



THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AS COACHES IN TEAM SPORTS IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES OF TOKYO 2020

A PARTICIPAÇÃO DE MULHERES COMO TREINADORAS DE ESPORTES COLETIVOS NOS JOGOS OLÍMPICOS DE TÓQUIO 2020

LA PARTICIPACIÓN DE LAS MUJERES COMO ENTRENADORAS DEPORTIVAS EN LOS JUEGOS OLÍMPICOS DE TOKIO 2020

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Abstract

Women have conquered greater spaces in the sports scope, but in sports leadership positions, women are still a minority, and are under-represented. The study aimed to verify the participation of women in coach positions (Head Coach and Assistant Coach) in team sports at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Official data were collected from 170 coaching staff of men's and women's teams in the following sports: Basketball, Soccer, Handball, Field Hockey, Rugby Seven, Volleyball and Water Polo. No women were identified in the positions on men's teams. In the female teams, 51 women of a total of 222 professionals were verified, representing 22.97% of the total, with a higher percentage for basketball, soccer and handball. Conclusion, even with the policies of the International Olympic Committee to increase the number of women in the Olympic Games, these actions do not reflect on the positions of coaching staff in Tokyo-2020.

Keywords: Sport; Leadership; Coaches; Gender; Woman.

Resumo

As mulheres vêm conquistando espaço no âmbito esportivo, porém nos cargos de liderança esportiva ainda são minoria, e estão sub-representadas. O estudo teve como objetivo verificar a participação de mulheres em cargos de treinadores (Treinadora Principal e Treinadora Assistente) em esportes coletivos nos Jogos Olímpicos de Tóquio 2020. Foram coletados dados oficiais de 170 equipes masculinas e femininas das seguintes modalidades:



Basquetebol, Futebol, Handebol, Hóquei em Campo, Rugby, Voleibol e Polo Aquático. Não foram identificadas mulheres nas comissões de equipes masculinas. Nas equipes femininas, foram verificadas 51 mulheres de um total de 222 profissionais, representando 22.97% do total, com maior percentual no basquetebol, futebol e handebol. Com esses resultados é possível verificar que, mesmo com as políticas do Comitê Olímpico Internacional de aumentar o número de mulheres nos Jogos Olímpicos, essas ações não refletem nos cargos da comissão técnica em Tóquio-2020, principalmente nas equipes masculinas.

Palavras-chave: Esporte; Liderança; Treinador; Gênero; Mulheres.

Resumen

Las mujeres han ido ganando terreno en el ámbito deportivo, pero en los puestos de dirección deportiva siguen siendo una minoría y están infrarrepresentadas. El estudio tuvo como objetivo verificar la participación de las mujeres en puestos de entrenador (entrenador principal y entrenador asistente) en deportes de equipo en los Juegos Olímpicos de Tokio 2020. Se recogieron datos oficiales de 170 equipos masculinos y femeninos en los siguientes deportes: baloncesto, fútbol, balonmano, Hockey, Rugby, Voleibol y Waterpolo. No se identificó ninguna mujer en los comités del equipo masculino. En los equipos femeninos se verificaron 51 mujeres de un total de 222 profesionales, lo que representa el 22.97% del total, con mayor porcentaje en baloncesto, fútbol y balonmano. Pese a las acciones por la igualdad de género, esto no lo vemos en los puestos de liderazgo en Tokio 2020.

Palabras clave: Deporte; Liderazgo; Entrenador; Género; Mujer.

INTRODUCTION

Sport is a sociocultural phenomenon and as such has an intrinsic relationship with social values and ideologies, including those related to gender, which are structurally present in various societies and cultures. Historically, sport is a field of male hegemony, reflecting the position and division of social roles imposed on women, who had limitations in participating in sporting events, reduced to only spectators and assistants (DEVIDE, 2005; BURTON, 2015).

However, as it is a polysemic phenomenon that is in constant transformation and evolution, and shows different forms of manifestation according to the environment in which it's inserted (STIGGER, 2005), as a social and historically constructed phenomenon, sport can also be a field of struggles and contestations, being influenced by changes in society (DEVIDE, 2005).

Over the years, women have conquered greater spaces in the sports scope, especially when they're in the position of athletes, an important milestone reached in the Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, in 2000, in which women had a total participation of 40% (PFISTER, 2003), this number gradually increased in the following editions, reaching 49% of the total number of athletes in Tokyo 2020/21 (IOC, 2020a).

Nevertheless, in sports leadership positions, such as head coaches and assistants, women are still a minority, and are under-represented (ACOSTA; CARPENTER, 2012), and these differences are even more striking the closer they get to high yield (PFISTER, 2003). In leadership positions in sports institutions, women still have a very small representation (ACOSTA; CARPENTER, 2012; BURTON, 2015; HRYNIEWICZ; VIANNA, 2018).





Both the worlds of sport and professional labor are marked by vertical and horizontal segregation that varies according to gender (PFISTER, 2003). Sports leadership positions, as coach, are historically associated with the male gender because they are defined with characteristics culturally related to men (HRYNIEWICZ; VIANNA, 2018). Thus, for women to occupy positions of coach there is a path hampered by the association between male identity in sport and in leadership.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2020 reached the mark of 47.7% of women in the staff of its commissions, a number reached due to the development of the institution's gender equality policy (IOC, 2020a). Despite the development of this policy and the efforts to make the Olympic Games a place with equality between genders and all the advances made by women in sports practices, we believe that sport, as a cultural practice, is still a space predominantly male.

In all IOC gender equality texts, actions for athletes and actions for managers in the IOC's internal commissions are mentioned (IOC, 2020a; 2020b; 2021a). However, there is little or rare information about women in head coach and assistant coach positions. The International Olympic Committee states that 10% of accredited coaches at the Summer and Winter Olympics over the past decade have been women, with Tokyo's initial figures showing little progress with women representing 13% of the event's total coaches (IOC, 2021b). Furthermore, most of the research that brings the number of women in the position of coaches is local or national studies, and it is difficult to find data on coaches in major international sporting events, such as the Olympic Games.

In view of this, we understand that there is a need for studies that demonstrate the current number of women in coaching positions at the Olympic Games. Therefore, the objective of the study was to verify the number of women in the positions of coach and technical assistant in team sports who participated in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, in order to recognize how they have been entering the sports field, specifically, in coaching positions.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In this study, the data were collected and analyzed regarding the participation of women in coach positions of team sports from the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. In this research was defined as a coaching staff the group of people responsible for the physical, technical and





tactical development of a team (NORMAN, 2015). According to official documents, we selected the Head Coach (HC) and Assistant Coach (AC) positions.

Official data were collected from the 170 coaching staff of female and male teams from seven team sports: Basketball, Soccer, Handball, Field Hockey, Rugby Seven, Volleyball and Water Polo. The collected data were: a list with members' names from coaching staff and their positions (head coach or assistant coach), gender, date of birth, the team's country and the coach's nationality.

The data collection was carried out from July to September 2021. The official data were collected on The Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games - 2020 official website <https://olympics.com/tokyo-2020/olympic-games/es/resultados/todos-los-deportes/entrenadores.htm>, which is linked to the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

This research has a quantitative and documentary characteristic, analyzing the data provided in the official documents. Therefore, the quantitative research is focused on measuring phenomena involving the collection and analysis of numerical data (COLLIS; HUSSEY, 2005), in addition to being made from materials that have not received analytical treatment (GIL, 2006). Based on these numerical data, trends were described together with the need of further explanation, comparing them with previous research (CRESWELL, 2012).

RESULTS

From the data collected of the seven sports that were selected for the study, a grand total of 170 group of coaching staffs were identified, being 88 from men's teams and 82 from women's teams. We've found that the 88 coaching staff of men's teams are exclusively led by men, that is, out of a total of 242 positions, 94 of which are head coaches, there are no records of women as head coaches or assistants in men's teams (Table 1).





Table 1 – Total number of men and women in positions of head coach (HC) and technical assistant (AC) in men's teams, and respective percentage of women in coaching staff positions

SPORTS	Men		Total	Women		Total	Grand Total
	HC	AC		HC	AC		
Basketball	12	24	36	00	00	00	36
Football	16	41	57	00	00	00	57
Field Hockey	18	17	35	00	00	00	35
Handball	12	23	35	00	00	00	35
Rugby Seven	12	17	29	00	00	00	29
Volleyball	12	26	38	00	00	00	38
Water Polo	12	NI	12	00	00	00	12
Total	94	148	242	00	00	00	242

Caption: NI = No information in the official website.

Source: prepared by the authors.

It is noteworthy that the data regarding assistant coaches for the Water Polo modality were not found in the official data source. However, in the 82 female teams resourced, a total of 222 head coaches (HC) and assistant coaches (AC) were identified, among men and women. From this total, 171 are men and 51 women, representing 22.97% of the total number of professionals, according to the distribution by sport shown in Table 2.

It's still possible to identify on table 2 the total of men and women in positions of technical coaching staff on female teams and the percentage of women occupying those positions per modality. It was found that Basketball has the greatest presence of women in these positions, while Rugby Seven has the smallest, with only one female assistant coach, out of a grand total of 28 coaches.

The data shows that the positions of head coach and assistant coach are predominantly occupied by men. Except for the head basketball coach position, where there is an equal number of men and women (n=6), all other positions are quantitatively more occupied by men, with this being even more pronounced for assistant coach positions.



Table 2 – Total number of men and women in positions of head coach (HC) and technical assistant (AC) in women's teams, and respective percentage of women in coaching staff positions

SPORTS	Men		Total	Women		Total	Grand Total	% Women (Grand total)	% Women (Total by sport)	
	HC	AC		HC	AC				HC	AC
Basketball	06	14	20	06	07	13	33	39.39%	50.00%	33.33%
Football	07	24	31	05	08	13	44	29.54%	41.60%	25.00%
Field Hockey	13	13	26	05	03	08	34	23.52%	27.77%	18.75%
Handball	11	14	25	01	08	09	34	26.47%	8.33%	36.36%
Rugby Seven	12	15	27	00	01	01	28	3.57%	00.00%	6.25%
Volleyball	10	23	33	02	04	06	39	15.38%	16.66%	14.81%
Water Polo	09	NI	09	01	NI	01	10	10.00%	10.00%	NI
Total	68	103	171	20	31	51	222	22.97%	22.72%	23.13%

Caption: NI = No information in the official website.

Source: prepared by the authors.

The head coaches have an average age of 47.25 (± 9.68 years), with greater presence on Basketball ($n=6$), Soccer ($n=5$) and Field Hockey ($n=5$). Rugby Seven did not show any women in this position, Handball and Water Polo had only one coach among all teams studied.

Tables 3 show the data collected from the positions held by these women, according to each sport, position (HC or AC), nationality of the team and nationality of the coaches. When checking the women's nationalities in the position of head coach, we have three Japanese, two Dutch and two South African. By expanding the analysis, as far as the continents are concerned, Europe appears with the largest number of coaches, eight in total; followed by Asia with six; Oceania, Africa and North America with two coach each. In this context, we have the absence of Latin American women exercising this function.

As for assistant coaches, the average age is 41.64 (± 8.9 years), and the modalities with higher presence of women in this position are Handball and Football, with eight assistant coaches, and Basketball with seven. The modalities that show the least presence of women are Rugby Seven, with just one, and in Water Polo there was no official record of female coaches. The most present nationality is the United States (US), with six women, being the country that also had the most women as assistant coaches for teams (five in total). When considering the continents, the Americas have the highest number of coaches, nine in total, however due to





the greater presence of women in the US (n=6), followed by Europe and Asia, with eight coaches each, and Oceania and Africa with two women each.

Table 3 – Description of women in the positions of Head Coach (HC) and Assistant Coach (AC)

Sport	Position	N	Team Country	Coach Nationality
Basketball	HC	6	Australia; Canada; US; France; Korea; Serbia	Australia; Canada; US; France; Korea; Serbia
	AC	7	Canada; China; Spain; US; Nigeria; Korea	Canada; China; Spain; US; Korea
Football	HC	5	Brazil; Canada; Great Britain; Japan; Netherlands	Sweden; Great Britain; Norway; Japan; Netherlands
	AC	8	Australia; Brazil; US; Great Britain; Japan; Zambia	Australia; Sweden; Brazil; US; Great Britain; Japan; Zambia
Handball	HC	1	Montenegro	Montenegro
	AC	8	Hungary; Montenegro; Norway; Netherlands; ROC; Sweden	Hungary; Montenegro; Norway; Netherlands; ROC; Sweden
Field Hockey	HC	5	South Africa; Australia; India; Japan; Netherlands	South Africa; Australia; India; Japan; Netherlands
	AC	3	Australia; Great Britain; India	Australia; New Zeland; Netherlands
Water Polo	HC	1	South Africa	South Africa
	AC	0	-	-
Volleyball	HC	2	Japan; China	Japan; China
	AC	4	China; US; Korea	China; US; Korea
Rugby Seven	HC	0	-	-
	AC	1	Canada	Canada

US= United States; ROC= Russian Olympic Committee.

Source: prepared by the authors.

DISCUSSION

Through the survey of the number of professionals in the functions of head coach and assistant, we verified that the number of women in coach positions that make up the coach staff of high-performance sports teams is still very small. When we look at men's teams of Basketball, Handball, Soccer, Field Hockey, Rugby Seven, Volleyball and Water Polo that attended at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, we realize that the coaching staffs of these teams are exclusively composed by men.

However, we found out that there's a moderate to low presence of women in these positions when we analyze the data from women's teams, especially regarding Basketball,





Soccer and Rugby Seven. Furthermore, it's possible to notice that in all modalities there was at least one woman in those teams, either as a head coach or an assistant coach.

The results found show the reality of women occupying coach positions in sports. Despite the increase in the number of female athletes in major sporting events, studies show that these achievements are not reflected in the positions of coaches and assistant coaches. This can be noted in Title IX, as women's sports increased significantly in the United States, men began to show a greater interest in acting in those sports (KILTY, 2006; ACOSTA; CARPENTER, 2012; PASSERO et al., 2020).

As for the low number of women in leadership positions in Latin America, Rubio and Veloso (2019) point out that women's participation in the Olympic Games began in 1932 with the Brazilian swimmer Maria Lenk, in the Los Angeles Games. The right to compete is directly related to the achievements arising from pressures and struggles to occupy different spaces in society, indicating an agreement with the international movements of the time (ARAÚJO, 2011). In this sense, despite the openness to participation as athletes, in the training sphere there is a shortage of opportunities to occupy decision positions (PFISTER; RADTKE, 2007). The increase in female athletes is not proportional to the number of female coaches.

Our data are corroborated by studies such as those by Walker and Bopp (2011) that verified the hegemony of male coaches in Basketball, with men occupying 57.4% of positions in women's teams, while female coaches in men's teams represent just less than 3%. As well as Jaeger and collaborators (2010) in Portugal, even working for long seasons in the sporting environment, whether as an athlete or former athlete, women did not reach positions at the highest level of sport. Such findings are reflected in the investigation made by Cunha, Estriga and Batista (2014), when investigating Handball coaches in male teams, did not observe the presence of women in the sample.

The data found in this research, regarding team sports, are similar to those of Silva, Jacó and Krahenbühl (2021), who did not find the presence of women in the coaching staff of men's Handball national teams in Brazil, and in the women's teams the percentage of convened assistant coaches was just 2.85%. Chimot (2004), who identified that women account for only 18.8% of the positions of national coaches in France and, in the United Kingdom, this number accounts for only 4% of the grand total of coaches of the women's national teams (NORMAN, 2008).





Based on this, we observed that the presence of women at the top of the professional hierarchy in the sports field is small, with positions of head coach and assistant coach being hardly accessible to women. Although they aren't directly prevented from occupying these positions, there're many barriers that prevent women's rise in this environment. The entry and permanence of women in the sports field are made difficult since it is an environment built under the gender ideology and also because it is predominantly a male space (CUNNINGHAM; SAGAS, 2002; BURTON, 2015; CARSON; MCCORMACK; WALSH, 2018).

Some very important social phenomena such as the "glass ceiling" help to explain the barriers that hinder women's access in higher-ranking positions in the professional hierarchy. The predominance of men in management positions, hiring by similarity, the idea of unequal competence, gender stereotypes and discrimination and difficulties in balancing personal life and work are some of the factors that cause these kinds of barriers to emerge (KILTY, 2006; LAVOI; DUTOVE, 2012; BURTON, 2015; MACHIDA-KOSUGA et al., 2017; CARSON, MCCORMACK; WALSH, 2018).

Leadership positions as sport coach are heavily associated with the male stereotype and by the fact that women aren't identified with these kind of characteristics culturally associated as males influence directly on hiring recommendations and the misperception that women would be less skilled in technical and tactical sporting aspects, not being firm enough to handle high pressure situations (WALKER; BOPP; SAGAS, 2011; WALKER; BOPP, 2011), this phenomenon is conceptualized as hiring by similarity and results in discouraging gender diversity in the recruitment of female coaches (KILTY, 2006; BURTON, 2015; CARSON; MCCORMACK; WALSH, 2018).

In addition, associating male characteristics with a sport coach position results in the prevalence of the ideal of unequal competence between men and women, which brings an inadequate conception of self-efficacy in women who occupy these positions (KILTY, 2006; MACHIDA-KOSUGA, et al., 2017), the need for constant self-assertion and, also, gender discrimination and homophobia, by not presenting the standard of heterosexual masculinity (LAVOI; DUTOVE, 2012; CARSON; MCCORMACK; WALSH, 2018).

Gender stereotypes and ideologies are also constitutive agents of the difficulties in balancing the personal and work lives of female coaches, due to the social division of roles that





are occupied by men and women in structurally patriarchal societies resulting in a low number of women who follow their carriers (NORMAN, 2008).

These barriers often prevent women from taking an interest in or dedicating themselves to a coaching carrier, and when finally those are overcome it's made difficult to access positions at a high competitive level. At lower levels, the proportion of male and female coaches is way closer, however, the female presence decrease as high performance approaches (READE; RODGERS; NORMAN, 2009).

In our study, it was possible to identify 20 women as head coaches. And when the barriers are finally overcome, we realize that women have performances proportionally similar to men's, that is, the coach's gender is not crucial for the achievement, that being a result of other factors, such as dedication, structure, team building, among others. Thus, we can note that there's a difficulty for these women to occupy those spaces, but when it occurs, they need to be supported by the results obtained.

Regarding the final classification, among the teams that classified in first, second and third places (gold, silver and bronze medals) we noted which ones were led by women. Thus, we have women's Basketball with teams that ranked in first and third places (US and France), in women's soccer, the team that ranked first (Canada) and on Field Hockey, the highest ranked (Netherlands) were the teams that had women in the position of head coaches.

In Tokyo 2020, Canada's women's team won a gold medal in soccer, a traditionally male sport, led by a female head coach of English origin. For some time, in world championships, Canadians have dominated non-stereotyped female sports such as Rowing, Cross-Country Skiing and especially Ice Hockey (READE; RODGERS; NORMAN, 2009).

The sports that most presented women as head coaches are: Basketball (n=6), Soccer (n=5), Field Hockey (n=5), Volleyball (n=2), Handball (n=1) and Water Polo (n=1). Rugby Seven is also part of the survey, however, we did not find women as head coaches. Basketball seems to be a modality that has a greater presence of women in coaching staff when compared to other team sports. For example, in the study by Passero and collaborators (2019), who observed a significant number of women in these positions in Brazil, and Walker and Bopp (2011) showed that 65.8% of assistant coaches and 57.4% of head coaches are women in the United States. Thus, we have a team sport that seems to promote the insertion of women in leadership positions, highlighting the United States, which achieved the gold medal with the women's team being led, in its entirety, by women.





We also observed a variation regarding the representation of women in coach positions and their respective age and nationality. We identified Japan as a highlight, which was present in three sports (Soccer, Field Hockey and Volleyball), followed by the Netherlands, South Africa, Australia and Canada, that were present in two sports. The most frequent nationalities among the female head coaches were: Japan and Australia with three women each, South Africa and Netherlands with two women in each team.

Another point to be highlighted is regarding the age of the coaches, in which the Soccer female head coaches from Brazil and China were 61 years old, the highest age among the entire group. Reade, Rodgers and Norman (2009) showed that high performance coaches have an average age above 40 years (for men and women). In this study, we observed that women achieved the coach position in national teams even at an older age.

The data presented here regarding women occupying technical commission positions in team sports at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games confirms what we observe socially about the low representation of women in leadership positions. In the sports context, the most commonly used metaphor to explain the low presence of women in these positions is that of the "glass ceiling." (KILTY, 2006; PFISTER, 2007).

However, this concept has been evolving because it doesn't explain how women manage to access these positions, even if in minorities. This new concept adds the idea of intersectionality between class, race, gender, and sexuality to explain the reasons why women follow different paths throughout their professional careers, i.e., the idea of a labyrinth is inserted into the trajectory of women's paths to reach leadership positions. (KRAFT et al., 2021; BARREIRA, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

We noted that there's an under-representation of women in the positions of head coach and assistant coach in team sports at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, which is more evident in men's teams, despite the International Olympic Committee's projects to reduce gender inequalities, we verified that this inequality is still very present in coach positions in team sports.

To change this reality, it is necessary to break with the paradigms of sporting ideological structures that are marked by the predominance of the male stereotype and that more spaces could be allocated for women to exercise leadership roles and positions in sport.





Therefore, we believe that this descriptive study is of great importance to verify how much still needs to be done regarding policies for the inclusion and retention of women in leadership positions in sports. We believe that this data serves as a starting point for other proactive studies that may contribute to how we can break down the ideological structures that anchor sports in a way that keeps men at the top.

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Recebido em: 18/01/2024

Aprovado em: 28/03/2024

Como citar este artigo:

KRAHENBÜHL, Tathyane e colaboradores. The participation of women as coaches in team sports in the olympic games of Tokyo 2020. **Corpoconsciência**, v. 28, e.16989, p. 1-14, 2024.

