significantly contribute to low wages. Further establishing the fact that these factors are not isolated challenges women football encounter but they form a nexus that contribute to either the increase or decrease of the wage remuneration level of women footballers in Liberia.

Hence, addressing these factors is essential for promoting fair pay in women's football in Liberia. Therefore, considerations should be made for tailored interventions that account for the unique sociodemographic and economic factors affecting female footballers, to

foster a more inclusive and rewarding environment for their participation in the sport in Liberia.

Recommendations

Hinged on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested towards improving the wage remuneration experience of female footballers in Liberia, creating a more equitable and supportive environment, and ultimately leading to improved wage remuneration and the overall growth of the sport in Liberia.

- a) **Enforcement of Minimum Wage Standards:** minimum wage guidelines should be established and enforced, specifically for women's football to ensure equitable pay across clubs and regions.
- b) **Promotion of Gender Equity Policies:** the government should develop and implement policies aimed at mitigating gender disparity in sports by incorporating equal pay for women athletes compared to their male counterparts. Regular assessments of player wages across clubs should also be carried out to ensure compliance with fair pay standards, as well as the promotion of transparency in the financial practices of football clubs and associations.
- c) **Increased Funding and Sponsorship:** there should be heightened advocacy for financial support from the government and private bodies towards women's football programs, which can improve player salaries and impact on the overall availability of resources.
- d) **Enhancement of Education and Training Programs:** investments should be made in educating and training vocationally, female athletes, to improve their skills and career prospects, and to enable networking opportunities with industry professionals.
- e) **Grassroots Development Support:** grassroots initiatives that promote women's participation in football from a young age should be endorsed to build a larger talent pool and enhance the sport's visibility.
- f) **Increased Media Coverage and Awareness:** greater investments should be made by the media to promote the popularity of female football in Liberia, raise public awareness about the importance of female athletes, and to enhance the visibility and profitability of women's football.

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Author's Note

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