

**Formative Research for Behaviour Change:
Evolution of Women's Rugby in Fiji.**

Report Prepared for Oceania Rugby and Fiji Rugby Union

by

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1. Questionnaire Survey Outline

The major purpose of this component of the study was to provide a quantitative analysis that led to the identification of factors that influence gatekeeper, cusp player, and current player women's rugby-related decision-making. The central goal was to identify factors that influenced: their general perceptions of rugby, intent to play rugby, intent to encourage others women to play rugby.

Research Questions

- 1) What factors influence *current player* decisions to: a) initially choose to play rugby; b) continue to play rugby; and c) choose not to play rugby in the future?
- 2) What factors influence *cusp player* decisions to: a) choose to play rugby; and b) choose not to play rugby in the future?
- 3) What factors influence *Gatekeeper* decisions to: a) encourage women to play rugby; and b) not encourage women to play rugby?

2. Questionnaire Survey Method

Participants

81 gatekeepers (38 male, 42 female), 71 current female players, and 81 female cusp players participated in the assessment. They were compensated for their time with \$10.

Procedure

All participants were approached by data collectors and asked if they were willing to participate in the survey. Once they confirmed that they were willing, they were informed that

their responses would be completely confidential and anonymous. The data collectors provided clear explanations of survey completion (i.e., circling versus filling in the circle for the appropriate responses, etc.).

3. Data Analysis Plans

A) Current Players:

- 1) Sections 1, 2, 3
 - a) Provide frequencies for all scale items
 - i) This will allow the determination of the most cited and most important general perceptions of rugby, motivating factors for playing rugby, and general attitudes/perceptions among current rugby players
 - b) Identify scale items that *significantly* predict the scale items associated with continued rugby play
 - i) This will allow a determination of the scale item variables that increase and/or reduce the probability of playing rugby in the future
- 2) Section 4
 - a) Identify the most frequently chosen *listed* factors that players feel are necessary to continue to play rugby
- 3) Sections 5
 - a) Identify the most frequently chosen *listed* factors that would decrease the probability of playing rugby
- 4) Section 6
 - a) Identify the most frequently chosen *listed* factors that would decrease the probability of playing rugby in the future

B) Cusp Players:

- 5) Sections 1, 2, 3
 - a) Provide frequencies for all scale items
 - i) This will allow the determination of the most cited and most important general perceptions of women's rugby, perceptions of women who play rugby, and general attitudes/perceptions
 - b) Identify scale items that *significantly* predict the scale items associated with the probability that they will begin to play rugby in the future

- i) This will allow a determination of the scale item variables that increase and/or reduce the probability that they will choose to play rugby in the future
- 6) Section 4
 - a) Identify the most frequently chosen *listed* factors that players feel are necessary to for them to choose to play rugby
- 7) Sections 5
 - a) Identify the most frequently chosen *listed* factors that would decrease the probability of playing rugby

Gatekeepers:

- 8) Sections 1, 2, 3
 - a) Provide frequencies for all scale items
 - i) This will allow the determination of the most cited and most important general perceptions of women's rugby, motivating factors for playing women's rugby, and general attitudes/perceptions among gatekeepers
 - ii) This would allow an identification of "triggers" that lead to the support of women playing rugby
 - b) Identify scale items that *significantly* predict the scale items associated with support for women's rugby
 - i) This will allow a determination of the scale item variables that increase and/or reduce the probability that they will support women
- 9) Section 4
 - a) Identify the most frequently chosen *listed* factors that players feel are necessary to support women playing rugby
- 10) Sections 5
 - a) Identify the most frequently chosen *listed* factors that would decrease the support of women's rugby

4. Results

4.1 Current Players

The current player responses are given in Appendix A-P1, A-P2, and A-P3. The top reasons for:

- a) choosing to play rugby was love of rugby; b) continuing to play rugby was family support; and c) choosing not to play rugby in the future was poor competition.

4.2 Cusp Players

The cusp player responses are given in Appendix A-CP1, A-CP2, and A-CP3. The top reasons for: a) choosing to play rugby was good coaches who care; b) choosing not to play rugby was poor facilities.

4.3 Gatekeepers

The gatekeeper responses are given in Appendix A-GK1, A-CP2, and A-CP3. The top reasons for: a) choosing to encourage women to play rugby was the belief that rugby can lead to opportunity and success; b) choosing not to play rugby was poor facilities.

5. Focus Group Outline:

Six focus group discussions were organised in Suva between 16 and 29 June, 2016. Two groups consisting of six to seven persons drawn from each of the three target populations (current players, cusp players and gatekeepers of cusp players) met for 1 – 2 hour discussions moderated by a trained Research Assistant, with the Principal Researcher overseeing the process (The current players' discussions were moderated by the Principal Researcher). A total of 38 persons participated in the discussions. The discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and put to qualitative analysis via thematic coding.

The focus group data suggest that current players are strongly drawn to the physicality of the game and the special sense of solidarity and team bonding that it offers. Due to their great passion, they have developed the sport with little institutional assistance, despite widespread culturally-based disapproval of women playing rugby. Indeed, they have witnessed great disparity in the support that male and female rugby players have received from rugby/government bodies as well as from the public. In order to further develop and promote the sport, current players are in desperate need for greater support, in the form of funding, medical insurance and other institutional assistance and societal/public support.

Cusp players are already physically active, which in itself breaks gender norms in a patriarchal society. Consequently they tend to be more supportive of gender equality; more affirmative of women playing rugby; and less affected by the common perception of rugby as a dangerous sport. The participants recognised a range of positive qualities of rugby, and all indicated possible interest in trying rugby themselves. However, while they themselves do not share the

culturally-based negativity towards women's rugby or the association of the sport with particular sexual orientation, they would be concerned about being subjected to such negativity themselves. They also perceive differential institutional support available to men's and women's rugby.

Considerable differences are found in the views expressed by gatekeepers in family roles and those in professional roles (teachers). Family members tend to be more traditionally oriented. While they recognise the benefits of women's sport participation in general, they may be strongly opposed to women's rugby on the basis of safety concerns and perceived gender non-conforming qualities of the sport. Perceived lack of institutional support for women's rugby further compounds the issue. Teachers may have more mixed and diverse views possibly due to their educational and professional backgrounds. They may support women's rugby and its promotion at the grassroots level, such as in schools. Nevertheless, they are also concerned about the physical nature of rugby and its safety implications, and are keenly aware of the widespread community opposition to the sport. Consequently some may take ambivalent, if not oppositional, stand on women playing rugby.

Urgent efforts must be made to provide more information on women's rugby at the grassroots level to address the societal/community disapproval and the safety concerns. Greater institutional support, in terms of increased funding, technical and logistical assistance, and acknowledgement of women's rugby, is critical in this process. Many participants also called on male rugby players to publicly display support for women's rugby, and for female players and their personal stories to be made more visible in the public eye.

6. Participant Characteristics:

Below are the key characteristics of the participants in each session.

The ethnicity, occupational backgrounds and other details of the current player focus group participants are not indicated here in order to protect their anonymity, in light of the small player population.

Current Players (1)

This group consisted of senior players with leadership roles in women's rugby.

One participant was drawn from each of the six women's rugby clubs affiliated with the Fiji Women's Rugby Union.

Current Players (2)

This group consisted of other active players with varying years of rugby playing (3.5 years to over 10 years): three players from Nadi and three from Suva. All were members of women's rugby clubs affiliated with the Fiji Women's Rugby Union. All belong to age group 20-35.

Cusp Players (1)

Efforts were made to recruit participants from diverse sports, age groups, ethnicities and educational/occupational backgrounds to achieve maximum variation. Below are the key characteristics of the recruited participants.

Sport	Age group	Ethnicity	Notes
1. Hockey	20s	Part-European Indigenous Fijian	National rep
2. Powerlifting	20s	Indo-Fijian	University student
3. Netball	20s	Indigenous Fijian	Police officer
4. Basketball	Teen	Part-Chinese Indigenous Fijian	Secondary school student
5. Hockey	30s	Part-European Indigenous Fijian	
6. Volleyball	30s	Indigenous Fijian	
7. Fitness - gym workout	20s	Indo-Fijian	University student

Cusp Players (2)

Sport	Age group	Ethnicity	Notes
1. Volleyball	20s	Indigenous Fijian	University student
2. Volleyball	20s	Indigenous Fijian- Indian	Employed
3. Hockey	30s	Part-European indigenous	Self-employed, married with children

		Fijian	
4. Volleyball	30s	Indigenous Fijian	Married with children
5. Hockey	20s	Indian- European	
6. Track and Field	Teen	Indigenous Fijian	Secondary school student

Gatekeepers (1)

Efforts were made to recruit participants from diverse sports played by those in their care or close relationship, age groups, and ethnicities to achieve maximum variation.

This group consisted mainly of family members of cusp players.

Gatekeeper role	Age group	Ethnicity	Sex	Sports played by those in their care or in close relationship
1. Mother of 3 daughters	40s	Indigenous Fijian	Female	Various sports, especially softball
2. Mother of 2 daughters	40s	Indigenous Fijian- Indian	Female	Netball and touch rugby
3. Father of a daughter	30s	Indo-Fijian	Male	Soccer
4. Brother of sisters	20s	Indigenous Fijian	Male	Boxing
5. Mother of 3 daughters	40s	Indigenous Fijian	Female	Basketball and touch rugby
6. Mother of daughters	40s	Indigenous Fijian	Female	Basketball

Gatekeeper (2)

Efforts were made to recruit participants from diverse sports played by those in their care or close relationship, age groups, and ethnicities to achieve maximum variation.

This group consisted mostly of teachers and others in professional roles.

Gatekeeper role	Age group	Ethnicity	Sex	Sports played by those in their care or in close relationship
1. School sport development officer (primary & secondary)	20s	Indo-Fijian	Male	Various sports
2. School teacher	30s	Indigenous Fijian	Female	Various sports, but actively involved in netball
3. School teacher	20s	Indigenous Fijian	Female	Various sports, but actively involved in netball
4. School teacher	30s	Indigenous Fijian	Female	Various sports, involved in school's sport development programme
5. School teacher	30s	Indigenous Fijian	Female	Involved in netball and softball
6. Mother of daughters	40s	Indigenous Fijian	Female	Netball
7. Father of a daughter	40s	Indigenous Fijian	Male	Athletics and hockey

7. Results: Salient Themes and Views Emerging from the Data

Given the discussions were completed only recently (29 June), it is not possible to provide detailed analysis of the data. Here, we present selected key findings, with a focus on the salient themes and views emerging from the discussions. There are considerable differences in the findings from the two gatekeeper focus group discussions – one consisting mostly of family members and the other predominantly teachers – and these are noted for their possible policy implications.

In the following sections, quotations from the transcribed data are either indicated with quotation marks or presented in indented paragraphs, depending on the lengths of the quotations.

7.1 Current Players

Overview

Current players are athletes who started and continued to play rugby despite the negativity towards the sport common across the country until recently. They are strongly drawn to rugby's physicality and the sense of solidarity and team bonding that it offers. Due to such passion, they have developed the sport with little institutional assistance. They have indeed witnessed great disparity in the support male and female rugby players have received from rugby/government bodies as well as from the public.

In this context, in order to further develop and promote the sport, current players are in desperate need for greater support, in the form of funding, medical insurance and other institutional assistance and societal/public support. The current player population consists largely of athletes who are so passionate about the sport that they would play it anyway. The development of women's rugby has to date depended on the commitment and sacrifice of such players. However, if women's rugby is to expand its player population, it needs to reach beyond these 'diehard' players who are prepared to play against all odds (Indeed, one participant noted that she would only stop playing when she stopped breathing, regardless of the adversities she might face). Urgent and significant increase in institutional support is essential to reward the current players for their contribution to the development of the sport to date, to motivate these players to continue to contribute in mentoring capacities, and to recruit new players from wider pools of physically active girls and young women.

Introduction to the game

All participants were introduced to rugby through friends or family members, except one who joined her club after responding to a recruitment poster. Most participants had played other sports prior to being introduced to rugby. **This suggests the importance of friends and family as a key medium of introduction to rugby** (as well as other sports, as shown in the cusp player discussions).

Attractions of Rugby

In regards to what they value most about rugby, three key attractions emerged from their discussions: 1) physicality of the game; 2) solidarity and team bonding unique to rugby; and 3) stress relief

Physicality

Many are attracted to the physicality of the game, which they find empowering and exhilarating. This is reflected in their responses to the question 'What is the one word that describes rugby to

you?': Guts, Passion, Strength, Challenging, Exhilarating, Tough, Rough. One participant elaborated on this:

I like the contact and even if I got hurt how many times and my family and friends told me, "Why don't you quit?" , I'd play. I'll go and play again. Just getting on to the field, holding the ball and running – There's a different type of feeling when you're in that ground playing with your friends and you playing for each other. It's just confidence.'

Solidarity and team bonding

As the above quote suggests, many felt that the physical nature of the game also enhances special bonding among players. There appears to be a connection between 'toughness' of the game and bonding with other players: 'I like the toughness that's in it, the contact and the team spirit that's in it for the 80 minutes you play.' All participants referred to solidarity and team bonding, which they believed was unique to rugby and stronger than in other sports:

The team work, being able to be there with your girls. You get to travel together. You know you come and see each other every day but I love that. You know the team bond that you have, the training that you get to do. For instance, I was really involved in athletics. That's just an individual thing. Being part of rugby, you are part of a bigger team. You know I love that connection you have with everybody else, and the training programmes you do is very different from other training programmes.

Stress relief

For some, physicality is linked to stress relief: 'I like hitting people, kicking all my stress away.' Stress could be work-related, but in some cases, it is related to difficulties in family life (such as abuse): 'I use to get a lot of beating from my dad because I was one hell of a cheeky kid and rugby was one of the games that always keep me happy. Rugby was one game that always took away all the bad things in my life.'

Negative Aspects of Rugby

Despite their passion for the sport, the participants found four inter-related aspects of rugby discouraging: 1) gender inequality at institutional level; 2) disapproval and ridicule from men; 3) wider societal/community disapproval; and 4) stigma related to sexual orientation.

Gender inequality at institutional level

All participants felt that rugby-related and government bodies provided differential financial and other support to women's and men's rugby:

There are people out there who are rallying for us, who are trying to take us to these places, but when it comes to decision makers, it's like there is a glass ceiling there. We can only go so far until we can break through. So one of the ways we have to do it is by doing it ourselves until they realise that they have to take us seriously. Everyone should be treated the same.

When you are in the national team where you should be up there with men because both teams are going to the Olympics, the funds that should be going towards women's rugby to develop the team is going elsewhere. You know what I mean, when it should be equal.

Disapproval and ridicule from men

The participants from Nadi noted that they did not experience negativity or discouragement from men, and that, in fact, they regularly received support and assistance from their male counterparts. However, those from Suva gave detailed examples to illustrate continuing open disapproval and ridicule they experienced from men, sometimes including male rugby players:

We use to train at [a sport ground]. When we used to train there, we shared the ground with men. One day they decided to take the whole ground without telling us, they just bumped into us and said, 'Ok girls stay on the side while we are training.' It was a few weeks ago and I asked the girls, 'Why did you switch grounds? That was a nice ground'. And they told me the story. The guys started swearing at them. 'Fxxx off get out of there, you girls are not playing here.' They had to move back and when they moved back, they use the front side [of the ground] and when they saw the girls move to the back they said, 'You girls do not belong here, you girls fxxx off from here.' They still have that mentality. It's quite hard. I think for me, the negative side is the way their mentality is, the way Fijian men think.

One time I was training with the Fijiana team and this group of guys were on the carrier and they were full shouting, full teasing. I couldn't hear it but saw the coach shouting back at them. Even the National side [receives such reaction]. We represented their country and even still.

Wider societal/community disapproval

All participants agreed that **there was still widespread societal/community negativity towards women playing rugby**. Some spoke of the ridicule, swearing and jeering that they had received during games from spectators. Others described general disapproval they experienced from members of the public:

You walk passing and people are just passing comments: 'You are a waste of money, why are you playing that sport?' It kind of hurts, because you know, this is your God-given talent and if you don't use it, what's the use of God giving it to you?

The participants discussed the extremely discouraging effects of such public reactions.

Stigma related to sexual orientation

Rugby, as in many other societies, is associated with lesbianism in Fiji and often regarded with suspicion and rejection by community members. The participants indicated this as an extremely discouraging factor.

If you play rugby people put in into this stereotypical box you know. It's like you must be like this, you must have this sexual preference because you are a rugby player. You know who cares who you are, you are an individual you know like you can be a girl you can play rugby, you can have any sexual preference, what difference does it make? You know what I mean. We should be respected as sports women.

Family Support for Playing Rugby

There is considerable variation in the degrees of support and encouragement that the participants receive from their families. Some come from sport-oriented families who support their rugby playing, while others do not receive active support or have even experienced punishment for playing rugby. Two noted witnessing positive change in their families' attitudes since they had joined the national team.

This suggests that **family and community support cannot be assumed and that in fact strategic efforts need to be made to address grassroots/parental perceptions of women's rugby** (which is also confirmed by the results of the gatekeeper focus group discussions). **The Fijiana's status to represent Fiji in a national sport may be tapped into as a positive influencing factor** (which is supported by the results of the other focus group discussions).

Public Knowledge of Women's Rugby

The participants felt that the public does not have sufficient knowledge of women's rugby. In their view, members of the public receive limited information from newspapers and TV. The participants noted with concern markedly differential media coverage of men's and women's rugby.

Safety

The participants acknowledged the physical risks of playing rugby as a contact sport: 'You can play golf and get injured but there is greater risk on a rugby field, someone dumps you on the head, you know.'

However, they agreed that with appropriate training, basic skills acquisition, and fitness, these risks can be managed.

A notable safety-related issue that the participants extensively discussed is **medical insurance**. They expressed concern over the lack of medical insurance cover for players. It was pointed out that even the national team members are only covered for injury while on overseas tours and that so provision is made for other players.

Assistance Needed to Continue to Play

The participants felt that women's rugby received very little institutional assistance/support that they needed 'a little bit of everything' to continue to play to the best of their ability. The areas they listed for assistance included: 1) medical insurance; 2) greater public support (i.e., addressing negativity and stigma); 3) greater support from the FRU Board; 4) more game time (i.e., more regular and consistent game schedules); 5) access to appropriate coaching; and 6) availability of appropriate clothing and equipment. In desperate need for any type of support, the participants noted that they would be grateful even for a small increase in the assistance provided: 'You know they don't have to give us that much; they can give us a little bit.'

Strategies for Women's Rugby Promotion

The participants discussed what they believed to be effective strategies for women's rugby promotion. Two major strategies emerged from this discussion: 1) greater media exposure of women's rugby; and 2) introducing women's rugby at the grassroots.

Greater media exposure

Greater media exposure would involve more than greater news coverage of women's rugby. This would involve a putting-a face-to-the-sport type media exposure, to present personal stories behind individual players:

Individual story from each player. Every player has a story, how far they have come, what they have gone through. Some stories are very touching, some encouraging, some are uplifting. Before opening someone's feeling [to women's rugby], someone has to see the face [behind the sport]. Especially the national ones [i.e. national team members], I think, could open doors to people's hearts. It could be eye-opening to some people, the villagers.

Introducing women's rugby at the grassroots

The participants felt that conducting rugby clinics in communities and at schools would enable members of the public and students to have first-hand experience of women's rugby.

Current Players' Life Goals

Some participants discussed rugby-related goals such as national team selection, but others had long-term goals such as resuming education and starting a business:

- Fulfil my purpose: 'Whatever I was bought here for, to fulfil my purpose and to follow my passion which is rugby.'
- Be selected into the Fijiana: 'And beyond that is bring back what I've learned to the girls and to the club.'
- Become a better role model especially to young players
- Be a better person to be able to contribute in whatever manner that's coming my way
- Go back to school
- Start a business

Given that many of the goals listed by the participants are directly related to rugby, **efforts may be made to assist current players, who tend to be passionately committed to the sport, in thinking beyond their playing career and making long-term life plans.**

General Information Source

Main information sources listed by the current players are:

- Internet (Facebook, YouTube)
- Newspapers (the Fiji Times)
- TV
- Friends

7.2 Cusp Players

Overview

Cusp players are already physically active, which in itself breaks gender norms in a patriarchal society. Consequently they tend to be more supportive of gender equality; more affirmative of the idea of women playing rugby; and less affected by the common perception of rugby as a dangerous sport. The participants recognise a range of benefits of rugby (its Olympic sport status among them), and all indicated possible interest in trying rugby themselves.

However, while they themselves do not share the culturally-based negativity towards women's rugby or the association of the sport with lesbianism, they would be concerned about being subjected to such negativity themselves. They also perceived differential institutional support available to men's and women's rugby.

As noted earlier, if women's rugby is to reach these women for recruitment, these concerns (i.e., lack of institutional and societal support) must be urgently addressed.

What Sums Up Rugby

The 'one word to describe rugby' question drew diverse response from the participants. **The majority of their responses represent positive qualities** that they admire about rugby:

- Intelligence: 'It's a smart sport. You have to know the position you play and the techniques.'
- Self-confidence: 'You have to be confident enough to play the game.'
- Strength: 'The amount of strength that a person has to take those tackles when you see those tackles. I'm like, "Oh my God how strong can a person be!"'
- Cheering: 'When I hear the word rugby I feel like cheering.'
- Fireworks: 'As soon as they [Fiji's national teams] win, there are fireworks. Everyone in my neighbourhood cheering, and it's such a beautiful feeling, one sport can unite the entire nation like that. That moment when everyone is sitting in front of their TV sets watching and cheering on. So I love that.'

Two associated rugby with **physicality**:

- Rough
- Thighs: 'A lot of muscles.'

Two others associated rugby with **gender and sexuality**:

- 'Rugby boys'
- Lesbianism: 'Lesbian. If I'm being honest, when you say rugby my automatic reaction is lesbian.'

This appears to summarise cusp players' views on women's rugby: they have predominantly affirmative views with acknowledgement of many positive qualities of the sport – but with some reservation concerning its definition as a men's sport and association with particular sexuality.

Identifying Gatekeepers

The participants identified two types of gatekeepers who exercise influence over their decision making: 1) **parents and other family members (such as siblings)** and 2) **friends**. One reflected on the ways in which the most significant gatekeepers change through a young person's life: 'Gatekeepers change as you grow up – starting with parents, changing to peers, and then to self-decisions.'

The importance of parents and friends resurfaced in their discussions of the ways in which they were introduced to their current sport (see below).

Cusp Players' Life Goals

The participants were asked to list what they considered to be their most important life goals. Their responses reflect a strong emphasis on **education** and **employment**. There is also a notable

emphasis on **independence and autonomy** ('To become self-sufficient, never have to turn around and meet someone to have to do something for me'). Some discussed the importance of **motherhood** ('Being a good mother'). Only one person discussed a sport-specific goal as her most important life goal (being selected into the national team of her sport), which forms a contrast to the predominantly rugby-linked goals of the current players.

Introduction to Their Sport

The participants were asked to explain how they had been initially introduced to their sports. They identified three main channels: 1) friends; 2) family members; and 3) schools. As one participant summarised: 'It [a sport] either comes through your family, comes through your school or comes through your friends because for us being in the Pacific Islands, that's generally the three groups that we have and they are constant in our lives.'

Friends

Some participants had not initially been interested in their sport but started playing because their friends encouraged it ('following friends around and hitting the ball') and it became part of their socialisation activity (i.e. 'hanging out' together through the sport).

Family

Some participants took up the sport because it was their 'family tradition': 'I had no choice. I was 6 years old. "Happy birthday, here is your hockey stick. You are going to play." I was pretty much expected to play. I didn't even like it initially.' It was in the family.'

Schools

In Fiji, schools provide girls with one of the limited opportunities for regular sport participation. Consequently, the question of which sports get offered in schools has a significant impact on girls' choice of sport. Netballers often start in this manner: 'Two sports were introduced at my school, rugby for boys and netball for girls.'

Attractions of Their Sport

The participants were asked to list what they valued most about their sport. They listed a range of health and personal benefits and positive social qualities of their sport:

- Improved concentration during the day
- Sense of achievement
- Adrenalin rush
- Keeping a family tradition going

- Team work
- Bond with teammates
- Fitness

Negative Aspects of Their Sport

The participants were asked to list what they considered to be negative aspects of their sport. The only such aspects the participants highlighted are poor administration and the male-dominated nature of their game (in the case of hockey). Hockey players appear to experience disapproval similar to (but perhaps not greater than) what rugby players face:

Hockey is a ‘man’s game’. It is hard to even get a team together because unfortunately we are bound by this ‘female thing’ and expected to have a husband and children, and prevented from playing the sport we love. This is what I’m upset about. That we don’t have enough women to play it.

Gatekeeper Support for Their Sport

All but two participants (who described their Indo-Fijian family values as traditional) received strong encouragement and support from their families for playing their sport. For instance, in contrast to many women’s rugby players, one hockey player discussed her partner’s unwavering support and noted that seeing her partner ‘going crazy’ cheering her is ‘the kind of thing that motivates you to do better.’

Interestingly, one participant noted that while her mother supported her sport and her stepfather also always cheered her loudly, her mother had said to her: ‘Don’t play rugby, otherwise you’ll become a lesbian’. This suggests that, **even among the more supportive gatekeepers, negativity towards rugby due to its association with particular sexual orientation may pose a particular challenge.**

As for the two Indo-Fijian women, although their families were initially not supportive, it was the health benefits of sport that eventually persuaded them to accept their sport:

In my family there were a lot of problems, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes. About 2 years ago my aunt was taken to India for a kidney transplant, and that’s when my dad kind of stopped discouraging me. He was like, ‘It’s fine if you watch what you eat, go to the gym, spend all your money in protein shakes.’

Health benefits may be a positive influencing factor for more traditionally-oriented parents.

This corresponds to the results of the gatekeeper focus group discussions.

Knowledge of Women's Rugby

All participants agreed that there was not enough information on women's rugby and noted the contrast with the extensive coverage of men's rugby: 'You will see men's rugby being played over and over. We play it over and over, and it goes over for about a week at least.' 'When anyone Fiji says 7s, your automatic reaction is Ben Ryan, the men's team. The women's team is generally over shadowed. The women's team, they have to bang, scream, kick and shout just to get any kind of reaction.'

The limited information they have is obtained from newspapers, TV and friends (Some have rugby-playing friends).

Normative Position on Women's Rugby

The participants were requested to discuss if they believed women should be encouraged to play rugby.

Sport in general is historically a male preserve, and even today, in a patriarchal society, physically active women break gender norms by the fact of participating in sports. This appears to apply to the focus group participants. They firmly supported the idea that women should be encouraged to play rugby on the grounds of equal rights: 'It shouldn't be a question of you should play. Women should already be there [playing rugby].' 'Not just rugby, any sport.'

Perceived Benefits of Rugby

The participants believed that rugby could offer benefits such as:

- Rugby scholarships
- International exposure
- High self-esteem
- Fitness
- Travel, and notably

They also identified rugby-specific benefits. First, rugby offers an opportunity to represent the country in what is widely believed to be a national sport:

Friends of a successful rugby player's mother would say 'Wow, so-and-so's daughter is the captain of the Fiji Rugby team!' Not Fiji *women's* rugby team.

Second, the Fijiana's qualification for the Rio Olympics was particularly attractive to some participants:

Representing your country in the Olympics is big – paramount.

It [rugby]'s taking them to Rio. It's an opportunity. Rather than playing netball, you could be a medal hopeful in rugby. Why not?

Cusp players, especially those who play at club levels, tend to be ambitious and achievement-oriented. **Rugby's status as an Olympic sport may be an effective influencing factor for cusp players.**

Negative Aspects of Rugby

The participants listed 3 main aspects of women's rugby that they considered to be negative: 1) cost; 2) injury; and 3) societal/community negativity and stigma related to sexual orientation. Among these, 2) and especially 3) concerned the participants.

Cost

Being athletes themselves, they are familiar with the financial costs of playing a sport.

Injury

This is discussed in the 'Safety' section.

Societal/community negativity and stigma related to sexual orientation

While the participants were clearly supportive of women's rugby themselves, they were keenly aware of the societal/community negativity and the stigma attached to rugby:

The truth is, from the iTaukei [i.e. indigenous Fijian] perspective, in every community, women would not be encouraged to play rugby. When a girl had a concussion playing rugby, she was told, 'Why the hell were you playing rugby?'

There's a girl I know, she's in primary school. I think she is a 10 year-old girl playing rugby. Watching her playing with boys is really good. I mean really good. And the other day, one of the parents was saying, 'What's that boy's name?' The mother was saying, 'That's a girl.' And her reaction was like, 'Really!' That kind of reaction is already there. She can't be a girl, she's playing too good.

The stigma and the labelling that goes with it. I mean yes, there's lesbians in sports. There's lesbians in every sport. The problem is that the stigma would be the biggest negative. 'Why do you want to be like a boy? Why do you want to play rugby? Rugby is for boys not for girls. Play netball.' I mean there's no offence, but that's what most of them say most of the time. That's for boys, that's a rough sport. Our culture that we grow up in in Fiji. We are not very open minded people. Well for the traditional people, it would be a big *tabu* [taboo] for girls to play rugby.

Personal Interest in Rugby

All participants stated they would try rugby. Only one participant was not entirely sure due to possible opposition from her family. As noted above, physically active women break gender norms by the fact of participating in sports. It appears that playing rugby, despite the socio-cultural barrier, is not a big leap for them. A powerlifter commented:

All at the end of the day, weights and stuff are associated with something that guys would do, much like rugby. Something guys are doing more than girls. So, like just to prove them wrong, yes, I would do it.

Gatekeeper Support for Playing Rugby

Cusp players often come from family backgrounds where they already receive support and encouragement for sport. Consequently, to some of them, rugby would not make a difference:

For me, because there's a lot of boys at home. I mean families, in-laws and cousins who always push us girls, my sisters and my cousin sisters to play, try to play rugby with the boys. Too bad the school doesn't like organise this kind of stuff. So we just do it at home.

I think some of us are really lucky having men folk who are very open minded and that sort of thing and it looks like there are people who are not so fortunate in terms of especially in sports.

However, others feel that the hurdle would be higher for rugby. Their families would discourage them for the reasons of safety concerns as well as the societal disapproval and stigma:

My husband would probably say 'Don't play rugby, we still need to have children.' Probably he is thinking that from playing rugby I might get hit badly and that could cause some problems. He just knows that men play rugby. He thinks I am dainty; because I am his woman he has to protect me.

One participant indeed once wanted to play rugby:

I asked my husband if he could buy me a boot so I could play next year. The first thing he said to me was 'No, don't play rugby, you might become lesbian' and I was like, 'Excuse me, I am married and I have 2 kids. Why would I become lesbian?'

Consistent with the earlier findings, this indicates that even among the more supportive gatekeepers, rugby may be met with resistance and discouragement due to safety concerns and the societal disapproval/stigma.

Many participants believed that their friends would be suspicious of them playing rugby and might make comments such as: ‘What, is she playing rugby? She must be...’, ‘Don’t turn into a lesbian.’ But the discouragement would not be so great as to end their friendships. **In light of the significance of friends as gatekeepers, peer approval may be as important as family approval for some cups players to take up rugby.**

Safety

While safety is a major issue for their gatekeepers, it is not for the cusp player participants. Since they already play sport, they have a more balanced, informed view:

Every sport has its dangers. I don’t think that there is a sport that can’t get dangerous. Even squash has dangers. Once you know the game as in know the game properly, you are generally safe. Once you know a sport inside and out you generally safe.

Support/Assistance Needed for Playing Rugby

The participants were requested to discuss what types of support or assistance they would require to start playing rugby. They wanted what they considered to be negative aspects of rugby (discussed above) addressed: 1) financial support: ‘When you first start minority sports like rugby or hockey, everything is coming out of your pocket’; and 2) social support: ‘If you are strolling down the street and you are wearing a shirt that says “I love rugby” and someone saying “Lesbo!”, it is not a very uplifting thing.’

Identifying Triggers for Playing Rugby

The participants listed a range of initiatives and actions that would motivate them and other cusp players to consider playing rugby: 1) greater media exposure; 2) female rugby players introducing the game themselves; 3) male rugby players being enlisted to promote women’s rugby.

Greater media exposure

The participants wanted greater media coverage and information on ‘how much sacrifice women rugby players have made to get where they are.’

Female players introducing the game themselves

Some participants wanted to be introduced to the game by female rather than male rugby players and coaches:

If you've got this bunch of women come in and say: 'Ok, I am a 7s player, I play 7s. Do you want me to teach you?' Because obviously women play different from the way men play, they [female players] might show you something. I think having the women come and give coaching would be a big boost for women.

Enlisting male players to promote women's rugby

Given the overwhelming popularity of men's rugby in Fiji, some participants wanted to see well-known male rugby figures, such as Ben Ryan and national squad members, visibly and publicly supporting women's rugby, which they believed would make a significant impact on not only cusp players' but also the general public's views on women's rugby:

People like Kolinisau, Ben Ryan, if they could take a walk to any school across Fiji – No matter how remote, if they could walk in and said 'We are here to promote women's rugby.' I believe we get the same reaction when you see any of them on TV. It's immediate attention drawn from everyone, from 2-year-olds to grandmothers. So, if by chance Ben Ryan strolled into a school and said 'I am here for a 1-hour clinic for girls' rugby.' Would you go? Who would not go? I would definitely. We still want the women [rugby players to participate in promotion]. If he could go in and say 'Hey, I've got Kolinisau but look, these are women who play rugby and they are here with us.'

General Information Source

Main general information sources listed by the cusp players are:

- School
- Facebook, Twitter
- Fiji Times
- Radio

Most emphasised the Internet (especially Facebook) as a key source of information. Two, for instance, said that they would only buy newspapers when they saw interesting headlines and wanted to know more about them.

7.3 Gatekeepers

Overview

Considerable differences are found in the views expressed by the two focus groups, one consisting mostly family members and the other school teachers. [In the following sections, the participants in the former group are sometimes referred to as 'the family members' and the latter 'the teachers' for convenience, although, as shown at the outset of this report, not all participants in either group are family members or teachers.]

On the whole, gatekeepers in family-member roles appear to be more traditionally oriented. While they recognise the benefits of women's sport participation in general, they are also apprehensive about the physicality of some sports and their gender non-conforming qualities. These concerns come to the fore when it comes to women's rugby. The family members were almost overwhelmingly opposed to it. Perceived lack of institutional support for women's rugby further compounds the issue.

Gatekeepers in professional roles, especially teachers, may present more mixed and diverse views possibly due to their educational and professional backgrounds. Many support women's rugby and are eager to see greater promotion of the game at the grassroots level. However, they are also concerned about the physical nature of rugby and its safety implications, and keenly aware of the widespread community opposition to the sport. Consequently some may take ambivalent, if not oppositional, stand on women playing rugby.

Urgent efforts must be made to address the absence of information on women's rugby at the grassroots level. Convincing sceptical gatekeepers would also require concerted effort to address the societal/community disapproval and stigma as well as assurance of insufficient institutional support, assurance that women's rugby is valued by rugby bodies as much as men's.

What Sums Up Rugby

The 'one word to describe rugby' question drew considerably different responses from the family member focus group and the teacher focus group. The family members associated rugby with aggressive, physical qualities:

- Dangerous
- Rough
- Aggressive
- Dangerous
- Fitness

The teachers, on the other hand, had more mixed perceptions:

- Men's game
- Masculinity
- Physical
- Skills
- Talent

Life Goals for Young Women

The participants were requested to discuss what they considered to be the most important life goals that young women of Fiji should aspire for. Both groups emphasised **education**,

employment and **self-realisation**. Notably, however, some teachers linked education with women's **independence**: 'The mind-sets of young women have to change. They have to educate themselves and pursue them not just to think in that manner that they are just house wives.'

Important Values for Young Women

The participants were requested to discuss what they considered to be the most important values that young women of Fiji should learn. The **family members listed traditional values**, such as respect and 'To know their culture [i.e. tradition] and to know their God Almighty'.

The **teachers**, except for one who listed motherhood as the most important value, **prioritised values relating to women's empowerment**, such as: confidence, self-worth, and independence. One made a point of challenging traditional gender values:

In our culture we are taught values in our young age we have different ways of showing respect. We had parents hammering 'Girls should be like this', 'You should be dressed like this', 'This is your hair cut.' I mean I grew up in that background. My dad would tell me 'When you walk down the street you look down. Never mind someone is greeting you, you look down. No women are supposed to show their face.' While I was growing up I told myself when I'd have children I would not enforce such harsh values to my children. I mean I was told to wear skirts all the time. Thank God I met a different man and married him.

Normative Position on Young Women Playing Sport

The participants were requested to discuss if they believed women should be encouraged to play rugby.

All participants, both teaches and family members, were supportive of women's sport participation.

Some based their position on their belief in gender equality: 'Being a female it shouldn't restrict you from doing anything that you play.' Others approved of the benefits of sport such as:

- Discipline
- Fitness
- Scholarship opportunities
- Travel
- Self confidence
- Identity
- Broadening one's thinking and horizon
- Possibility to represent the country

Representing the country at international levels appears to be important to the participants from all focus groups ('Women should be given the chance to participate in any kind of sports that they want because some of them have the skills that can take the name of the country up to that level').

At the same time, the participants also expressed concern over what they considered to be negative aspects of women's sport participation. **Both the teachers and the family members were concerned about sports that are 'too physical' and their adverse health effects on women.**

The family members were also concerned about:

- Safety issues
- Effects of sport on feminine physique
- Effects on study and academic performance

Knowledge of Women's Rugby

The participants had limited knowledge of women's rugby, except two who were familiar with its history: 'I just know that the Fijiana team was qualified for the Olympic games.'

The teachers in particular expressed dissatisfaction with the limited media coverage of women's rugby in comparison to men's rugby. One summarised the disparity:

There's more publicity on men's rugby than there is on women's. Like if we lose there is always everyone saying this and everyone saying that. Everyone's got an opinion and everyone writes to the paper, letters to the editor. But when women win or lose there's not much coming from the public or the media. It's just that one line of paragraph or something.

The main sources of information on women's rugby for the family members were: 1) radio, 2) newspapers and 3) personal knowledge. The teachers listed: 1) newspapers, 2) TV, 3) magazines, 4) friends/relatives, and 5) radio. **No one discussed the internet other than one person** who once watched a YouTube video of women's rugby. This is a contrast to cusp layers (young women) to whom the internet was very important.

Normative Position on Women Playing Rugby

The participants were requested to discuss if they believed women should be encouraged to play rugby. In the family member group, only one person was supportive, with some caution:

My culture does not encourage women to play rugby. But personally, if there was someone in my family who wanted to play, I would share with them the concerns regarding the sport. I will make sure that she is aware of the risks that she's taking. If she

really has the interest I would take her to the playing field, take her to a proper trainer to train. I would do all those things.

Other participants in the family group were all opposed to women playing rugby for three main reasons relating to: 1) safety concerns and lack of medical insurance: ‘If there’s a big mishap on the ground, there’s a spinal injury, that woman is going to live that life in hell for the rest of her life. Nobody’s going to cover up for her’; 2) lack of institutional support that women’s rugby receives in Fiji; and 3) gender norms: ‘Ever since we’ve been growing up only men has been playing rugby.’ ‘It is a *tabu* [taboo]’.

By contrast, all participants in the teacher group agreed that women should be supported to play rugby for a range of benefits that they believed rugby offered:

- Exposure and confidence
- Employment opportunity: ‘If men can be a professional player, women can be a professional player too.’
- ‘Being famous’
- Exposure: ‘Now that they are playing there probably after this Rio game they will get noticed from other clubs in overseas.’
- Character building
- Education via rugby scholarships
- Discipline
- Physical education
- Career paths for coaching and sport management

However, the **teachers also acknowledge what they believed were negative aspects** of rugby for women:

- Negative effects on femininity: ‘it’s quite hard for them to retain their femininity.’
- Injury and medical insurance

These results suggest that families may be more traditionally-oriented and opposed to women playing rugby, while teachers, due to their educational backgrounds and professional exposure, are more supportive, although they are also concerned about physical risks and gender non-conforming qualities of the sport. One teacher aptly summarised the positive, negative and ambivalent views:

Women’s rights have to be considered you know, but in our culture there’s this perception where Fijian women do not play [rugby], it’s a men’s sport. We should be

sitting there waving the flag or something. It does take away the passion of someone who wants to play but then considering the odds, there are no finances. The publicity may be big, but they are women and some of them have a child or two. What happens to those children if you sustain an injury? My opinion, women in Fiji should not play unless they are receiving million dollars a game.

Support for Young Women in Their Care or Close Relationship to Play Rugby

The participants were requested to discuss if they would support their daughter, sister, student, etc. if they wanted to play rugby. Similar to the above results, **no one in the family group expressed active support**. It should be noted, however, that the opposition derives not only from rugby's perceived safety issues or gender non-conforming qualities but also from the perceived lack of institutional support for women's rugby in Fiji:

My friends tell me about the Unions they have in New Zealand. Like Fiji's years away from been this close to New Zealand and Australia. I like Fiji to be up to that standard for safety standards before letting my sisters go through. They have to be aware of the risks. Like taking up a contract sport we have to be willing to put your body on the line all the time. I wouldn't want them to get hurt.

The **teachers were not opposed, but had ambivalent views**, conflicted between young women's right to play a sport of their choice and what they considered to be the excessive physicality of rugby and its safety implications.

Community/Family Support for Women Playing Rugby

The participants were requested to discuss if wider communities and families would support their daughter, sister, student, etc. if they wanted to play rugby. **All participants in the family group agreed that there would be strong community opposition**. One mother summarised such opposition based on gender norms, safety concerns, and the sexuality stigma:

When he [her husband] talks about women's rugby first thing that comes out of his mouth is, truth be told, "That's a bunch of lesbians." The question of sexuality comes into play. Because the Fijian society is patriarchal. We are very patriarchal society, right. Automatically the thought of a woman playing that game will suddenly shift her interest from being a woman to being a man. That's the reality on the ground level for the majority. The native family, they think of it like that. "Don't you play, besides being dangerous that's a men's game. This one here is going to become like a lesbian." There's no encouragement from society.

The teachers shared the same view. They envisage much community opposition, especially from: 1) fathers and other relatives ('Because the father of course will be the first one who doesn't want to see the daughter getting hurt'); 2) villages; and 3) churches. The opposition may not necessarily be verbal but in the form of silent disapproval.

Safety

All participants in the **family group emphatically noted that rugby is dangerous.** They discussed injuries including spinal injuries which could damage a person's life forever.

While some teachers shared the family group's view, others expressed more balanced views: 'All sports are unsafe.' 'Main thing is fitness and training.'

Identifying Triggers for Supporting Women's Rugby

Consistent with their safety concerns, the family members wanted to see sufficient medical support and appropriate training from early age. They also wanted assurance of institutional support:

FRU as a whole organisation should uplift the sport. The only way to get our mothers to see that what they [rugby-playing women] are doing is right is these mothers to see that their children have good coaching, they have the facilities to give them skills and stuff. Right now when you walk down towards Vatuwaqa you'll see a women's team training at the ground there. They don't get the facility like the men's team. Most of the time the Fijiana team is either at Marist [sport ground] or down there. You can't expect anyone to see the sport up and coming when they are not getting the same treatment. I mean you can't expect sport to thrive if they are just walking in old canvas on a dusty ground.

Similar to the current players and the cusp players, some family members believed that enlisting male players in promoting women's rugby was important in changing especially men's views of the sport:

It goes back how FRU approaches those at the grassroots. When we were in primary school FRU would bring coaches and famous rugby players. Serevi came to Marist Primary one time to talk to us. I mean if we have that for our young girls as well. The rugby world isn't just for us males. FRU can start those awareness programmes, let our kids know those who are inspired to rugby players can be rugby players.

It should be noted that **one mother emphatically stated 'I won't allow my daughter to play' regardless of improvements** or awareness programmes.

The teachers also favoured the idea of enlisting male players in women's rugby promotion ('If our sevens male players can stand beside our women'), for instance, in school visits and on social media. They believed this would be an effective promotion strategy given the special status accorded to rugby in Fiji: 'It will work. In Fiji, it will'.

Some also supported female players participating in community outreach activities:

They should visit schools and encourage our young girls to follow their footsteps, or show the benefits that they have now so that the young girls, if they have a dream of playing rugby, they can follow their footsteps.

Finally, the teachers also felt that rugby should be introduced to girls at early age, at the grassroots level:

Going through schools, more games, more club games, rugby clinics. We have Kaji Rugby for primary school boys. Maybe we could have something like that for the primary school girls. **Kaji Girls**.

General Information Source

The participants from both focus groups listed the following as their main sources of general information and news:

- TV
- Newspapers
- Radio

In addition to the above, the teachers also used the internet (Facebook and Google).

It appears that the three traditional media, newspaper, radio and television, remain the most important information sources across the population, while for gatekeepers of professional backgrounds and especially for cusp players, the internet is becoming increasingly important. Consequently, **different media outlets may be used for promotional efforts targeting different groups**.

8. Conclusions

The key conclusions emerging from the findings are:

1. Women's rugby has faced a series of challenges relating to lack of consistent policy support, financial hardships and societal negativity;

2. Current players value the physicality of the game and the sense of solidarity it offers. While women's rugby has depended on these players, it is crucial to reach beyond them and expand the player base to further develop the sport;
3. Cusp players recognise a range of benefits of rugby and would consider playing themselves if provided with good coaches. However, they are discouraged by, among others, differential institutional support for men's and women's rugby;
4. Considerable differences exist between gatekeepers in family roles and professional roles (teachers). Overall, while they recognise benefits of rugby, they are ambivalent about supporting it due to perceived lack of institutional support for women's rugby, perceived physical risks, and widespread community opposition.

*** THE END ***