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Social Well-being Among Foreign Football Players in the Malabar Region of Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Sports have a special role in Kerala especially in the Malabar region. Football has a special fanbase from the Malabar region. The people feel and become happy to enjoy the football. It became the culture of that region. This qualitative study explores the social well-being of foreign football players active in the Sevens football circuit in the Malabar region of Kerala, India. The research focuses on six core objectives: place attachment, social support, social cohesion, social justice, self-esteem, and emotional support. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with ten male foreign players currently affiliated with local clubs. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the responses. The findings reveal that while players initially faced challenges such as language barriers, homesickness, climate adaptation, and emotional struggles, they gradually developed a strong sense of belonging and place attachment. Supportive relationships with teammates, coaches, and fans played a crucial role in helping them integrate into the local culture and football environment. Participation in cultural events, like the Onam festival, enhanced their social cohesion and emotional connection to the region. However, issues of social justice were noted, including unequal treatment, lack of transparency in contracts, and occasional racial discrimination. Players also expressed concerns over financial insecurity, lack of clear contracts and legal support systems for athletes in regional sports settings. Despite these challenges, the passionate football culture of Malabar, combined with community encouragement, significantly contributed to their motivation and self-esteem. The study highlights both the positive and challenging aspects of foreign players.

Keywords: Foreign players, Malabar region, Sevens football, social well-being, cultural integration

1. Introduction

“O sport, you are peace! You forge happy bonds between the people by drawing them together in reverence for controlled, organised, and self-disciplined strength. Through you, the young of the entire world learn to respect one another, and thus the diversity of national traits becomes a source of generous and peaceful emulation.” - Pierre de Frédy, Baron de Coubertin. (Ubaidulloev, 2018)

“According to the dictionary of Cambridge, Sports is a game, competition, or activity needing physical effort and skill that is played or done according to rules, for enjoyment and/or as a job (Sport, 2025)”. Sports is a form of entertainment, career, exercise and a competition for the people. We can't imagine when the sports began. The ancient people themselves do physical activities as running and hunting is a part of sports. Children have included sports in their play as run races and wrestling. All kinds of physical activities come under the sports. It is not only limited to the physical activity that drains energy, but also is an effective way to gain, strengthen and maintain the physical, mental and social health of people. In addition to the physical benefits, exercise also has a positive impact on mental health. Physical activity can stimulate the release of endorphins in the brain, known as "happiness hormones", so they can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression (Rokade, 2011). Exercise can also improve sleep quality, increase energy, and help sharpen focus and concentration. In a societal context, exercise can help reduce the growing burden of mental health problems.

“Football is the world's most popular game. It is simple in its principles and rules and almost everyone and anywhere can play from an official pitch or ground, street, school, beaches, or parks. The official body of football Federation International de Football Association (FIFA) estimated that at the turn of the 21st century there were approximately 250 million football players and over 1.3 billion people “interested” in football; in 2010 a combined television audience of more than 26 billion watched football's premier tournament, the quadrennial month long World Cup finals (Alegi et al., 2025)”.

Malabar

Malabar is the southern region of Kerala, a state in India. It is known for its historical and cultural heritage. It includes the districts of Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Palakkad, Kannur, and Kasargod. Before the formation of Kerala as a state, there were three separate territories in Kerala: 'Malabar' in the north, where power was shared between the Mysore Kings and the mighty Zamorin; the 'Cochin' Kingdom in the centre, and the 'Travancore Kingdom' to the south. Malabar is known for its culture, nature, arts, sports, and humanity.

Malabar was a major spice trade centre. It is a historical place in the Indian independence timeline. Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama arrived first in India in the Kappad of Kozhikode, in the Malabar region. And many of the tourists and trade people arrived here for their trading. Portuguese, Dutch, Arabian, and British came here and did trading. They exported the spices, especially pepper. Other notable exports included cinnamon, cloves, mace, and nutmeg. The Malabar Coast, also known as the "Spice Garden of India," was a major source of these commodities for various traders, including Arabs, Dutch, Portuguese, and British.

The Malabar region is known for educational flourishing and development. There are three prominent universities, two airports, and one central university. And make historical movements in academic achievements and arts, and sports events. The cultural festivals here are remarkable.

Football in Malabar and Kerala

Football has a special role in the hearts of Kerala people, especially among the Malabar regions. They are very passionate about playing, see and feel football in their free time. Football can heal the minds of people and make them happy. It is a source of happiness and enjoyment for the majority of Malabar's children, youth and even the adults. People of Malabar consider football as more than just a game, to make and maintain friendships, to enjoy the evenings and nights, to make rivalries with friends, to feel free from stress and pressure. We can see many football grounds around the Malabar regions.

The emergence of football and sevens tournaments empowers many valuable players in Kerala. They marked a signature in Indian football history. Kerala is a hotspot for many foreign professional players. They revealed that they like to play and be a part of Kerala teams. Kerala grabbed a seat in major Indian football tournaments, such as. Indian Super League, I League, Santhosh trophy, Durand cup, School championship, etc.

Emergence of Sevens Football

Sevens football is developed from Kerala. As like the name, it's played seven-players-to a side, on the normal pitches across Kerala. Matches are shorter, mostly with halves of 15 or 20 minutes. At the time of British rule, they played football in the official grounds and enjoyed themselves. The Kerala people are watching it from outside the ground and can't play because they are not allowed to enter the ground. At the time they realized how to play football in their own limits. They started playing football with the handmade ball in their local streets and paddy field with limited area and players. It was the start of sevens football in Kerala. Later it became the biggest festival of the All-Kerala Sevens Football Tournament. Sevens football is very spirit and enjoyment for the entire communities of Kerala. People will watch and enjoy the matches with friends, families and others. Clubs will register semi-professional foreign players, mostly from African countries to play.

The approach of the people of Kerala towards the foreign players are different. Some will treat them like their family members or friends, but some will see them as workers and deal badly with them. This attitude change of people will influence the mental strength and wellbeing of the players.

Social Well-being: Definition and Importance

Social wellbeing is a critical aspect of overall human health, reflecting the quality of an individual's relationships, sense of community, and engagement with society. It involves having meaningful interactions with others, building and maintaining positive relationships, and feeling connected and supported within a community. Social wellbeing can be enhanced through social support systems, strong family ties, participation in cultural and religious activities, and engagement in community events. This sense of belonging can significantly influence an individual's emotional and psychological health, leading to improved resilience, satisfaction, and quality of life (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003).

In the context of Kerala, social wellbeing is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the state. Kerala is known for its strong community-oriented culture, where people often participate in social events such as festivals (e.g., Onam), religious gatherings, and local sports like the famous "Sevens football." These events create an environment of connection and mutual support, enhancing the sense of belonging for both locals and foreigners. Additionally, Kerala's emphasis on education, healthcare, and social welfare programs ensures that individuals have access to resources that promote mental and emotional wellbeing. Foreign football players in Kerala, for example, often experience a heightened sense of social wellbeing through their involvement in team sports and local cultural activities, which allows them to integrate into the community and build relationships with locals. Social wellbeing in Kerala is a vital part of daily life, contributing to the overall well-being of its citizens.

The concept of social well-being is a multifaceted and integral aspect of human life, influencing both individual and community dynamics. In the context of sports, particularly football, the social well-being of players extends beyond the mere act of competition and performance. It encompasses the emotional, psychological, and interpersonal dimensions of an athlete's life, including their sense of belonging, social integration, and mental health. For foreign football players, who are often removed from their native environments and immersed in new cultural contexts, social well-being becomes an even more complex issue. The objectives of these studies are place attachment, social support, emotional support, self-esteem, social cohesion and social justice.

Under social well-being there comes many factors like place attachment, social support, emotional support, self-esteem, social cohesion and social justice.

Place attachment:

"It is the connection of people towards the place or geographic location that provides security and comfort to them. Individually and collectively, people become attached to certain places, such as their homes or their neighborhoods" (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

Social support:

“It is the form of assistance that helps in coping up with different domains such as biological, psychological, and wide varieties of social stressors. Any Interpersonal relationship can lead to support, it can be either family, colleagues, support groups, friends or people who are closely related. The support can be in any form, such as practical help like doing chores, offering advice, giving money, emotional support, or other material assistance” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

Emotional support:

“It can be a form of communicating care and concern for another, offering reassurance, empathy, comfort, and acceptance. It can be both verbal and nonverbal processes. It may be a major factor contributing to the effectiveness of self-help groups, within which members both provide and receive emotional support, and to attachment, in which the caregiver provides emotional support to the child” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

Self-esteem:

“The degree to which the qualities and characteristics contained in one’s self-concept are perceived to be positive. It reflects a person’s physical self-image, view of their accomplishments and capabilities, and values and perceived success in living up to them, as well as the ways in which others view and respond to that person. The more positive the cumulative perception of these qualities and characteristics, the higher one’s self-esteem. A reasonably high degree of self-esteem is considered an important ingredient of mental health, whereas low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness are common depressive symptoms” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

Social cohesion:

It is the bond and connection between the team members for every action and work. The degree to which the members of a group share values, understanding, and positive social interaction with each other. Strong social cohesion is characterized by positive interaction with others, and they share their values and beliefs within them and work to achieve one goal.

Social justice:

It's a political philosophy that aims to create a just and equitable society. It is the concept that every person should get equal rights, opportunities, and importance. How many people find it difficult to reach their goal? Some people get more priorities and some do not. Even now people are being mistreated or discriminated against on the basis of color, caste and socio-economic status. It's high time to change these kinds of racial inequalities from our society.

1.1 Research objectives

The research focuses on the following objectives that influence the social well-being of foreign football players.

Place attachment: To examine the extent to which foreign football players develop a sense of belonging and emotional connection to the Malabar region.

Social support: To explore the nature and impact of social support received by foreign players from teammates, coaches, clubs, and the local community.

Social justice: To investigate the players' experiences related to fairness, equal treatment, and transparency within the Sevens football circuit.

Social cohesion: To assess how participation in football and cultural activities fosters a sense of unity and integration among foreign players and the local population.

Self-esteem: To understand how engagement in the Sevens football environment influences the self-worth and confidence of foreign players.

Emotional support: To identify the sources and significance of emotional support in helping foreign players cope with challenges and adapt to their new environment.

1.2 Background of the study

Many foreign players were playing for various sevens football teams in Kerala. They are coming through the agent and settled the contract with the team. Many of them are played for a long period and some of them still continue. They will be attached to the team members, managers and people of the place, because they treat them like that. But some of the players revealed the difficulties and problems from the teams and people. They will not continue for a period.

One of the Malayalam films Sudani from Nigeria (2018) tells the positive side of the topic. “In a nutshell, Majeed, the manager of the local football team MYC Aaccode, is a man with an immense passion for the game of football, like any other person who’s born and brought up in Malabar. He recruits three Nigerian footballers for his team and ends up winning several tournaments. But the star player of the team, Samuel Robinson aka Sudu, confronts a fatal accident by slipping on the bathroom floor which leaves him bedridden for a month and stays at Majeed’s house. Eventually, both Majeed and Sudu form a deep friendship, resulting in the declaration of the issues faced by Majeed, with his stepfather. Back in his home country, Sudu had lost his parents in the Nigerian Civil war, and was living in a refugee camp with his grandmother and sisters until Majeed recruited him. In a hassle created by a picture published in the news, the police demand the identification of Sudu, which leads to the truth that his passport is lost. While trying to find the same, Samuel

discloses to Majeed that he can't apply for a duplicate of the passport as the original was a fake. Towards the end of the movie, Majeed finds the passport, understands Sudu's need of going back to Nigeria, and brings back his stepfather to his home in a retrospection. In the final scene, when Sudu leaves for Nigeria, he exchanges his jersey with Majeed, an expression used in football games between two captains of the competing teams, to show mutual respect (Sethulakshmi, 2021)".

In recent years there are reported many cases such as people beating and throwing away the foreign player because they made a mistake on the field. The people who are responsible to support and protect the guest were trying to attack and destroy their career. These types of cases are reported at various places of Kerala due to the name of discrimination.

The newspapers reported the case on "March 14, 2024, that an Ivory Coast player was chased and beaten up by a crowd in Kerala's Malappuram district during a Sevens football tournament held in the region recently. The player complained that the crowd had racially abused him by calling 'African monkey' and 'black cat'. He was attacked by his colour and race. One person among the crowd supported him and protected from the crowd's attack (HT News Desk, 2024)".

The New Indian Express and Mathrubhumi reported on March 14, 2024 that an "Ivory Coast player had approached the Malappuram district police chief, complaining that he was denied food and accommodation by a football club which brought him to Malappuram to play in sevens football tournaments (Express News Service & Express News Service, 2024)". Many of the people take advantage of these players. Because they are new to the place and helpless.

These reports and cases proved the two sides of attachment, treating, relation and culture of the people. Looking from the positive aspect, people help and support the guests as foreign football players because of their passion and culture for football and harmony. They see them as like their brothers and friends. But at the same time some were seeing them as outsiders. They keep a distance from them because of the colour, caste, and status.

1.3 Need and Significance

Social wellbeing is an important aspect of health. It influences our physical and mental health and wellbeing. It involves having meaningful interactions with others, building and maintaining positive relationships, and feeling connected and supported within a community. The purpose of the study was to know the ideas, comments and thoughts of the foreign players who are playing football in the Malabar region of Kerala. The feelings and experiences will reflect through this study. We can showcase the positive and negative aspects of their experiences.

The increasing presence of foreign football players in Kerala's Malabar region, particularly in Sevens football, highlights the need to examine their social well-being. These athletes, hailing from diverse regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Europe, contribute significantly to the sport's growth in Kerala. However, their experiences off the field ranging from cultural adaptation to mental health challenges remain largely unexplored. This study seeks to understand multiple areas of social wellbeing, which includes place attachment, social cohesion, social justice, emotional support, social support and self-esteem.

One of the key areas of focus is the cultural and social challenges faced by foreign players. Many struggles with language barriers, unfamiliar food, and differing social norms, which can lead to feelings of isolation. Additionally, some players report facing discrimination, exclusion, or even hostility from locals, teammates, or fans. These factors not only affect their personal lives but also their professional performance. Understanding these challenges is essential to creating a more inclusive environment that fosters both athletic excellence and personal happiness.

Another critical aspect of this research is the mental health and emotional well-being of foreign players. Being far from home, many experience intense homesickness, loneliness, and stress, with limited support systems in place. Clubs and football associations often lack structured mental health resources, leaving players to cope on their own. The study will assess how these emotional struggles impact their careers and what measures can be implemented to provide better psychological support.

Financial and contractual fairness is also a major concern. Reports suggest that foreign players sometimes face wage disparities, delayed payments, and unclear contract terms, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. This study will investigate whether foreign players receive equitable treatment compared to their local counterparts and whether existing policies adequately protect their rights. Addressing these issues is crucial to maintaining Kerala's reputation as a fair and attractive destination for international football talent.

2. Literature Review

'Travlos, et. al. Conducted study on "Foreign player migration and athletic success in Greek football" in 2017. The purpose of this study was to examine the migration of foreign football players that participated in the elite football championship in Greece and the impact of this migratory channel on the athletic success of the football clubs. The study analyzed a database of all migrant and local athletes that participated in the professional Greek football championship over the period 2001-2013. They found that there is a positive and significant statistical relation between the investment in foreign talents and the position of the clubs in the championship'.

'Kumar conducted a study on the title of "social intelligence and social support in football players: a key to success" in 2017. The study was aimed to identify the social intelligence and social support in football players. For this purpose, he selected sixty female football players of 18 to 22 years of age.

They were further divided into three groups; (i.e., N1=20; District, N2=20; State and N3=20 National). To measure the level of social support among the subjects, he administered the Social Support Scale constructed by Zimet et al. (1988). One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to find out the intra-group differences. The findings also show that insignificant differences were present among female Football players on the sub variables of Social Support. ‘

‘Bogac in 2009 conducted a study on the title ‘place attachment in a foreign settlement’. This paper explores problems emerging from the forced resettlement of Turkish Cypriot refugees from the southern to the northern side of the island of Cyprus. Following the ceasefire in 1974, the subjects of this study were resettled into houses originally constructed and inhabited by Greek Cypriots. Drawing on data collected from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and drawings, the research examines their place attachment under the exceptional conditions of their own forced displacement combined with their occupation of homes vacated by residents similarly displaced by war and interethnic violence. The research contrasts the place attachment of refugees with that of their children, who were born and raised in the host community. The findings of this research indicate that the future expectations of participants influenced their attachment to their new home and community, while their level of attachment to their original surroundings was also a key factor in the attachment process. The younger generation, conversely, were more attached to their present surroundings than older generations but did not want to be associated with their current surroundings ‘.

‘Schiefer and Doll studied the literatures on the topic ‘The essentials of social cohesion: A literature review’ in 2017. Literature on social cohesion always laments the lack of agreement on theoretical conceptualization of the construct. The current paper attempts to demystify the confusion by presenting a review of recent conceptualizations from literature. Having a picture of previous conceptualizations of social cohesion, we emphasize the point that in most conceptualizations there indeed is more overlap in the concept than has so far been assumed. Specifically, our view is that there are three overarching dimensions of social cohesion: (1) social relations, (2) identification with the geographical unit, and (3) orientation towards the common good. Each of these is then sub-divided into several sub-dimensions. Our own view is that other factors listed in the literature (shared values, inequality, quality of life) are determinants or consequences of social cohesion, but not constitutive factors. Implications for future research are discussed ‘.

‘The Mediating Role of Self-Esteem: The Effects of Social Support and Subjective Well-Being on Adolescents’ Risky Behaviors’ is a descriptive study conducted by Cakar & Tagay in 2017, when placed in the context of examining a structural model that was derived considering the effect of the perceived social support and subjective wellbeing on risky adolescent behaviors, and the possible mediating role of self-esteem. Participants were 676 high school students who were attending formal education institutions, a total of 376 girls and 300 boys. Data collection employed the use of Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory-Short Form, Risky Behaviors Scale, Social Support Rating Scale for Children and Adolescents, Subjective Well-being Scale, and a personal information form. LISREL 8.51 software were used during the process of building the structural model, and analysis showed sufficient amounts of indices of model-data fit. Subsequently, perceived support from social situations and subjective wellbeing, Self-esteem mediating effect explained 29% of the risky behavior variance.’

‘Cox et.al., conducted study ‘Exploring the link between place attachment and social wellbeing in older adults’ in 2024. Place attachment has been shown to play a significant role in promoting social well-being, particularly among individuals adapting to new environments. This study on older adults in St. Louis found a positive correlation between place attachment and various dimensions of social well-being, including social acceptance, integration, contribution, and actualization, highlighting the importance of emotional connection to place in enhancing one's sense of belonging. However, the study also noted that place attachment did not significantly impact all aspects of well-being, such as social coherence and intergroup anxiety, suggesting that while it fosters certain social benefits, it may not fully address all psychological or social challenges. These findings are relevant to the experiences of foreign football players in the Malabar region of Kerala, who, like other transitional groups, navigate cultural and social adjustments. This research builds upon existing literature by examining how place attachment, alongside other factors like social support and emotional well-being, influences the integration and social experiences of athletes in a unique regional sports context. ‘

‘Varghese (2024) conducted study among residents of Qatar during the 2022 FIFA World Cup highlighted the significant role of place attachment in shaping individuals' psychological and emotional responses to mega-events. Using validated scales such as the Psychological Place Attachment Scale (PPAS), the study found that volunteers exhibited a higher level of place attachment and psychic income compared to other residents, indicating a stronger emotional connection to the host nation among those actively involved in the event. Interestingly, place attachment was found to have a direct impact on psychic income, suggesting that a stronger bond with the place enhanced the perceived personal and community benefits of hosting the World Cup. However, no significant relationship was found between place attachment and psychological capital (PsyCap), nor between psychic income and PsyCap. Additionally, the findings revealed that students had higher levels of place attachment than working professionals, and those who had lived in Qatar for less than ten years reported higher psychological capital. These results underscore the importance of contextual and experiential factors in shaping place attachment and its influence on well-being and perceived benefits, offering valuable insights for understanding similar dynamics among foreign football players in regional sports settings like the Malabar Sevens circuit.

Stewart et.al., conducted study in ‘Multicultural meanings of social support among immigrants and refugees’ in 2008. The purpose of this study was to understand the meanings of social support for immigrants and refugees in Canada, and to explore the types and adequacy of formal supports. Individual interviews were conducted with 60 service providers and policymakers initially (Phase 1), and 120 immigrants and refugees (60 Chinese, 60 Somali) in the second phase. The implications of these findings were elicited in group interviews (Phase 3) of policy decision-makers, advocates, service providers, and managers. This investigation revealed many interrelated challenges facing refugees and immigrants such as language difficulties, inadequate information on services, poor health, racism, needs for retraining, rejection of foreign qualifications, unemployment, social isolation, social insecurity,

dwindling social networks, and family conflicts. The study also illuminated culturally and socio-economically determined perceptions of social support and support-seeking strategies.

Faleel et.al., (2012) studied on the topic ‘Stress, perceived social support, coping capability and depression: A study of local and foreign students in the Malaysian context’. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of perceived social support and stress on the coping capability and level of depression of foreign and local students in Malaysia. Using convenience sampling, 200 students from three universities in Selangor, Malaysia participated in the study. The results of this study revealed that there was a significant relationship between perceived social support and coping capability. It is also found that there is a negative relationship between coping capability and depression.

Tajeddini (2014) researched ‘Emotional intelligence and self-esteem among Indian and foreign students – (A comparative study)’ The purpose of the present research was to study Emotional Intelligence and Self Esteem among Indian and Foreign Students – A comparative study. Sample consisted of 400 students with 200 Men and 200 Women. The age range of 20 to 35 years from different Ph.D., M.Phil. and MA courses. The sample was drawn from education institutes such as Osmania University (OU), English and Foreign Language University (E F L U), Hyderabad Central University (HCU) and Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU) - India. The number of 32 foreign countries studied and compared with Indian students in this research. Tools used in the present study to collect data were 1- Self Esteem Inventory – M Rosenberg (1965) and 2- Emotional Intelligence Inventory - N Shutte (1998). It was concluded from the study that Emotional Intelligence and Self Esteem were strongly and positively correlated and significant. Concluded based on the findings of this study that foreign students showed higher Self Esteem as compared to Indian students

Saulius and Malinauskas conducted study in 2025 on ‘How do foreign students from different collectivist countries perceive interpersonal emotion regulation? A thematic analysis in Lithuania’. The main aim of our qualitative research is to find out how foreign students from different Collectivistic countries perceive interpersonal emotion regulation (IER). Using semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection and thematic analysis as a method of data analysis, we found that most participants used IER to provide psychological support to their colleagues and friends in a variety of contexts. 64% of participants highlighted cognitive strategies as key in emotional regulation, especially the use of temporal perspective shifting—and that, finally, most of the participants highlighted the evident results of the interventions, the most common of which was the increased adaptive behavior of the targets of IER.

Tuhina (2025) studied ‘Place attachment in foreign psychology: theoretical approaches and empirical research’. The article provides an overview of studies of the phenomenon of attachment to place of residence in foreign studies. A comparison of the points of view of foreign researchers on the relationship between the categories “Place Attachment” and “place identity” is carried out. It has been revealed that attachment to place of residence, according to the results of modern research, is a significant factor influencing intergroup relations, however, the characteristics of the influence are determined by the sociocultural context. The results of the analysis showed that the influence of place attachment largely determines pro-environmental behavior in relation to a place that is significant for a person. The article also analyzes the results of empirical studies of predictors of attachment to the place of residence: socio-demographic, socio-psychological, as well as the perception and assessment of the characteristics of the place of residence.

Hamza et.al., conducted study in ‘The role of social support factors in the development of elite football players’ in 2024. This research has emphasized that the journey to elite performance in football is influenced by a range of factors, including physical, technical, tactical, psychological, and notably, social and environmental elements. Among the social factors, support from parents, siblings, teachers, and especially coaches plays a critical role in shaping a player’s development and motivation. Parental encouragement and coach guidance have been identified as key contributors to an athlete’s progression to higher levels of competition. In addition, the training environment—including the availability, quality, and accessibility of sports facilities—has been shown to significantly impact performance outcomes. While the influence of social support is well established, the role of the training environment continues to be a subject of academic discussion. Nonetheless, a conducive and well-equipped environment is widely recognized for enhancing skill development and performance. This body of literature underscores the need to understand how both social and environmental support systems interact to influence the performance of football players striving to reach elite status.

3. Method

The methods or techniques which are used for conducting a research can be conceptualized as a research method. To put it another way, in order to analyze the research problem a researcher might use various methods and that can be termed as research method (Kothari,2004).

3.1 Research Design

“The structured framework of how a research is conducted can be referred to as a research design. It constitutes a complete blueprint about the research which includes how the data was collected, measurement and analysis of the collected data. In other words, a research design constitutes a framework of the complete research from forming a hypothesis to the final analysis of the data (Selltiz & Issues, 1959).”

For conducting this study, a qualitative research method was used, it helped in attaining a deeper level of knowledge about the topic and was able to find various other factors related to it. “A Qualitative research is one of the research method in which the major aim was to discover the underlying motives of human behavior, and by using this method we can analyze the various factors that motivate people to behave in a particular manner or which make people like or dislike a particular thing (Kothari, 2004). The qualitative research method also has different other advantages like collecting in depth information about the topic, used in better understanding about different concepts, understanding subjective opinions and how an individual's perception can give

meaning to the social reality (Kothari, 2004). For this research topic of analyzing the inner thoughts and experiences of foreign football players in Malabar region will give a genuine and deep knowledge and data.

3.2 Population and Sample

“A population is the complete group of objects (people, non-human animals, institutions) from which a sample is drawn to obtain empirical observations and to which results can be generalized, also called the universe” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

The population under this study is the foreign football players who are playing in the Malabar region.

“Sample is a subset of a population of interest that is selected for study with the aim of making inferences to the population. It is important to ensure that a sample is representative of the larger population” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

3.3 Sampling

The sample for this study was selected by using the method of purposive sampling. “Purposive sampling can be defined as a method used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information” (Kelly, 2010). The sample needed for this study was foreign football players playing in the Malabar region and the suitable method for collecting an in-depth information about the experiences, suggestion, struggles and difficulties raising infield and outfield. The goal of this research is not to generalize the results with a larger population but to gain a deeper level of knowledge from the participants of the research. The sample consisted of 10 players, selected completely based on the willingness to participate in this research and share their experiences.

3.3.1 Inclusion Criteria

- Participants must be foreign football players who are playing in and around the Malabar region
- Players must be above 18 years old.

3.3.2 Exclusion Criteria

- Female football players are excluded because of the lack of availability and there is no many teams and sevens football for them.
- Players of 11s formation is excluded because I focus on sevens football.

3.4 Data Collection Method

Semi structured interview

The data obtained for this research was through both face to face and telephonic semi structured interviews. The participants of this study were asked a set of previously prepared questionnaires with 10 questions. Questions were open ended questions that will help in collecting an in-depth level of information. The responses given by the participants were recorded with their consent. The demographic details of the participants of the research were collected along with the consent form, which ensures confidentiality and flexibility of the research.

3.5 Data Collection Tool

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed based on the study objectives. The Questionnaire included open-ended questions to explore the emotional, social, and place experiences of foreign football players in the Malabar region of Kerala. A voice recorder was used to capture the interviews for accurate transcription, and brief notes were taken during the sessions to document observations.

3.6 Procedure for Data Collection

This study explores the social well-being of foreign football players in the Malabar region of Kerala. A qualitative research approach was employed to elicit subjective experiences and insights. The sample comprised foreign football players who are playing sevens football for different clubs in the Malabar region, selected through purposive sampling. This non-probability sampling method enabled the selection of participants who could provide rich and meaningful narratives related to the research topic.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews conducted in a private and comfortable setting to ensure confidentiality and encourage open sharing. Participants were provided informed consent and demographic information such as age and place. The interviews consisted of approximately 12 open-ended questions, allowing participants to reflect on their personal experiences, emotions, place attachment, social view, view about the region, etc..

3.7 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is used to analyse the method. It involves careful reading and interpretation of data to extract meaning and understand different subjects and interpretations. It helps to identify the patterns and subjective variations about the topic.

It is a qualitative research strategy for identifying, analyzing, and reporting identifiable patterns or themes within data. There are multiple phases to this process: The researcher familiarizes themselves with the data, generates initial codes or categories for possible placement of themes, collates these codes into potential themes, reviews the chosen themes and checks that these work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, effectively generating a thematic “map” of the analysis, defines and names the themes, and produces the report (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.)

4. Result and Discussion

The study aimed to explore the social well-being among foreign football players in the Malabar region of Kerala. Through in-depth qualitative responses from ten participants, it became evident that the players experienced a complex interplay of challenges and positive experiences while adjusting to life in a new cultural and sporting environment. Most participants reported feeling welcomed and supported by the local community, highlighting the warmth, passion for football, and cultural hospitality of the region. The players expressed that despite the initial struggles—such as language barriers, cultural adaptation, climatic changes, and emotional isolation the support from teammates, coaches, and the local fans played a pivotal role in enhancing their sense of belonging. Engagement in local festivities like Onam, and the recognition they received from the public, helped to bridge cultural gaps. However, there were also underlying concerns regarding emotional and financial support, unequal treatment in terms of privileges and pay, and instances of discrimination against fellow foreign players. These mixed experiences reflect the dual nature of their social well-being—rooted in both a strong communal bond and structural or systemic shortcomings.

4.1.1 Table 1

The participants' socio demographic characteristics

Participant code	Age	Place
R1	26	Malappuram
R2	22	Kannur
R3	25	Calicut
R4	25	Malappuram
R5	27	Kasargod
R6	24	Calicut
R7	24	Kannur
R8	22	Palakkad
R9	23	Wayanad
R10	27	Palakkad

Total no of participants:10

From table 1 it is seen that a total of 10 subjects were present in the study. In which all the subjects are from Malabar region of Kerala.

4.1.2 Table 2

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Participant Responses
Cultural Adaptation and Adjustment	Language Barriers	All the participants mentioned about the language barriers that have faced from the team and place. It will affect the communication, emotional and feeling sharing. <i>"There must provide be a language assistant for each foreign player"</i> (R1).
	Climatic Challenges	<i>"Climate was also a challenge. But later, I got adjusted with the people and place"</i> (R2) <i>"The climatic changes here are sometime difficult for me. The sudden changes cause some disorders"</i> (R4) <i>"The climate of Kerala is so beautiful, and I loved it. Comparing to my homeplace Kerala have a good climate with cold atmosphere"</i> (R6)
	Cultural Immersion	<i>"I have attended some team gatherings festivals like Onam, Eid, Pooram, etc. These experiences helped me to understand Kerala's culture better and made me feel more welcomed"</i> (R1) <i>"Once I had participated in Onam celebration program of our club and it was really a best experience. They dance with us, play with us"</i> (R2) <i>"Festivals and gatherings make the relationships between the players more attached and develop a good bond among us"</i> (R9).

Emotional and Psychological Well-being	Homesickness and Loneliness	<i>"Especially during holidays or when injured. I will cope up with these by videocalls with my family, exploring local places and focusing on training help. But it is still tough sometimes" (R1) "Sometimes I miss being home. I try to engage more in my practice or go on an outing with my friends, it really helps" (R2) "I feel lonely when I get injured. The teammates look at me, but sometimes I will not get a proper emotional support like how I get from my family" (R6) "The news of functions, festivals and marriages related with my family and relatives will feel me homesick and loneliness" (R10).</i>
	Mental Resilience	<i>"Exploring local places and focusing on training help to avoid loneliness and mental stress" (R1) "Spending time with teammates is so stress release time for me. They support and shares everything" (R8)</i>
	Need for Emotional Support Systems	<i>"I think the most needed will be the emotional support, we left our homeland and came here only follow our passion as footballer, emotionally we might be drained coming to new place, don't know the language, new people and all. It takes some time to grind in with the process. If there is someone who can support emotionally is a big thing" (R2) "I believe one of the most essential needs for foreign players like us is emotional support. Leaving our homeland to pursue our passion for football can be emotionally exhausting especially when we arrive in a completely new environment" (R4) "One of the most crucial needs for foreign players is having strong emotional support systems in place. When we leave our home countries to follow our dreams in football, we are not just changing locations—we are stepping into a world where everything is unfamiliar, from language and food to social customs and daily routines. For example, during my initial days, I struggled with basic communication and often felt isolated despite being surrounded by people. In such moments, having someone to talk to or guide you emotionally can be incredibly comforting. Beyond emotional support, practical aspects like financial security and proper guidance in handling contracts are equally important. Without these, it becomes even harder to focus on the game, as you're constantly battling uncertainty both on and off the field." (R8)</i>
Financial and Contractual Issues	Low or Inconsistent Wages	<i>"The wages are not consistent. Sometimes we get paid, and sometimes we must keep reminding the management. It becomes awkward to ask repeatedly. We came here expecting professionalism, but the financial part is often very unorganized. We also have our families depending on us back home, so it's a big pressure" (R3) "There are times we don't get any match benefits or allowances, even if we win. And the worst part is, we can't even argue because we don't have any formal agreement or proper support here. It feels like we are being used just for the crowd attraction" (R7) "There were a few matches where I didn't receive any payment at all, even though I was promised a certain amount before the game. At first, I thought the delay was normal, but later I realized that some clubs just avoid paying foreign players properly. It's really discouraging when we give our full effort on the field and don't get compensated fairly" (R9) "Sometime I experience that some teams are not paying the equal wages for foreign players and local players" (R10).</i>
	Lack of Contract Transparency	<i>"When I signed up to play here at first time in another team, the agent didn't give me a proper contract. It was just a verbal agreement, and I trusted his words. But after coming here, I realized a lot of the promises like good accommodation, regular payment, and match bonuses were not kept. I had no written proof, so I couldn't do anything about it" (R3) "The contract, if you can call it that, was very vague. It didn't clearly mention how much we'd be paid per match or what facilities we'd get. It felt like they just made a document to show formality. Later, I found out that each player had a different deal, and there was no consistency or fairness" (R5) "One of my teammates was promised proper housing and travel support in his agreement, but when he came here, he had to stay in a shared room with no basic facilities. There was nothing in writing to fight back. These kinds of false promises are common here because the system is not transparent" (R9)</i>
	Inadequate Accommodation and Facilities	<i>"The accommodation is nice and comfortable for me. There are 3 foreign players in my team, and we were staying in an apartment near to club office" (R1) "The accommodation was very poor according to they said before making contract. It is a pathetic hall and very uncomfortable and no privacy. We are staying here by the passion to football" (R7) "Accommodation was not proper as I expect" (R8)</i>
Social Support and Interpersonal Relationships	Team Camaraderie	<i>"I am blessed with a good teammate and whenever i am in need i seek help from them. They make me feel home and they never tried to backlash or mistreat even though i am a foreigner" (R2) "From the first week itself, my teammates made sure I never felt like an outsider. Even when I struggled with the language, they helped me during the practice and explained things with gestures and patience. It felt like I was part of a brotherhood, not just a team" (R4) "I had no family here, but my teammates became my family. Whenever I was sick or feeling low, someone would always check on me, bring me food, or just sit and talk. That kind of care really helped me feel emotionally stable in a new place" (R5) "There were times</i>

		<p>when I messed up during a match, but nobody blamed me. Instead, the whole team came together and motivated me. That kind of support builds your confidence and makes you want to give your best every time you step on the field" (R9) "Once during a local festival, our team arranged a small celebration and insisted I be part of it. They taught me how to join in their traditional dance, and we all had a great laugh. Moments like that really built a strong connection beyond the game" (R10)</p>
Helpless	Coach and Staff Support	<p>"In the beginning, I was really struggling to keep up with the training style here. But our coach never made me feel left out. He spent extra time after sessions helping me adjust and constantly encouraged me. That personal attention made a big difference" (R1) "What I really appreciate is how approachable the coach is. I've played in other places where coaches hardly talk to you outside the game, but here, our coach checks in regularly—not just about football but also about how I'm doing in general" (R4) "During my first injury here, I was really nervous about what would happen. But the staff took care of everything—they arranged proper medical help and made sure I was comfortable. It gave me a sense of safety and reassurance" (R6) "There were a few cultural misunderstandings at first, but the coach handled them with patience and respect. He helped me understand the team's values and made sure others understood mine. That mutual respect really helped build trust" (R8)</p>
	Community Encouragement	<p>"The crowd here is something else! Every time we play, the ground is full, and the energy is just amazing. Even though I'm not from here, they cheer for me just like they cheer for local players. That support keeps me going" (R1) "When I walk through the town after a match, people wave and smile. Some even come up to talk and appreciate how I played. That kind of recognition makes me feel respected and part of this place" (R4) "I didn't expect people of Malabar to be this passionate about football. The fans come with drums, chants, and so much love. It feels like they understand how much we've sacrificed to be here, and they show that through their support" (R5) "I still remember one match where I scored a goal, and the crowd started chanting my name. I was shocked and emotional at the same time. That moment made me feel like I truly belonged here" (R8)</p>
Discrimination and Inequality	Ethnic or Racial Discrimination	<p>"Personally, I have not faced any discrimination, but I've heard from my fellow players that some locals treat them differently because of their skin color or where they come from. It doesn't happen all the time, but it's there" (R1) "In my case I haven't experienced any such unfair treatment. But I heard about it from my friends that the people try to mistreat them because of their color, and ethnicity" (R2) "Once, during a match, someone from the crowd shouted something about my appearance. It was just one person, but it made me feel uncomfortable. Most people are supportive, but those moments stay in your mind" (R5) "Discrimination may not always be direct, but it's subtle. Like being ignored in team discussions or not being given the same importance as local players. You can sense it in the way some people treat you" (R7)</p>
	Unequal Privilege	<p>"I've noticed that the local players get more opportunities whether it's training time, match selection, or even accommodation. Sometimes it feels like we're just here to fill in when they don't have enough players" (R3) "I have not experienced any kind of inequality. But there are times when the local players are given better gear or facilities compared to us. We sometimes must manage with older equipment or wait for what's left" (R9) "I think it's because they have been playing here longer and know the system. But still, it feels unfair when contracts, payments, or even travel arrangements are better for them than for us" (R10).</p>

4.2 Discussion

The data in this study were analyzed using thematic analysis which consists of six major steps proposed by Braun and Clerk 1) familiarizing with data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The major area of focus of this study was to deeply analyze the social well-being among foreign football players in Malabar region of Kerala and the analysis of the data revealed 14 sub themes under five major themes.

This discussion explores the themes and subthemes identified through the experiences of foreign football players participating in Sevens football clubs in the Malabar region of Kerala. Each theme reveals a unique aspect of the players' social well-being and reflects on the cultural, emotional, professional, and systemic challenges they face. This section integrates participant narratives with theoretical insights to provide a holistic understanding of their lived realities.

Theme 1: Cultural Adaptation and Adjustment

Cultural adaptation and adjustment are essential processes for foreign football players who relocate to new regions, particularly in culturally rich and diverse areas like the Malabar region of Kerala. This theme encompasses how players adjust to differences in language, lifestyle, food, social interactions,

and local customs. In Malabar, where football is deeply embedded in the local culture, players are often exposed to community-driven events and traditions, such as the Onam festival, which can both challenge and enrich their cultural experience. The ability to adapt culturally has a direct influence on their social well-being, emotional stability, and on-field performance.'

Language barriers

Language differences were one of the first and most pressing challenges faced by foreign players. Most participants reported that not knowing Malayalam created difficulties in understanding instructions, communicating with teammates, and engaging with the local community. "There must provide be a language assistant for each foreign player" (R1). "During the initial days it was very difficult, language was one of the major barriers to adapt with the culture and environment" (R2). Despite this, players adapted by relying on non-verbal communication and slowly learning basic phrases. This adjustment reflects Berry's (1997) acculturation model, where language acquisition is essential for integration.

Climatic challenges

Players reported significant discomfort due to Kerala's humid and hot climate, especially those from cooler regions. Initially, this impacted their physical performance and health. However, regular exposure, physical conditioning, and encouragement from teammates helped them adjust. "Climate was also a challenge. But later, I got adjusted with the people and place" (R2). "The climatic changes here are sometime difficult for me. The sudden changes cause some disorders" (R4). This aligns with research in sports migration (Magee & Sugden, 2002) which highlights environmental adaptation as a key factor in athlete integration.

Cultural immersion

Participation in festivals such as Onam offered players a meaningful cultural connection. Sharing food, dancing, and engaging in community activities helped bridge the gap between the foreign players and locals. "I have attended some team gatherings festivals like Onam, Eid, Pooram, etc. These experiences helped me to understand Kerala's culture better and made me feel more welcomed" (R1). This cultural immersion not only fostered inclusion but also built respect and appreciation on both sides.

Theme 2: Emotional and Psychological Well-being

' Emotional and psychological well-being is a vital theme in understanding the lived experiences of foreign football players in the Malabar region of Kerala. Being away from their home countries, these players often face challenges such as loneliness, homesickness, cultural differences, and performance pressure, all of which can impact their mental health. A supportive environment—comprising teammates, coaches, fans, and local communities—can play a significant role in maintaining emotional balance and building resilience. When players feel valued and accepted, it boosts their self-esteem, motivation, and overall psychological well-being, which in turn positively influences their on-field performance. However, the absence of emotional support or the presence of stressors like discrimination, unstable contracts, or lack of legal protection can lead to anxiety, low confidence, and emotional burnout. Thus, emotional and psychological well-being is not only crucial for their personal happiness but also essential for sustaining consistent and high-level performance in the competitive Malabar Sevens football circuit.'

Homesickness and loneliness

Leaving their families and familiar environments left many players emotionally vulnerable. Several reported feelings of sadness and disconnection, especially during the early stages. "Sometimes I miss being home. I try to engage more in my practice or go on an outing with my friends, it really helps" (R2). "I feel lonely when I get injured. The teammates look at me, but sometimes I will not get a proper emotional support like how I get from my family" (R6). These emotions are consistent with migration literature, which documents isolation as a common experience among migrants (Anderson, 1994).

Mental resilience

Despite emotional lows, most players demonstrated considerable resilience. They focused on training, formed new friendships, and engaged in activities to cope. "Exploring local places and focusing on training help to avoid loneliness and mental stress" (R1). "Spending time with teammates is so stress release time for me. They support and shares everything" (R8). This resilience underscores the role of intrinsic motivation and adaptive coping strategies, as emphasized in psychological resilience theory (Masten, 2001).

Need for emotional support systems

Multiple participants expressed the need for structured emotional support. Players recommended that clubs offer access to counselors or mentorship programs. The absence of such support can hinder their mental health and performance. "I think the most needed will be the emotional support, we left our homeland and came here only follow our passion as footballer, emotionally we might be drained coming to new place, don't know the language, new people and all. It takes some time to grind in with the process. If there is someone who can support emotionally is a big thing" (R2). These insights reflect gaps in athlete welfare infrastructure.

Theme 3: Social Support and Interpersonal Relationships

' Social support and interpersonal relationships play a critical role in shaping the experiences of foreign football players in the Malabar region of Kerala. Moving to a new cultural and social environment, these players often rely heavily on the relationships they build with teammates, coaches, club staff, and residents. Positive social interactions provide emotional comfort, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, which help them cope with the challenges of adaptation and professional demands. Strong interpersonal bonds can ease the stress of cultural transition, boost morale, and enhance team cohesion, all of which contribute to better performance and mental well-being. In the Malabar football scene, where the community is deeply engaged with the sport, the support from passionate fans and inclusive clubs further strengthens players' motivation and integration.'

Team camaraderie

Teammates were described as central to the players' adaptation. Many players felt they were treated like family, with others helping them understand local customs and supporting them during personal challenges. "I am blessed with a good teammate and whenever i am in need i seek help from them. They make me feel home and they never tried to backlash or mistreat even though i am a foreigner" (R2) "From the first week itself, my teammates made sure I never felt like an outsider. Even when I struggled with the language, they helped me during the practice and explained things with gestures and patience. It felt like I was part of a brotherhood, not just a team" (R4). These bonds reflect strong team cohesion, which contributes to emotional safety and performance (Carron & Brawley, 2000).

Coach and staff support

Support from coaching staff was cited as a major strength. Coaches were approachable, empathetic, and attentive to the players' well-being. "In the beginning, I was really struggling to keep up with the training style here. But our coach never made me feel left out. He spent extra time after sessions helping me adjust and constantly encouraged me. That personal attention made a big difference" (R1). This aligns with coaching psychology literature that emphasizes the importance of emotionally intelligent leadership (Thelwell et al., 2008).

Community encouragement

Local fans played a significant role in boosting morale. Players described how cheers from the crowd and post-match interactions with supporters made them feel accepted and respected. "The crowd here is something else! Every time we play, the ground is full, and the energy is just amazing. Even though I'm not from here, they cheer for me just like they cheer for local players. That support keeps me going" (R1) "When I walk through the town after a match, people wave and smile. Some even come up to talk and appreciate how I played. That kind of recognition makes me feel respected and part of this place" (R4). Community support served as a key motivator and a form of emotional reinforcement.

Theme 4: Discrimination and Inequality

' Discrimination and inequality are important themes when examining the experiences of foreign football players in the Malabar region of Kerala. Despite the region's passion for football and the generally welcoming nature of the local community, some players face unequal treatment based on race, nationality, or contractual status. Instances of racial discrimination, lack of transparency in contracts, and differences in pay or accommodation compared to local players can lead to feelings of exclusion and injustice. Such experiences not only affect players' emotional well-being but also hinder their ability to fully integrate into the team and community. Persistent inequality can lower self-esteem, reduce motivation, and create tension within teams, ultimately impacting on-field performance. Addressing these issues is crucial for creating an inclusive and supportive football environment where all players—regardless of their origin—are treated fairly and can thrive both personally and professionally.'

Ethnic or racial discrimination

Though not a universal experience, several players shared that they or their peers encountered subtle or overt discrimination based on race or nationality. "Personally, I have not faced any discrimination, but I've heard from my fellow players that some locals treat them differently because of their skin color or where they come from. It doesn't happen all the time, but it's there" (R1) "In my case I haven't experienced any such unfair treatment. But I heard about it from my friends that the people try to mistreat them because of their color, and ethnicity" (R2). This highlights underlying prejudices that need to be addressed within the local football ecosystem.

Unequal privileges

Many participants noted disparities in how local and foreign players are treated. Local players often received better equipment, facilities, and recognition. "I've noticed that the local players get more opportunities whether it's training time, match selection, or even accommodation. Sometimes it feels like we're just here to fill in when they don't have enough players" (R3) "I have not experienced any kind of inequality. But there are times when the local players are given better gear or facilities compared to us. We sometimes must manage with older equipment or wait for what's left" (R9). These imbalances create professional insecurity and hinder social equality.

Theme 5: Financial and Contractual Issues

' Financial and contractual issues are significant concerns affecting the stability and performance of foreign football players in the Malabar region of Kerala. Many of these players enter into informal or poorly defined agreements with local clubs, often lacking legal protection, job security, or clear terms regarding salary, duration, and benefits. Delayed payments, inconsistent wages, and the absence of formal contracts can lead to financial insecurity and stress, undermining their sense of safety and commitment. These uncertainties can distract players from focusing on their performance, affect their mental well-being, and diminish their trust in the system. Addressing financial and contractual transparency is essential for ensuring fairness, professionalism, and long-term development in the Malabar Sevens football scene.'

Low or inconsistent wages

Many players reported irregular or insufficient payments. Some were not paid for certain matches despite prior agreements. "The wages are not consistent. Sometimes we get paid, and sometimes we must keep reminding the management. It becomes awkward to ask repeatedly. We came here expecting professionalism, but the financial part is often very unorganized. We also have our families depending on us back home, so it's a big pressure" (R3). These experiences reflect financial exploitation, a common issue in unregulated sports markets (Poli, 2010).

Lack of contract transparency

Several players had no written contracts or were given vague terms. This lack of clarity led to misunderstandings and left them with little recourse when disputes arose. "One of my teammates was promised proper housing and travel support in his agreement, but when he came here, he had to stay in a shared room with no basic facilities. There was nothing in writing to fight back. These kinds of false promises are common here because the system is not transparent" (R9). Standardized contracts and legal aid are urgently needed.

Inadequate accommodation and facilities

Poor living conditions were reported by some players, particularly those recruited through informal networks. "The accommodation is nice and comfortable for me. There are 3 foreign players in my team, and we were staying in an apartment near to club office. But in some teams, they complained that accommodation is not well." (R1) "The accommodation was very poor according to they said before making contract. It is a pathetic hall and very uncomfortable and no privacy. We are staying here by the passion to football" (R7). Lack of proper housing and facilities negatively impacted their health and performance. All figures should be numbered with Arabic numerals (1,2,3,...). Every figure should have a caption. All photographs, schemas, graphs and diagrams are to be referred to as figures. Line drawings should be good quality scans or true electronic output. Low-quality scans are not acceptable. Figures must be embedded into the text and not supplied separately. In MS word input the figures must be properly coded. Lettering and symbols should be clearly defined either in the caption or in a legend provided as part of the figure. Figures should be placed at the top or bottom of a page wherever possible, as close as possible to the first reference to them in the paper.

The figure number and caption should be typed below the illustration in 8 pt and left justified [*Note:* one-line captions of length less than column width (or full typesetting width or oblong) centered]. For more guidelines and information to help you submit high quality artwork please visit: <http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/authorsview.authors/authorartworkinstructions>. Artwork has no text along the side of it in the main body of the text. However, if two images fit next to each other, these may be placed next to each other to save space. For example, see Fig. 1.

5. Conclusion and Summary

The research summary is an important as any other part of the research. The summary and conclusion part of the research takes in the large set of ideas and analysis portrayed along all previous chapters and paints the picture as a whole. It gives out a brief outlook of the research findings and results.

The purpose of the study was to analyze the impact of social well-being among foreign football players in the Malabar region of Kerala. Qualitative research design was used to identify the deep understanding of the various challenges faced by the foreign players. Qualitative research is a type of research that explores and provides deeper insight into real world problems. Major objective of the study is to explore the factors like place attachment, social support, social cohesion, social justice, emotional support and self-esteem. Foreign football players who are playing for the local sevens teams in the Malabar region of Kerala aged above 18 were taken for this research. Purposive sampling method is chosen for the present study. The method of data collection is an in-depth interview. In this method participants have freedom to explore additional points and change the direction of the process when necessary, using the interview method for collecting data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

This qualitative research explored the social well-being among foreign football players currently playing in the Sevens football teams across the Malabar region of Kerala, India. Through semi-structured interviews with ten foreign male players and a thematic analysis, the study aimed to understand how these athletes experience and perceive various dimensions of social well-being—including place attachment, social support, emotional resilience, social cohesion, justice, and self-esteem.

Findings indicate that players initially struggled with language barriers, cultural differences, and homesickness, but gradually adjusted with the support of teammates, coaches, and the broader community. Their involvement in local cultural celebrations enhanced their sense of belonging. Emotional and social

support from their immediate circles played a crucial role in their adaptation and well-being. At the same time, challenges such as unequal treatment, contract issues, and occasional discrimination were also evident, pointing to areas of concern. A sports psychologist is needed for every team for assisting the players especially for foreign players. Giving legal support, mental and emotional health care, improving the team cohesion among local and foreign players and to listen the problems of players.

Despite these hardships, the deep-rooted football culture in Kerala, enthusiastic local fanbase, and the players' own passion for the sport helped foster a strong sense of motivation and purpose. Their stories reflect both the richness and complexity of living and performing in a foreign land, emphasizing the importance of structured support systems for expatriate athletes.

5.2 Major Findings

Through the collected data from a semi structured interview, the following results were found;

- Language and Climate were significant initial barriers, but players overcame them through adaptation and peer support.
- Emotional challenges such as homesickness and loneliness were common, especially during the initial phase of their stay.
- Team camaraderie and supportive coaches were key factors in enhancing players' emotional and social well-being.
- Players developed strong place attachment and felt a sense of belonging through cultural participation (e.g., Onam).
- Football fans in Malabar provided immense motivation, boosting self-esteem and confidence during matches.
- Instances of racial discrimination and inequality in access to resources were reported or observed secondhand.
- Contractual and financial issues, such as lack of clarity and delayed or denied payments, were a recurring concern.
- Despite these, players expressed deep passion for football, which helped them endure and grow through challenges.
- Cultural exchange between locals and foreign players enriched the experience for both groups.
- Structural emotional and legal support systems were found lacking and were strongly recommended by participants.
- A sports psychologist is needed for every team for assisting the players especially for foreign players. Giving legal support, mental and emotional health care, improving the team cohesion among local and foreign players and to listen the problems of players.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The implication of the study includes the following:

- Football clubs and management bodies should implement formal emotional support systems for foreign players.
- Language and cultural orientation programs can help improve early-stage adaptation.
- There is a need for transparent and fair contractual agreements to protect the rights of foreign players.
- The study highlights the importance of inclusive sports environments to promote intercultural understanding.
- Local football authorities should monitor agencies and intermediaries to prevent exploitation.
- Enhanced community engagement initiatives can help deepen mutual respect and integration between locals and foreign athletes.
- Findings can guide policy reforms in sports associations to ensure equal treatment and social justice for expatriate athletes.

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Appendix — A

Consent Form

Title of the Study:

Social well-being among foreign football players of the Malabar region of Kerala.

Shamil Bin Ashraf (Final Year MSc Applied Psychology)

Department of Psychology

Wadihuda Institute of Research and Advanced Studies, Vilayanocde

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to explore how the social well-being experiences among the foreign football players who are playing in the Malabar region of Kerala. Before deciding to participate, it is important for you to understand the purpose, procedures, and potential implications of the study.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to understand and aware about the feelings and experiences of foreign football players playing in Kerala's Northern Malabar region. By participating, you contribute valuable information that may enhance our understanding of the basic emotions, feelings, needs of players and support that they want.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

Engage in a short, semi-structured interview to share your thoughts and experiences on different aspects of social wellbeing that place attachment, social support, social cohesion, emotional support, social justice and self-esteem. The entire process is expected to take approximately 45 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without consequences.

Potential Risks and Benefits:

There are no anticipated physical risks associated with this study. However, discussing personal experiences related to you may evoke emotional responses. To minimize discomfort, you have the right to skip any questions or withdraw from the study at any point.

Potential benefits include contributing to academic research on sports, need of foreign players, problems facing by the foreign players, their emotional and mental feelings and experiences.

Confidentiality:

Your responses will be kept confidential. To collect data, your responses may be recorded. All data will be anonymized and stored securely. Only the researchers will have access to the collected information. Any published results will not include personally identifiable information.

Participant Rights:

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact 9072437034.

Certificate of Consent

By continuing with this interview, you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided
- ☐ I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.
- ☐ I am aware that I can withdraw at any time without consequence.
- ☐ All the information given are correct to the best of my knowledge.

Participant's Name:

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Appendix — B

Sociodemographic Details of the Subject

Name:

Age:

Place:

Nation:

Appendix — C

Questionnaire

1. How connected do you feel to the Malabar region as a place of residence and play?
2. What are the challenges you faced in adapting to the local culture and environment?
3. How would you describe your relationships with local teammates and coaches?
4. Have you participated in social or cultural events outside of football? If so, how has that impacted your sense of belonging?
5. What kind of support do you need the most as a foreign player in Kerala, and do you feel you receive enough of it?
6. Can you explain how your experiences with social support in Kerala compare to your home country or other places you have played football?
7. Who do you turn to when facing emotional difficulties (teammates, coaches, local friends, family back home)? Why?
8. Have you ever felt isolated or homesick? If yes, how do you cope with these feelings?
9. How has playing in the Malabar region influenced your confidence as a player and person?
10. Have you faced any discrimination or unfair treatment based on your nationality or ethnicity in Kerala?
11. Do you feel that foreign players are given equal opportunities in terms of contracts, wages, and playing time?
12. Did you notice any issues related to the foreign football players in the Malabar region?
13. What improvements do you think are necessary to ensure fairness for foreign players in the Malabar football community?