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ORIGINAL

ANALYSIS OF THE SPORTING CONTEXT OF SPANISH FEMALE COMPETITIVE CYCLISTS AND TRIATHLETES

ANÁLISIS DEL CONTEXTO DEPORTIVO DE CICLISTAS Y TRIATLETAS ESPAÑOLAS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to know and compare the psychosocial characteristics from Spanish under-licence female cyclists and triathletes establishing guidelines to improve their situation in competitive sport. We compared two sports with common aspects (use of a bicycle in competition, participants who participate in both sports...) and differentiating ones (classic sport vs. modern), with the aim of uncover potential differences and/or similarities between the two. 80 cyclists and 126 triathletes took part in this descriptive study. We determined the average socio-demographic profile of cyclists and triathletes through 2 semi-structured questionnaires. The athletes' average socio-sporting profile was defined as a) amateur with a competitive tendency; b) who became specialised in the sport at a late age; c) having vast sporting experience; d) having completed, or completing, a high level of education; e) belonging to the middle class. We believe a change in politics in sports federations is needed, as are initiatives to improve competition conditions for these athletes.

KEYWORDS: gender, gender differences, female cyclists-triathletes, psychosocial aspects, female sport participation.

RESUMEN

El objetivo del presente estudio fue conocer y comparar las características psicosociales de las ciclistas y triatletas federadas en España estableciendo unas pautas de actuación que mejoren su situación en el deporte de competición. Se analizan dos deportes con aspectos comunes (uso de la bicicleta en competición, participantes que realizan ambos deportes...) y diferenciadores (deporte clásico vs deporte moderno), con el objeto de descubrir las posibles diferencias y/o similitudes entre ambos. En este estudio descriptivo participaron 80 ciclistas y 126 triatletas. Se determinó el perfil sociodemográfico promedio de las ciclistas y triatletas mediante 2 cuestionarios semiestructurados que permitieron definir las como deportistas a) amateurs con tendencia competidora, b) iniciadas a una edad tardía en su especialidad deportiva, c) con una amplia experiencia deportiva, d) con un nivel alto de estudios completado o en curso, y e) pertenecientes a un estrato social medio. Tras el análisis de los resultados creemos que se hace necesario un cambio en la política deportiva de las federaciones deportivas así como iniciativas tendentes a la mejora de las condiciones de competición de estas deportistas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: género, diferencias por género, triatletas-ciclistas femeninas, aspectos psicosociales, participación femenina en el deporte.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, Spanish sportswomen had to overcome cumulated social and cultural backwardness and fight against gender stereotypes (Ferrando, 1987).

As a result, problems arise, such as the un-equal representation of women's sports in the media (Crolley y Tesso, 2007; López, 2011; Solano, 2002), limited access to certain sports and the lack of support or social recognition (Puig y Soler, 2004); low representation of women in sports governing and organising bodies (Alfaro, Vázquez, Gallardo y Ferro, 2012; Robles y Escobar, 2007, Puig y Soler, 2004; Peyró Santana, 2002) and sexual harassment in high level competition sport (Vázquez, Bastanchury y Fernández Ferro, 2002).

This fight is accentuated in the cases of traditionally "male" sports, such as combat or resistance sports in which paternalism and masculine ideals of control, aggressiveness, and strength are dominant.

In Spanish competition cycling, women joined decades later compared to other European countries. It could be due to the existing hygienic and moral principles and subordination to men that their participation in competition was vetoed. Early in the nineteenth century the first male cycling events began and the role of the female rider was relegated to walks in the company of a man (Izquierdo Mazcón y Gómez Alonso, 2001; Zubiarre, 2010). Years after Franco Regimen's *Sección Femenina* banned all the sports which break stereotypes associated with femininity and kept women away from their main interest of being good mothers and wives (Manrique Arribas, 2003), it was in 1977 when the RFEC (Royal Spanish Cycling Federation) approved female license and the first women racing cyclists started officially (Conesa, 1977).

However, according to the statistics of the National Sports Council (CSD, 2013), currently the percentage of female license is scarcely 4% compared to the percentage of 96% of men's and there is no female representation in the governing bodies of the Royal Spanish Cycling Federation. Instead, the Spanish triathlon arises in the 70s with a more favorable competitive social environment for sportswomen, the first triathletes competing in unison with their male counterparts and considering it a transgressor and innovative sport with an increasing number of licenses (Ruiz, Salinero Banuelos and Sanchez 2008; Ruiz and Salinero, 2012), with a representation of 15% women in the governing bodies of the Spanish triathlon Federation.

With regards to cycling and Triathlon, most studies focus on physiological aspects (Ruiz et al, 2008), however, the interest in the social aspects of sport is increasing. (Atkinson, 2007; Brown y O'Connor 2007; Brown, O'Connor y Barkatsas, 2009; Cronan y David Scott, 2008; Garrard, 2003; Hendy y Boyer 1993; Lamont y Kennelly, 2012; Levy, 2002; O'Connor y Brown, 2007; Ruiz et al, 2012). The aim of this study was to determine and compare the psychosocial characteristics of Spanish under-license female cyclists and triathletes to establish some guidelines to improve their situation in competition sports.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

80 cyclists (28 years old \pm 9,4 years) from 14 territorial cycling federations and 126 triathletes (30 years old \pm 8 years) from 16 territorial triathlon federations took part in this descriptive study. All competitive cyclists and triathletes were selected from the junior category and have a Spanish Royal Cycling Federation or Spanish Triathlon Federation licence for 2010-2011.

They conducted a descriptive design through semi-structured questionnaires, and this instrument has proven to be the most used in this scientific field of descriptive sociology (García Ferrando, 2003). The construction process of the tool followed two routes: firstly a literature review on sociological questionnaires concerning the conditions of competition for the Spanish athletes (García Ferrando, 1987; Garrard, 2003; Ruiz et al, 2008) proposed by experts in the field from a brainstorm to define the variables under study.

Finally, after getting the approval from the committee of experts, two semi-structured questionnaires of 41 questions (38 closed, multiple-choice or dichotomous nature and 3 open) grouped in 7 dimensions with their respective variables were defined (see Table 1). The completion time needed was approximately 45 minutes. The anonymity and the voluntary nature regarding the participation in the research were guaranteed in writing (letter of study). Both questionnaires were sent to the cyclists and triathletes from the 19 territorial federations of each sport via e-mail, along with precise instructions on how to fill them in. We received a 75% response rate from the cyclists and 65% from the triathletes.

We used the statistics programme, SPSS 15.0 to process the data and calculate the descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), and to contrast the variables using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test in each case. A value of $p < 0.05$ was considered significant.

Table 1: Dimensions of the questionnaire and variables

Dimensions	Variables
Sociodemographic aspects	Age and category Profession and level of education of athletes Profession and level of education of cyclists/triathletes' mothers Socioeconomic status
Socializing agents	Social/family environment and sporting activity Family involvement in sports
Motivational aspects	Cyclists and triathletes' motivations to practice sports
Economic assistance for athletes	Type of grant/economic assistance
Sociopolitical aspects /gender discrimination	Opinion and assessment of the women and sport commission Opinion of the representation women in managing position Causes of discrimination against female cyclists/triathletes
Training aspects	Daily and weekly training
Problems related to competition sport	Issues of interest in improving sport

RESULTS

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS

1.1. Age and categories

The average age of the triathletes who took part in the study, 30.10 years old (± 8.06), is higher than that of the cyclists, 28.76 years old (± 9.42), the first ones started sport competition when they were 21-18 years old and the second ones started sport competition when they were 16.18 years old. We found significant statistical differences in the "years of experience in competitive sports" variables ($p < 0.000$; 7.59 years for cyclists and 3.91 for triathletes). 36.3% of cyclists and 18.3% of triathletes live with their parents.

1.2. Level of education and profession of athletes

Although no significant statistical differences were found between cyclists and triathletes when it came to analyzing the "main occupation" and "work situation" variables, the "level of education" variable did show statistically significant differences with concerning studies completed or being carried out ($p < 0.000$).

42% of triathletes go to university whereas 27.5% of cyclists are in secondary school.

1.3. Level of education and profession of cyclists/triathletes' mothers

Although there were no statistically significant differences with regards to the "occupation" variable, there were significant differences when it came to the "level of education" of the athletes' mothers, ($p=0,091$). Indeed, although there is a high percentage of cyclists and triathletes' mothers with primary education (47,5% and 23,8% respectively), there is also a high percentage with a university education (26,2%).

Most cyclists' mothers are housewives (33,8%) or have occupations corresponding to mid-level executive entrepreneurs-employees (office employees (15%) and shop assistant or salesperson (11%)). On the other hand, even though there is also a large proportion of housewives (27,8%), triathletes' mothers have occupations related with management and public administration of businesses (7,9%), have university level studies in teaching, medicine or biology (17,5%), or mid-level executive entrepreneurs-employees (office employees (15,1%))

1.4. Socioeconomic status

In terms of family socioeconomic status, there are statistically significant differences between the two groups of athletes ($p < 0.007$). 65%, 1% of cyclists and 57, 1% of triathletes are middle class, whereas 32, 5% of triathletes and 16, 3% of cyclists are more upper-middle class (see figure 1).

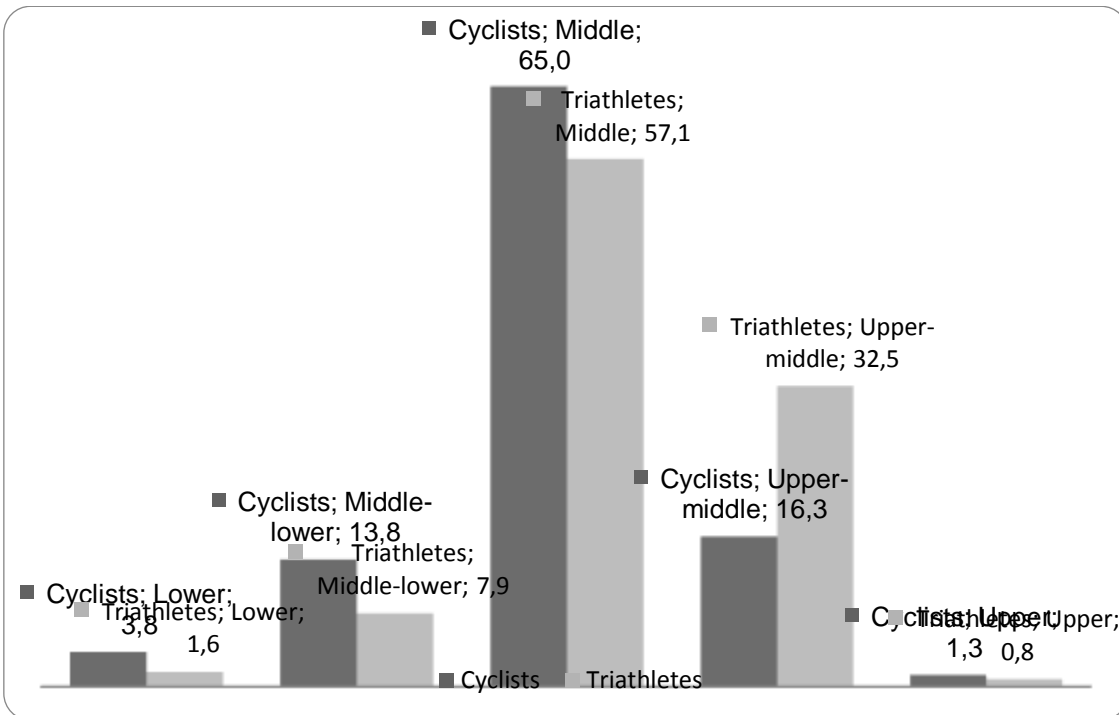


Figure 1. Sample's socioeconomic status expressed in percentages

2. SOCIAL AND FAMILY ENVIRONMENT WITH REGARDS TO COMPETITIVE ACTIVITY

2.1. Influencia del apoyo familiar en la práctica deportiva

The majority of cyclists and triathletes, 82, 5% and 77% respectively, were influenced by family when started to practice sports, moreover, 50% and 57.8% of cyclists and triathletes' relatives were involved in sport.

2.2. Family involvement in sports

In the cyclists' families, brothers/sisters (13,8%), father/mother (10%) and partner/spouse (7,5%) stand out, with the most practiced sports being cycling (20%), football (2,5%) and motorcycling (2,5%). They are mostly amateur, former amateur, or professional sportsmen and women.

In the triathletes' families, the brothers/sisters (12, 3%), partner/spouse (10, 7%) and father/mother (9, 5%) stand out. They mostly practice or used to practice football (4%), athletics (4%), swimming (3,4%), cycling (2,4%) or triathlon (2,4%) and are mostly amateur sportsmen and women (24,6%).

When it comes to socializing agents, there are statistically significant differences between the two groups of athletes ($p < 0.000$). While for cyclists the main socializing agents are their partner/spouse (28,8%), father/mother (17,5%) and friends/classmates (11,2%); for triathletes they are friends/classmates (22,2%), partner/spouse (15,9%) and partner/spouse-friends/classmates (4%). Moreover, they received considerable family support both at the beginning and in continuing the sport (see table 2).

Table 2. Cyclists and triathletes' initial and current family support in practicing sport, expressed in percentages

	Cyclists (n=80)		Triathletes (n=126)	
	Initially Mean (SD)	Currently Mean (SD)	Initially Mean (SD)	Currently Mean (SD)
Family support in practicing sports				
None	10	3.8	13.5	3.2
Little	23.8	21.3	21.4	23.8
Strong	18.8	20	28.6	23
Complete	47.5	55	36.5	50

Responsibilities hindering sports activity

Among the cyclists, those who stated that certain responsibilities hinder their practicing sports, most cited responsibilities related with: studies or work

(18,7%), or studies, work or household chores (10%). Among triathletes, the main responsibilities cited were: family related (11,1%) or studies, work or household chores (8,7%).

3. MOTIVATIONS TO PRACTICE SPORTS

Table 3 shows cyclists and triathletes' motivations to practice sports both at the beginning of their careers and at the moment. There are statistically significant differences between the two groups of athletes when it comes to their initial motivations related with: "to make friends, meet new people" ($p < 0.000$), "to win races and try to become a champion" ($p < 0,019$), "to show others what I'm worth" ($p < 0.028$), and "to please others" ($p < 0.014$). These differences are also noted in the same variables with regards to current motivations: "to make friends, meet new people" ($p < 0.033$), "to show other what I'm worth" ($p < 0,014$), and "to please others" ($p < 0.030$), with the exception of "to win races and try to become a champion" ($p = 0,216$).

Table 3. Cyclists and triathletes' motivations to practice sports

Motivations	Cyclists (n=80)		Triathletes (n=126)		Cyclists vs. Triathletes	
	Initially Media (SD)	Currently Media (SD)	Initially Media (SD)	Currently Media (SD)	p	p
To make friends	2.8(0.9)	3.1 (0,8)	2.4 (0.8)	2.8 (0.8)	0.000	0.033
To have fun	3.6 (0.5)	3.7 (0.5)	3.6 (0.6)	3.7 (0.5)	0.924	0.298
To win races and try to become a champion	2.2 (1.3)	2.3 (1.1)	1.8 (0.8)	2.1 (0.8)	0.019	0.216
To improve my physical aspect	2.4 (0.9)	2.5(0.9)	2.2 (0.8)	2.4 (0.8)	0.340	0.298
To improve my health	2.9 (0.8)	3.1 (0.8)	2.8 (0.9)	2.9 (0.9)	0.138	0.365
To show myself what I'm worth	3.0 (0.9)	3.1 (0.8)	2.9 (0.9)	2.9 (1)	0.420	0.310
To show others what I'm worth	2.2 (1)	2.1 (0.1)	1.8 (0.9)	1.8 (0.8)	0.028	0.014
To please others	1.7 (0.9)	1.7 (0.9)	1.4 (0.5)	1.5 (0.7)	0.014	0.030
To earn a living as a cyclist	1.4 (0.7)	1.5 (0.9)	1.2 (0.5)	1.3 (0.7)	0.069	0.279

Likert scale (1-4 in which 1= not at all important, 4= extremely important). $p < 0.05$

4. ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FOR ATHLETES

86,3% of cyclists and 81% of triathletes do not receive any economic assistance or sports grant from the relevant sports institutions. Figure 6 shows the percentages of cyclists and triathletes who took part in the study, according to the type of assistance/grant they have. 68,8% of cyclists and 76% of triathletes do not receive income in the form of prizes or salary for competing in their

respective sports. Those who are remunerated do not earn more than 500 Euros a year.

5. SOCIOPOLITICAL AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION ASPECTS

5.1. Opinion and assessment of the women and sport commission

A high proportion of the sample, 87,5% of cyclists and 91,3% of triathletes, are unaware of the existence of the women's cycling and triathlon commissions. The cyclists who do know of them consider the quality their work bad/very bad.

5.2. Opinion of the representation of women in managing positions

There are statistically significant differences in terms of the sample's opinion on female athletes' involvement in sports management/administration ($p < 0.025$), with 80% of cyclists and 65,95% of triathletes feeling that they should be more involved.

It should also be noted that, as well as competing in their disciplines, 7,5% of cyclists and 11,9% of triathletes hold managing positions in the clubs they belong to. Another interesting point worth highlighting is that 8,8% of cyclists and 11,9% of triathletes take part in organising activities within their sports organizations.

5.3. Gender discrimination

Table 4 shows the causes of discrimination against women as put forward by the cyclists and triathletes who took part in the study. We found statistically significant differences in analyzing the sample on the basis of the "discrimination against women" variable, with 67,5% of cyclists and 33,4% of triathletes stating they feel discriminated against either in general or in specific areas, such as having fewer opportunities when it comes to competing, or in terms of remuneration.

6. Training

There are no statistically significant differences in terms of the number of hours per week spent training by Spanish female cyclists and triathletes: 11, 17 hours for the first and 11,05 hours for the latter. With an average training time of 5.5 days a week.

7. Problems related to competition sport

Table 4 shows a percentage distribution of sportswomen who previously expressed gender discrimination. Table 5 shows the percentage distribution of

sportswomen who had wanted to express problems or changes associated with their sport practice.

Table 4. Causes of discrimination against female cyclists and triathletes

Causes of discrimination against female cyclists/triathletes (%)	Cyclists (n=54)	Triathletes (n=43)
Inequality of selection criteria for championships	1.25	-
Lack of races in the year	2.5	-
Smaller prizes and lower salaries	15	3.4
Worse circuit time-tables and routes in races	3.75	10.31
Lack of representation in the media	1.25	5.6
Insufficient women's changing rooms	1.25	-
Combining of categories into one	3.75	0.8
Insufficient sports assistance and sponsoring	3.75	4.8
Low social recognition of female federated sports and gender discrimination	23.75	3.4
Lack of consideration for bicycle touring compared with competitive cycling	1.25	-
Lack of professionalism in female cycling	10	2
Sports equipment not adapted to women	-	3.1

Table 5. Issues related with practicing sports

Problems in practicing sports (%)	Cyclists (n=57)	Triathletes (n=55)
Little social recognition/discrimination against women	10	4.8
Lack of support for federated “professional” cycling – international level	7.5	-
Risks associated with practicing competition sports (accidents and injuries)	1.25	7.5
Lack of safety on roads	7.5	3.2
Disappearance of women’s competitions due to a lack of female competitors	8.75	7.9
Incompatibility of motherhood with practicing competitive sports	6.25	3.2
Lack of time for training and competing	1.25	5.6
Poor organization of women’s competitions	2.5	1.6
Lack of economic assistance for both federated and amateur sports	5	1.6
Inequality of selection criteria for championships	3.75	
Inequality in general conditions compared to men	7.5	0.8
Insufficient promotion for and encouragement in cycling/triathlon in general	3.75	0.8
Insufficient media impact	1.25	0.8
Bad relations with colleagues	2.5	0.8
Lack of qualified sports doctors	1.25	-
Lack of competitions	1.25	-
Lack of structured training and tailor-made personal training		2.4
Incompatibility work-training	-	3.2
Drawback of reaching my goals and superseding myself in my sports discipline		2.4
Insufficiency of amateur triathlon and cycling through initiation tests		0.8
Insufficiency of female sports equipment and kit	-	0.8

DISCUSSION

Sociodemographic data

The average age of the triathletes who took part in the study, 30,10 years old ($\pm 8,06$), is higher than that of the cyclists, 28,76 years old ($\pm 9,42$) and they have less sporting experience (3,91 years vs. 7,59 years). This difference in terms of experience leads us to believe that triathletes who began competing in triathlons at a late age, around 26,18 years old already practiced and competed

in one or two of the three triathlon disciplines as demonstrated in the studies of (Hendy & Boyer, 1993; Ruiz et al., 2008).

The cyclists and triathletes who took part in the study have a high level of education, most having completed or busy completing university studies. This is in line with the studies carried out by (Atkinson, 2007; Hendy y Boyer, 1993; Ruiz et al, 2008).

In terms of the social status, Spanish female cyclists and triathletes mostly come from the middle strata. This result coincides with other studies carried out with regards to high-level female athletes in which most participants were also middle class (Atkinson, 2007,2008; Ruiz et al, 2008).

Also, while the triathlete sample tends to be of upper-middle class, the cyclist sample tends to be lower-middle class. This demonstrates the more popular and therefore more accessible nature of cycling as a competitive sport compared with triathlon.

Social/family environment and sporting activity

The analysis of family influence on practicing sports showed that the cyclists and triathletes highly value the family environment surrounding them. However, an encouraging family environment is not always accompanied by the same social environment. Many of these athletes, in particular the cyclists, are not encouraged in their competitive activity by their social surroundings. This is mostly due to the lack of social recognition women's cycling receives and because of gender discrimination/oppression (see tables 4 and 5), leaving them to fight against social ideals, so family support is considered critical for the sportswomen to develop their competitive activity.

Our study, like those carried out by other authors (Fredriks y Eccles, 2005; Miller y Levy, 1996; Sallis, Prochaska y Taylor, 2000; Wuerth, Lee y Alfermann, 2004), demonstrated that parents' roles as social agents in their children's sport practice, as well as brothers and sisters and partners and spouses in the case of triathletes.

Also, the athletes do not consider the cycling/triathlon coach/trainer as an influential socializing agent when they first start practicing the sport. This result contrasts with most studies analyzed in which the coach/trainer plays a fundamental role along with the parents in the athletes' initiation in competitive sport (García Ferrando, 1987; Ruiz et al., 2008).

MOTIVATIONAL ASPECTS

There are two opposing ways of understanding the practice of competitive sports. On the one hand, we have athletes who tend to see the sport in its recreational and instructive dimension which coincides with the amateur

dimension; on the other hand we have those who opt for the professional dimension in which the sport is considered as “a means to reach a better position in life, a profession like any other and a way of standing out and gaining notoriety” (Ferrando, 1987: 45).

Studying the results obtained, we see that a large majority of Spanish female cyclists and triathletes tend to see the recreational side of sport, even though the average number of hours spent training per week (11,17 hours for cyclists and 11,05 hours for triathletes), and the federated competitions they take part in all over the country and abroad, exceed the expectations corresponding to an amateur profile. This can be explained by the fact that the main motivations for beginning and continuing in competition sports deal with the recreational nature of the activity and with improving health and physical aspect ((Atkinson, 2007; Garrard, 2003; La Chausse, 2012; O’Connor y Brown, 2007, 2009; Ruiz et al, 2008).

In line with Ruiz et al. (2008), we found that many triathletes are drawn to the sport to get away from the monotony of their former sport (swimming, cycling, running), with triathlon providing a personal challenge and adventure.

Cyclists, on the other hand, point more towards the importance of variables related to competitiveness (see table 5). Despite this, competing with the aim of becoming a professional cyclist is not one of female cyclists’ main motivations to practice the sport. This data contradicts other studies in which sport is considered in its entertaining and leisure dimensions, as a means of attaining social and economic rewards (Henry y Boyer, 1993; Levy, 2002).

Spanish sportswomen do not consider their national model of competition sports well organized, with consideration (level of social and economic rewards for performance) in line with their competitive activity. They therefore do not choose to become professional cyclists or triathletes, preferring to practice their sport in an amateur capacity and work in areas related with their studies.

Aspects of sports politics

The sporting activity of these Spanish sportswomen could be classified as being a “part-amateur profile with a competitive tendency”. That is to say they are not professional athletes who receive a salary, the vast majority not receiving any economic assistance or sports grant to compete. Both groups of sportswomen, and in particular the cyclists, also feel male cyclists have better conditions. Nowadays, in Spain, competition female cycling only has two professional teams UCI. Although they compete in the same category of professional cycling, they only have sport sponsorship grants, and they are not paid like the Spanish male teams UCI which are at the same professional level. On the other hand, female triathletes have the same organizational structure in their sport as the male triathletes showing more self-confidence and equal conditions in competitions compared with male triathletes (Henry y Boyer, 1993).

In regards to specific aspects of discrimination, 23,75% of female cyclists cite a series of situations, saying there is total discrimination against women in cycling and that they receive little social recognition. Triathletes, on the other hand, pinpoint inequality in organizational aspects of races and the lack of publicity women's triathlon receives in the media.

Another point to be highlighted in regards to female representation in the federation is that the athletes are not aware of the initiatives in place by the women and sports commissions of both sports federations to promote women's cycling/triathlon. On top of this, cyclists do not consider their role highly as they feel under-represented by the body. A vast majority feel their involvement in federative entities and sports clubs/teams they belong to, in managerial or decision-making positions, is very important in improving their situation within competition sports. Nevertheless, according to statistical data of CSD 2013, both sports federations do not currently follow the International Olympic Committee's recommendations on incorporating women into managerial positions in federations (Gil & Robles, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

The results previously presented make it evident that women's triathlon and cycling face the same issues as Spanish women's competition sport, due to the lack of economic assistance to compete in sports, low levels of social recognition these athletes receive and the discrimination they are subjected to. The sporting behavior, motivations, socializing agents, opinions and problems mentioned by the cyclists are almost the same as those mentioned by Spanish female triathletes, except that the latter are not subjected to as much discriminatory treatment as their cyclist colleagues.

After having analyzed the socio-sporting profile and sports related situation of Spanish female cyclists and triathletes, we believe it is necessary, among other measures, to change sports politics in federations by increasing the number of female members of their boards of directors and in managerial positions. This would enable the sportswomen to identify more closely with their managing teams. Both women's cycling and triathlon commissions should promote themselves by disseminating their plans of action among the athletes. With regards to gender equality policies, initiatives to minimize inequality between men and women must be adopted, For example, the regulations should be entirely adhered to in all sports competitions; women's sporting achievements should receive more coverage and be more widely disseminated in both sports federations; comprehensive compliance regulations in all sports competitions and measures to reconcile work and family personal life.

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