The Model of Supporting Elite Female Athletes in Championship Sports

Elham Arian[1] | **Mahbanou Ghaderi** [2*] iD

1. Nahavand Higher Education Complex, BU-Ali Sina Univesity, Hamedan, Iran
   Email: elhamarian33@yahoo.com
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Sport Sciences, Nahavand Higher Education Complex, BU-Ali Sina Univesity, Hamedan, Iran
   Email: m.ghaderi@nahgu.ac.ir

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this study was to provide a model for supporting elite female athletes in championship sports. To achieve the research aim, 200 people answered the questionnaires using purposive sampling method. The researcher-developed questionnaire was prepared through studying the theoretical background, semi-guided interviews with sports management professors and elite female athletes through an exploratory process, and exploratory factor analysis was used to categorize the 46 items into nine factors. The extracted constructs were found to be both valid and reliable based on confirmatory factor analysis by LISREL software and Cronbach's alpha. Results of the study indicated that the present questionnaire was a suitable tool to assess the support for elite female athletes. Besides, the final research model indicated that financial support was the first priority from the respondents' perspective while government support was the last priority according to them. Moreover, all the fitness indices of the model for supporting elite female athletes and its aspects had good fitness which confirmed the model. Based on the results of the present study, it is suggested that the research model and the priority of its factors be considered for policy-making in the field of women's championship sports.

Introduction

Sports' pervasiveness and its significant position in international relations have made governments focus on this phenomenon. Various continental and global matches, and most importantly, the Olympics have become an arena for competition between the selected young athletes of the nations, and various scie3nces and techniques have thus been applied to sports (Saeidi, Ghadimi, Shojaee, & Kheibari, 2020)Aside from its economic and social influences, countries' success in international sports events is a symbol of their stability and capabilities in other aspects as well, which is one of the reasons why countries invest hugely in the championship and professional sports (Abdi & Sajadi, 2009). On the other hand, championship sports have always interested people and the authorities of

the country, and a large portion of the material and spiritual resources is spent on them annually. However, the unfortunate fact is that there is no accurate prioritization in championship sports, and sports systems across the world have leaned towards getting more professional after the increase in the international rivalries at the end of the 19th century (Salimi, 2020). Besides, the spread and popularity of championship sports have intensified the competitions held to select male and female elite athletes in various sports fields as well as the competitions between the companies on a global scale to achieve prominent positions (Oakley & Green, 2001).

The role of women in social activities has recently become more prominent, but their presence in sports activities is unfortunately limited. On the other hand, sports can be a context for women to express their presence in the community, and this possibility of expression will increase the higher their presence is among the sports events. Championship sports is an arena for the empowerment and self-confidence of women and helps shatter the misogynistic symbols in the community. A woman getting known as a champion and sports role model reinforces the position of women's identity and helps women defend their abilities and value regardless of the sexist and oppressing beliefs in society (Zia & Rouhollahi, 2020). On the other hand, sports play a significant part in human life as a global common space, to the extent that it has overstepped its symbolic role and has become one of the components of human life. Of course, the aforementioned is of greater significance in the case of women ((Ball, Salmon, Giles-Corti, & Crawford, 2006). On the other hand, there are obstacles to the expansion of women's sports in many countries including Iran such as economic obstacles, political problems, government's schemes not prioritizing women's participation in sports, and the inconsistency of media with women's sports (Jafari Moghadam, Aminai, & Marefati, 2016). Many of the studies conducted in this regard such as the study of Mozaffari et al and Askarian et al. that indicate the same idea (Mozafari, Elahi, Abbasi Sh, & Rezaei, 2012). On the other hand, various studies have been conducted regarding championship sports and their challenges as well as women's sports. For instance, Benar et al. (2015) investigated the problems in women's championship sports in Gilan province and reported and economic and social factors had the highest and the personal factor had the lowest priority. Results indicated a significant difference between the athletes and the authorities in terms of prioritizing the factors. Mozaffari et al. (2012) investigated and proposed a model for the national championship sports and reported that institutionalization of meritocracy and specialism in federations and operational organizations of championship sports, reinforcement of basic-level sports development programs in sports federation, development and implementation of a comprehensive scientific national sports development system, establishment of a new coaching system in the country, expansion of public relations and successful sports media to increase their public popularity, increasing the TV broadcasting of sports other than soccer, development and implementation of a comprehensive system for recruiting and improving the professional human resources in various sports fields, improving the system of fair financial, physical, and human resource distribution between sports fields, developing and standardization system for sports arenas o the countries with emphasis on international standards, and the expansion of systematic and effective interaction between regional and national championship sports institutions and the education system were the most important indices for championship sports development (Mozafari et al., 2012).

On the other hand, Askariyan et al. (2015) reported that GDP, life expectancy, climate, and the Gini coefficient interacted and impacted the performance of championship sports (Askariyan, Jafari, & Fakhri, 2015). Furthermore, Meenaghan (2001) considered recruiting organizations and companies for sponsorships as one of the ways for funding sports activities, particularly women's championship sports activities (Meenaghan, 2001). Besides, the results of Koivula (1999) on the lack of media coverage of women's sports concluded that women are often portrayed humiliatingly in sports and activities that are considered inappropriate for them. Moreover, women are usually marginalized and unseen and are considered insignificant and childish. The language used in the media is a powerful tool in reinforcing misogyny (Koivula, 1999). Besides, Cunningham considered weak media coverage as the equivalent of a small number of financial supporters and live role models for women and future athletes. On the other hand, the importance of addressing women's sports issues at the

championship level is quite significant since championship sports is one of the aspects of sports that can induce suitable incentives for the community, especially the youth, and taking the right measures towards improving the level of championship sports can ensure the provision of solutions for the improvement of any given sport and identification of its problems and weaknesses (Alidoust Ghahfarokhi, Sajjadi, Mahmoudi, & Sa'atchian, 2014). Still, we observe in the country that despite the long-term investments and great expenditure on training elite athletes, many of them –particularly female athletes- retire from sports due to various financial problems, unemployment, the lack of professional and championship supports, etc. before reaching their full potential. Thus, the development of a credible measurement tool is the first step in assessing a field of research. In this regard, the present study sought to design a model for supporting elite female athletes in championship sports given the lack of a credible tool to evaluate the support for elite female athletes in championship sports.

Methodology

The research method is descriptive, and the present study is a survey. Purposive sampling was used, and the statistical population included the elite female athletes in Iran. One of the important questions in determining the sample size is the minimum sample size in factor analysis. Klein believes that 5-10 samples are required per variable in exploratory factor analysis, but a minimum sample size of 200 is acceptable. The recommended sample size for confirmatory factor analysis is at least 200 samples for 10 factors (Kline, 2015). Therefore, a sample size of 200 elite female athletes was determined for the present study, which was adequate based on the structure of the present questionnaire. The tool used in the present study was a researcher-developed questionnaire, for the preparation of which a list of indicators regarding the support for elite female athletes was developed after literature review and a semi-structured interview with experts –particularly elite female athletes, from which 46 items were finalized. First, 46 questions were extracted for the questionnaire of support for elite female athletes based on in-depth interviews with the experts, and exploratory factor analysis was conducted using SPSS software to classify the indicators into the factors and aspects of support for elite female athletes, which classified the questions into nine factors, each factor was then named based on the nature of the questions it contained. 15 sports management experts then gave their opinions regarding the content and form validity of the questionnaire. After making the required corrections, the questionnaire was completed using a five-point Likert scale (ranging from one (completely disagree) to five (completely agree)) by a 50-people sample in a pilot study. Analysis of the results indicated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93, and the questionnaire was eventually distributed between the respondents in the two parts of demographics and questionnaire questions. Questionnaires were distributed and collected in fall and winter 2015. Exploratory factor analysis with orthogonal rotations was used to identify the factor of supporting elite female athletes and determine the construct validity of the research tool. Eventually, a base of 0.3 was set for the questions, and the 46 items were categorized into the nine factors of need for social support (seven items), financial support (six items), job requirements (four items), lifestyle (seven items), Medical support (five items//0, sports support (five items), educational and training support (five items), government support (four items), and facilities and infrastructure (three items). Confirmatory factor analysis was performed in LISREL software to confirm construct validity. Descriptive statistic indices such as mean and standard deviation, and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated the normality of the factors, and Cronbach's alpha and confirmatory factor analysis in LISREL software were used as well.

Results

To classify the items estimating the support for elite female athletes and perform exploratory factor analysis, the KMO test evaluating the adequacy of the sample size for exploratory factor analysis must be performed first. Bartlett test of sphericity was also conducted to evaluate the factor ability of

the data. As Table 1 demonstrates, the KMO value is 0.899 which indicates the adequacy of the sample size to perform exploratory factor analysis (KMO value must be greater than 0.7 to perform exploratory factor analysis). In other words, the 0.899 value obtained for KMO indicates that research data can be reduced into several fundamental factors. Besides, the results of the Bartlett test (6024.519) were significant at the 0.01 level which means a high correlation between the items in each factor and no correlation between the items across the factors. In other words, the fact that Bartlett test result 6024.519) was significant at the 0.01 level indicates the right division of the factors based on factor load coefficients.

Table 1. KMO test results and Bartlett test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO)		**0.899**
Bartlett spherical test	Chi-square coefficient	6024.519
	Degrees of freedom	1035
	The significance level:	0.001

The number of latent factors must be identified at the next stage. Table 2 determines the number of latent factors based on the Eigenvalues. The total value in the table above refers to the Eigenvalues. As the result demonstrate, the factor of need for social support has the highest Eigenvalue (5.384) and determines the highest variance (11.704) of the variables. On the other hand, the factor of infrastructures and facilities has the lowest Eigenvalue (1.126) and determines the lowest variance (3.596) of the variables. According to the LISREL criterion, the factors with Eigenvalues lower than one have not been included in the selection of factors. The results of the table above also show that around 67% of the total variance in supporting elite female athletes can be explained based on the nine identified factors.

Table 2. Describing the final (total) variance of the questionnaire to support elite women athletes

| Factors	Total rotating square			Total non-rotating squares		
	Total	Percentage of variance	Compression percentage	Total	Percentage of variance	Compression percentage
1	5.384	11.704	11.704	14.132	30.721	**30.21**
2	4.894	10.640	22.344	5.169	11.238	**41.959**
3	4.589	9.976	32.321	2.866	6.231	**48.189**
4	3.667	7.973	40.293	1.961	4.262	**52.451**
5	3.538	7.692	47.985	1.771	3.849	**56.301**
6	3.182	6.918	54.903	1.639	3.563	**59.863**
7	2.169	4.716	59.619	1.343	2.920	**62.783**
8	1.991	4.328	63.946	1.195	2.598	**65.381**
9	1.126	3.596	67.543	1.117	2.429	**67.810**
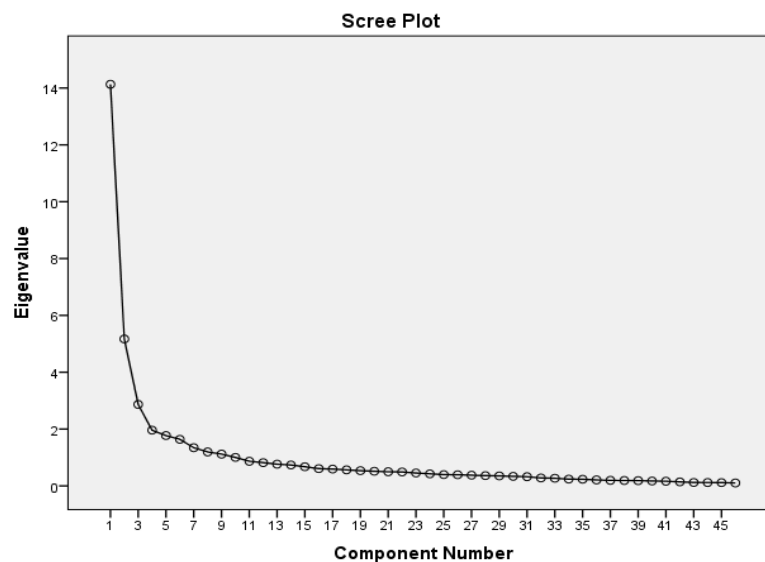
Figure 1. Pebbles to show the supporting factors of elite women athletes

Figure 1. Demonstrates the Scree plot. This figure portraits the results of the previous table indicating a suitable number of factors. Similar or the Eigenvalues, this plot can also be used to determine the number of factors. As the figure indicates, nine factors have Eigenvalues higher than one, which means the 46 items can be reduced into nine factors. Table 3 indicates the complete tool, factor loads, and complementary descriptions.

Table 3. Analysis of the factors in the support for elite female athlete's questionnaire

	Factors and items	Factor load	Eigenvalue	% variance explained	Cumulative % variance
	Factor 1: the need for social support		5.374	11.704	11.704
1	Authorities do not pay enough attention to women's championship sports	0.804			
2	Champion women in various sports are unknown in society.	0.792			
3	There is poor of Women's sports in the national media.	0.746			
4	Few spectators watch and support women's sports.	0.745			
5	Authorities do not have much respect for female athletes.	0.712			
6	Families support female athletes to participate in competitions.	0.618			
7	Elite female athletes are encouraged by their friends to participate in competitions.	0.617			
	Factor 2: The need for financial support		4.899	10.640	22.344
8	I am satisfied with the support of sponsors (if any).	0.810			
9	Proper cash prizes are awarded to athletes in competitions.	0.738			

	Factors and items	Factor load	Eigenvalue	% variance explained	Cumulative % variance
10	Sports federation or board cover all sports travel costs.	0.703			
11	The federation or board has considered pensions and benefits for retirement.	0.644			
12	An appropriate budget is allocated to women's championship sports.	0.638			
13	The officials fulfill the promises and contracts in time.	0.637			
	Factor 3: job requirement		4.589	9.976	32.321
14	I have a suitable job alongside championship sports.	0.599			
15	My second job (if any) is in the field of sports.	0.564			
16	As an elite athlete, I am preferred for job opportunities in the country.	0.792			
17	I have employment concerns alongside playing championship sports.	0.774			
	Factor 4: lifestyle		3.667	7.973	40.293
18	A female athlete's life will only be effective if she provides a happy home for her family along playing sports.	0.694			
19	I am more capable than most in my field of sports.	0.681			
20	I like to spend most of my time playing sports in the gym or sports fields.	0.654			
21	I'd like to be the captain of my team and lead others.	0.597			
22	I am always looking for excitement and I find it in sports.	0.834			
23	I'd like my sports activities to be based on the latest world knowledge.	0.803			
24	I'd like to exercise at places that are equipped with world-class equipment.	0.758			
	Factor 5: the need for medical support			7.692	47.985
25	There is a sports psychologist alongside the athlete and the sports team.	0.758			
26	The team doctor provides the athletes with proper diets.	0.747			
27	There is an experienced physiotherapist alongside the team.	0.741			
28	The team physiotherapist's services are useful when training for competitions.	0.649			
29	There is a sports masseur alongside the team and athletes.	0.623			
	Factor 6: the need for sports support		3.182	6.918	54.903

	Factors and items	Factor load	Eigenvalue	% variance explained	Cumulative % variance
30	I have full-time coaches.	0.540			
31	Elite female athletes trust the expertise of the coaches.	0.520			
32	Athletes are taken to proper international camps to train for the matches.	0.518			
33	Elite female athletes have sports science supports such as psychological, dieting, etc. consultations.	0.515			
34	Interested athletes can take part in training and coaching courses.	0.853			
	Factor 7: The need to support education and training		2.169	4.716	59.619
35	Sports officials work to improve the scientific level of elite female athletes.	0.788			
36	Universities offer scholarships for elite female athletes.	0.783			
37	I am satisfied with the universities' scholarships (if available).	0.675			
38	Training and retraining classes are held regularly by the board of the federation to improve the academic level of the instructors.	0.586			
39	The universities of athletes support them during sports caps and competitions.	0.689			
	Factor 8: The need for government support		1.991	4.323	63.946
40	The government is increasing its support for women's sports.	0.686			
41	Elite female athletes have access to adequate services and facilities.	0.768			
42	Elite female athletes have access to public insurance.	0.718			
43	Athletes have the chance to travel for domestic and international competitions.	0.768			
	Factor 9: infrastructure and facilities		1.126	3.596	67.543
44	Standard and suitable sports facilities in high-potential areas of the country.	0.865			
45	Easy access to training fields and competition fields for elite female athletes	0.844			
46	Elite female athletes have standard training facilities appropriate to their sports field.	0.938			

Confirmatory factor analysis on research variables

The indices used to ensure the fitness of the model include Chi-square to the degree of freedom, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI). Table 4 demonstrates that the model is a good fit, and when is smaller than 3, the closer GFI, AGFI is to one, the better the fitness of the model is. Besides, the RMSEA value was 0.06 for goof models and 0.05-0.1 for models with moderate fitness. All the values above 0.1 indicate the poor fitness of the model.

**Table 4**. The appropriate ranges of some fitness indices in factor analysis

Acceptable fit	Goodness of fit	fit index
$0.05 \leq p \leq 0.1$	$P < 0/05$	P-Value
$2 \leq x^2/df \leq 3$	$0 \leq x^2/df \leq 2$	x^2/df
$0.05 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.1$	$0 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.05$	RMSEA
$0.8 \leq GFI \leq 0.95$	$0.95 \leq GFI \leq 1$	GFI
$0.8 \leq AGFI \leq 0.9$	$0.95 \leq AGFI \leq 1$	AGFI
$0.9 \leq AGFI \leq 0.95$	$0.95 \leq AGFI \leq 1$	NNFI
$0.9 \leq AGFI \leq 0.95$	$0.95 \leq AGFI \leq 1$	CFI
$0.9 \leq AGFI \leq 0.95$	$0.95 \leq AGFI \leq 1$	IFI
$0.9 \leq AGFI \leq 0.95$	$0.95 \leq AGFI \leq 1$	NFI

Table 5. The results of fit index's

Absolute fit indices	Acceptance range	The amount of index obtained
RMSEA	Values less than 0.09 indicate a good fit range of the model and values above 0.1 indicate a fit the model	**0.08**
P-Value	Values above 0.05	**0.0000**
x^2/df	Values less than 3	**2.44**
GFI	Values above 0.8	**0.92**
AGFI	Values above 0.8	**0.94**
Comprativ fit index	Acceptance range	**The amount of index obtained**
CFI	Values of 0.90 or higher	**0.93**
IFI	Values of 0.90 or higher	**0.92**
NFI	Values of 0.90 or higher	**0.95**
NNFI	Values of 0.90 or higher	**0.92**

Figures 1 and Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate the results of second-order factor analysis. Table 5 indicates the value of r, r3, and the fitness indices of the model such as Chi-Square, GFI, RMSEA, etc. As

mentioned earlier, the ratio of Chi-square to the degree of freedom is smaller than 3. Besides, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is less than 0.09. Moreover, Comparative Fitness Index (CFI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), Increasing Fitness Index (IFI), Normed Fitness Index (NFI) and Non-Normed Fitness Index (NNFI) are all close to 0.9 and over, so the model is relative of good fitness and is accepted. Figure 1 demonstrates the second stage of confirmatory factor analysis (standard estimation).
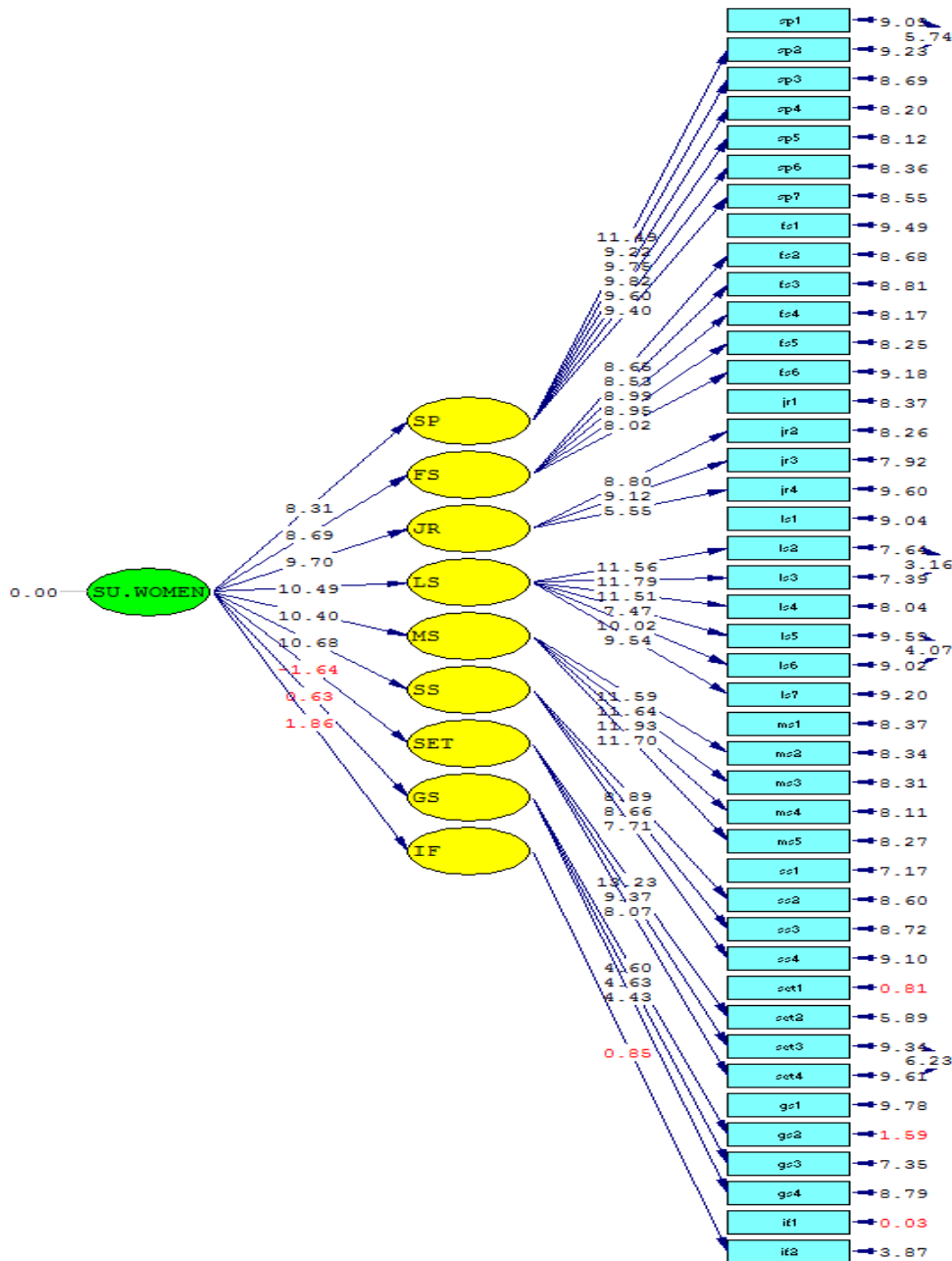
Figure 2. Confirmatory factor analysis of the second stage (t-test)

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted to propose a model for supporting elite female athletes in championship sports. Results obtained from the model of supporting female athletes indicated that the factor of social support left a significant impact on supporting elite female athletes. According to the results, the path coefficient between supporting elite female athletes and the factor of social support was 0.74. Thus, this factor can predict the variable of support for elite female athletes. These results are consistent with previous studies that emphasizing the role of social support such as the support from the community, family, and government in the development of women's sports (Mozafari et al., 2012; Rasekh, Zareian, Ghasemi, & Rezaie, 2019; Rostami & Qasemi, 2016; Sotiriadou, 2009). To analyze the result of this study, it must be noted that there is an excellent capacity in the field of women's sports, and government support can remove some of the obstacles and limitations of women's sports such as presence in sports halls and stadiums, holding organized leagues in various sports fields, etc. Media –particularly the television- can also help the development of women's championship sports and bring pride to the country by reflecting its news and events, and broadcasting women's sports competitions. In this regard, Imani Hersini et al. (2009) investigated the socio-cultural obstacles for women's participation in sports and reported that athlete women had a higher socio-economic base and compared to non-athlete women. Besides, the cultural capital and personal tendency of athlete women was significantly higher than non-athlete women, and they were more supported in the community compared to non-athlete women. Despite some of the cultural limitations for women's sports, the performance of elite female athletes in global arenas reveals the upward trend of their improvement in various fields, and we will witness their greater success in championship sports and obtaining medals and honor for Iran in international arenas provided they receive further social support, the examples of which we have witnessed at Rio Olympics and Paralympics.

The factor of financial support was the next indicator with a significant impact on the support for elite female athletes. Results indicate that the path coefficient between supporting elite female sports and the factor of financial support was 0.93, which indicates that this factor can strongly predict the variable of support for elite female athletes. This result is consistent with the results of previous studies (De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg, & Shibli, 2006; Rasekh et al., 2019; Sotiriadou, 2009). It must be noted that according to the elite female athletes who participated in this study, the financial factor was the key factor in supporting elite female athletes. On the other hand, despite all the potentials that female championship athletes in the country have, they deal with a huge amount of problems, one of the most important of which is not having sponsors. Sports leagues, teams, and athletes need sponsors, while almost no sponsor is willing to support women's sports teams and female athletes which is the main challenge in supporting female athletes. Besides, women's sports are not broadcast in Iran which makes female athletes less seen. Therefore, it is only natural that sponsors are not interested in funding these athletes which have troubled female athletes significantly, to the point that they even have to take part in training in sports caps wearing their personal sports gear. Thus, not having proper training fields and clothes and other financial problems are the challenges that female athletes face due to the lack of financial supporters. On the other hand, no proper budget being allocated to women's sports by the federations has also worsened the situation. In this regard, Rasekh et al. stated that each system needs resources to sustain itself, among which financial, physical, and human resources seem more important than the other sources in the sports system (Rasekh et al., 2019). Besides, the studies of the Cultural Studies Office of the Research Center indicated that budget shortage and improper budget allocation, as well as cultural issues and problems, are among the largest obstacles for the development of women's sports, and women's sports have also been neglected in the vision document and policies of the country such as the fifth and sixth development plans. On the other hand, De Bouscher et al. reported financial support as the main component and the most significant predictor of international success in sports (De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg, Shibli, & Bingham, 2009). Although the brilliant performance of women in international arenas has changed the community's perspective and the support of international

federations and the Ministry of Sports, there is still a long way towards a favorable condition. Thus, allocating the required funds and paying more attention to women's championship sports by the officials is a priority to achieve sustainable development in women's sports and support the elite female athletes.

Lifestyle was another indicator in the present study which had a significant impact on supporting elite female athletes. Considering that the path coefficient between supporting elite female athletes and the factor of job requirement was 0.9, this factor can predict the support that elite female athletes receive. This result is consistent with the results De Boucher et al. (2006), and Rasekh et al. (2019). It must be noted that lifestyle is the style that a person chooses for their life and is influenced by their social space and position (De Bosscher et al., 2006; Rasekh et al., 2019). According to Bourdieu, lifestyle is the asset through which occupants of various positions distinguish themselves from others voluntarily or involuntarily. These assets are the embodiments of individuals' preferences. The aspects of lifestyle include activities such as recreation and leisure time, dressing style, mining one's physical appearance, the use of language, and budgeting. Female athletes can be good role models for the youth in Iran considering the Islamic values of its society. On the contrary, the inappropriate lifestyle of elite athletes can not only harm their lifestyle but also impact other athletes and people in the community. Athletes are the role models for the youth according to the Supreme Leader, so their lifestyle influences the community.

Medial support is another indicator that leaves a significant impact on supporting elite female athletes. Considering that the path coefficient between supporting elite female athletes and the factor of medical support was 0.82, this factor is capable of predicting the variable of support for female athletes. This result is consistent with the results of De Boucher et al. (2006), Sotriado et al. (2009). To analyze this result of the study, it must be noted that the importance of this factor indicates that Sports Medicine Federation is among the important authorities in the fields of sports and medicine, particularly in the field of championship sports in the country and is in charge is beneficial activities in providing services to female athletes. In this regard, some of the good services provide3d by the sports medicine federation include coordination for pre-season examination of athletes and providing health certificates, following up on injured elite female athletes' medical and rehabilitation affairs, providing injured female athletes with medical and rehabilitation services, giving female athletes dieting and medical consultation, and holding training courses for the athletes. Although, the lack of sports psychologists to solve the psychological issues of female athletes can be considered as one of the challenges of this field.

Sports support left a significant impact on supporting elite female athletes. Considering that the path coefficient between supporting elite female athletes and the factor of sports support was 0.82, this factor can predict the variables of supporting elite female athletes. This result is consistent with the results of De Boucher et al. (2006), Sotriado et al. (2009), and Rasekh et al. (2019)(De Bosscher et al., 2006; Rasekh et al., 2019; Sotiriadou, 2009). To analyze this result, it must be mentioned that there are various problems in the field of sports support. For instance, the lack of proper media coverage for women's sports is one of the most important sport's problems. Media coverage of sports events is undoubtedly one of the influential factors on the development of sports, to the extent that it is referred to as the sports industry driver (Elahi, 2008). Considering that commercial TV stations seek to follow what people like, women's sports do not attract as many viewers as men's sports which are covered most often by the media. On the other hand, low media coverage results in smaller numbers of sponsors (Bakhshalipour, Khodaparst, & Rezaei soofi, 2021). One of the most significant factors that bond the economy and sports events are sports sponsors. Thus, planning and holding public relations meetings in sports organizations with the media –particularly the television, considering points for the media, and signing contracts for media coverage of women's championship matches while trying to attract financial supporters and sponsors can have many financial and emotional advantages. On the other hand, positive approaches in sports support and the development of women's sports from the national Olympics committee and the Ministry of Sports, drawing attention to elite female athletes in international events such as the Olympics by having them carry

Iran's flag have recently been adopted. In this regard, the presence of Zahra Nemati, the proud and powerful archer from Iran, in the 31st Olympics as the flag bearer of Iran was a significant event that gave women the role of flag-bearing again after eight years. The female Iranian archer who has won great honors at the Para-Asian Games and the Paralympics took on greater responsibility as the Iranian flag bearer to convey a message to Iranian women. I this regard, the share of the women of our country in these competitions grew by one quota and reached none, which amounted to 18% of total athletes compared to the 41 male athletes that participated in the Olympics. The importance of female athletes' presence in the Olympics caught the eyes of many news reporters and photographers in the opening ceremony and the parade of the Iranian flag bearer and conveyed the message that a Muslim a Hijabi Iranian girl can climb the ladder of success even while sitting on a wheelchair and shoot alongside standing people in the Olympics.

Another factor identified in the study was educational and training support, which has a significant impact on supporting elite female athletes. Considering that the path coefficient between supporting elite female athletes and the factor of education and training support was 0.12, this factor is not significantly capable of predicting the variable of supporting female athletes. This result is inconsistent with the results of Sotriado et al. (2009), and Rasekh et al. (2014). This inconsistency can be justified by considering that other issues such as financial, social, and training state might be more important than this factor. Besides, it must be mentioned that universities have provided conditions and facilities for the education of elite male and female students, through which they can enroll in bachelor's, and sometimes master's, programs without the entrance exam in specific fields such as physical education. For instance, the managers at Payam-e Nour University have provided suitable conditions for elite athletes to enter the university with no entrance exam and announced that male and female Olympic champions and champions of global student Olympiads can continue their studies in this university per regulations. On the other hand, Islamic Azad universities have provided the most support for champion and elite athletes compared to public and Payam-e Nour Universities, to the point that Olympics, world, and Asian games champions have been provided the chance to study for a Ph.D. in some cases. However, there is criticism towards providing champion athletes with such facilities as well. For instance, some of the critics suggest that financial rewards and other incentives are well-deserved by champions, but scientific position and studying at universities while performing like a champion and having to train, go on sports camps, etc. might not contribute much to the athlete's knowledge and academic level.

Government support was another factor that left a significant impact on supporting elite female athletes, given that the path coefficient between supporting female athletes and government support was 0.82, this factor is well capable of predicting the variable of supporting elite female athletes. This result is consistent with the results of De Boucher et al. (2006), Sotriado et al. (2009), and Rasekh et al. (2019)(De Bosscher et al., 2006; Rasekh et al., 2019; Sotiriadou, 2009). To analyze this result, it must be mentioned that there are national and international legitimacies for women's sports, and the presence of women in championship sports can create international legitimacy for our country to some extent. On the other hand, the success of a country's athletes in the Olympics and global competitions generally improves the country's reputation at a global level, which is of great significance in Iran as a developing country. Women can work equal to men to create this reputation. However, women's championship sports in Iran face many challenges despite the attention it is paid. Women the championship sports can convey the Iranian and Islamic culture and traditions. The presence of athletic women in international arenas and championship sports demonstrates the importance of women's role in the community since they are capable of representing their country, and this representation can end the rumors saying that women are abandoned in Iran. Hopefully, paving the way for women's championship sports will make the road less bumpy for other sports and physical activities at other levels too, since sports at lower levels can be a starting point that ends in championship sports. In this regard, the government must make for the preconditions of success for elite female athletes through financial support, facilities, etc. On the other hand, the Deputy Minister of Sports for Women's Affairs has stated that "Regulation is drafted so we can hire elite and champion

athletes in the public organizations". He stated that there are currently 2.7 million organized athletes in the country, 35% of whom are female.

Infrastructure and facilities were the final factors that had a significant impact on supporting elite female athletes. Considering that the path coefficient between supporting elite female athletes and the factor of infrastructure and facilities was 0.14, this factor was capable of predicting the variable of supporting elite female athletes. This result is inconsistent with the results of many studies such as Green (2004), De Boucher et al. (2006), Sotriado et al. (2009), and Mozaffari et al. (2012)(De Bosscher et al., 2006; Green & Houlihan, 2004; Mozafari et al., 2012; Sotiriadou, 2009). The reason for this inconsistency might be due to the different social, cultural, and geographical conditions of women's sports in countries other than Iran. Given that infrastructures play a significant role in the success of athletes in any field and are considered as one of the effective factors in the qualitative improvement of sports performance, the financial priority and economic conditions of the respondents might have led to this factor's lower rank. Therefore, high-quality training facilities and competition spaces can significantly influence the success of athletes and help them prepare for better and more successful performance at the highest levels. Thus, not paying attention to the main infrastructures can be considered an obstacle in women's championship sports. To further analyze this result, it must be mentioned that the lack of facilities and training, as well as improvement classes, are among the problems in this area, and measures must be taken to improve athletes' readiness, training, facilities, and training programs.

Acknowledgments

References

Sotiriadou, K., Shilbury, D., & Quick, S. (2008). The attraction, retention/transition, and nurturing process of sport development: Some Australian evidence. Journal of sport management, 22(3), 247-272..Abdi, H., & Sajadi, S. (2009). Continental Comparison Of The Results And Medials In The Summer Olympic Game (1896-2004).

Alidoust Ghahfarokhi, E., Sajjadi, S. N., Mahmoudi, A., & Sa'atchian, V. (2014). The evaluation of development priorities and strategies of judo championship in Iran. *Journal of Sport Management, 6*(2), 231-246.

Askariyan, F., Jafari, A., & Fakhri, F. (2015). Influential factors on athletic performance in Iran. *Sport Management Studies, 7*(29), 37-50.

Bakhshalipour, V., Khodaparst, S., & Rezaei soofi, M. (2021). The Pathology of Spectators' Behavior in Sports Stadiums. *Journal of New Studies in Sport Management, 2*(3), 235-246. doi:10.22103/jnssm.2021.17287.1023

Ball, K., Salmon, J., Giles-Corti, B., & Crawford, D. (2006). How can socio-economic differences in physical activity among women be explained? A qualitative study. *Women & health, 43*(1), 93-113.

De Bosscher, V., De Knop, P., Van Bottenburg, M., & Shibli, S. (2006). A conceptual framework for analysing sports policy factors leading to international sporting success. *European sport management quarterly, 6*(2), 185-215.

De Bosscher, V., De Knop, P., Van Bottenburg, M., Shibli, S., & Bingham, J. (2009). Explaining international sporting success: An international comparison of elite sport systems and policies in six countries. *Sport management review, 12*(3), 113-136.

Elahi, A. (2008). Obstacles and solutions for the economic development of the Islamic Republic of Iran Football Industry. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Tehran University, Tehran.(Persian).*

Green, M., & Houlihan, B. (2004). Advocacy coalitions and elite sport policy change in Canada and the United Kingdom. *International review for the sociology of sport, 39*(4), 387-403.

Jafari Moghadam, S., Aminai, M., & Marefati, H. (2016). A Comparison of the Acute Effects of Voluntary Contractions at Different Intensities and Times on Explosive Power, Sprint and Agility in Football Players. *Journal of Sport Biosciences, 8*(1), 35-49.

Kline, R. B. (2015). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling*: Guilford publications.

Koivula, N. (1999). Sport Participation: Differences in Motivation and Actual. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 22*(3).

Meenaghan, T. (2001). Understanding sponsorship effects. *Psychology & marketing, 18*(2), 95-122.

Mozafari, S., Elahi, A., Abbasi Sh, A. H., & Rezaei, Z. (2012). Strategies for the development of Iran's championship sports system. *Sports Management Studies Journal, 13*, 33-48.

Oakley, B., & Green, M. (2001). The production of Olympic champions: International perspectives on elite sport development systems. *European Journal for Sports Management*, 83-105.

Rasekh, N., Zareian, H., Ghasemi, H., & Rezaie, Z. (2019). Championship sports for Iranian women: Challenges, opportunities and solutions. *New Approaches in Sport Sciences, 1*(1), 99-116.

Rostami, L., & Qasemi, H. (2016). Prioritization of the Barriers and Advantages of Female Employees' Participation in Daily Sports Activities (Case Study: Tehran Water and Wastewater Organization). *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Sciences, 3*(1), 145-161.

Saeidi, K., Ghadimi, B., Shojaee, M., & Kheibari, K. (2020). Explanation of the Relationship between Respect for Life and the Development of International Peace and Friendship. *IAU International Journal of Social Sciences, 10*(2), 63-68.

Salimi, M. (2020). The Mediating Role of Professional Ethics in the Relationship of the Organizational Culture with Social Responsibility and the Organizational Commitment in Sports Organizations. *Journal of New Studies in Sport Management, 1*(1), 1-9. doi:10.22103/jnssm.2020.2722

Sotiriadou, K. (2009). The Australian sport system and its stakeholders: Development of cooperative relationships. *Sport in society, 12*(7), 842-860.

Zia, M., & Rouhollahi, V. (2020). Relationship between Creativity and Emotional Intelligence in Sport Organizations: A Gender Comparison. *Journal of New Studies in Sport Management, 1*(1), 53-58. doi:10.22103/jnssm.2020.16424.1002