

Tanja Kajtna*

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SLOVENE FEMALE COACHES

DEMOGRAFSKE ZNAČILNOSTI SLOVENSКИH TRENERK

ABSTRACT

Female coaches are more often than not the minority, when compared to their male colleagues. A number of stereotypes exist on why there are so few female coaches, only a small amount of these have any validity. Research shows that the three most common reasons for female coaches ending their careers are a lower level of education, neglect and ridicule from their male colleagues and the need to care for family and children. Some people even go as far as to say that there should be no female coaches. Our research focused on how many female coaches there are in Slovenia, how old they are, which sports they are involved in, what their education is like and which age groups they work with as coaches. Our purpose was to review the demographical status of female coaches in Slovenia. A total of 237 male and 37 female coaches participated in our research; all of them coach athletes who have been included in at least junior national teams. We found that female coaches were better educated than male coaches (64.9% of female coaches finished at least a university study, whilst only 46.5% of the male coaches achieved this level of education). Female coaches also engage more frequently in sports such as dancing, figure skating and rhythmic gymnastics and there are a number of sports in which only male coaches participate (for example biathlon, ice hockey, basketball; most of these sports are known to be "traditionally male"). We also found a higher percentage of female coaches among coaches of junior athletes, while there is a lower percentage of females among coaches of adult athletes competing on senior levels.

Key words: female coaches, demographic characteristics, education

Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

***Corresponding author:**

Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana, Gortanova 22,
SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Tel.: +386 (0)1 5207751

Fax: +386 (0)1 5207750

E-mail: tanja.kajtna@fsp.uni-lj.si

POVZETEK

V primerjavi z moškimi trenerskimi kolegi so ženske trenerke v manjšini. Kljub temu, da obstajajo številni stereotipi o ženskih trenerkah, je le njihov majhen del zares osnovan. Raziskava kaže, da so trije najpogostejši razlogi za končanje trenerske kariere žensk nižja stopnja izobrazbe, omalovaževanje in posmehovanje moških kolegov in potreba po skrbi za otroke in družino. Nekateri gredo celo tako daleč, da trdijo, da ženske sploh ne bi smele biti trenerke. Pričujoča raziskava je bila osredotočena na število trenerk v Sloveniji, njihovo starost, športe, v katerih delujejo, na njihovo izobrazbo in na to, s katero starostno skupino delajo kot trenerke. Naš namen je bil narediti pregled demografskega statusa slovenskih trenerk. V raziskavi je skupaj sodelovalo 237 moških trenerjev in 37 ženskih trenerk, vsi pa so trenirali športnike, ki so bili najmanj člani mladinskih državnih reprezentanc. Ugotovili smo, da imajo ženske trenerke višjo izobrazbo od njihovih moških kolegov (64,9% trenerk ima zaključen vsaj univerzitetni študij, medtem, ko je to stopnjo izobrazbe doseglo le 46,5% moških trenerjev). Ženske kot trenerke pogosteje delujejo v športih kot so ples, umetnostno drsanje in ritmična gimnastika, obstjajo pa tudi športi, v katerih kot trenerji delujejo izključno moški (npr. biatlon, hokej na ledu, košarka; vsi ti športi so razumljeni kot "tradicionalno moški"). Ugotovili smo tudi, da večji delež trenerk dela z športniki v mladinski kategoriji in le majhen delež s športniki v članski kategoriji.

Ključne besede: ženske trenerke, demografske značilnosti, izobrazba

INTRODUCTION

Many authors define the coach as the leading character in developing an athlete's career (Tušak & Tušak, 2001; Krevsel, 2001; Martens, 1990; Gummerson, 1992; Sabock, 1985), while Solomon (2001) states, that only the coach's evaluation of the athlete's confidence can predict the success on the oncoming competition. Dick (1997) defines coaching as "more an art form than a science" and Everd and Selman (in Popper & Lipshitz, 1992) say that coaching is a process of creating a culture of development and an atmosphere of teaching. A coach is thus clearly an important figure in the process of achieving athletic success

Women who embark on the journey of being a coach encounter several difficulties in their work. Coaching is a typically male profession and women often experience problems when they try to coordinate the roles of a mother, of a person who needs to look after the family, with that of a coach, which is a time- and effort-consuming role (Cof, 2000). A female coach needs to be aggressive and dominant; many women who cease pursuing their coaching careers do so because they are unable to behave in a typically more masculine manner.

Hart, Hasbrook, and Mathes (1986) state three reasons, why females give up coaching careers: a) a conflict of roles of a mother/wife and a coach, b) female coaches are less educated than their male colleagues, c) female coaches often face discrimination (they are less frequently offered promotions, have to continuously compete with male coaches, are offered fewer opportunities to coach elite athletes, they are worse paid and get worse schedules for practice).

We can discuss several groups of factors women in sport have to face (Krečič, 2002). Obstacles can be found in social aspects (traditionally, women are in charge of the upbringing and care of children, managing the household etc.), in economic aspects (salaries of women are lower than those of men in the same line of work), legal aspects (women are often offered fewer employment opportunities) and in institutional aspects (some sport are considered to be traditionally male and women are rarely employed in them), in organizational aspects (coaches are sometimes expected to join in practice and work alongside with their athletes) and in individual aspects (female coaches are often low in motivation and self esteem). Loy (1969, in Tušak & Tušak, 2001) found female coaches to be more dominant, self-sufficient, intelligent, determined and less sociable than women who did not work as coaches. Female coaches thus demonstrate a larger amount of what are deemed to be male psychological characteristics; the same was found also in the comparison of male and female athletes (Tušak & Tušak, 2001). The differences between more and less successful female coaches were similar to those found between more and less successful male coaches: more successful coaches are more confident, dominant, achievement-oriented, persistent and heterosexual, while less successful coaches show a lack of sensitivity to relations with athletes and demonstrate a certain amount of indifference towards the athletes (Tušak & Tušak, 2001).

In research conducted on the Faculty of sport in Ljubljana (Manfreda & Pikl, 1996), we attempted to discover how future professionals see the role of a coach. When assessing the male coaches, the students found them to be persistent, responsible, determined, with high organizational and motivational skills. They said that the ideal male coach is highly professional, persistent, responsible, with high organizational skills, honest, with high motivational skills and fair, can understand the athlete, is hard-working, determined and can cooperate well with a team of experts. When assessing female coaches, the students said that the most present characteristics

are caring for the well-being of the athletes, understanding the athlete, readiness to work hard; they believe that female coaches have a very pedagogical approach to athletes, are persistent and communicative. The ideal female coach, in their opinion, is very professional, responsible, has good organizational and motivational skills, determined and understanding to the athlete. They believed that both male and female coaches were in reality far from the ideal image of the coach; however, female coaches were somewhat further away from the ideal image of the coach (Manfreda & Pikel, 1996).

It is quite interesting to find, that the ideal image of a female coach is quite similar to the ideal image of a male coach, but we can find several discrepancies between the image of an ideal coach and the coach as she really is. Tušak and Tušak (2001) conclude that we expect the female coaches to be like male coaches, but the perceived image of a female coach is closer to a traditional image of a female (being considerate, paying attention to the quality of communication and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, minding the athlete's health etc.) An interesting feature of that research is that female participants were more critical when evaluating female coaches. If females are less willing to accept a female coach, the road to success of a female coach is even harder (Tušak & Tušak, 2001). What is also interesting is that the older the participants were, the more knowledge they had about sport, the more positive and realistic became their opinion of coaches, both male and female. It seems that knowledge, rather than years of experience in sport, influences the quality of the perception of coaches.

Research on preferences of the coach's gender gives ambiguous data. Parkhouse and Williams (1986, in Tušak & Tušak, 2001), Sabock and Kleinfelter (1987, in Tušak & Tušak, 2001), George (1989, in Tušak & Tušak, 2001) and Drew and Zimmerman (1994, in Tušak & Tušak, 2001) report that both male and female athletes prefer to have male coaches, whereas Coakley and Pacey (1982, in Tušak & Tušak, 2001) and Patriksson and Eriksson (1990, in Tušak & Tušak, 2001) report athletes to have no gender preferences for the coach.

A female coach in the case of a young athlete assumes the role of the "important other"; she can exert a great amount of influence on the athlete, similar to the influence of a parent (Cratty & Hanin, 1980, in Tušak & Tušak, 2001). Since this type of interaction is emotionally demanding on the coach, some attempts were made to see whether male or female coaches suffer a larger amount of consequence because of it. Vealey, Udry, Zimmerman, and Soliday (1992) find female coaches experience burnout more frequently; they invest "more of themselves" into coaching and wish to offer their athletes everything possible, even more than what they themselves as athletes were offered (Doupona Topič, 1994). The same author also describes a larger number of female coaches as having a lack of role models. Bon (1996) offers a critical perspective of the stereotype, which is frequently used in public (among spectators, coaches, accompanying staff) to describe female coaches: "*She can't be a coach – she's a woman!*"

Bon (1996) also states that more women in coaching remain on the level of beginner sports, working with younger athletes; among the reasons for this, she mentions the exhausting nature of the profession and it being harder for a woman to gain the trust of players and management, even though they are frequently better educated (28% of female handball coaches have university levels of education, whereas only 16% of male handball coaches achieve the same level of education (Doupona Topič, Bon, and Primožič, 1998). Bon (1996) says female coaches are simply different than male coaches; not necessarily better or worse, but different in ways of thinking, abilities to communicate and adapt, with different attitudes towards work. A difference, she says, that can

be good when used well (Bon, 1996). A smaller number of female coaches are reported also in foreign studies (Plaisted, 1995, in Jurčak, 2003; Buchicchio, 1995, in Jurčak, 2003).

Marshall (2001, in Krečič, 2002) discuss six strategies that could be used to increase the number of female coaches: female coaches who aspire to be top level coaches should be identified and offered adequate education, they should be offered mentorship, female athletes with “coach-like abilities” should be identified, a network of communication between female coaches should be developed, they should be taught to negotiate for their working opportunities and conditions and they should be encouraged to ask for change, to feel the need to change and evolve.

The purpose of this research was to establish the demographic characteristics of Slovene female coaches: which sports they work in, what their level of education is when compared to their male colleagues, which age groups of athletes they work with and also to see, whether we could apply the three main reasons Hart et al. (1986) state for a lower number of female coaches to the Slovene sample.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 275 Slovene coaches participated in the research, 237 of them were male and 37 female and one coach did not answer the questionnaire. The average age of the coaches was 38.87 years ($SD=10.01$), the youngest was 21 and the oldest 64 years old. Their average in years of coaching experience was 17.47 years ($SD=10.34$). 220 of them were top athlete coaches, meaning a coach who had in the past five to ten years worked with athletes who were in junior or senior teams; 55 coaches were “National Sport Schools” programme coaches; there were no significant differences between the both groups of coaches (Ferjančič, 2006).

Instruments

A demographic questionnaire was used, in which we obtained the following demographic characteristics:

- Age
- Gender
- Sport in which they work
- Achieved level of education
- Age group of athletes with whom they are currently working
- Number of athletes they have coached, who are categorized as top athletes; world or international classification according to the Slovene Olympic Committee (Olimpijski komite Slovenije – združenje športnih zvez, 2005).

Procedure

The results were gathered within the scope of the project of the Slovene Ministry of Sport and Education called “Leadership styles in Slovene Coaches”; the participants were tested during October 2004 and September 2005, the majority of them individually.

Results and discussion

There were no significant differences in age between male and female coaches: the average age of male coaches was 39.21 years (SD=10.15), and the average age of female coaches was 36.69 years (SD=8.88) ($F=1.97$ in $\text{sig}(F) = 0.16$).

Table 1: Number of male and female coaches according to sports and grouped in team and individual sports

	<i>Sport</i>	<i>Male coaches</i>	<i>Female coaches</i>
<i>All male coaches</i>	Cycling	11 (4.6%)	0 (0%)
	Basketball	16 (6.8%)	0 (0%)
	Biathlon	5 (2.1%)	0 (0%)
	Boxing	7 (3%)	0 (0%)
	Ice hockey	8 (3.4%)	0 (0%)
	Football	9 (3.8%)	0 (0%)
	Volleyball	13 (5.5%)	0 (0%)
	Parachuting	3 (1.3%)	0 (0%)
	Climbing	7 (3%)	0 (0%)
	Ski jumping	8 (3.4%)	0 (0%)
	Nordic skiing	8 (3.4%)	0 (0%)
	Tennis	8 (3.4%)	0 (0%)
	Triathlon	2 (0.8%)	0 (0%)
	Water-polo	7 (3%)	0 (0%)
	Rowing	3 (1.3%)	0 (0%)
<i>Both male and female coaches</i>	Table tennis	9 (3.8%)	1 (2.7%)
	Karate	10 (4.2%)	1 (2.7%)
	Bowling	5 (2.1%)	2 (5.4%)
	Alpine skiing	6 (2.5%)	1 (2.7%)
	Track and field	16 (6.8%)	3 (8.1%)
	Kayak and canoe	5 (2.1%)	2 (5.4%)
	Swimming	26 (11%)	3 (8.1%)
	Gymnastics	14 (5.9%)	5 (13.5%)
	Archery	1 (0.4%)	1 (2.7%)
	Handball	11 (4.6%)	3 (8.1%)
	Shooting	10 (4.2%)	1 (2.7%)
Judo	1 (0.4%)	1 (2.7%)	
<i>More female coaches</i>	Roller skating	0 (0%)	1 (2.7%)
	Figure skating	1 (0.4%)	3 (8.1%)
	Rhythmic gymnastics	0 (0%)	4 (10.8%)
	Dancing	4 (1.7%)	5 (13.5%)
	Undefined	2 (0.8%)	0 (0%)
<i>Category</i>	Individual sports	172 (73.2%)	34 (91.9%)
	Team sports	63 (26.8%)	3 (8.1%)

Legend: Individual cells contain frequencies and percentages according to gender

Table 1 shows an interesting picture with regards to the number of female coaches according to sport. The majority of sports have no female coaches on the top levels; there are 15 such sports. Some of these could be defined as traditionally male, such as rowing, biathlon, Nordic skiing, ski jumping; some are more dangerous sports such as boxing, parachuting and climbing (although these sports are not always included in the so-called high risks sports studies (Kajtna, Tušak, Burnik, & Barić, 2004)) and the majority of team sports are in that group: ice hockey, volleyball, basketball, football and water-polo. Team sports often engage a larger amount of physical contact and physical contact can quickly (in the eyes of a person with average or little sports knowledge) be considered to be aggressive and thus perhaps less female; a stereotype for a female is for her to be non-aggressive, submissive, quiet, orderly, avoid exposure etc. (Cox, 1994).

Sports including both male and female coaches (although even here the predominant gender for a coach is male) are some basic sports, such as swimming and track and field, alpine skiing, gymnastics and one team sport: handball. One interesting aspect is the two fairly masculine sports: shooting and judo. The number of respondents in judo, however, is small and could quite be considered to be coincidence.

Sports in which more female than male coaches work on top levels are figure skating, roller skating, rhythmic gymnastics and dancing. In rhythmic gymnastics, of course, one could hardly expect a large number of male coaches, since the sport only allows female competitors; regardless, all these four sports show a common quality: they are all sports in which aesthetics is a crucial element of success. It could be said that this is a much more traditional female characteristic and it seems that these sports allow female coaches to fully express their potential. These sports enable a more accepted stereotype that a woman is, of course, allowed to participate in sports as long as she remains beautiful in so. These are the sports that allow exactly this, because being beautiful is a part of success.

The second part of our research was to compare the education level of Slovene male and female coaches.

Table 2: Educational levels of male and female coaches

Education	Gender	
	Male	Female
High school	81 (34.2%)	7 (18.9%)
Bachelor's	37 (59.1%)	6 (75.7%)
Master's or PhD	7 (3%)	2 (5.4%)
Not stated	9 (3.8%)	0 (0%)

Legend: Individual cells contain frequencies and percentages according to gender

Table 2 shows that a larger percentage of female coaches have a higher level of education; together, there are 81.1% of female coaches who have a university degree or more, whilst there are only 62.1 % of male coaches with such a high level of education. The review of studies in the introductory part of this paper shows that female coaches drop out of sport also because of their lower levels of education (Hart et al., 1986; Marshall, 2001, in Krečič, 2002). These studies report data mainly from American colleges, but the picture in Slovenia seems to be different; Doupona Topič et al. (1998) have found Slovene female handball coaches to be more educated than their male colleagues. This is now also confirmed on a somewhat larger scale for the field of Slovene sports.

We thus cannot accept that a smaller number of female coaches in Slovenia is due to lower education.

We also looked at the age groups our coaches worked with.

Table 3: Age groups of athletes the participating coaches work with

	Age group	Number of coaches (% all)
Working in one age group	seniors	49 (17.82%)
	juniors	74 (26.91%)
	beginners	42 (15.27%)
	together	165 (60.00%)
Working in several age groups	beginners and juniors	26 (9.45%)
	beginners and seniors	7 (2.54%)
	juniors and seniors	40 (14.54%)
	all categories	37 (13.47%)
	together	110 (40.00%)

The data also shows that among all the coaches who worked with younger athletes (up to 18 years of age, thus beginners and juniors) there were 16.3% female coaches, and among coaches of seniors athletes there were somewhat fewer female coaches: 9.8%. Before we continue with the discussion, we should first explain that Slovenia currently has no clear definition of who can work with which age group, or at least in practical terms, these guidelines are not followed. That can be seen from the percentage of coaches who have to work with more than just one age group; a staggering 40% of coaches have to frequently change their work and adapt it to different age groups and needs of athletes. The division into coaches who work with predominantly senior athletes and those who work mainly with younger children is thus somewhat arbitrary; this should be taken into consideration with interpreting the data. Nonetheless, this still shows that more women work with younger athletes, which is consistent with previous findings (Bon, 1996). Female coaches can thus assume the role of an “important other” in sport and if they work well with children, enable them to grow to like sport, ensure that they practice within the limits of their abilities, can prevent overly early specialization, help them to practice for themselves, for their own improvement. They can be seen as “sport mothers” to young athletes. There is no better basis for the psychological aspect of the top athlete than a healthy attitude towards sport and strong internal motivation.

Further research of female Slovene coaches should go in the direction of verifying whether they deal with stereotypes, whether they have to work twice as hard as their male colleagues and have twice as good results to be recognized, as some of the coaches put it themselves. That should be done through interviews or a similar type of detailed methodology since it will give a more accurate and intimate perspective of the way female coaches deal with and experience their position in comparison to that of male coaches.

CONCLUSION

Our paper focuses on demographic characteristics of Slovene female coaches. We found that there are several sports in our country in which there are very few or no female coaches at all, such

being rowing, biathlon, Nordic skiing, ski jumping, some of the more “dangerous sports”, such as boxing and parachuting and climbing, as well as the majority of team sports, including ice hockey, volleyball, basketball, football and water-polo. We called those sports, “traditionally male sports”. The sports that include both male and female coaches (although even here the predominant gender for a coach is male) are some of the more basic sports, such as swimming and track and field, alpine skiing, gymnastics and, the one team sport, handball. The sports in which more female than male coaches work on top levels are figure skating, roller skating, rhythmic gymnastics and dancing; in other words, sports in which the aesthetic aspect is a crucial element of success, thus enabling the stereotype that women should be beautiful, even in sports.

Our study also shows that Slovene female coaches are better educated than male coaches. Therefore, we cannot say that lower levels education is the cause of fewer female coaches.

We also found that the percentage of female coaches is larger in youth sport: 16.3% of coaches working with children to the age 18 years are female, whilst only 9.8% of coaches working with those older are female. This can be very useful, since female coaches (by assuming the role of the “important other”) can help young athletes focus on their attitude towards sport and help them raise internal motivation. Further research should attempt to verify how Slovene female coaches deal with stereotypes and how much they are exposed to them. Hart et al. (1986) stated three reasons for female coaches dropping out of sport; we saw that lower education levels can not apply to our sample. We should thus further investigate the remaining two: discrimination and the conflicting roles of a mother, wife and coach. Slovenia is a very democratic and open society in some ways, but in many perspectives we are still very traditional, sometimes too much. Perhaps female coaches clash with a very old and a very rooted stereotype, mentioned in the introductory part of this paper: “*She can’t be a coach, she’s a woman!!!*” (Bon, 1996).

REFERENCES

- Bon, M. (1996). Ženski rokomet v Sloveniji: trenutno stanje in perspektive [Female handball in Slovenia – current state and perspectives]. *Trener Rokomet*, 3(2), 54-60.
- Cof, Ž. (2002). *Odnos športnikov in športnic do moških in žensk v vlogi trenerja – diplomsko delo [Attitude of male and female athletes towards male and female coaches – bachelor’s thesis]*. Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za šport.
- Cox, R.H. (1994). *Sport psychology – concepts and applications*. Madison: Brown & Benchmark.
- Dick, F. W. (1997). *Sports Training Principles (3rd edition)*. London: A & C Black.
- Doupona Topič, M. (1994). *Šport, spol in vzgoja – magistrska naloga [Sport, gender and up-bringing – master’s thesis]*. Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za šport.
- Doupona Topič, M., Bon, M., & Primožič, M. (1998). Gender and education structure of the coaches of handball teams in Slovenia. In *Šport mladih – Sport Pedagogues Association of Slovenia*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za šport.
- Ferjančič, P. (2006). *Stli vodenja, stališča, emocionalna inteligentnost pri trenerjih, zaposlenih v panožnih šolah v primerjavi z ostalimi trenerji - neobjavljeno diplomsko delo [Leadership styles, attitudes, emotional intelligence of coaches, working in national sport schools – bachelor’s thesis]*. Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za šport.
- Gummerson, T. (1992). *Sports coaching and teaching*. London: A & C Black.

- Hart, B., Hasbrook, C., & Mathes, S. (1986). An examination of the reduction in the number of female interscholastic coaches. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 57, 68-77.
- Jurčak, T. (2003). *Razlike v stilih vodenja in osebnostnih lastnostih pri trenerjih in trenerkah v Sloveniji - diplomsko delo [Leadership styles and personality traits in male and female Slovene coaches – bachelor's thesis]*. Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za šport.
- Kajtna, T., Tušak, M., Barić, R., & Burnik, S. (2004). Personality in high-risk sports athletes. *Kinesiology*, 36(1), 24-34.
- Krečič, U. (2002). *Ženske v trenerstvu in na vodilnih položajih v športu - diplomsko delo [Females as coaches and sport directors]*. Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za šport.
- Krevsel, V. (2001). *Poklic športnega trenerja [The profession of a coach]*. Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za šport, Inštitut za šport.
- Manfreda, M. & Pikel, M. (1996). *Percepcija podobe trenerja – diplomsko delo [Perception of the image of a coach – bachelor's thesis]*. Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za šport.
- Martens, R. (1990). *Successful coaching (2nd edition)*. Champaign: Human kinetics.
- Olimpijski komite Slovenije – združenje športnih zvez (2005). *Obvestila [Announcements]*, 44 (October). Ljubljana: Olimpijski komite Slovenije – združenje športnih zvez.
- Popper, M. & Lipshitz, R. (1992). Coaching on leadership. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 13(7), 15-18.
- Sabock, R. J. (1985). *The coach (3rd edition)*. Champaign: Human kinetics.
- Solomon, G. B. (2001). Performance and personality impression cues as predictors of athletic performance. An extension of expectancy theory. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 32(1), 88-100.
- Tušak, M. & Tušak, M. (2001). *Psihologija športa [Sport psychology]*. Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete.
- Vealey, R. S., Udry, E. M., Zimmerman, V., & Soliday, J. (1992). Intrapersonal and situational predictors of coaching burnout. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 14(1), 40-58.