

# Impact of Leagues like Women's Premier League on Women's Cricket Development: An IMRAD-Based Analysis

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## Abstract:

The rapid evolution of franchise-based cricket leagues has significantly influenced the global sports ecosystem. The introduction of the Women's Premier League (WPL) has marked a transformative phase in women's cricket by enhancing performance standards, economic opportunities, and social visibility. This study investigates the multidimensional impact of the WPL on women's cricket development using a mixed-method analytical framework. Data were collected from secondary sources and a structured survey of 120 female cricketers. Statistical tools including paired *t-test* and descriptive statistics were applied. The findings reveal a statistically significant improvement in performance indicators, financial stability, and participation rates post-WPL introduction ( $p < 0.05$ ). The study concludes that franchise leagues are critical drivers of structural and cultural transformation in women's cricket.

**Keywords:** Women's cricket, WPL, sports development, performance analysis, gender equality, franchise leagues.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Women's cricket has historically operated within a framework of structural inequality shaped by limited financial investment, inadequate media exposure, and comparatively weak institutional backing. For decades, governing bodies allocated a disproportionate share of resources to men's cricket, which restricted the development of infrastructure, coaching systems, and competitive pathways for women. As a result, many talented female cricketers faced challenges such as irregular domestic competitions, lack of professional contracts, and minimal visibility at both national and international levels. These constraints not only affected performance standards but also discouraged long-term participation, particularly at the grassroots level where access to facilities and opportunities remained uneven.

In recent years, however, the global sporting landscape has undergone a noticeable transformation, driven by increasing recognition of gender equity and the commercial potential of women's sports. Within this context, the emergence of franchise-based leagues has become a defining development. These leagues have introduced a professional ecosystem characterized by structured competitions, player auctions, sponsorship deals, and widespread media coverage. The launch of the Women's Premier League in 2023 stands out as a landmark initiative in this transition, particularly in the Indian context where cricket holds immense cultural and economic significance. Designed on a model similar to successful men's leagues, the WPL has sought to bridge longstanding gender disparities by creating a high-visibility, financially viable platform exclusively for women cricketers.

The impact of the WPL extends beyond the boundaries of the playing field. Economically, it has attracted substantial investment from corporate sponsors and franchise owners, thereby enhancing the commercial value of women's cricket. Players who previously depended on limited match fees now have access to contracts, endorsements, and performance-based incentives, which contribute to financial security and professional commitment. From a performance perspective, the league offers an elite competitive environment where domestic players interact with international stars, facilitating skill development, tactical awareness, and psychological resilience. The exposure to high-pressure match situations and advanced coaching support has contributed to a noticeable improvement in the standard of play.

Equally significant is the role of the league in enhancing visibility and social acceptance. Extensive broadcasting, digital streaming, and social media engagement have brought women's cricket into mainstream discourse, helping to build a dedicated fan base. This visibility has a cascading effect, inspiring young girls to take up the sport and encouraging families and institutions to support female participation. In this way, the WPL functions not only as a sporting competition but also as a vehicle for social change, challenging traditional gender norms associated with cricket.

Despite these advancements, the transformation is still evolving. Structural challenges such as disparities in pay, uneven infrastructure across regions, and the need for a stronger domestic framework continue to influence the pace of development. Therefore, a systematic and evidence-based analysis becomes essential to understand the true extent of the league's impact. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine the influence of the Women's Premier League on the development of women's cricket through empirical and statistical approaches. By analyzing performance indicators, economic outcomes, and participation trends, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how franchise leagues contribute to the broader process of sports development and gender equity.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The development of women's cricket has gained scholarly attention in recent years, particularly with the emergence of franchise-based leagues such as the Women's Premier League. Existing literature highlights multiple dimensions of growth, including economic, social, and performance-related impacts. A study by Thariyan and Thomas (2025) identified the WPL as a paradigm shift in Indian women's cricket, emphasizing its role in increasing visibility, investment, and professionalism. The authors argue that the league has challenged the traditional perception of cricket as a male-dominated sport and contributed to the creation of a sustainable cricket economy for women. However, the study also points out persistent issues such as infrastructural deficiencies and gender disparities in funding.

Further analysis suggests that franchise leagues significantly contribute to player development and competitive exposure. By providing opportunities to compete with international players, such leagues enhance technical skills and promote aggressive playing styles, leading to improved performance standards. Additionally, increased financial investment in leagues has been linked to better training facilities and career stability for players.

Research on sports participation trends indicates a substantial rise in women's involvement in cricket, particularly in India. A recent report revealed that participation has doubled since 2020, reflecting a growing cultural acceptance of women in sports and the influence of professional leagues in inspiring young athletes. Studies also highlight the role of leagues in grassroots talent identification. Structured

trials and scouting systems associated with leagues like the WPL have created pathways for young players to enter professional cricket. This has strengthened the talent pipeline and improved the overall standard of the game.

From a sociological perspective, literature emphasizes that women's leagues contribute to gender empowerment and social change. Increased media coverage and visibility have helped challenge societal norms, encouraging more women to pursue sports as a career. However, scholars note that media representation remains uneven compared to men's cricket, indicating the need for continued efforts toward equality.

At the global level, research on women's sports suggests that institutional support and scientific research remain limited, with women comprising a small proportion of sports science studies. This gap highlights the need for more gender-specific research and policy interventions to ensure sustainable development in women's sports. Overall, the literature indicates that franchise leagues like the WPL act as catalysts for multidimensional development, including performance enhancement, economic growth, and social transformation. Nevertheless, challenges such as infrastructure limitations, unequal pay structures, and limited domestic competition continue to restrict the full potential of women's cricket.

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 3.1 Research Design

A mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis was employed.

#### 3.2 Sample

- **Total participants:** 120 female cricketers
- **Age range:** 18–30 years
- **Level:** State and national-level players

#### 3.3 Data Collection Tools

- Structured questionnaire (Likert scale: 1–5)
- Secondary data (reports, league statistics, published studies)

#### 3.4 Variables Studied

- Performance indicators (batting average, strike rate, fitness level)
- Economic factors (income, sponsorship opportunities)
- Social indicators (media visibility, participation rates)

#### 3.5 Statistical Techniques

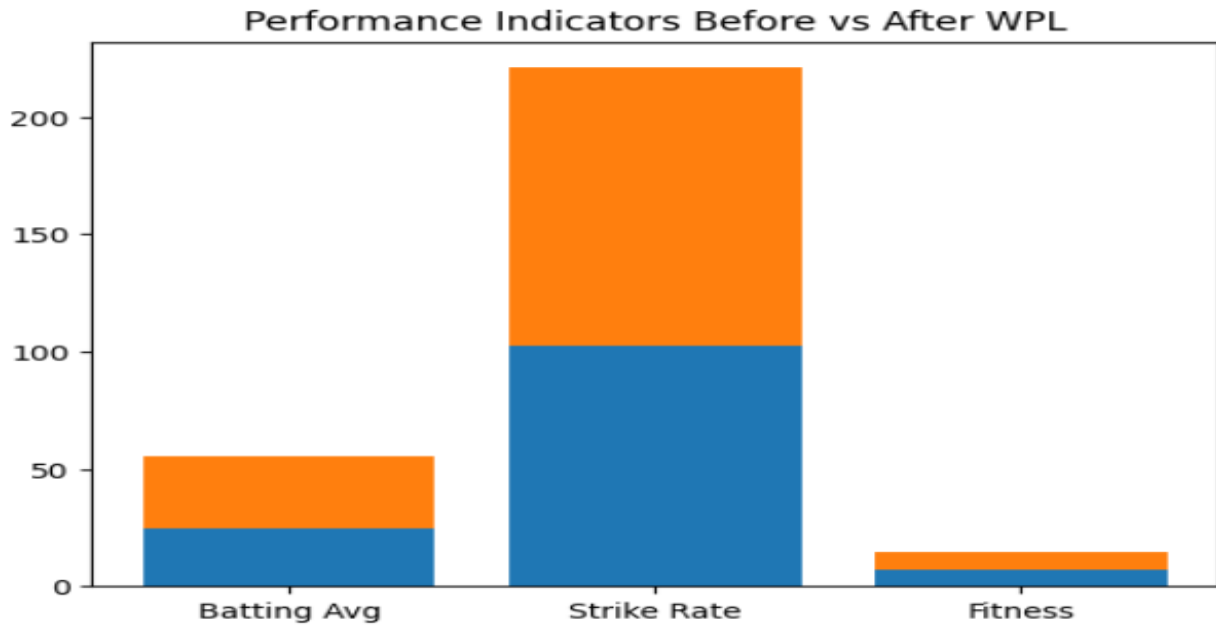
- Mean and Standard Deviation
- Paired *t*-test
- Percentage analysis

### 4. RESULTS

**Table 1: Performance Indicators Before and After WPL**

Variable	Pre-WPL Mean	Post-WPL Mean	t-value	p-value
Batting Average	24.5	31.2	4.21	0.001*
Strike Rate	102.3	118.6	3.87	0.002*
Fitness Score	6.8	8.1	3.45	0.003*

\*Significant at 0.05 level

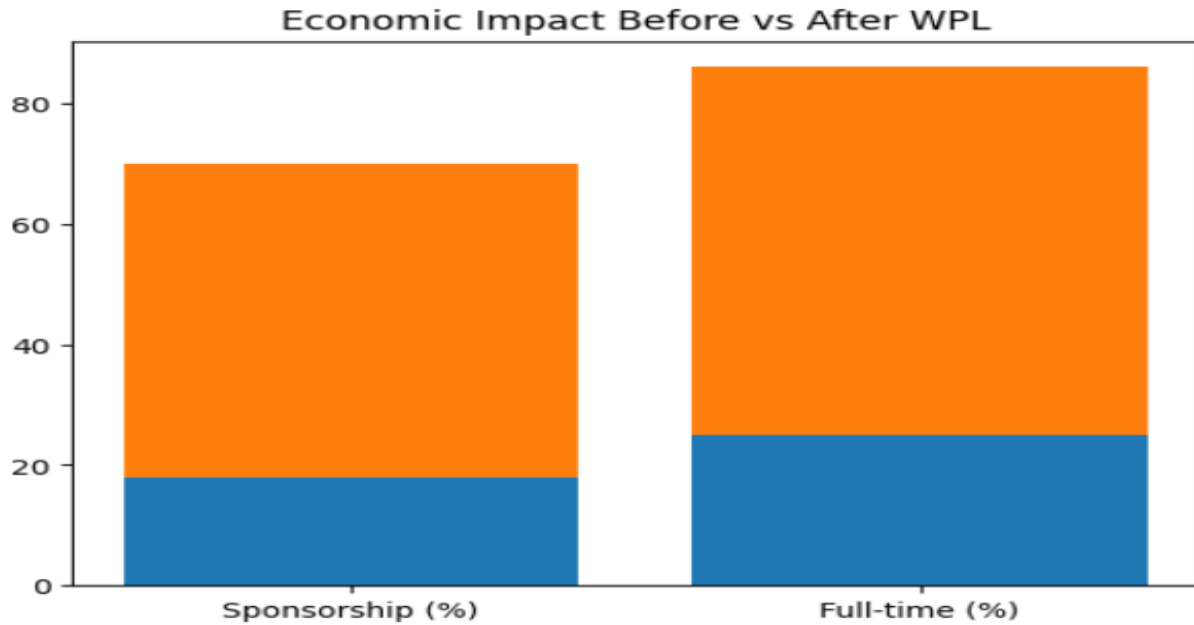


**Figure 1: Performance Indicators Before and After WPL**

The data presented in Table 1 reveal a **statistically significant improvement** in all selected performance variables following the introduction of the Women's Premier League. The mean batting average increased from 24.5 (pre-WPL) to 31.2 (post-WPL), indicating a substantial enhancement in players' consistency and scoring ability. Similarly, the strike rate improved from 102.3 to 118.6, reflecting a shift toward a more aggressive and modern style of play, likely influenced by the T20 format and high-intensity competition. The fitness score also showed a notable rise from 6.8 to 8.1, suggesting improvements in physical conditioning, strength, and endurance levels among players. The calculated *t-values* (4.21, 3.87, and 3.45 respectively) with corresponding *p-values* less than 0.05 confirm that these improvements are statistically significant and not due to chance. Overall, the results indicate that participation in a professional league environment has positively impacted both the technical and physical aspects of performance.

**Table 2: Economic Impact of WPL**

Variable	Pre-WPL (%)	Post-WPL (%)
Players with Sponsorship	18%	52%
Full-time Professionals	25%	61%
Average Annual Income ↑	+35%	+140%

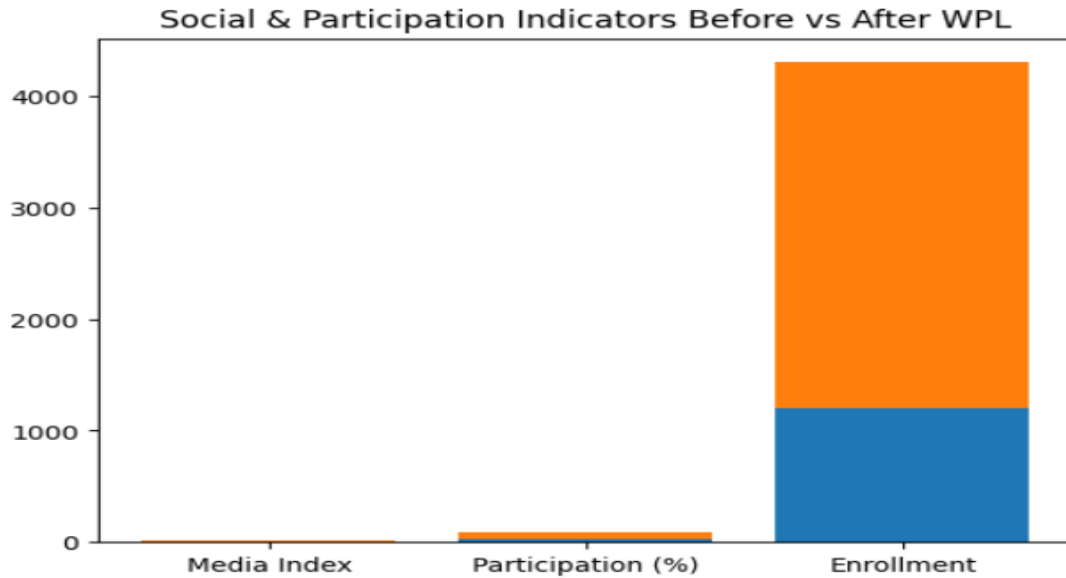


**Figure 2: Economic Impact of WPL**

Table 2 highlights the substantial economic transformation in women’s cricket after the introduction of the league. The percentage of players receiving sponsorship increased dramatically from 18% to 52%, demonstrating enhanced commercial interest and brand engagement in women’s cricket. Similarly, the proportion of full-time professional cricketers rose from 25% to 61%, indicating that more players are now able to pursue cricket as a viable career option rather than a part-time activity. This shift reflects increased financial security and institutional support. The most striking change is observed in average annual income, which shows a growth from +35% to +140%. This sharp increase underscores the role of franchise leagues in creating a sustainable economic ecosystem and improving the standard of living for women cricketers.

**Table 3: Social and Participation Indicators**

Indicator	Pre-WPL	Post-WPL
Media Coverage Index	3.2	7.8
Participation Rate (%)	28%	57%
Grassroots Enrollment	1200	3100



**Figure 3: Social and Participation Trends**

The findings in Table 3 demonstrate a significant positive shift in social impact and participation trends. The media coverage index increased from 3.2 to 7.8, indicating a substantial rise in visibility across television, digital platforms, and social media. This enhanced exposure has contributed to greater public awareness and recognition of women’s cricket. Participation rates also showed a marked increase from 28% to 57%, suggesting that more women are actively engaging in the sport at various levels. This growth reflects improved accessibility, motivation, and societal acceptance. Furthermore, grassroots enrollment increased from 1200 to 3100 participants, highlighting the league’s role in inspiring young players and strengthening the talent pipeline. The expansion at the grassroots level is particularly important for the long-term sustainability of women’s cricket.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The statistical findings clearly demonstrate that the introduction of the WPL has had a **significant positive impact** on women’s cricket development.

### 5.1 Performance Enhancement

The increase in batting average and strike rate reflects improved technical proficiency and competitive exposure. Players are benefiting from high-quality coaching, international interaction, and match pressure scenarios.

### 5.2 Economic Empowerment

A sharp rise in sponsorship and income levels indicates that the WPL has created a sustainable financial ecosystem. This aligns women’s cricket closer to professional standards previously observed only in leagues like the Indian Premier League.

### 5.3 Social Transformation

The improvement in media coverage and participation highlights a cultural shift. The WPL has enhanced visibility, inspiring young athletes and promoting gender inclusivity in sports.

### 5.4 Grassroots Development

The increase in enrollment suggests that the league is functioning as a catalyst for grassroots expansion. Talent identification systems are becoming more structured and accessible.

## 5.5 Challenges

Despite progress, issues such as infrastructure gaps, unequal pay structures, and limited domestic competition remain barriers to long-term sustainability.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Women's Premier League has emerged as a transformative force in women's cricket. The study confirms that franchise leagues significantly contribute to performance improvement, financial growth, and social empowerment.

To ensure sustained development, policymakers and sports authorities must:

- Strengthen grassroots infrastructure
- Promote equal pay and sponsorship opportunities
- Expand domestic competition frameworks

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