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Sport Corruption Vulnerability and Its' Associated Risks Factors in Ethiopian Football and Athletics Sport Clubs

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Abstract

Corruption in football and athletics clubs weakens integrity, with risks including match-fixing, bribery, and mismanagement. This might weak governance, financial distress, and lack of accountability worsen vulnerabilities, threatening fair play and sport development. Thus, the study focused on sport corruption vulnerability and its' associated risks factors in Ethiopian football and Athletics sport clubs. The study research design was convergent Mixed Methods Design which involves field exploration of sport competition, phenomenological and survey strategy retrospective study design, document analysis, systematic observation, questionnaire and in-depth semi-structure interview. Football club players (n = 398) and athletics sport athletes (n =231) was sampled respectively. The variables of the study include sport corruption vulnerability and associated risk factors. The variables were measured using standardized questionnaire. The collected quantitative and qualitative data were entered and processed using SPSS Version 28 and MAXQDA version 24 respectively. Ordinal logistics regression was used to analyze the quantitative. The associated risk factors significantly influence sport corruption vulnerability in Ethiopian athletics and football clubs ($p<0.001$). The increase in one-unit of corruption perception is associated with a 112% increase in the odds of higher vulnerability (OR = 2.12). Furthermore, football was found to have a significantly higher vulnerability to corruption compared to athletics ($p=0.02$, OR = 1.65). The findings of this study reveal that there was corruption vulnerability within Ethiopian athletics and football sport clubs, manifesting at individual, team, and organizational levels. Athletes, referees, coaches, and team leaders were identified as primary participants in these corrupt practices. The major forms of corruption observed include the misuse of inside information, bribery of officials, falsification, and violations of legal and management procedures. To some extent, match-fixing, bribery, expressions of gratitude, and referee manipulation were also evident in both football and athletics. Football sport clubs were found to have a significantly higher vulnerability to corruption compared to athletics sport clubs.

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Introduction

Sport sectors are vulnerable to sport corruption (UNODC, 2021). IOC and FIFA lack transparency and accountability (Andrew, 2011). IOC and FIFA were vulnerable to bribery, unethical governance, financial misconduct, lack of transparency, and weak accountability (Andrew, 2011). FIFA the world's leading football governing body was vulnerable to corruption, such as bribery, fraud, and unethical governance (Chance, 2016). Athletics sport corrupt practices issues like bribery and unethical payments (Siegel, 2016).

Previous study shows that life time ban on the person who sold information of UEFA competition (UNODC, 2021).The corruption in international sports identifies key forms such as bribery, match-fixing, and governance scandals (Wolfgang, 2005). UK and internationally identified ant-bribery law to combat sport corruption such as robust compliance programs, due diligence, and whistle-blower protections (Peter, Alice, Peter, & Rory, 2017). German Olympic athletes found that 7.6% of surveyed squad athletes suspected manipulation in their sports, with higher risks in low-visibility disciplines (Frenger, Emrich, & Pitsch, 2019).

African sport corruption was manifested by match-fixing, human trafficking, doping, poor governance, bribing players or officials, creating errors, bribery, tanking, manipulation of referees, time wasting, prearranged scores, strategic fixing and betting-related fixing and executive committee (Chris, 2016). African football was hindered its development due to corruption like bribery, mismanagement, and lack of accountability within continental football associations (Manase, 2014). Africa athletes have been migrating to Europe due to corruption (Chris, 2016).

Nigerian Football corruption practices includes embezzlement, bribery, and mismanagement as systemic issues diverting resources from infrastructure, youth development, and player welfare, resulted in decline in Nigeria's football performance and public trust (Manase, 2014; Okwudili & Emmanuel, 2016). South African football (Chris, 2016) and Zimbabwe national football team (UNODC, 2021). Egyptian football corruption includes match-fixing, bribery, and financial mismanagement. This reduces sponsorship revenues, fan engagement, increases job losses and reduces infrastructure development (Saad, 2016).

Nigeria football corruption influences sport infrastructure, athlete welfare, and grassroots programs, reduced public trust, missed opportunities for youth empowerment stifling talent growth and competitive performance (Dada, 2020). Egyptian football reduces sponsorship revenues, fan engagement, increases job losses and reduces infrastructure development (Saad, 2016). Sub-Saharan

Africa countries football supporters were reduced due to football corruption practice (Anastasia, Tommy, & George, 2022). Moreover, it diminishes public trust in institutions and community cohesion (Argyro, Comille, Paul, & Bram, 2022). Furthermore, it diverts resources, undermine talent development, and erode public trust in the sport (Manase, 2014).

IAAF was involved in Russian doping ring, money laundering, covering up positive tests, and accepting bribes (Babacar& Graham, 2021), bribery of World. Athletics Championship in DOHA2019 (Patrick, 2023) and using performance-enhancing drugs (Interpol, 2024). Paris Olympics, 2024 athletics sport achievements related to athletics corruption (Gizew, 2023).

Ethiopian corruption index was 37/100 points in 2023 (Annalise, 2023). There was previous study conducted on Ministry of Culture and Sports by the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption commission of Ethiopia; however it does not address corruption vulnerability, associated risk factors and mitigation mechanism of Ethiopian athletics and football in detail. Therefore, it is the right time to conduct research on sport corruption vulnerability and its' associated risks factors in Ethiopian football and Athletics sport clubs.

this, male and female athletes competed in the first and second division was the participant of the study. The participants' demographic information includes gender, age and marital status. Ethical clearance letter was obtained from Jimma University, Sport Academy, Research and postgraduate coordinating office dated on 22/07/2025 and Reference number SA/RPG/255/2025.

Method and Materials

Study area

Addis Ababa City administration, Dire-Dawa city administration, Adama city, Jimma City and Hawasa city was the city most frequently football tournament was conducted. In order to collect data from football teams the researchers visited Addis Ababa City administration, Dire-Dawa city administration, Adama city and Hawasa city. Athletics national competitions conducted in Addis Ababa City Administration and Asella Town, the data collected from these study areas.

Participants

The participants of the study include male football players played in different Ethiopian football leagues and female football players played in major Ethiopian football leagues such as Bet-King Ethiopian Premier League, Super league and higher league. In addition to

Procedures

The study research design was convergent Mixed Methods Design which involves field exploration of sport competition, phenomenological and survey strategy retrospective study design, document analysis, systematic observation, questionnaire and in-depth semi-structure interview. In the first phase, the sport corruption vulnerability and associated risk factors survey was prepared for respondents and the data were analyzed, and then the trend was critically observed for

further analysis. In the second phase, FGD and interview protocol was prepared football and athletics higher officials, this qualitative findings helps to explain and explore quantitative finding. Finally, both findings were integrated to form a complete understanding of sport corruption vulnerability and associated risk factors.

The study populations were selected from major competition participants of football (N = 800) and samples (n = 398) whereas athletics major competitions participants (N = 550) and samples (n = 231). The study consists of three major classifications including male football premier league clubs (Strata = 18), female football premier league clubs (strata = 14) and athletics clubs (strata = 22). The sample size for a finite population can be determined using the formula for stratified sampling.

$$n = \frac{z^2 * p * (1-p) * N}{e^2 * (N-1) + z^2 * p * (1-p)}$$

Where:

- n = Sample size
- z =z-score (e.g., 1.96 for a 95% confidence level)
- p = proportion of the population (use 0.5 for maximum variability if unknown
- e = margin of error (e.g., 0.05 for ± 5%)
- N = total population size

Since the population was divided into different sport clubs, each sport clubs had the same number of athletes (25) the sample can be allocated proportionally using the stated formula.

$$\text{Sample size of athletes per club} = \frac{n}{Number\ of\ clubs}$$

$$\text{Total sample size} = \text{number of sport clubs} * \text{Number of athletes per club}$$

Table 1
Football and athletics sport participants for quantitative study

S.n	Types of Sports	Division	Clubs	Number of Players	Players' Population	Sampled players	Sampling Technique
1	**Football**	Ethiopian Football Premier League Male	18	25	450	216	Stratified proportional simple random sampling technique
		Ethiopian Women's Premier League	14	25	350	182	
Total			32	50	800	398	
2	**Athletics**	First	6	25	150	60	
		Second	16	25	400	171	
Total			22	50	550	231	

Table 2
FGD and Interview respondents

Sn	Participants	Numbers	Purpose	Sampling
1	Referees from EFF	1	FGD	Snowball
2	Coaches from EFF	1	FGD	Snowball
3	Team Managers from EFF	1	FGD	Snowball
1	Referees from EAF	1	FGD	Snowball
2	Coaches from EAF	1	FGD	Snowball
3	Team Managers from EAF	1	FGD	Snowball
4	Competition organizers	1	FGD	Purposive
5	Delegates from EFF	3	Interview	Purposive
6	Delegates from EAF	3	Interview	Purposive

The study variable includes sport corruption vulnerability and associated risks factors. These two variables were measured by standardized questionnaires. Sport corruption vulnerability was measured by Sport Integrity Assessment Tool (SIAT), developed by the International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS).Dependent variable was vulnerability dataset type was ordinal scale (1 to 5, where higher values indicate greater vulnerability).

Sport corruption risk was measured by corruption risk management questionnaire.Independent variable was associated risk factors which was ordinal scale (1 to 5, where higher values indicate higher corruption levels).Factor category was sports type was binary (1 = Athletics, 2 = Football). Covariates of the model include age and gender. Age was ordinal scale (1 = 18-24year; 2 = 25-34 year; 3 = 35-44 year; 4 = 45-54 year). Gender was binary (1 = Male; 2 = Female).

Data Analysis

The collected quantitative and qualitative data were entered and processed using SPSS Version 28 and MAXQDA version 24 respectively. After that the data was analyzed using ordinal logistics regression.

Most responses for Vulnerability and Associated Risk Factors were clustered at the highest levels (4 for both). The dataset suggests a perceived high level of corruption vulnerability (mode = 4). Football (coded as 2) appears more frequently in the data compared to Athletics (coded as 1).

$$Y = log\left(\frac{P(Y \leq j)}{P(Y > j)}\right) = \alpha j - (\beta 1x1 + \beta 2x2 + \beta 3x3 + \beta 4x4$$

Where:

Y: Vulnerability (1 to 4).

X1: Associated Risk Factors

X2: Sports Type (Football = 2,

Athletics = 1).

X3: Age

Results

The participants' demographic information includes Gender, age and marital status were analyzed using crosstabs including frequency counts and percentage across the types of sports such as football and athletics sports. The impact of associated risk factors on sport corruption vulnerability was analyzed using ordinal logistic regression.

Participants' Information

Table 3

Participants' Informationacross the sport type

Variables	Category	Responses	Football	Athletics	Total
Gender	Male	Count	184	301	485
		% within Gender	37.90%	62.10%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	100.00%	76.40%	83.90%
	Female	Count	0	93	93
		% within Gender	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	0.00%	23.60%	16.10%
	Total	Count	184	394	578
		% within Gender	31.80%	68.20%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Age	18-24	Count	139	316	455
		% within Age	30.50%	69.50%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	75.50%	80.20%	78.70%
	25-34	Count	45	43	88
		% within Age	51.10%	48.90%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	24.50%	10.90%	15.20%
	35-44	Count	0	21	21
		% within Age	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	0.00%	5.30%	3.60%
	45-54	Count	0	14	14
		% within Age	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	0.00%	3.60%	2.40%
	Total	Count	184	394	578
		% within Age	31.80%	68.20%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Marital status	Single	Count	132	278	410
		% within Marital status	32.20%	67.80%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	77.60%	74.70%	75.60%
	Married	Count	38	94	132
		% within Marital status	28.80%	71.20%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	22.40%	25.30%	24.40%
	Total	Count	170	372	542
		% within Marital status	31.40%	68.60%	100.00%
		% within Types of sport	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

The majority of athletes' demographic information shows, more than half of athletes were male from athletics sports whereas less than half of them were from football sports. The majority of athletes' age was from 18-24 years old from athletics sport which means large sum of athletes were youngsters. More than half of athletes were single from both athletics and football sports.

The analysis reveals that athletics sports are

predominantly male-dominated, with over half the athletes being male, compared to less than half in football. Most athletes, particularly in athletics, are young (18-24 years old), indicating a strong presence of youngsters. Additionally, the majority of athletes in both sports are single, suggesting that younger, unmarried individuals are more likely to participate in these sports.

The impact of Age, gender and Associated risk factors on sport corruption vulnerability

Before running ordinal logistic regression proportional odd ratio was checked, the result shows that the effect of associated risk factor was consistent across all levels of the sport corruption vulnerability. Moreover,variance of inflation factors (VIF) was checked and there was no Multicollinearity. The dataset suggests a perceived high level of corruption vulnerability (mode = 4). Football (coded as 2) appears more frequently in the data compared to Athletics (coded as 1). Most responses for "Vulnerability" and "Associated Risk Factors" are clustered at the highest levels (4 for both).

The participants of sport corruption vulnerability were involved highly in the types of corruption such as misuse of inside information, bribing officials, falsification and law and management procedure violation. Football and athletics sport corruption vulnerability participated to some extent in match-fixing, bribery, thanking and manipulation of referee.

Table 4
Ordinal Logistics regression of predictor variables on sport corruption vulnerability

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Odds Ratio (exp(β))	p-value
Associated Risk Factors	0.75	2.12	<0.001*
Sports Type (Football)	0.50	1.65	0.02*
Age	-0.10	0.90	0.15
Gender (Female)	-0.05	0.95	0.50

*: $p < 0.05$
β = beta coefficient

The results of this study indicate that associated risk factors significantly influence sport corruption vulnerability in Ethiopian athletics and football clubs ($p<0.001$). Specifically, a one-unit increase in corruption perception is associated with a 112% increase in the odds of higher vulnerability (OR = 2.12). Furthermore, football was found to have a significantly higher vulnerability to corruption compared to athletics ($p=0.02$, OR = 1.65). In contrast, neither age nor gender of athletes and players demonstrated a significant effect on corruption vulnerability ($p>0.05$). The study recommends that since associated risk factors strongly predict vulnerability, interventions should target reducing corruption. Football shows higher vulnerability; consider stricter governance for

this sport.

Corruption in Ethiopian football, particularly involving referees, is driven by key risk factors that undermine the sport's integrity. The primary issue is inadequate professional payment for federal football referees. Their current compensation is insufficient to meet their needs, creating financial pressure that makes them susceptible to accepting bribes or incentives from stakeholders to manipulate match outcomes. This lack of fair remuneration encourages unethical behavior, as referees may prioritize personal gain over impartiality, directly impacting game fairness.

Discussions

In agreement to this study, previous study identified sport corruption vulnerability such as match-fixing, bribery, doping, moral disengagement, societal norms, and personal justifications increases sport corruption (Hwang, 2016), governance scandals (Samantha & Simon, 2011), fraud (Najafi kolori, Hami, Shojaei, & Bagherian, 2023), illegal betting, governance scandals, and money laundering (UNODC, 2021). Nigeria was vulnerability includes fund mismanagement, bribery and nepotism (Dada, 2020). The study reported that there was on-field corruption in sports including match-fixing and doping to systemic governance failures in policymaking (Masters, 2015). The most common football corruption includes match-fixing, doping, fraud, legalization of criminal proceeds (Kostiantyn et al., 2024).

Corresponding to this finding, the factors for sport corruption suggest that tolerance for corruption varies based on cultural context, perceived severity, and personal stakes (Hwang, 2016). Bribery, match-fixing, and governance failures, emphasizing roles of players, officials, and external(Ole, 2016). Weak oversight, lack of transparency, and unethical leadership (Esmaeil, Aziz, Saman, Ali-Mohammad, & Zeynab, 2015). Challenges journalists face, including threats, censorship, and ethical dilemmas, while reporting on football sport corruption (Lyton, 2016). Laack of transparency and weak accountability (Chance, 2016).

Previous study suggested that the risk factor for sport corruption was socio-economic and political factors (Manase, 2014); lax regulation, financial incentives, and weak enforcement (Samantha & Simon, 2011);institutional failures, conflict of interests, and weak enforcement (Gardiner, Parry, & Robinson, 2016); weak governance, lack of transparency, and unethical financial practices (Najafi kolori et al., 2023); financial gain, weak oversight, and cultural tolerance were the risk factor for corruption (Ole, 2016); financial mismanagement, lack of transparency, and political interference undermining CAF's credibility were the risk factors for corruption (Michael & Mlondi, 2019) and growing sophistication of criminal networks resulted in weak regulations and globalization (UNODC, 2021). Recent study identifies systemic factors like weak governance, financial incentives, and cultural tolerance enabling bribery, match-fixing, and fraud (Raja & Mohamed, 2024) and weak

regulation, financial incentives, and institutional complacency enable unethical practices (Masters, 2015).

Limitations

In Ethiopia, currently there are 35 Ethiopian national federations among them only Ethiopian Football federation and Ethiopian Athletics Federation was part of this study. This study was used cross-sectional design during data collection and it is preferred if it will use longitudinal research design. The study used survey method and it will be advisable if it will be experimental. The study used small sample size; large sample size will be preferred.

Conclusions

The findings of this study reveal a prevalent vulnerability to corruption within Ethiopian athletics and football sport clubs, manifesting at individual, team, and organizational levels. Key stakeholders, including athletes, referees, coaches, and leaders, were identified as primary participants in these corrupt practices. The major forms of corruption observed include the misuse of inside information, bribery of officials, falsification, and violations of legal and management procedures. To a smaller extent, match-fixing, bribery, expressions of gratitude, and referee manipulation were also evident in both football and athletics. Football sport clubs were found to have a significantly higher vulnerability to corruption compared to athletics sport clubs.

Practical Implications

The findings on corruption in Ethiopian athletics and football clubs suggest several practical implications for research. Future studies better to prioritize longitudinal designs to track corruption trends across individual, team, and organizational levels, focusing on why football clubs exhibit higher vulnerability than athletics. Researchers better to explore the socio-cultural and economic motives of corrupt practices, such as bribery and falsification, through qualitative methods like interviews with athletes, referees, and coaches. Developing standardized metrics to quantify corruption such as frequency of match-fixing or misuse of inside information could enhance comparability across sports. Additionally, research should evaluate the effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions, such as training and education programs, particularly in football clubs. Investigating the role of technology, like data analytics for detecting irregularities, could provide actionable insights. These efforts will inform evidence-based policies to develop integrity and transparency in Ethiopian sports.

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