ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Career Barriers of Women Managers in Women Football

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ABSTRACT

Background: These days women are employed in every field of the sports sector in management positions. Football is one of those fields. However, this is clear that woman employment is not enough. There are few studies about management positions of women in football.

Aim: This study, which was carried out to understand the situation women managers are in football, aims to examine the career barriers they face in football.

Methods: The study has been conducted through a qualitative research method, utilising a phenomenology design. The study participants include four women managers and eight women footballers in amateur women's football clubs in Sakarya province. There are four women managers in the Sakarya province, and all of them participated in the study. The participants were selected by criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods. Women managers working in women's football and women footballers voluntarily participated in this study. Researchers obtained the data for the study through face-to-face interviews with semi-structured questions. The data obtained in the study were analysed by the content analysis method.

Results: Accordingly, five main themes, namely Career, Gender Advantage, Gender Disadvantage, Social Perception and Career Barriers, were formed.

Conclusion: The findings of the study have complied with the previous research in the literature arguing for career barriers before women, and showed that women managers in women's football face similar obstacles stemming from sexism and social perception.

Keywords: Women Manager, Career Obstacles, Football

INTRODUCTION

Many studies show that gender-based stereotypes and prejudices, different career environments, and gender discrimination reduce women's participation in organisational leadership. It is a given in the literature that sexism is widespread in organisations and that women are not equally engaged in most organisational processes[1]. Women are being discriminated against, especially in men-dominant sports like football. Indeed, their interest in this sport is seen as worthless and insignificant in many countries[2]. Though they are being employed in varying, including administrative, positions in the football sector, their overall employment is still significantly at a low degree throughout the world. This phenomenon results in the lack of studies regarding the place of women in football[3]. This inequality that women suffer from has always been an obstacle throughout their careers.

Although limited in number, the studies on women managers in sports, especially in football, indicate low levels of women employment. Moreover, in some sports branches, women participation, even as a athlete, is at considerably a low level[4,5]. Yiamouyiannis and Osborne[6] NCAA (National College Athletics Association), in their study regarding women's place in the governing bodies, point to the limited influence and power of women with their employment ratio being less than 25% in executive leadership committees and 18% at the administrative levels. A study conducted on this subject showed that the majority of male managers believe that women could not be good managers in the field of sports[7].

Studies on the subject in the literature point out that even though women are increasingly participating in business life nowadays, they cannot take a role in senior management positions[8]. From the perspective of women managers, women's place, efforts are diminished due to the structural obstacles they encounter throughout their career path in men-dominated sectors[4]. From the perspective of women managers, women's place and efforts are inevitably diminished and wasted due to the structural obstacles in management when they encounter throughout their careers in men-dominated sectors[4]. In order to secure women's place in senior management positions in football, it is essential to be aware of the career barriers the women managers face and determine what can be done to eliminate those barriers. With the aim of understanding the situation the women managers are in football, this study examines the career barriers they face in women's football.

MATERIAL & METHODS

The study has been conducted through a qualitative research method, utilising a phenomenology design. Phenomenology studies are employed to reveal the meaning of people's experiences about an event or a subject[9] or find answers to questions about the source and structure of the phenomenon being studied for people involved in the study[10].

Participants: Participants of this study included four women managers and eight women footballers in amateur women's football clubs based in Sakarya province. The low number of women managers across Turkey and the unwillingness of these managers to participate in the study has been the main cause of the low participation in the study. There are four women managers in the Sakarya province, and all of them voluntarily participated in the study. Among the participants, while three managers have undergraduate degrees, one manager has completed high school education, and they all have 4-6 years of experience.

Data Collection: In this study, the participants were

selected using the criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods. Researchers obtained the data for the survey through face-to-face interviews consisted of semi-structured questions. The survey prepared for the managers included questions about their goals and ideals, positive and negative opinions about the reflection of their gender in their jobs, the thoughts of their male colleagues about themselves, the problems they face in football as women managers, and gender patterns. The survey for football players sought answers about their opinions regarding their women managers, whether they are satisfied with the fact that their managers are women, the advantages and disadvantages of being supervised by a women manager, their opinions about male managers, the perception of women managers in society, and the career barriers before women managers. The interviews were recorded by a mobile phone upon the approval of the participants.

Analysis of the Data: The data acquired through interviews have been analysed by the content analysis method. The audio recordings of interviews have been transcribed into texts by a computer. In the analysis of the research data, a code pool has been created after the extraction of codes. Among these codes, the ones related to each other have been combined, and the semantically similar ones are grouped under the same headings. After having also these headings combined according to their semantic similarities, the composition of themes was finalised.

To ensure the reliability of the study, analysis of the data by different researchers and then comparing the results is a valid method[11]. Following this method, the data and themes were analysed by three different researchers, as a result of which a consensus was reached on the findings. The reliability and credibility of the research were tried to be increased by diversification method, through the use of tactics supporting participant honesty and colleague evaluation methods.

For the consistency of the study, the participants were informed that their identities would remain confidential and that the data would only be used for scientific purposes. It was ensured that the data form a meaningful whole and that the findings are internally consistent and meaningful. To ensure the verification of the research, researchers kept the tools of data collection, raw data, and coding made during the analysis phase.

RESULTS

Research findings were presented as themes after coding the data obtained as a result of the interviews. Firstly the findings obtained from the managers; secondly, the opinions of the women football players about their managers are presented.

Themes Regarding the Women Managers: The central themes and sub-themes created about the managers are given in Figure 1. Accordingly, five main themes were formed: Career, Gender Advantage, Gender Disadvantage, Social Perception and Career Barriers.

Sub-themes of the Central Theme of Career: When looked into the factors affecting the choice of profession, they include the participants' sports background, their interest in sports and their past experience in the same sport as an athlete.

Background as a Footballer. The managers participating in the research stated how their background in football played a role in their choice of football management as a profession with the following sentences:

"*One of the most important factors in choosing my profession is because I come from athletics, and I have been an athlete for many years, so I sort of grew up from the core of it. But this was perceived not as a choice of profession but as our destiny, so it became my profession because I spent my time happily here*" (*Manager 3*).

Interest in Football. The managers participating in the research stated how their interest in football played a role in their choice of football management as a profession with the following sentences:

"*What was important for me, when choosing my profession, was to enjoy what I was doing fully, and I enjoyed football very much. That was why I wanted to move in this direction in my career*" (*Manager 1*).

Fig. 1. Central themes and sub-themes for the women managers

Sub-Themes of the Central Theme of Gender Advantage.

Advantages of being a women manager in a women's football club. The participants stated good relations with footballers, understanding their problems and mutual communication as the advantages of working as a woman manager in the women's football club.

Good relations with their fellows. Participant managers stated that working with fellows who have the same gender is an advantage for themselves.

Mutual communication and understanding Athletics' problems. They noted that the athletics factor is an advantage in understanding and explaining the problems of the sportspersons as follows:

"*Of course, the advantages of being on the women's football team, being with women athletes and working with a woman manager are great. In this way, we can get to know our athletes and understand them better. Man coaches or managers, because football is seen as a men's sport, usually cannot think like a woman or empathise with them. They can underestimate the work the women do, or they can select too hard goals and accuse them of failure when women fail to achieve them*" (Manager 1).

Sub-Themes Related to the Central Theme of Gender Disadvantage.

The participants have stated that they face problems in their institutions and business environments because of being a woman.

Gender Factor. The participants have stated that they had problems in the work environment of their organisations due to being a woman and that they could not receive

support while doing their work with the following words:

"*We are facing quite a lot of issues like not being appreciated for our success at work and lack of support for the team*" (*Manager 3*).

Participants have also expressed that they encountered negative attitudes from men managers. They stated that they encountered attitudes such as disdain, gender-based discrimination, and not being seen as rivals.

Disdain. In their statements, the participants stated that male managers ignored them and did not appreciate and acknowledge their achievements and existence, as follows:

"*At the least, we have been ignored. There are only two women's football clubs in Sakarya, but there are around four or five hundred men's football clubs. Normally, we must be regarded as more valuable, considering the fact that women are few in amateur sports. But we are being ignored and deemed unimportant*" (*Manager 3*).

Gender-Based Discrimination. The participants stated that they encountered negative attitudes from male managers due to the gender factor. They gave examples for negative cliches, such as "Women cannot succeed in this sector." with the following words:

"*We have faced a few troubles as they set out with the idea that women cannot be successful in many places* (*Manager 2*)".

Not being seen as a rival. The participants stated that men managers do not see themselves as equal rivals and find themselves inadequate. Despite doing the same job as men managers, the participants expressed their men colleagues' negative attitude as follows:

"*I cannot say that they all behave in the same way, but there are managers who do not see women as equal rivals even though our work is the same*" (*Manager 2*).

Sub-Themes Related to the Central Theme of Social Perception: The participants have stated that they experienced exclusion due to the fact that their achievements were not appreciated because of being a woman.

Their achievements are not appreciated. The participants stated that the society and men managers did not appreciate their success in their work; therefore, they felt left out or unsuccessful.

"*I don't feel the failure, but it just annoys us as the other side biases my team and me as if we are going to fail. But we do not have such an opinion as a team*" (*Manager 1*).

"*There are instances when we feel (unsuccessful) from time to time, but this is not intimidating. After all, we became the regional champion in the 2014-2015 season. But, it seemed something very ordinary for Sakarya; it was not even considered. The press did not even appreciate this success*" (*Manager 3*).

Sub-Themes Related to the Central Theme of Career Barriers: The participants have stated that the biggest obstacle to career plans is the gender perception of society. They mentioned that men dominate administrative positions and that society does not regard women in the management with respect.

Gender Perception of the Society. The participants have said that there is men dominance in the administration, women are not wanted in this area, and they have difficulties in being recognised. They have stated the

negative attitudes that the society promotes like "Women cannot be successful in football." or "The management of football must be in the hands of men."

"*… We do not want to make gender discrimination in this club, but we have to make this gender discrimination in order to reveal ourselves. Because we do not look equal with men, and in order to make ourselves more visible, we have to emphasise that our women and our women's football club have achieved so much success*" (Manager 3).

"*There are obstacles in the society such as not valuing women's football enough and considering football as a men's sport*" (*Manager 4*).

Themes Related to Football Players: In addition to the findings of the research, this section includes the opinions of women football players in the club about their managers (Figure 2).

Fig. 2: Football players' opinions regarding their managers

The footballers stated that their women managers are physically competent due to their background as a athlete; that is, they have played football before. While six of the football players stated that they had a comfortable and healthier communication with the women managers because they were same-sex; two footballers stated that they preferred men managers as they are more experienced than the women managers and since the women managers are more docile in comparison to the men managers. Stating that women successfully perform the management profession in the football sector and more women should turn to this profession, the players also noted that society negatively perceives women managers. In this context, they agreed that women managers had difficulties that act like barriers throughout their careers.

DISCUSSION

In this study to determine the career barriers faced by women managers in football, the central themes formed by the career barriers that women managers face are as follows: "Career, Gender Advantage, Gender Disadvantage, Social Perception and Career Barriers". It has been observed that factors such as sports background, interest in sports and being an athlete in the same sport play a role when individuals choose the management profession. Studies show that the number of women is less than men in leadership positions, not only in the field of sports but also in many organisational structures. Especially in football, which is expressed with masculine norms, it is seen that women managers are in the minority.

Football clubs and all human resource elements within the structure are mostly formed according to men's standards, although they are not openly stated[4]. In an organisation structured in this way, literature shows that the place of women and their efforts face inevitable obstacles throughout their career path. Despite the increasing participation of women, they are under-represented in leadership positions in all kinds of sports[4,12].

Ely and Padavic[13] pointed out that power is connected to gender within organisations in at least three different ways. First, because men are overrepresented with higher status and salaries in organisations, power is attributed to gender in the organisational structure. In addition, the perception of power associated with gender is demonstrated by social practices in which men are portrayed as strong and women harmonious, and positions and tasks are therefore constructed in favour of men. Finally, power can be used in the process of gender identity formation within the organisation. While external forces can affirm particular meanings of gender, internal pressures can determine the degree of harmony of an individual (4).

Koca[14] concluded in his research on determining attitudes towards women managers that although the scores of women and men employees were both at a positive level, men had more gender stereotypes than women. In this study and other studies, it can be said that the negative perception of the society against women managers and women's under-representation in institutional structures are among the common findings in the literature[1,4,15–19].

Cunningham[20] specifically argued that political, functional and social pressures would question the institutionalised nature of gender inequality in sports organisations. These pressures are thought to result in later commitment and behavioural support of employees to gender diversity initiatives. Dixon & Bruening[21] argue that long working and office hours expectations at the organisational level contribute to increased work-family conflict for women coaches.

In the USA, it is observed that the proportion of men employed is much higher than women in manager, coach and manager positions in sports leagues[4]. When looked into the structures in the international arena and even within the Olympic Movement, it is seen that women leaders are quite asymmetrically less than men leaders. In Zambia alone, as an extreme example, the Olympic Committee consists of women only[4]. Organisational practices that endorse women have been found to have a similar effect on men's organisational commitment and intention to stay in the organisation. This finding suggests that the endorsement of women may have an overall positive effect on the entire organisation[4,22].

A study that detected no significant difference between the athletic manager position and life skills coordinator position while evaluating the compliance of feminine characteristics for the job requirements showed that women continued to be employed as athletic managers while men as athletic directors[17,18]. These are all in line with the career barriers findings of the study and show that women face similar obstacles even in women's football.

While the attitude of the participants towards the advantages and disadvantages of working with women managers was overwhelmingly positive, some participants also mentioned the disadvantages of working with women managers. A study conducted in public institutions indicates that many women leaders support and help the career development of other women[23,24]. However, there are findings indicating that some former women managers did not support their women employees. The weak relationship between a senior women manager and women employees will adversely affect women's career development. The organisations where hierarchical relations apply should endorse employees to create environments that promote healthy working relationships between women and men. The organisational structure should first strengthen the ties among women and correct wrong prejudices by underlining the basic principles about gender equality within an organisation[25].

CONCLUSION

When the findings of the study are examined, it can be said that they are in compliance with the findings in the literature about the career obstacles before women and that women managers face similar challenges in women's football. It is uncommon for women to be represented in the administrative position of sports equally or higher in proportion to men, especially in senior leadership positions. Indeed, there are studies revealing this inequality in the literature. However, it is noteworthy that research and practices aimed at intervening in the social normalisation of this situation or solving this inequality are also inadequate. In the studies to be carried out, the need for an increase in the participation of women and the number of women managers not only in football but also in other sports should be emphasised.

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