Attracting and Maintaining Women in Football Refereeing in Trinidad and Tobago

Lynda Bramble-Thompson, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine
Sherlan Cabralis, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

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In Trinidad and Tobago women’s football underwent a period of unprecedented growth, with an increase in the number of women and girls playing the game as well as leagues and competitions. Specifically, over the past ten (10) years the number of female footballers increased from five (500) hundred in 2006 to over nineteen hundred (1900) in 2016. There are now four national female teams, twenty national club teams, forty-five secondary school's teams and eighty primary schools’ teams. Unfortunately, this growth has not been mirrored in the number of female referees available to service the games played. Presently, there are twelve (12) active female referees in Trinidad and Tobago, eight (8) in Tobago and only four (4) in Trinidad. The dearth of female football referees in Trinidad and Tobago is of major concern.

As a result, this study was conducted to: identify the factors that attract and deter females in Trinidad and Tobago from being recruited as football referees by examining the lived experiences of past and current referees; identify the recruitment policies, practices/methods of the Trinidad and Tobago Football Referees Association and the Trinidad and Tobago Football Association Referees Committee; and identify stakeholders’ suggestions for the improvement of the recruitment of female football referees in Trinidad and Tobago.

The study was qualitative in nature and involved twenty-three participants (nineteen female referees and four administrators) from the football refereeing fraternity who were selected by convenient sampling. This research adopted a constructivist approach that sought to discover knowledge through the interpretation of the experiences of individuals. It was based on the responses to semi structured (open-ended) interview questions. This Semi-structured approach allowed for key questions to be asked but probes or prompting was encouraged so that the respondent could further elaborate on the topic. The research also sought to fill a gap in the literature since there is a dearth in research regarding women officials in sports.

The findings revealed that the referees identified seven benefits of being involved in football refereeing: improvement in health and fitness which was the major benefit; social interaction; career opportunities; financial rewards; improvement in self-confidence; increase in knowledge of the laws of the game; and role modeling. These benefits were consistent with similar findings from Kellett and Shilbury (2009), Kellett and Warner (2011), Nordstrom (2013) and Phillipe et al. (2009). Six challenges were identified: acceptance in a man’s world, which was the major challenge; time management; fitness test performance; lack of facilities; gender inequality; and sexual harassment. Specifically, to gain acceptance, was identified as a challenge in research done by Chiafullo (1998) and Rainey (1999). The finding also revealed geographical differences in spectator behavior towards female referees, from total disrespect in Trinidad, early in their career to appreciation as refereeing skills improved. In Tobago, there was a show of sympathy for the work done by female referees. The findings also revealed that most referees became involved in refereeing through encouragement from a referee and the major recruitment method employed by the organization especially in Tobago was Word of Mouth.

The findings showed that administrative ineffectiveness, especially in Trinidad, was responsible for the dearth of female referees. The organization lacks proper recruitment policies and practices. While administrators in Trinidad did nothing to encourage women to become referees, in Tobago, a low-level talent identification process was used which lead to the increase in the number of female referees. Both referees and administrators agreed that public education, advertisement, behavior modification of spectators, coaches and players, and improvement in the facilities available for women at match venues will help to improve the recruitment of female referees.

The information obtained from this study would assist officiating associations with their recruitment and retention of female officials, as well as add to the literature on female officials and by extension female football referees.
working in male dominated sports environments. Additionally, the findings can be used to develop a recruitment plan for recommended use by the TTFA Referees Committee, to help increase the number of female football referees in Trinidad and Tobago. The success of the recruitment plan will be the focus of a further study as well as the conducting of a similar study throughout the Caribbean since no other research on female football referees has been done in the Caribbean to date and the same phenomenon of the lack of female football referees exist.