

## WOMEN'S FOOTBALL FROM THE PLAYERS' PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract.** *Background:* Women's football is known to be played at professional level in a lot of countries. In Romania, women started playing football in unofficial matches in 1960, and only after 30 years, in 1990, the Women's National Football Team was founded. Being a very competitive and accessible sport and taking account of his multiple benefits, women's football became more and more solicited by the students of the University of Bucharest.

*Objectives:* Due to its importance and recent evolution and because we find it attractive, we decided to make women's football the main subject of this presentation. Along with the theoretical part of this project, we administered a questionnaire to some former/actual women's football players in order to find out their personal perspective related to this sport.

*Purpose:* Understanding the benefits that come along with this sport, how it has been promoted and how accessible they think it is to women. Moreover, we want to link the answers and experience of others, to our own experience in this wonderful sport.

*Methods:* For our study we have asked 24 female subjects aged 13 to 22 years old, out of which 13 are professional players and 11 are amateurs. Our questionnaire is made up of 14 questions, which together highlight the personal perspective regarding the practice of women's football, from three different directions: benefits, promotion and accessibility.

*Results:* In the past years, regardless the area we may refer to (professional, academic, amateur), a fast evolution can be noticed in all three main directions we have researched (benefits, promotion, accessibility). Our research shows that most of the players who have been encouraged by their family or friends to play football kept playing at a professional level. On the other hand, those that were not supported by their family, have lost their enthusiasm, and now they only play for fun or not at all.

*Conclusions:* From a really long list of sports, we chose to play football in college because it is a big and important part of our lives even though we did not choose to do this professionally. Analyzing the answers from the questionnaire, we can conclude that players benefited a lot by playing football, most of them saying that their lifestyle has improved dramatically since they started practicing this sport.

**Keywords:** women's football; perspective, benefits, promotion, accessibility

### Introduction

Women's football is known to be played at professional level in a lot of countries, but only 187 of them have a national team. In Romania, women started playing football in unofficial matches in 1960, and only after 30 years, in 1990, the Women's National Football Team was founded.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, football started to become popular among female factory workers, forming feminine football teams in various places. It started to develop more in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



The women who worked at the Dick, Kerr & Co. factory. were boosted after winning matches against the men, forming Dick, Kerr Ladies F.C. .

In 1921, women's football encounters obstacles after attracting a record audience (53,000 spectators), the Football Association (FA) imposes a ban on women's football that lasted for 50 years.

The FA claims that football is "*unsuitable for women*" and that it "*should not be encouraged*". This decision was made in order not to overshadow the men's football teams. The women continued to play on non-FA grounds, avoiding the media. There were also possible political reasons as the teams raised money for charity and were involved in fundraising for miners protesting wage cuts. Thus, women's football has become a politically dangerous sport. In other countries, women's football was banned, for example in Germany, France and Brazil for 15, 30 or 40 years.

According to *Federatia Romana de Fotbal*, in 2015, the World Cup became the subject of a "turf war" lawsuit. A group of female football players who participated in the final of the last World Cup sued FIFA over the decision to play the match on artificial turf, because they believe is unsafe and does not provide a level playing field compared to the men's championship, who always play on grass. FIFA denied the allegation of discrimination and the players eventually dropped the case. This shows that the discrimination among men and women is not over yet, but people are trying to make a change.

In the past years, regardless the area we may refer to (professional area, academic area, amateur area), a fast evolution can be seen, which we have noticed in all three main ideas we have researched (benefits, publicity, accessibility) for this presentation. These days, women's football is more known to the public and more supported by people around the world because people understood that is not only a men's sport, women are free to practice any sport they like and in the same terms as men are.

Football is an excellent way to spend your free time, it brings joy to its players and a lot of benefits. For example, football improves your heart activity, your strength, mobility and resistance. While playing football you switch from one physical state to another (walking, running, sprinting) and that helps maintaining an optimal state of health.

Also, football helps you find fast and good solutions in difficult times, so after playing football for a while your ability to take decisions under pressure will be improved; plus, it helps you with your concentration, perseverance and self discipline.

Besides that, football is a great way to socialize, to make new friends and it enhances your confidence and reduces the level of anxiety.

Football is easy to learn, but you need a lot of motivation and practice to be good at it, but if you just want to play it for fun, you can do that too.

We decided to make women's football the main subject of this presentation because we also find it attractive and we have always liked it. From a really long list of sports, we chose to play football in college because it is a big and important part of our lives even though we did not choose to do this professionally. Had we been encouraged to play football when we were kids, or at least when we started playing it for fun, we would have combined work with passion. Even though we are not playing at a professional level, we still give our best at every practice and match.

## Objectives

Along with the theoretical part in this project, we thought that it would be a great idea to have something more specific, so we put together some questions for a quiz. We tried to reach out to some women who could answer our questions from their personal perspective.

Our work targets girls and women of all ages because we want to understand their perspective on the benefits that come along with this sport, how it has been promoted and how accessible they think it is to girls and women (whether they can play it/practice at school/high school/college, not only in competitions).

For our study we have asked 24 girls and women aged 13-22, out of which 13 are professional players and 11 are amateurs. Our research was based on a 14-question quiz asking them about the players' perspective regarding some specific football aspects.

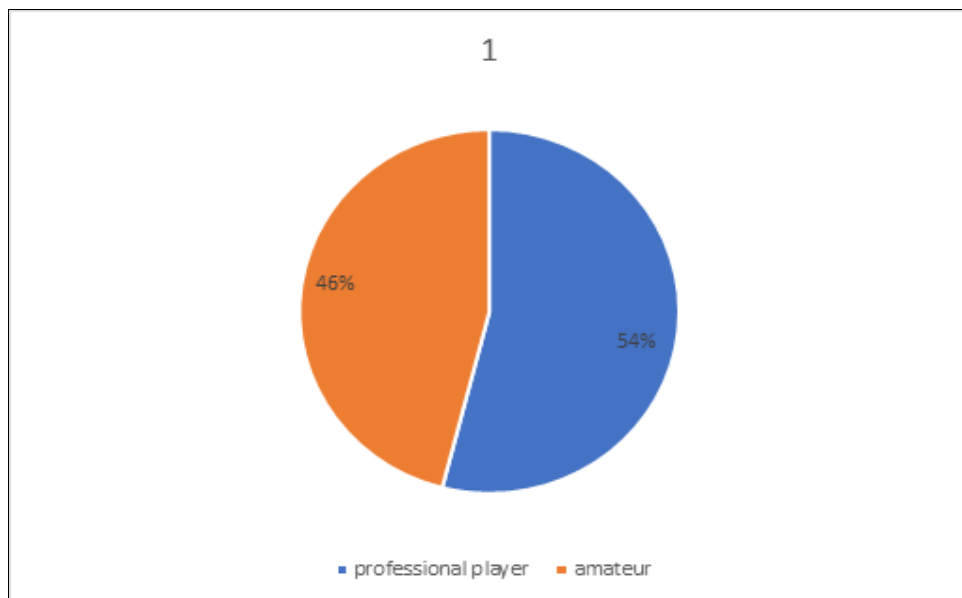
In our presentation, we are going to present the statistics and we hope it will give you another perspective on women's football.

First, we are going to present all 14 questions from the quiz:

1. Do you practice football?
2. Where do you practice football?
3. How old were you when you started to play football?
4. How old are you?
5. Where did you find out, for the first time, about football?
6. Why did you choose this sport?
7. Were you encouraged to play football?
8. If the answer to the previous question was YES, who encouraged you and how did they do it?
9. Have you taken part in sports competitions? At school/ high school/ college?
10. Has practicing football helped you to develop any new social relationships?
11. Do you consider that, in your group of friends, your image has improved as a result of practicing football?
12. How has playing football benefited you? (socially, health wise)
13. Do you have a favorite football player?
14. Would you like to add anything? (e.g.: a personal experience)

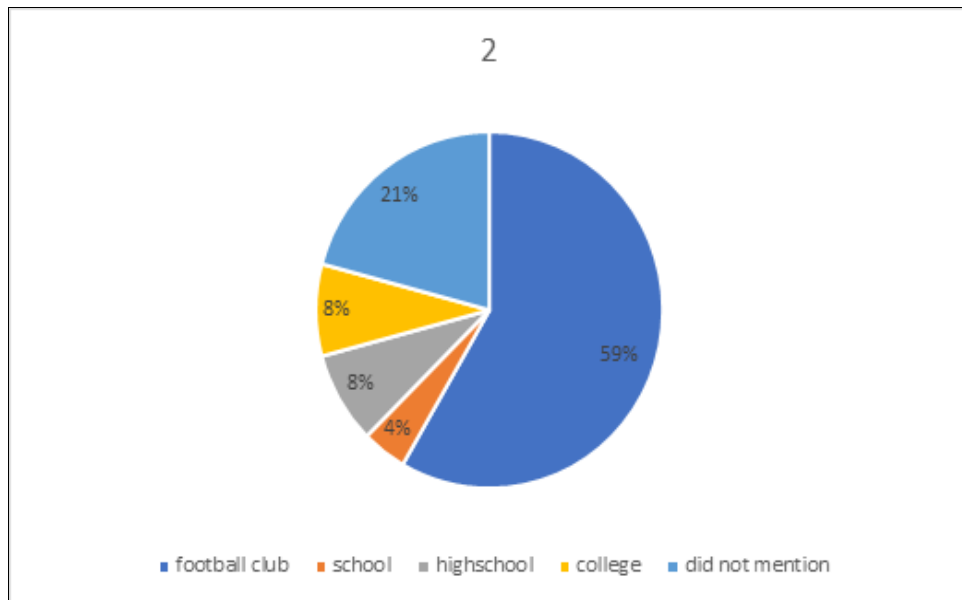
## Results

1. At the first question, 54% of the respondents are professional players, the other 46% are amateurs.



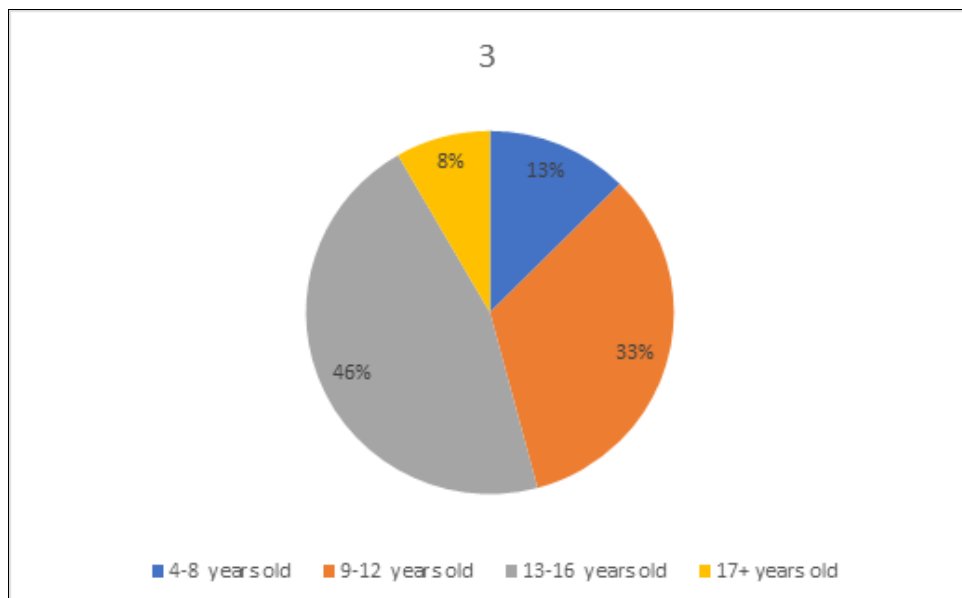
**Figure 1** – Question 1

2. At the second question, the answers were as it follows: 59% play at a professional level, 8% play at college, 4% play at school, 8% at high school and 21% did not mention.



**Figure 2 – Question 2**

3. As far as their age was when they started: 13% were between 4 and 8 years old, 33% started when they were 9 to 12 years old, 46% at the age of 13 to 16 years old and 8% were older than 17.



**Figure 3 – Question 3**

4. Our respondents, when they answered, were aged between 13 and 22, out of which 8% were 15 years old, 17% were 16, 21% were 18, 17% were 17, 8% were 19, 17% were 20, and only 4% were 13, 21 and 22 years old.

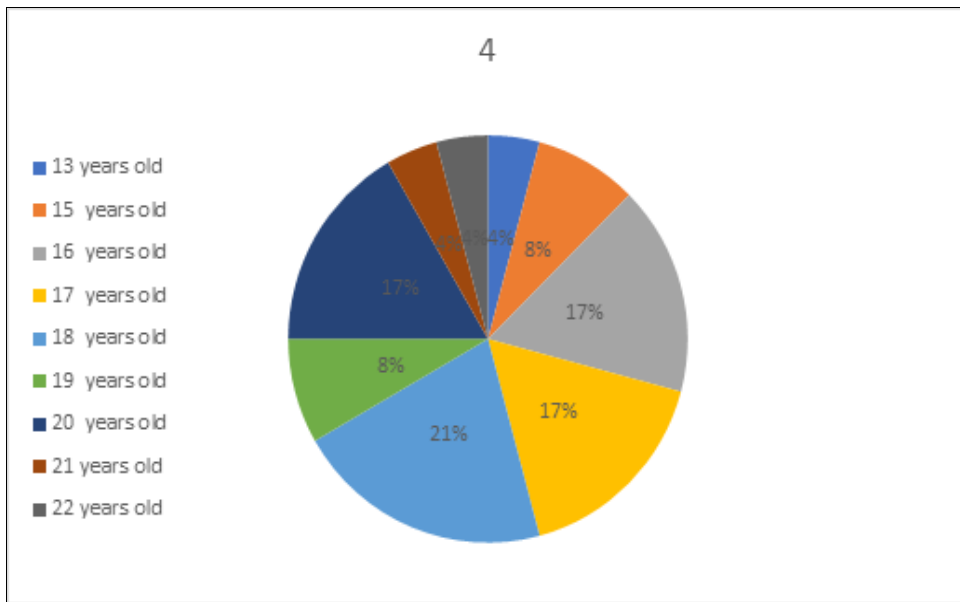


Figure 4 – Question 4

5. Players found out about football from different sources: 50% from friends, 29% from school, 8% in high school, 13% from sources such as family and social networks.

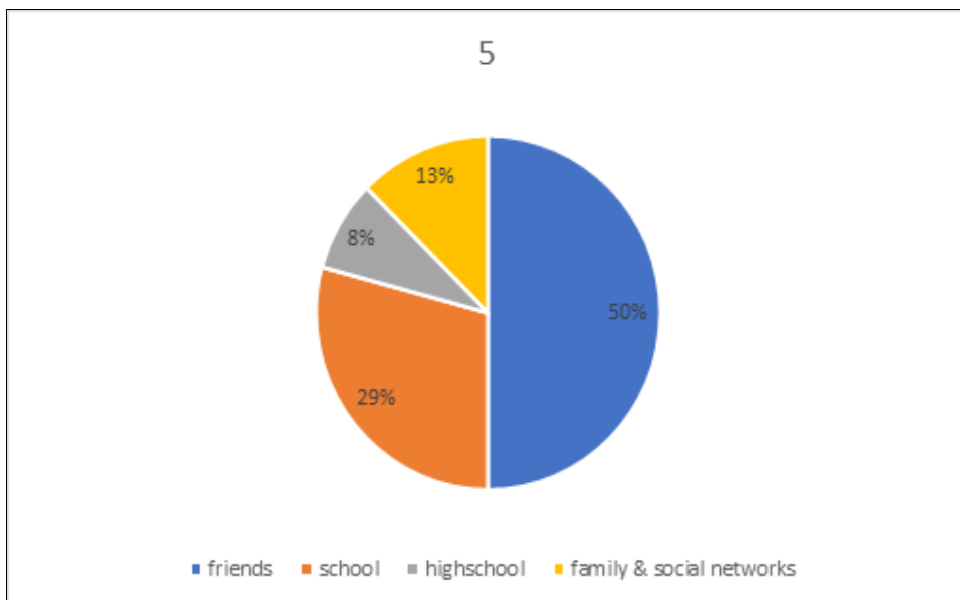
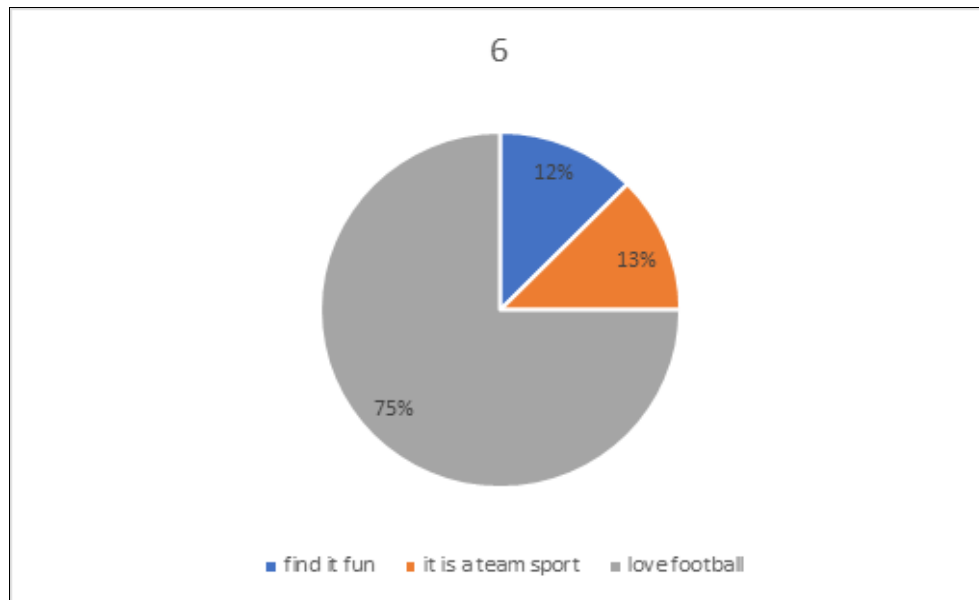


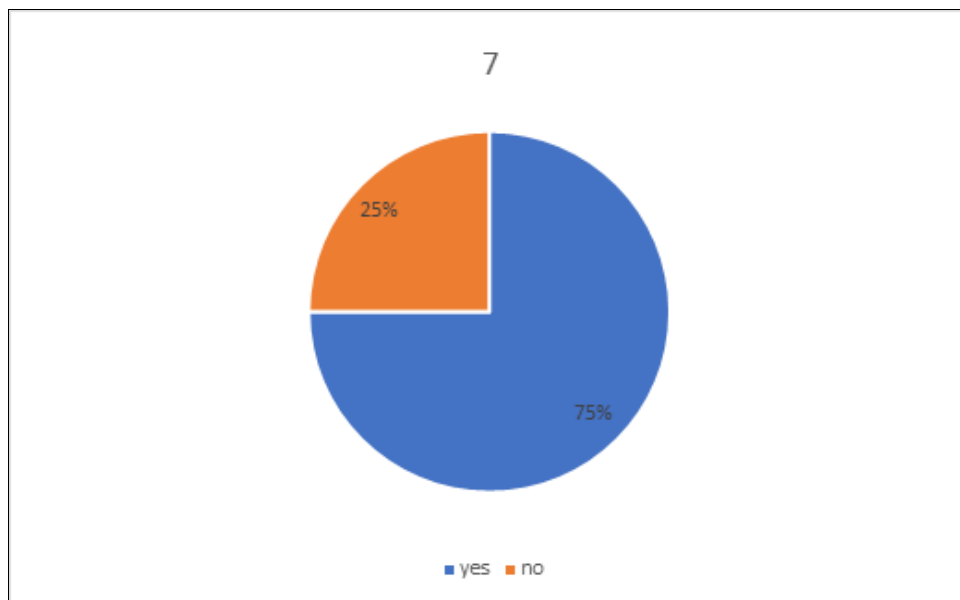
Figure 5 – Question 5

6. There are numerous reasons why women started playing football among which: 12% find it fun, 75% consider that it is the only sport they love and 13% chose it because it is a team sport.



**Figure 6 – Question 6**

7. Most of our respondents were encouraged to play football, more accurately 75%, while 25% were not.



**Figure 7 – Question 7**

8. Here, the answers were various too: 68 % were encouraged by their family and friends, 8 % by their teachers and 24 % were not encouraged at all.

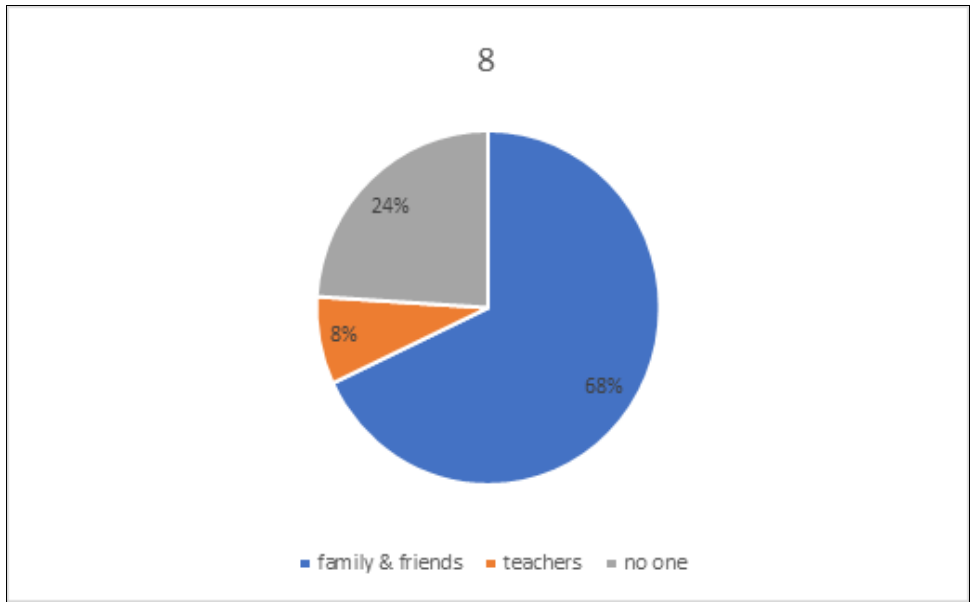


Figure 8 – Question 8

9. 96 % of our respondents participated in school competitions, while 4% did not.

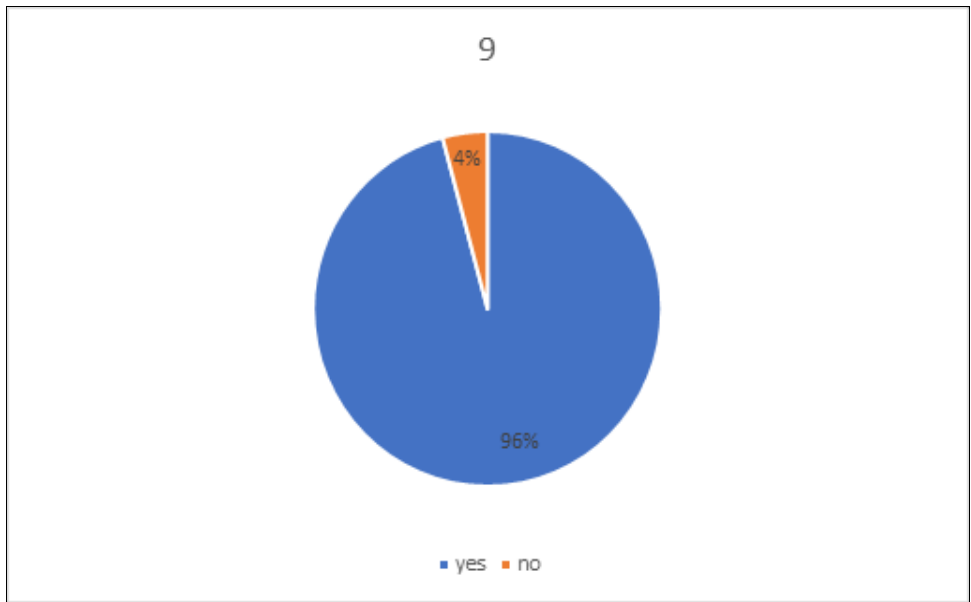
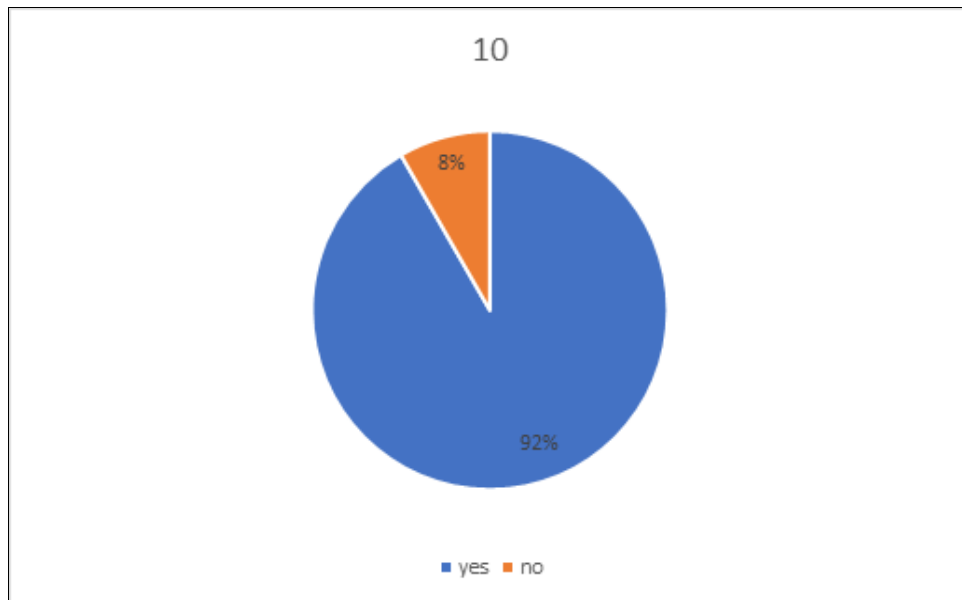


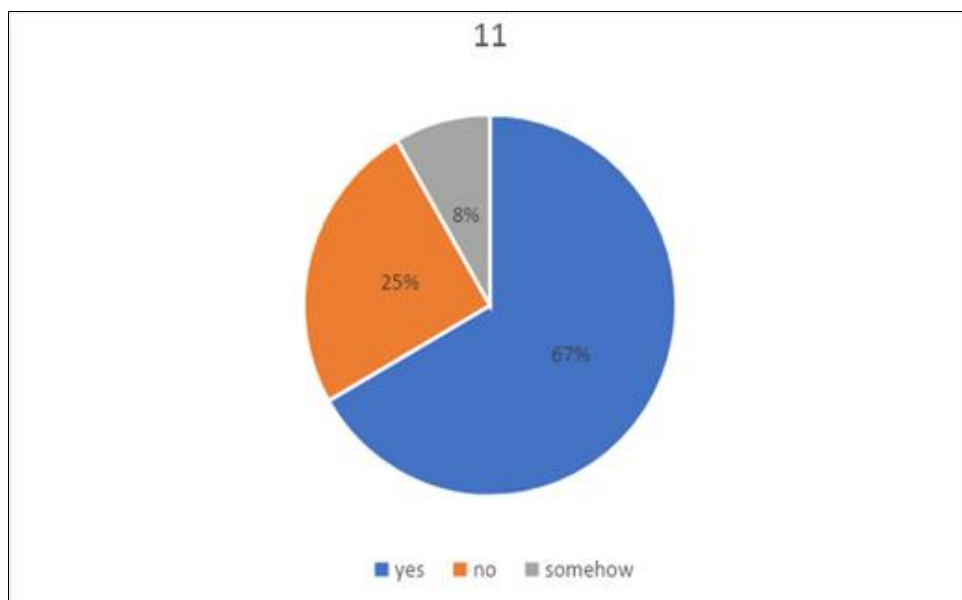
Figure 9 – Question 9

10. Most of the respondents said they developed new social relationships while practicing football, more exactly 92%, but 8% did not.



**Figure 10** – Question 10

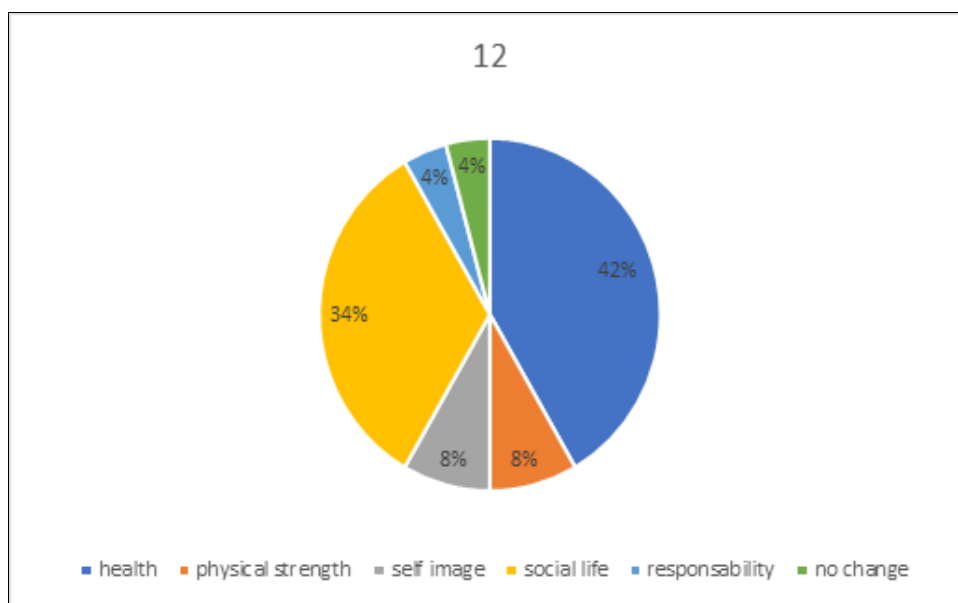
11. 67% consider that their image has improved in their group of friends due to practicing football, 25% consider there is no difference and 8% saw a difference, but not a very significant one.



**Figure 11** – Question 11

12. Football helped women by improving their health (42%), their physical strength (8%), their self-image (8%), it developed their social life (34%) and made them more responsible (4%). Also, 4% of the women said there was no change at all.





**Figure 12** – Question 12

13. + 14. In our quiz, besides the questions that targeted the three directions we were interested in, we also had two open questions. Referring to the first question, most of the answers were about Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar Jr. and Sergio Ramos. Referring to the second question, the answers were more diverse.

### Conclusions

Analyzing the answers from the questionnaire, we can conclude that players benefited a lot by playing football, most of them saying that their lifestyle has improved dramatically since they started practicing this sport.

Football brings a lot of benefits, physically and mentally. From the physical perspective, it increases your resistance, your coordination and your reflexes. Along with the physical benefits, we have the mental benefits, which are: adaptation to critical situations which involve fast thinking, social skills and team spirit.

Through the current research, there are concluded, once again, the multiple educational and formative values of women's football, both from the perspective of the school sports discipline, as well as from the perspective of performance sports. All this within a favorable context in which this sports discipline is at the moment, especially in the direction of its promotion and accessibility.

When we are speaking about accessibility, the answers highlighted the fact that women's football is established as an offering sport for practitioners, both at the amateur and professional level. This, mainly, being due to its structure and elements of content characteristic of team sports.

Based on the interpretation of the questionnaire regarding the promotion component, we can conclude that women's football is becoming increasingly present in everyday life and as a leisure activity. The main vectors of promotion are: family, friends and school.

Year by year, women's football, and football in general, becomes more and more solicited by students from The University of Bucharest because it has multiple benefits, among which physical and psychosocial. Besides that, football is a very competitive and accessible sport and that makes students interested in it; football keeps students active and healthy.

## Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally contributed to this study.

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