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## ORIGINAL

### FEMALE FITNESS PROFESSIONALS: A CASE STUDY IN THE CITY OF HUESCA (SPAIN)

### SITUACIÓN DE LAS PROFESIONALES DEL FITNESS ANÁLISIS DE CASO DE LA CIUDAD DE HUESCA (ESPAÑA)

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## **ABSTRACT**

The situation of women in the labour market in Spain has undergone a great evolution, and although there are some studies on the differences in professional careers depending on gender, fitness has been scarcely analysed. Our objective is to describe the situation of women in the labour market in this field and their conditions by understanding their perception about possible gender inequality. To this end, a descriptive quantitative methodology has been used, carrying out a cross-sectional study based on the application of a self-administered questionnaire of own elaboration. The 33 women from Huesca (Spain) who participated in the study represent a young and university-educated sector, but nevertheless, they seem to encounter greater difficulties to be hired, to get promoted, and to achieve work-life balance than men.

**KEYWORDS:** Fitness, Woman, Working Conditions, Maternity, Gender Equality.

## RESUMEN

La situación laboral de la mujer en España ha sufrido una gran evolución y a pesar de que hay estudios que indican las diferencias en las trayectorias laborales en función del género, apenas analizan el sector del Fitness. Nuestro objetivo es describir la situación laboral de la mujer en este ámbito y sus condiciones conociendo su percepción acerca de posibles desigualdades a raíz del género. Para ello se ha empleado una metodología cuantitativa de corte descriptivo, realizándose un estudio transversal basado en la aplicación de un cuestionario autoadministrado de diseño propio. Las 33 mujeres de Huesca (España) que participaron en el estudio muestran un sector joven y con formación universitaria, pero perciben mayores dificultades para ser contratadas, para promocionar, y para conciliar, que los hombres.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Fitness, Mujer, Condiciones Laborales, Maternidad, Igualdad.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the integration of women in the labour market has been promoted and their participation in the country's economy is becoming very important, both in salaried employment and in self-employment and entrepreneurs (López & Santos, 2013). Despite the fact that the situation of women in the labour market has undergone a great evolution, there are still differences in the Spanish society based on gender regarding the professional careers and the characteristics of participation (Alcañiz, 2017). Women's professional careers have been broken (prioritisation of family and abandonment of employment) or adjusted (modification of work activity). According to data from the public employment service in Spain (SEPE, 2019), in March 2020 the number of women affiliated to Social Security amounted to 8,978,764 workers, the highest figure since 2007. Women currently represent 46.64% of the total employment ratio in Spain. Female representation in the affiliation to the Social Security system experienced a slight year-on-year increase as a result of the increase in female workers, causing as a result a slight reduction in the difference between affiliated men and women. However, if we regard the unemployment rate, 1.89 million women are unemployed compared to 1.35 million men, according to the public employment services register. Other data provided by the SEPE are records of family care leave; In 2019, a total of 59,446 family care leaves were registered, 86.96% corresponding to women.

In Spain, several governments have expressed the need for gender equality between men and women, a principle of universal jurisdiction recognised in several international texts on human rights. To this end, in 2007 the Organic Law 3/2007, of March 22, was enacted for the effective equality of women and men. This law seeks the elimination of all acts of discrimination against women from a gender perspective.

But, although society has advanced significantly and it seems that current policies try to close possible gender gaps in the workplace, inequalities are easily found on a day-to-day basis affecting the real situation of women in the Spanish society. López & Santos (2013) state that women have a higher rate of unemployment, temporary contracts or part-time work and receive a lower salary than men for the same job. Álvarez (2002) states that the decision taken by women in relation to entering the labour market or not is determined by the level of education, by the number of children and by the more or less favourable circumstances of the labour market, in addition to the presence of other relatives at home or the existence of childcare centres. These aspects do not seem to condition the participation of men in the labour market to the same extent. From a gender perspective, Borrás, Carrasquer, Moreno & Torns (2012) explain that the professional careers will be different for women and men because women, apart from the structural factors that also affect men, have to deal with the accomplishment of domestic tasks, while men primarily focus on their role as providers.

Padilla (2002) summarises women's situation in the labour market as characterised by a low employment rate, the existence of big gender pay gaps, a high rate of temporary employment due to family reasons and a high unemployment rate. Alcañiz (2017) maintains that the presence of women in the labour market is characterised by its precariousness, part-time jobs, temporary contracts, little chance of promotion and a low pay. Most women find themselves immersed in part-time jobs, not voluntarily but because they cannot find a full-time job, explains Otaegui (2014).

Regarding maternity, it seems to have been and continues to be the main cause of discrimination against women in the labour market. Martínez (2017) divides this discrimination into three different aspects: access to employment, continuity in employment and gender pay gap due to maternity. When women enter the labour market and do not abandon childcare, they must develop strategies to balance both family and work tasks. This conditions their professional career and influences their performance of the job (Borrás et al., 2012). Despite the existence of policies focused on this balance between family and work, Bote & Cabezas (2012) affirm that the impact of the decisions related to maternity on participation in the labour market is very unequal for men and women, since women continue to assume a disproportionate part of the family care, thus considering maternity as the end of their professional career. The costs of motherhood are very high for women, sometimes even having to give up their jobs. As an alternative, according to Bote & Cabezas (2012), flexible working is encouraged, such as part-time contracts, and childcare services are promoted. These types of flexible working are offered to both men and women, but women are who most resort to these flexible working methods.

If we refer specifically to the employment situation of women who work in the fitness industry, everything suggests that women have a different role from men. In 2003, López de Viñaspre, Rodríguez & Boned confirmed a stronger presence of men in the fitness industry. Studies such as those by Boned, Felipe, Barranco, Grimaldi-Puyana & Crovetto (2015), Campos, González, Pablos & Mestres (2013), and Campos-Izquierdo (2019), point out that the socio-demographic characteristics of the Spanish fitness professional are; male gender, under 30 years old, university-educated or having a vocational training, and employee in a company. The study by Estrada-Marcén, Sanz-Gonzalo, Casterad-Seral, Simón-Grima & Roso-Moliner (2019) indicates a slight numerical superiority of men over women in the fitness industry, although figures are very similar. On the other hand, there does seem to be greater differentiation in terms of the task carried out by men and women in this professional field; Group fitness instructors are usually men and women around 30 years old, some of them not having a formal higher education in Physical Education and Sports (Juan-Llamas, 2015). Boned et. al (2015) suggest the existence of a greater number of men than women in fitness rooms, personal training, and coordination and management positions, while, as confirmed by Gallardo & Campos (2011), women predominate in activities aimed at the maintenance of physical fitness and performed collectively.

Regarding entrepreneurship, the empirical study on entrepreneurship by Leoni & Falk (2010) confirms that women have less intention or probability of

entrepreneurship than men in the professional field of physical activity, so a gender gap can be observed in this respect. Nevertheless, the employment situation of women in this sector has been scarcely studied so far, so many questions remain unanswered, and that is the reason why we considered the need of this study. In relation to the professional career of women in the fitness industry, this analysis perspective has not been found in the bibliography.

The objectives of this study are to describe the employment situation of women in the professional fitness industry in the city of Huesca (Spain), analyse their characteristics, their working conditions, and learn about their perception of possible gender inequalities. We intend our study to be useful as a precedent or basis for future research on the employment situation of women in the professional fitness industry at a national level. The city of Huesca, where the participants in this study come from, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics (INE) for the year 2021, is a Spanish city with a population density between 50,001 and 100,000 inhabitants, which means a census close to the national average.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **Design and instrument**

A descriptive quantitative methodology was used in this case study, with a cross-sectional study based on the sample.

After setting the objectives, a questionnaire was created to collect the information. Due to the lack of bibliography with validated questionnaires on this topic, the instrument used is of own design, based on other questionnaires previously applied to fitness professionals, (Boned, Felipe, Barranco, Grimaldi-Puyana & Crovetto, 2015; Estrada-Marcén, Sanz-Gonzalo, Casterad-Seral, Simón-Grima and Roso-Moliner, 2019; García, 2011). A first draft of the instrument was designed, and it was submitted to the judgment of a panel of experts, 3 female fitness professionals and a female university professor also expert in fitness who refined the content. A pilot test was carried out with 10 active female fitness professionals from other cities, verifying the adequate understanding of the items and the approximate duration of the questionnaire, finally not having to make any changes. The aim of this tool was to ask questions to the study sample in order to obtain descriptions of different aspects regarding the situation of women in the fitness industry. Both open-ended questions (paragraph and short answer) and closed-ended questions (check boxes, drop-down and multiple selection) were used in the questionnaire, most of them being open-ended.

The questionnaire was made up of three clearly differentiated sections: socio-demographic data, employment situation of women in the fitness industry and maternity. The first section had eleven items and focused on the socio-demographic data of the participants, in order to describe the characteristics of the women who work in the fitness industry in the city of Huesca. The second section had sixteen items and focused on the employment situation of women in

the fitness industry from the personal point of view of each participant, thus attempting to describe the working conditions of women in this sector, establishing possible gender inequalities. It also focused, from the point of view of the participants, on the inequalities they had to undergo or those they had witnessed. Finally, the third and last section had thirteen items, addressed only to those who had been mothers. The aim was to establish the possible negative effects of maternity on their professional lives, and to prove if, from the point of view of the workers, men's paternity had the same effects.

The participants were contacted through social networks such as Instagram, email and/or Whatsapp App, with the collaboration of some of the fitness centres where they worked. They were fully informed as to the intent and purpose of the study, and requested consent to proceed with sending the survey. This prior contact was made with the entire sample, although finally 33 women agreed to participate. It was a self-administered online questionnaire.

The questionnaire was applied using Google Forms, included in the Google Drive office suite. The questionnaire started with a brief introductory message explaining the purpose of the study, the characteristics of the questionnaire, and the inclusion criteria. After this message, a check box was included for the participants to give their consent to the processing of data for research purposes. The field work was carried out between April and May 2020, when most of the participants were not working due to the health situation at that moment (Covid).

## **Participants**

The sample was made up of female fitness professionals hired by fitness centres in the city of Huesca. They had to be part of the technical staff of the fitness centre, in one of the following positions: technical director, coordinator, fitness room instructor, group fitness instructor or personal trainer.

To find out the size of the universe of the study, we contacted the local Social Security offices, the Employment Office, the Information Systems Integration Section of the INAEM, the Directorate for employment of Aragon and the Statistics Institute of Aragon. These entities did not provide us with a census, and the sources where they referred us to did not allow us to obtain the size of the study population. Finally, we decided to contact all the fitness centres in the city of Huesca. To find out the total number of fitness centres in the city of Huesca, we used the same procedure used previously in other works (Estrada-Marcén, Sanz.Gonzalo, Simón-Grima, Casterad-Seral & Roso-Moliner, 2019; García, 2011), obtaining a list with a total of 38 centres. Of this list of 38 centres, we eliminated those which were focused on martial arts, meditation, physiotherapy, dance, climbing or were simply sports clubs or facilities such as sports halls or running tracks, reducing the list to 20 centres. Besides, 2 of the centres had ceased their activity so they had to be also eliminated.

The 18 resulting centres were contacted via e-mail or telephone to find out the number of women who worked in them performing tasks related to fitness.

Finally, 36 women working in the fitness industry in the city of Huesca were found, so the universe was finally estimated at 36 professionals. From this population, the study sample comprised 33 participants, which allowed us to obtain globally representative data with a confidence interval of 95% ( $3\sigma$ ) and a margin of error of  $\pm 5\%$  according to the calculation method offered by Sierra (2001) to estimate sample sizes in finite population.

The mean of the participants' age was between 29 and 30 ( $M=29.6$ ;  $SD=7.54$ ) ranging between 18 and 47.

### **Processing of results**

The answers to the questionnaire in Google Forms, were automatically collected and organised using Microsoft Excel software. Subsequently, the data was transferred to the statistical package SSPP version 22.0 in order to analyse it. A descriptive analysis of the data was carried out, obtaining frequencies and percentages, or means and standard deviations, depending on the nature of the data. In some cases, the  $\chi^2$  test of Pearson was applied to verify the independence of two variables, for a significance level of 5%. Bar charts and pie charts were created by using Microsoft Excel and were used to present certain results more visually.

### **3. RESULTS**

44% of the professionals are 25 years old or younger, followed by 23% ranging between 26 and 30, 13% ranging between 31 and 35, and the rest over 35 years old. The oldest woman is 47 years old.

#### **Formal and non-formal learning**

Regarding formal learning related to sport, the high level found stands out. 54% are university-educated: 44% have a degree in Physical Activity and Sports Sciences and 10% have a degree in Physical Education Teaching. It is noteworthy, however, that 23% of the sample perform their work without having any formal learning related to sport. Regarding non-formal learning related to fitness, 73% of the professionals state that they have some training of this type, among the most frequent being those related to Zumba, K-Stretch, Les Mills, or training related to Indoor Cycle activities, Pilates, aerobics or step, or personal training.

When the participants were asked whether there is a balance between the number of male and female trainers in the fitness industry, we found that 50% consider that there is a balance between male and female trainers, while 43% consider there are more male trainers, and 7% more female trainers. They present the following arguments:

*“When I started learning there were usually more male instructors and more women who were learning. Currently the numbers are more similar”.*

*“From my own experience, regarding courses focused on personal training or centre management and coordination, there are more men teaching those courses. Women teach courses more focused on specific disciplines: collective activities, etc...”.*

## **Types of contracts**

Considering the type of contract, 80% are employed, while 20% are self-employed. Of the 80% who are employed, 67% have a part-time contract compared to 13% who have a full-time contract.

## **Functions developed**

In relation to their occupation within the fitness centre, we can analyse two different aspects, the number of activities they are engaged in, and the frequency of each of the different positions/tasks, differentiating between high-responsibility positions such as owner or coordinator of the centre and the rest of the positions such as personal trainer, group class trainer, room trainer or others. The most frequently performed activity by far among the women who work in fitness centres in the city of Huesca is group class instructor (76%), followed by weight room instructor (36%) and personal trainer (33%). Only a low percentage of women are the owners or coordinators of the centre (15%).

Considering the number of activities the professionals are engaged in, in the fitness centres in the city of Huesca, we observe that 34% perform a single activity, 43% two, 10% three, 10% four, and finally 3% perform six different activities. We also consider it interesting to highlight that only 33% of them work in one single centre; 27% work in two different centres, 20% in three, 13% in four, and finally 7% work in five different centres.

When asked whether there are differences between men and women in terms of holding senior positions (director, coordinator, etc.), 73% believe that more men hold these positions in the fitness industry, while 27% think there is a balance. When it comes to arguing their answer, these are some of the opinions among the participants:

*“As the owner of a centre, I would choose a man rather than a woman, because a pregnancy, plus the subsequent raising of a child, taking into account the total lack of family and work balancing conditions offered by the Government, can destroy a small sports centre. A small centre could not endure a one-year sick leave or a reduction in working hours under current laws. A larger company might, but losing productivity and money”.*

*“Although currently some women are seen in managerial positions in the fitness industry, there is still a great deal of machismo and disbelief at the ability of a woman as a leader”.*

*“(...) great dedication to the job is required and if you decide to have children, things get complicated. In my case I have decided to devote myself to my job”.*

### **Perception of their working conditions**

We can analyse the salary that these professionals receive using two different parameters: monthly salary or hourly wage. If we analyse the monthly salary of the professionals, 64% receive less than €1,000 for their work in the fitness centres. 27% of the participants receive less than €500, 10% receive between €500 and €750 per month, and 27% between €750 and €1,000. 23% receive a salary between €1,000 and €2,000, the most frequent range being between €1,250 and €1,500 (13%). Only 13% earn more than €2,000, and those are the owners of the centres and workers with a high level of professional qualification. (Mean = 1070.15; SD = 780.7). We have to keep in mind that a large number of the workers had part-time contracts.

Regarding the hourly wage, the average is around €10.5 (Mean=10.42; SD=5.79). 78% of the participants declared that they received less than €10 (22% received a maximum of €6, 28% between €7 and €8, and 30% between €9 and €10). Furthermore, only 7% earn between €13 and €14 per hour, and 4% earn between €17 and €18. Finally, 14% earn €20 or more, usually the owners of the centres and highly qualified professionals.

When the participants are asked about how their working conditions have evolved over time, 47% state that they have improved, 33% think that they are the same as when they started, and 20% state that they are worse now than before. In relation to their salary, 60% consider that their activity is "very poorly paid", 30% consider it "poorly paid", and only 10% defend that it is "well paid".

With regard to the differences they perceive between their working conditions and those of a man, 77% agree that men have the same hiring conditions as women, as opposed to 33% who hold that men have better working conditions, and regarding remuneration, 83% perceive that men have the same remuneration for the same job, as opposed to 17% who consider that men have better salaries.

### **Problems affecting women in the fitness industry**

In the first place, we analysed whether women in the fitness industry encountered greater difficulties to be hired. 54% affirm that it is not as easy for women as for men, 7% affirming that it is “much more difficult” to be hired and 47% considering it “more difficult”. 33% consider that it is likewise easy for a woman to be hired in this sector.

We also inquired as to whether, in the context of work, they considered themselves treated in the same way as their male colleagues. 70% defend that they are treated in the same way as their male colleagues, but 30%, on the contrary, think that they are not treated equally, especially by the users of the centres. Some of the explanations given to argue this aspect are the following:

*“A man only has to be nice and treat people well to have his position guaranteed, even if he is not versatile. It is not enough for a woman to be nice: she has to demonstrate excellence constantly”.*

*“In my experience, in the different centres where I have worked, I have always been treated in the same way by my colleagues, without discrimination of any kind. But as for the members/users of the different clubs, on many occasions, because you are a woman they believe that you will not be able to help or advise and guide them in the same way as a man. I have found myself in similar situations frequently, in which they prefer a man”.*

When enquired whether they had ever been asked about their intentions of maternity, about their marital status, etc., in job interviews at fitness centres, 80% of the women had never been asked about these questions, compared to 17% who had been asked about them, the remaining 3% do not know/do not answer. Those women who were asked about these issues in their job interviews, consider that a man would not have been asked these same questions.

In relation to the age they stop working in the fitness industry, 63% affirm that the working life of a woman ends before that of a man, while 30% do not agree (7% do not know/do not answer).

The participants were asked for a general conclusion about the situation of women in the fitness industry, and we highlight:

*“In general, although fortunately it is starting to change, fitness in Spain is associated more with fun and socialising than with health and obtaining results. (...) a nice boy draws more attention and therefore generates more money, even though he is less prepared and his technical level is lower, than the most prepared and most professional woman”.*

*“Men are perceived as being stronger. We still live in a macho society in which women are undervalued (and even more in the world of physical activity and sports) and people continue to think that only men can build muscle”.*

*“Normally, the gender differences regarding fitness activities are influenced by the content of the activities themselves. All those activities related to corporal expression are associated with women, as opposed to those related to performance, which are associated with men”.*

*“We are undervalued on many occasions, both in terms of knowledge on the subject matter and in our ability to carry out the task”.*

*“The differences that I believe may exist in this sector are the balancing of family and work life, and maternity”.*

*“Despite the fact that we have progressed in terms of equality, there are still notable differences depending on the centres. This is due to the society that surrounds us, since we have the preconceived idea of a male personal trainer, as opposed to female instructors. The fact that women are entitled to a maternity leave but after that no process of adaptation to the job is offered prior to the reincorporation, shows the lack of consideration that currently exists for the integration of women in the working environment. This, added to the stress and the number of burdens carried when trying to balance family, sports, work and social life, leads to physical and emotional stress”.*

*“Today women are becoming more visible and better considered in the fitness industry, a growing number of female users are training in weight rooms and therefore, more room instructors are required, which has been a struggle for women in this field more than for men. We must make an effort to be taken seriously; our physical appearance is not the prototype that men want to achieve. This does not mean that we do not have the knowledge about the type of training required to achieve these objectives, but even so they prefer to take advice from a male instructor”.*

*“I think the situation of women in the fitness industry is positive. The biggest problem, undoubtedly, is when considering maternity. Gestation is a major problem, but the maternity leave is no longer a big problem since the duration of paternity leave is currently almost the same, and from January 2021 it will be exactly the same for both women and men.*

## **Maternity and professional fitness in fitness centres**

Of the 33 participants in the research, 12 of them are also mothers. In this section we focus on the impact of maternity on their jobs, as well as the participants' perception of the impact of paternity on men, and the possible difficulties of the balancing of family and work life.

In the first place, we wanted to know if women, before becoming mothers, considered the consequences of maternity in their professional careers. 63% of them considered the consequences before becoming mothers, compared to 8% who did not. In addition, 25% postponed maternity due to the consequences that could arise in their professional career. We also wanted to know their opinion about the consequences of maternity in their professional career in the fitness industry. 75% of the participants considered that motherhood stops or slows down the professional career, compared to 17% who thought that motherhood does not imply any changes at this level. Many of the participants stated that they had come to consider abandoning their jobs due to

motherhood. 10% considered job abandonment frequently, and 40% occasionally.

In the case of female fitness trainers in Huesca, 41% have had a colleague who has been fired for maternity reasons, and 42% have never had a colleague in this situation.

The negative consequences that motherhood can have for a woman working in the fitness industry, would be:

*“Stop training and having to get back into shape when returning to work”.*

*“Stress, lack of personal space, fatigue, injuries, financial compensation”.*

*“Less probability of promotion and improvement, fear of job loss: some tasks cannot be carried out while pregnant and the recovery period after giving birth and then returning to training is hard and complicated. It is hard work and time-consuming, and sometimes you don't have that time”.*

*“In my case I am exclusively breastfeeding and that is a problem when you go back to work, since you have to breastfeed every two hours. You also fall out of shape, and working hours are not very favourable for family life”.*

*“Adverse maternity conditions, very low wages”.*

*“Not being able to dedicate myself exclusively to the management of the centre. Not having time and that my body undergoes changes that can cause injuries”.*

Regarding the balancing of family and work life, 33% of the participants affirm that the centre facilitated the conditions for the balancing, compared to 17% who were not offered those conditions. In addition, 67% admit having had to make decisions related to maternity that have affected their purchasing power, such as a reduction in working hours. And in terms of the balancing of family and work life, the greatest difficulties that the participants have encountered are the following:

*“Lack of progressive adaptation to the workplace”.*

*“I need more hours to be able to rest more and to study and prepare the classes”.*

*“I have spent many hours not being with my son”.*

*“As I am the director of my centre, it has not been easy to find a substitute”.*

Motherhood entails changes in women at a physical level, so we thought it would be interesting to know how these changes had affected them in terms of both quality and pace of work. In relation to the quality of the classes and training, 58% defend that maternity has not affected them, compared to 17% who consider that the quality of their classes has been affected at some point after motherhood. Those that have not been affected state:

*“It can affect your physical level while providing an instructor-led training, but it cannot affect the quality and the explanations given to the class so that the participants perform the exercises properly and in the best possible way”.*

*“The quality is in the spirit, in the feelings that you inspire, not only in the physical shape or in the power of a jump”.*

On the other hand, those women who have been affected state:

*“After labour you suffer from diastasis recti (abdominal separation), posture problems, and stabilizer muscles imbalance. If you breastfeed, the increase in prolactin besides all the hormonal imbalances during and after the labour can cause prolonged emotional imbalance too, thus affecting the tolerance to physical fatigue during work. In the case of Caesarean sections, such as my third labour, we suffer from a partial tear of the abdominal muscles, which is irreparable and causes serious problems in the pelvic floor”.*

*“I have been a mother for a short time, but I have already been able to experience during my pregnancy how my condition affected the classes, and I am sure that in the future it will also affect them, since I will have less time to prepare the classes and my physical shape has already changed considerably”.*

Regarding the level of intensity of the classes and training, 50% consider they have not been able to keep up with the same intensity, as opposed to 17% who have been able to keep up with the intensity.

We have raised a series of questions related to the impact of maternity on their working conditions. But, do the participants consider that paternity affects men's working conditions similarly? In the first place, all the participants agree (100%) that women are more negatively affected by maternity than men by paternity. Regarding the balancing of family and work life or the need to make decisions that affect their purchasing level such as a reduction in working hours, 67% argue that a man does not encounter these problems in the same situation, and only 8% believe that men face the same problems as women. And finally, all women agree once again (100%) on the fact that they have never experienced a situation in which a man is dismissed from a job due to paternity reasons.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

In relation to the age of the sample, we can notice from the data obtained that women working in this professional field in the city of Huesca are young, in accordance with the socio-demographic characteristics of the Spanish fitness professional by Boned et al (2015) and Campos-Izquierdo (2013; 2019), which is characterised by a large number of workers under the age of 30.

The high level of qualification found in these female fitness workers is in line with the results found in other studies. In this sense, our data coincide with studies such as those by Boned et. al (2015) and Campos-Izquierdo (2013) and (2019), who state that the Spanish fitness professional is characterised by having a university degree. Estrada-Marcén et al. (2019) also observed that CCAFD (degree in physical activity and sport) graduates were present in 82.4% of the fitness centres of the city of Zaragoza, performing different tasks. In addition, Veiga, Valcarce-Torrente, King & de la Cámara (2019) agree with the argument that properly trained professionals, with appropriate qualifications in Physical Activity and Sport is one of the current trends in fitness. 23% have the lower-level but also official qualification of Physical Activity and Sport Technician (TAFAD).

The reason why a high percentage of the participants (23%) do not have a formal training in the field of physical activity and sport could be due to the fact that in the Autonomous Community of Aragon, where our study is contextualized, careers in sports are not yet regulated. As highlighted in the study by Estrada-Marcén et al. (2019), the need for urgent regulation of this profession in all the Autonomous Communities is evident since, due to the impact of their work on the health of the users, all workers carrying out tasks related to sport in fitness centres should have a formal qualification or accreditation from the corresponding Autonomous Agency of Professional Qualifications. And it seems that, according to the participants, the number of male trainers is higher than that of women trainers in the fitness industry, having women a greater presence in the specific trainings for collective activities. The under-representation of women as leaders often entails the perpetuation of roles.

Regarding the type of contract, female fitness workers in the city of Huesca are mainly employed (80%) and have a part-time contract (67%). The prior study by Estrada et al. (2019) also showed that more than 91% of the professionals in the fitness centres of the city of Zaragoza were employees; and when referring to the type of dedication, this same study indicated that 58% of the workers had a part-time contract. It is not easy to discern the reasons, but it seems that part-time contracts are frequent in the physical activity and sports market (Estrada et al., 2019). According to Boned, et al. (2015), 13.6% of the fitness professionals, both men and women, simultaneously study at university and also have a job in the sector. This could explain that part of these workers want a part-time contract in order to work and study at the same time. It would be also interesting to see if, in the fitness industry itself, there exist differences between men and women in terms of their dedication. The part-time contract is the contract par excellence for women, as suggested by authors such as Alcañiz (2017), Scott, Crompton & Lyonette (2010) and López (2013). Scott, et al. (2010) state that

full-time work is associated with men and part-time with women. Reasons related to the balancing of family and work life and maternity could also be the reason for the prevalence of part-time work in this case.

As for the tasks carried out by female workers in the fitness centres, they are usually instructors of group fitness classes (76%), as opposed to a low percentage of participation in high positions. These data could be explained by the fact that the number of instructor positions is quantitatively much greater than the rest of the available positions (Estrada et al., 2019). Although studies such as the one by Alcañiz (2017) affirm that women have less access to management and coordination positions, that is, high positions, and that Leoni & Falk (2010) confirm that women have a lower intention to undertake, we cannot draw any conclusions from our data, since we would need to know the frequency of males in each of the jobs to be able to know who hold the management positions. However, the participants do perceive inequality in the occupation of high positions (73%). Scott et al. (2010) state that, despite the progress, the traditional asymmetric model of gender relations still remains, hindering the achievement of equality and creating new inequalities such as less autonomy, the impossibility of promotion, and therefore, less access to managerial positions. In fact, platforms such as YouTube, representative of the new online spaces of participation, recreate the gender power structures of traditional media. This fact requires media education, since certain contents, such as some specific fitness trends, are stereotypically feminine (Reguerira, Alonso-Ferreiro & Da Vila, 2020). On this platform, some women create a wide variety of content of all types, but those women who post content linked to gender stereotypes such as beauty or keeping fit, get more female followers and are more visible (Döring and Mohseni, 2018). In the study by Huertas, Valentine, Pérez, Aguado, Calabuig & Crespo (2016), with a sample of students of the degree in Physical Activity and Sports, significant differences were found in the variables predicting the intention to undertake depending on gender, without being able to establish causal relationships. This seems to suggest that women could have experienced a cultural learning regarding the place they occupy. Our participants are also characterised as performing multiple functions, in line with the results of other works on fitness workers of both genders (Pérez et al., 2016).

When asked about their working conditions, it seems that most of them perceive that their conditions are the same as in their beginnings or have improved. We do not know if this is due to the increasing levelling of conditions between men and women or to other factors difficult to establish. In any case, the majority think their work is poorly remunerated. Other workers in the sport industry are also dissatisfied with their salary (Koehler, 1998, Chelladurai & Ogasawara, 2003), this should be taken seriously into account since it is one of the factors affecting job satisfaction.

There is a percentage of women who perceive gender inequality in terms of remuneration (17%), and in terms of working conditions (33%). López (2013) argued that women received a lower salary than men for the same job, which seems to happen in some fitness centres in the city of Huesca. Alcañiz (2017) suggests that working conditions are more precarious for women, and Padilla

(2002) that there is a big inter-gender wage gap. This wage gap is evidenced by the SEPE (2019) which estimates an average contribution base of €1662.7 for women, compared to €1984.7 for men.

With regard to women's specific difficulties in this labour sphere, it seems that the participants perceive that they encounter more difficulties than men. As in the study by Martínez (2017), despite the fact that current legislation is opposed to the discrimination against women based on maternity, it seems there have been some cases of dismissal of working women for this reason. These authors also explain that different types of flexible work plans due to maternity are found mainly in female workers. With regard to the specific difficulties they perceive as women in their work environment, many women perceive gender inequality, especially coming from the users of the fitness centre, and they also think it is more difficult for them to get hired.

They also think that a woman's working life in the fitness industry ends before that of a man. This idea had already been explained by Borrás et. al in 2012, stating that professional careers are different for men and women, and therefore, the age when the working life comes to an end is different too, mainly due to structural factors and to care-giving tasks.

The general conclusions requested from the participants regarding the situation of women working in the fitness industry are clarifying and speak for themselves; in this sense, it should be noted that almost all the sample decided to answer this question which was voluntary, and the answers were full and detailed.

With regard to maternity, the majority (63 %) of the participants who were mothers, stated that they had thought about the consequences of maternity on their professional career. According to León (2016), women decide whether to have children or not basing their decision on the expectations of stable hiring, professional promotion and the presence or not of family-responsible policies in the companies that promote work flexibility. Many companies continue to view pregnancy as a period of poorer performance at work, a reason for absenteeism and a period of poorer physical condition. Therefore, we can observe how in many job interviews, the companies ask the women about their pregnancy intentions and about their marital status. But, surprisingly, in the study by Martínez, Vallejo & De San Andrés (2009) on work absenteeism, we find that women absent themselves due to illness less than their male colleagues, but the companies do not distrust the hiring of a man. The participants perceive maternity as an obstacle in their professional career, also noticing that the physical changes it entails have meant an overexertion for them. The arguments concerning the burden of maternity on work for women are supported by Bote & Cabezas (2012) who affirm that the impact of decisions related to maternity on work are very unequal for men and women.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The professional characteristics of women working in the fitness centres in the city of Huesca can be summarised as; young women under 25 years of age, graduated in Physical Activity and Sport sciences, with specific additional learning in Fitness, employee, with a part-time contract, with a monthly salary under 1000 €, and an hourly wage under 10€. In the fitness centres they usually carry out two different tasks, one of them being group class instructor, they dedicate themselves solely to fitness and they only work in one centre.

Women's working conditions in the fitness industry have improved over time, despite the fact that they still think their job is poorly paid, and also perceive their conditions as somewhat worse than those of their male colleagues.

The participants encounter greater difficulties than their male colleagues to be hired, to promote, and for the balancing of family and work life, also perceiving differences in the treatment received by the users. They consider it more difficult for them to deal with clients and employers just for the sake of being a woman. They also think that women's working lives come to an end earlier in this professional field.

The participants also perceive that it is more difficult for women to reach senior positions, and ponder over the consequences of maternity on their professional careers.

Those who are mothers, consider that this fact has limited their career and their promotion. Most of them have experienced dismissals of female colleagues for reasons related to maternity. They consider that the workplaces have not facilitated the balancing of family and work life, so they have had to reduce working hours and consequently this has reduced their purchasing power. However, they consider that men do not experience the same work-related disadvantages due to paternity as women in this particular work environment.

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