

31 August, 2020

Joint academic letter to all board members at World Rugby and Member Unions

To the attention of *all* members of the World Rugby Executive Committee

Care of Sir Bill Beaumont, Chair and Bernard Laporte, Vice-Chair

cc. All board members of national unions c/o Andy Cosslett (RFU), Tim Powers (RC), Bernard Laporte (FFR), Brent Impey (NZR), Nicholas Comyn (IRFU), Mark Alexander (SARU), Hamish McLennan (RA), Gareth Davies (WRU), Alfredo Gavazzi (FIR), Julie Lau (USAR), John Jeffrey (SR), Marcelo Rodríguez (UAR)

Dear Board and Executive Leaders,

We write as academics from a range of fields whose research is in sport, public health, or involves transgender people. We are opposed to World Rugby's proposed ban of an entire population group from playing women's rugby: non-binary people assumed male at birth and transgender women. There is no peer-reviewed, scientific evidence to justify a ban which would only be harmful to trans and gender diverse people. This is not a fringe population affected; recent large-scale research by the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found 3.4% of American school students (year 9-12) identify as trans or gender diverse, or they were "not sure" about their gender identity (Johns et al., 2019).

To develop appropriate guidelines requires ongoing work with transgender athletes and community representatives, and engagement with rigorous, peer-reviewed evidence. These guidelines fail on both accounts. There currently is very little peer-reviewed science that has collected data on trans women athletes, and the guidelines rely on assumptions about trans women's bodies. The guidelines propose to ban trans women and non-binary people who have "transitioned post-puberty and have experienced the biological effects of testosterone during puberty" from participating in women's rugby. This is based on a *suggestion* that cisgender women "who are participating with and against transwomen are at a significantly increased risk of injury", including an injury risk increase of "at least 20-30%" during tackles. This claim appears to be based on unpublished, non-peer reviewed research (one study in particular which was not conducted with trans athletes) and predictive modelling.

As you are likely aware from World Rugby's pioneering research on concussions, conducting research to determine injury rates/risks is resource intensive, difficult, and the findings are often inconclusive. There is no evidence that a simple model can be used to answer such complex questions. Furthermore, recent systematic reviews of research, which have undergone peer-review, have found no evidence that trans women pose a safety risk to others (Ingram & Thomas, 2019; Jones et al., 2017). Adopting these draft guidelines will undermine World Rugby's reputation for developing and adopting evidence-based policies to ensure player welfare and safety.

Evidence-based policy making takes time and requires deep consultation with the people who are directly affected. Yet, there is also no evidence that there has been a meaningful consultation process with transgender rugby players, their cisgender female teammates or transgender community organisations. The guidelines also do not consider existing anti-discrimination laws and human rights protections in many rugby playing countries.

If the values of Rugby really are based around the concept of inclusion, policies cannot alienate and discriminate against vulnerable people. We urge World Rugby and its Member Unions to consult with relevant stakeholders to devise new guidelines that are inclusive, comply with anti-discrimination laws, and based on peer-reviewed evidence from research *with* transgender athletes.

Signed,

**Note: peer-reviewed references at end of signatures*

This letter reflects the views of the signees. It does not reflect the views of the institutions or departments.

Name	School/Department	University
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Prof George B. Cunningham	Health and Kinesiology	Texas A&M University
Dr Sae-Mi Lee	School of Kinesiology, Nutrition and Food Sciences	California State University, Los Angeles
Dr Madeleine Pape	Institute of Sports Sciences	University of Lausanne
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Prof Richard Pringle	Faculty of Education (Sport, Exercise, Physical Education)	Monash University
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