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Analysis on the Difficulties Related to the Training Activity Specific to Women's Rugby

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Abstract: In Romania are just 4 women's rugby teams, and just 60-70 players, the selection and the competition in rugby is difficult. Also, the lack of skills of coaches in the women's rugby sector creates the need to promote education in and through sport with special focus on skills development of coaches interested in women's rugby. The objective of the study is to highlight the vulnerabilities faced by rugby coaches and female rugby athletes and find solutions for eliminating or diminishing prejudices like parents' fears of letting their girls practice a sport that can be considered harsh. The survey contains 27 questions and was applied online via google forms in four countries: Romania, Poland, Portugal and Spain. The research was carried out over a period of 2 months, in 2020. Participants were 126 rugby specialists: coaches, doctors, teachers, managers, referees. Results aim to provide important data for understanding the challenges faced by coaches and specialists in women's rugby 7: how to select girl athletes, what are the things that determine athletes to continue playing rugby, if their training should be different from that of the boys and how the women's rugby game could be promoted. Possible solutions can be: coaches may need to use a full range of questioning and demonstration strategies (use of experienced players to demonstrate, use of video). Physical differences between male and female children aged ten to twelve years of age are usually minimal. Rugby girls seven needs more media coverage.

Keywords: *feminine rugby, rugby promotion, rugby selection, rugby coaches, rugby prejudices.*

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Introduction

Rugby is a complex sport and is not just a sport for men. Women play this sport also. As rugby values we identify: discipline, respect, integrity, passion, solidarity and very important, passion. These values are included in the document World Rugby Playing Charter. In Romania, Rugby for women is played just in seven. Men have teams for fifteen also.

Globally there are about 1,76 million women rugby players. From it, in Romania are about 60 to 70 women rugby players. From 2019 till 2021, the number of women rugby teams remain the same: just four. Curtin reveals in 2016 the beginnings of women's rugby players over the world. This sport is played for about one hundred years old in other countries, like New Zealand, for instance. Many countries discover the need to promote more the feminine rugby, and this will reveal our study made in Romania, Poland, Spain and Portugal.

Rugby sevens for women is played by just seven girls, each half lasts just seven minutes. The final game lasts ten minutes for each half of the game.

Kerr (2019) identifies achievement, success, team environment and friendship as main reasons to start and continue playing rugby. In France, women's access to rugby started just from about thirty years old, according to Joncheray & Tlili (2013). According to these two authors, on a study conducted on about 200 women players as main barriers to play rugby are: the fear of physical injury and after this, the social risk, the fear that they will lose their feminine side.

Cleary (2000) discuss regarding the perception of rugby. It is also seen as a main sport for men, not for women in New Zealand too.

Ezzell (2009) also observes the existence of the gender inequality for the ones who play rugby: women who play rugby have to deal to sexist and homophobic stigmas from outsiders. Prejudices outside the field are a problem for women who play rugby.

Lemez et al. (2016) identify another problem in women rugby competitions: having less players, there exists a difference of age between players in the same competition. Therefore, the competition is difficult.

One possible solution for Romania in order to reduce the deficit for women's rugby might be to reduce the age for selection. We could start selecting girls since the age of ten years old or less. The younger is the age, the better is the chance to have more girls to play rugby, because they don't get to practice other sports. The most important need is that there are not

enough girls to play rugby. The best solution might be a better promotion in various fields (internet, new media, television and so on.

Having a good strategy informing parents regarding the benefits of this beautiful sport. So, we need a good strategy to convince parents, teachers and girls regarding rugby. Biases are not real, beneficiary just have to be convinced. By adapting the conditions, such as in Spain, where women train by having a smaller balloon (size four). Men play with a size five balloon.

Pringle (2008) pays a lot of attention to the impact offered by illustrating collective stories. These collective stories are seen as pedagogical tools. The stories are about "silenced and left over by dominant cultural narratives" (p. 215). These might help to raise awareness about the relationships between sport, physical education and gendered identities in order to get empathetic responses and better understand that practicing rugby does not affect identity. Not being just a sport for men might increase girls' interest in practicing this sport will make people to feel appreciated and understood by the community.

Talking about the enrichment hypothesis, Murray and Howat (2009), involves the need to provide awareness and support for the girls who decide to choose a non-traditional sport. This sport requires awareness and support for the women who decide to choose a non-traditional sport for girls. Murray and Howat conducted interviews by having subjects: 40 women's rugby players from South Australia to examine their motivations: why initially they got involved in rugby and what has kept them participating. The results of this study reveal that women started playing rugby because of three major reasons: because of the social element of participation which was a key ongoing motivator, because they had supportive families who were already involved in sport and they knew other female rugby players.

By promoting women's rugby players and competitions could have an impact on the development of this sport. Also, the competitions might have an impact on the development of this sport and the formation of a national identity as it happened in New Zealand. In New Zealand, this was possible by having the support of women, both from the lower and from the middle classes in the society. They supported rugby competitions ever since the 1870s as supporters, spectators and fans. According to Curtin, (2015), female rugby players have also increased much the popularity of this port and helped it to became a national game.

McSharry (2017) has conducted a survey in the Republic of Ireland, regarding rugby. This survey was focused on the inequalities experienced by girls who were attending secondary schools where specific male sports

dominated school life: hurling, Gaelic football and rugby. Attending to these schools, girls had experienced the inequalities in obtaining recognition in sport and discrimination. Girls had accessing male-orientated sports, as well as unequal resources, unequal opportunities, and less support. McSharry points out the fact that inequalities appear due to inefficient school management, students and teachers (male and female as well), who protect often these strategies that unfortunately maintain exclusion of girls.

Therefore, we realize that we have to deal not just with the prejudices of parents, girls and the community in general, but also with the teachers and the people who are involved in the school management. The school management should be the first one to promote gender equality and enable girls to practice whatever sport they like.

Rookie Rugby, known in Romania as Rugby Tag might be a possible solution in order to increase interest in rugby and to make possible to lower the age at which students are introduced to rugby.

Oslen et al. (2011) have presented this alternative as a fun sport which was created for physical education classes. The game of rugby involves a lot of teamwork, good discipline, a sense of community and respect.

We conducted a small-scale research on women's rugby specialists (126 specialists) from different national rugby clubs from Romania, Poland, Portugal and Spain. responded to our survey. The 126 rugby specialists are: coaches, doctors, teachers, managers, referees.

Instruments

The research methods used are: scientific documentation, survey, mathematical and statistical method, graphical method.

Methodology

The participants gave their informed written consent for participating to this study (were informed of the withdrawal possibility, with no other consequences on their status). We ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the answers.

The survey has 27 questions and was applied online via google forms. The research was carried out over a period of 2 months, 2020. Objective. Our research aims to highlight the vulnerabilities faced by rugby coaches and female rugby athletes and find solutions for eliminating or

diminishing prejudices like parents' fears of letting their girls practice a sport that can be considered harsh.

The questions are either open-ended or closed-ended and refer to:

- Position and years of experience as a rugby specialist;
- at what age should start the selection of rugby girls;
- if school is the main selection environment for women's rugby;
- and other places for selection and recruitment;
- if should be collaboration protocols between schools and the sports environment approved by decision factors,
- if it would be benefic the implementation of introductory sessions in the female rugby game at the second cycle level of education;
- if the motivation of girls to practice rugby is appreciated by the family;
- if the role and family obligations of girls affect the involvement in a regular training program;
- if girls' performance and belonging to sports life is appreciated by the family;
- how can we fight prejudice and negative image against women rugby;
- what are the reasons for girls abandoning rugby;
- how can we promote the formative values of female rugby;
- if trainings should be adapted to female gender particularities;
- if teaching materials for girls (balloon, shield, tackle bag) should be different from those of boys;
- if girls should train with boys, by organizing common trainings of different ages and levels of education, and if yes, until what age;
- how do rugby specialists manage the problems of the girl players' reproductive apparatus (like adapting training for players during period);

The research methods used are: scientific documentation, survey, statistical-mathematical method, graphical method.

Results

Positions held by rugby specialists who participated in our study are shown in Figure 1.

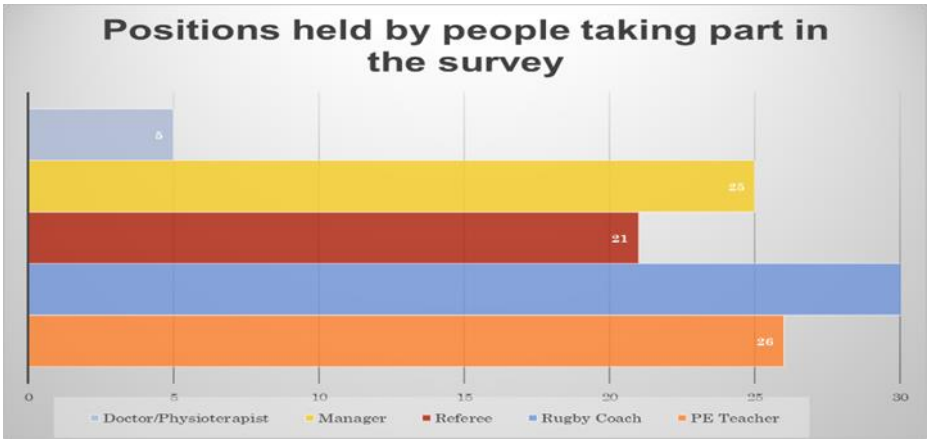


Fig 1. Positions held by people taking part in the survey
Source: Authors' own conception

Regarding positions held by rugby specialists who participated at our study, we notice that: 5 of them are doctors/ physiotherapists (3.96%); 25 are managers (19.84%); 21 are referee (16.66%); 30 are rugby coaches and 26 of them are physical education teachers (19.84%). So, the we managed to invite to participate as respondents a wide range of specialist in rugby to our study.

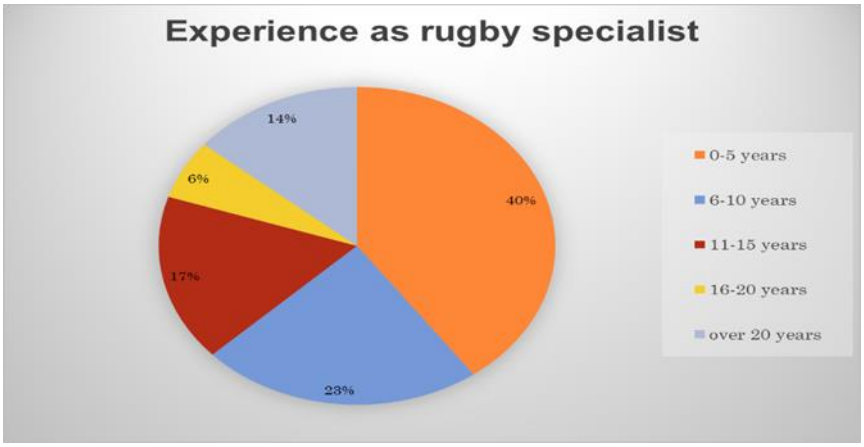


Fig.2. Years of experience in rugby
Source: Authors' own conception

Most of our respondents have an experience as rugby specialist between 0 and 10 years of experience (63%). Just 14% of respondents have more than 20 years of experience.

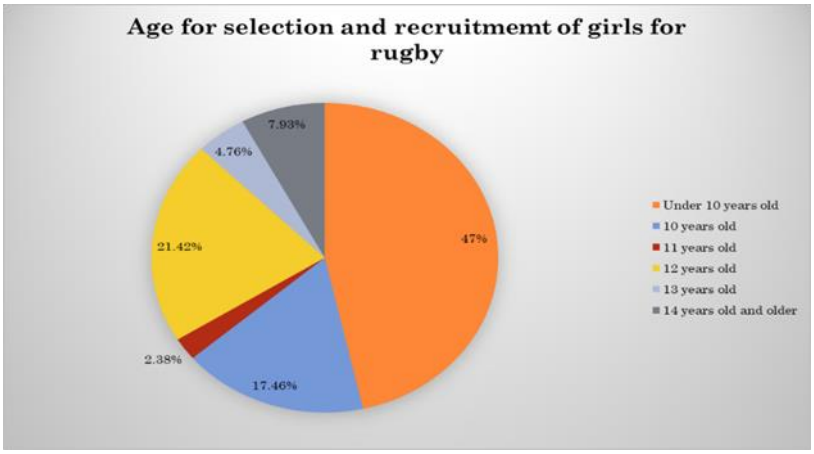


Fig. 3. The best age for selection of girls for rugby
Source: Authors' own conception

Most of rugby specialists who participated at our study consider as soon as selection of girls for rugby starts, the better is to attract more girls to play rugby. So, 47% respondents consider that rugby selection should start at age of under 10 years old. Just 7.93% of respondents believe that age for selection and recruitment of girls for rugby should start at 14 years old and more than 14 years old.

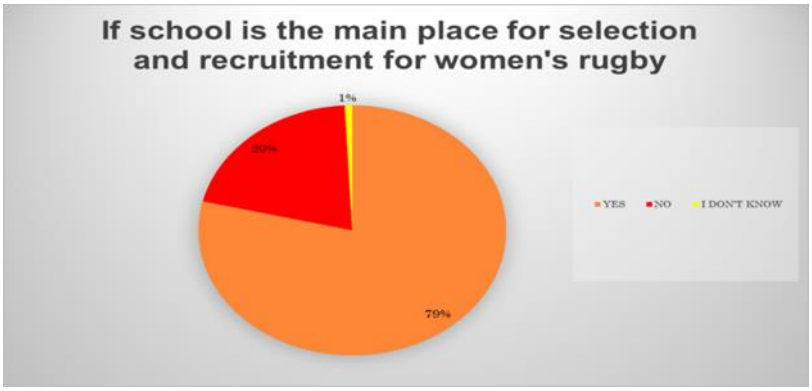


Fig.4. School as main place for selection and recruitment for women's rugby
Source: Authors' own conception

At next question, where participants had to identify and recommend other important places for selection and recruitment, after schools- which is the most important place for selection and recruitment in rugby girls, are:

- From other sports, organizing selection championships, interschool rugby tag tournaments, athletics tournaments;
- The selection should start from kindergarten. Local events can be used to promote the sport and recruit players;
- Recruitment events at the club, exhibition trainings/ games at local social/cultural events;
- School events of other sports;
- Other sport clubs;
- Internet.

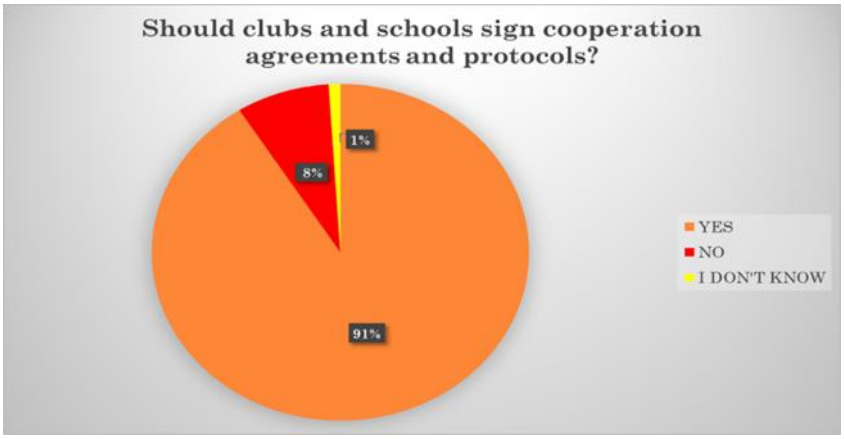


Fig.5. Opinion regarding cooperation protocols and agreements
Source: Authors' own conception

Being considered as main resource for selection and recruitment for rugby girls, 91% of participants believe that between schools and clubs should be signed cooperation agreements and protocols.

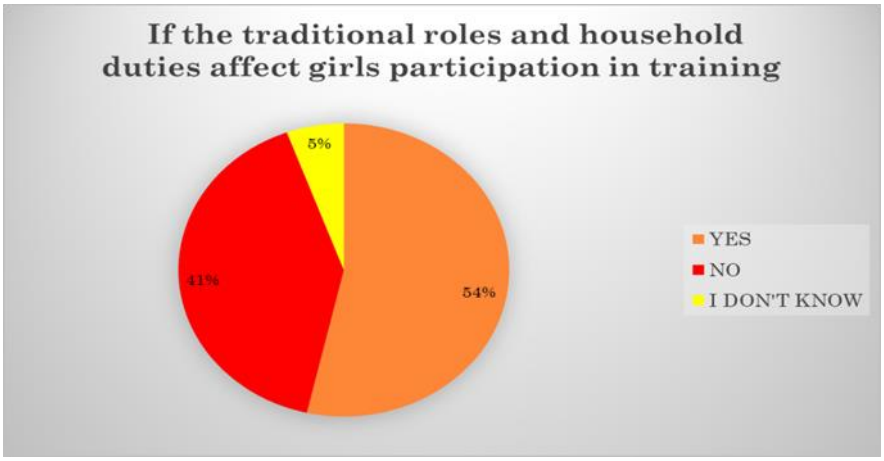


Fig. 6. If traditional roles and household duties affect girls' participation in trainings
Source: Authors' own conception

54% of participants at this study consider that traditional roles and household duties affect girls' participation in rugby trainings.

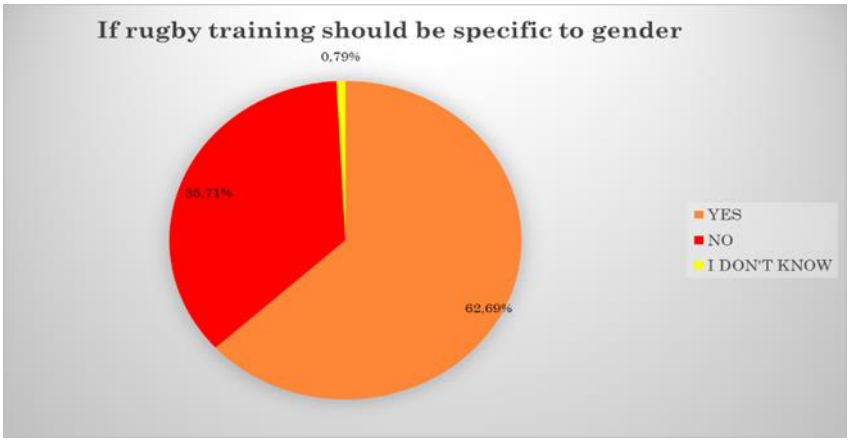


Fig.7. If training should be different from boys to girls
Source: Authors' own conception

Most of participants, 62.59% of respondents consider that trainings should be adapted related to gender.

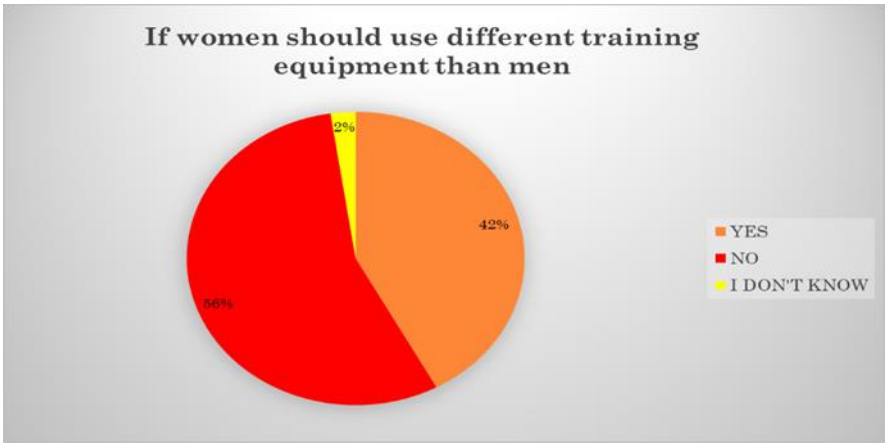


Fig.8. Specialists opinion regarding training equipment for girls and boys in rugby
Source: Authors' own conception

Rugby specialists consider that training equipment (balloon, shield, tackle bag) for girls should be different from the ones for boys in rugby.

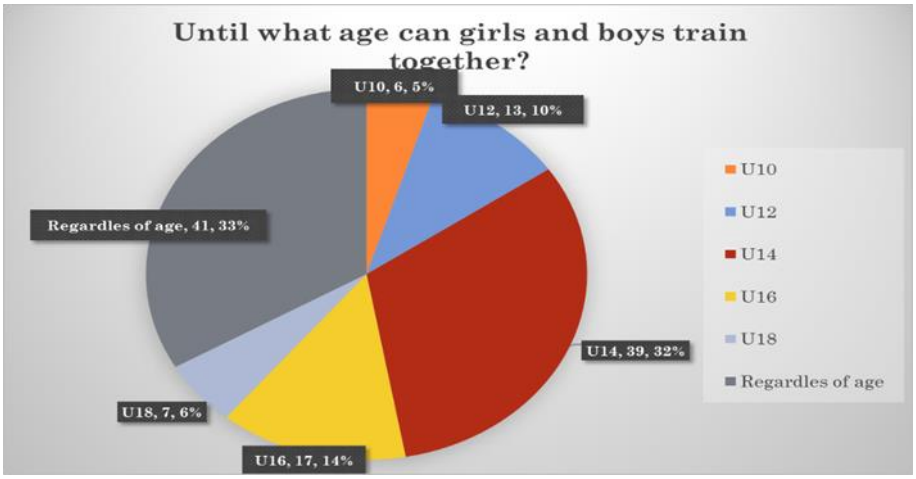


Fig.9. Age limit for mixed training between girls and boys
Source: Authors' own conception

Due to the small number of girls who practice rugby, we can organize common trainings for girls of different ages and levels of education. Here, the opinions are diverse: 41.33% consider that boys and

girls should train together, regardless of age. 39.32% believe that girls and boys should train together till the age of under 14 years old.

Regarding the differences between female and male competition systems in each of the four countries: Romania, Poland, Portugal, Spain we notice important particularities from each country.

Current situation in Poland

There is no competition for girls in 15's - they only play 7's (11 people). Not all girls age groups have competitions in Poland (3 people). There are no differences till 14 years old (4 people). There are less girls/women's teams which can make the competition rather boring. Women's competition is subordinated to one club from which most National Team players are – not everyone accepts it. In men's competition decisions are reached in more democratic manner. There are more male players, more teams and more levels to compete at; It is difficult to play with a women's team that doesn't have any experienced players. Girl's/ women's competitions are treated as second grade comparing to male competition (2 people). Women's rugby has less supporters and they are less engaged. Girls and women play less matches during season due to less competitions (4 people). There are fewer clubs with women's/ girls' teams (3 people). Women's rugby is less competitive – there are teams that are dominating the championships for years. Girl's rugby competition started just 3 years ago and women's rugby about 15 years ago.

Current situation in Romania

The women's championship is organized by F.R.R. In this competition, players with a minimum age of 15, who have reached the respective year, have the right to play. Female only have R7. Very few women's teams. The number of men's teams is higher than the women's, the competition is stronger and because of them and everyone's interest is higher for men, are better promoted than for women. Women's competitions do not cover all age groups, so there is not much competition Importance. The game volume is therefore much lower for women. In the men's competition system both rugby 7s and rugby 15 take place. No small number of players and no small number of women's rugby sections. At the male level it covers approx. all categories and at senior level there are 2 divisions. At the women's level there is a junior championship and a senior championship which takes place in tournaments.

Current situation in Portugal

Differences between female and male competition in rugby are huge. Women's rugby has almost no competition. The female team doesn't even have half the opportunities that the male team has. Less investment in Women's Rugby competition systems. Fewer teams. Communication channels often promote men's results, both national and international, and it is rare to hear / read about women's competitions. Increased funding for Men's competitions. As an example, it is common for women's competitions to have no official referees appointed. Men's Rugby competitions are more stable and more attractive. Women's Rugby competitions have a wide range of models (Rugby 7, Rugby 10, Rugby 13, Rugby 15). Male have more support. Are differences regarding investment; organization; visibility; stability; sustainability. Female system is poorly planned and without development strategy (clubs, players). Women's Rugby has undergone multiple changes over the past 5 years, mainly practicing Rugby from 7's until the last year. In Men's Rugby, R15 is mainly practiced. Men's competitions have greater visibility in the media. Some male athletes are also invited to various social events of media relevance, unlike female athletes. Women's Rugby does not attract interest from brands, sponsors and spectators.

Current situation in Spain

The main difference in the competition is the number of players (12 answers), which has an impact on the number of competitions and thus on the valuation of men's rugby against the female (5 answers); related to this, male rugby, if professional, allow to live with that, but isn't the same for female rugby. 2 respondents consider that the difference is in the level and 4 respondents indicate that there are no differences.

Conclusions

Coaches may need to use a full range of questioning and demonstration strategies (for example, use of experienced players to demonstrate, use of video). Physical differences between male and female children aged ten to twelve years of age are usually minimal.

Possible solutions to attract girls to play rugby:

• Organising sport events for girls;

• Promoting rugby and its values among PE teachers and parents – the effects may be mixed, because some people may not like it, but they will not be indifferent;

• Engage the players, that are finishing their careers to help promote it, engage the icons of women's sport to help promote rugby, organise exhibition PE lessons at schools, using social media to promote rugby, reaching out to local organisations that associate women in business and sport;

• When promoting rugby always include female players to show it is not only men's game;

• Create positive atmosphere within the team, which will encourage other girls to join;

• Creating and running interesting social media profiles, where girl's rugby would be promoted;

• Promote the benefits of sport for women, organise meetings with National Team players to encourage women to play rugby, organise trips for girls;

• Create separate competitions for girls at age groups of U10, U12 and U14;

• Actively promote and create positive image of women's rugby and your team in social media;

• Promote the success of Polish National Women's rugby team and the players as individuals;

• Perform as many rugby exhibition lessons in schools as possible and try to engage local media (television, newspapers, internet media) into covering girl's/ women's sport;

• Promoting girls rugby more;

• Giving away rugby balls to girls so they can get used to rugby;

• Working with the parents, both of players and potential players;

• Promoting other sides of rugby (for example how social it is), so it wouldn't be only received from match perspective as a "battle".

• Exhibition matches and trainings, participation in local sports, cultural or charity events. When it comes to the girls who are already training social events should be organised (going to cinema, bowling, etc.), going to camps;

• Creating and promoting rugby academies and sport classes in schools. Creating pathway for the players combining education, sport and career;

• Organising rugby tournaments for girls only;

• Providing proper sport infrastructure, equipment and possibility to go on a sport camps; Building girl's age group teams outside the training (strengthen bonds). Provide more than just trainings;

• Creating equal opportunities for girl players by providing the same level of funding and commitment from club and union management, so the players feel they are equally treated and they belong to the sport and club;

• Using all types of promotion possible: organising meetings at school with current and former members of National Team, exhibition lessons. The most important is creating a working system: creating rugby profiled classes in schools where girls can train and get education;

• Using social media to be recognised locally. Connect with the parents of potential players;

• Create, promote and sustain the image of rugby as sport for girls;

• Promote awareness of how rugby influences self-esteem, confidence, courage and fortitude and what is its positive impact on woman's fitness and figure;

• Organise as many local rugby events as possible;

• The interest is connected to how attractive and fun trainings are

1. Promotion 2. Exhibition 3. Presentation 4. Open lessons 5. Training the coaches 6. Training the PE teachers 7. Getting rugby as a sport into schools 8. Creating club-school agreements;

• Getting rugby into the school sports system, so more teachers care to show it and train during PE lessons;

• It depends from what is already done and what are your goals. Some teams have established promotion and recruitment strategies that are working. The main problem is that there are few clubs that are interested in attracting girls to rugby;

• The key to success is promoting rugby in all media possible and in different ways. We should promote the image that girls can play rugby from early age. Promoting the game in schools and among the youngest children using contactless rugby tag or touch rugby;

• Atmosphere, equipment, clothing;

• Promoting the sport and cooperating with the schools;

The sport of rugby girls seven needs more media coverage. By promoting this sport, TV advertising and the written press, advertisements. We don't always have to watch only football on TV, we also need rugby on TV display. For example, in schools, high schools, colleges, campaigns can be carried out to promote women's rugby.

A coach or club representative could go through schools / high schools / colleges to present and promote this sport. Also, some players could go to schools, high schools and explain to the girls what rugby meant, and their experience in this sport.

The promotion could start by transmitting on TV screens the National Championship and the Romanian Cup, offering media coverage of the European Championship (and we do not mean media coverage on social networks: Facebook, Instagram, but also television, newspapers, posters, etc.), offering media coverage of women's rugby players (TV shows / interviews, etc.).

Also women's rugby players could be invited to participate in various charitable/ volunteer/ sporting/ cultural events, or play demonstrative games.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed equally to this study and should be considered as main authors.

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