

The Growing Importance of Women in Portuguese Football and in the Sports Press

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the processes of change in valuing women's participation in the world of football, as well as their recognition by sports journalism. The initial research question was: "What difficulties do women encounter in gaining acceptance in the world of football and in sports journalism in Portugal?". The main objectives were: To analyse the role of women football players in Portugal; To understand the position of women's football in Portugal; To find out how Portuguese sports journalism treats women's football; To investigate the role of communication in publicising women's football in Portugal; To understand the perception of women's football in Portugal. In order to achieve these objectives, the methodology involves carrying out an exploratory empirical study based on analysing the content of the main Portuguese sports newspapers and applying a questionnaire survey to the Portuguese population in general. The main aim of analysing the sports newspapers is to find out how Portuguese sports journalism treats women's football and how regularly and relevantly women's football is covered in the news. In turn, the questionnaire survey seeks to understand the perception, acceptance and information that the Portuguese population has about women's football. The results obtained were very enlightening, showing that women's football in Portugal still needs a lot of development and acceptance and that the mass media is blamed for the lack of publicity and promotion of women's football in Portugal, which means that the majority of the population has no knowledge or information about what goes on in women's football. On the other hand, it was also possible to ascertain that there is still a certain stigma regarding women's football, denoting the existence of prejudice and unequal treatment, as reflected in its presence in sports journalism.

Keywords: Gender, Women, Women's Football, Sports Journalism, Portugal

1. Introduction

The main aim of this exploratory study is to address the importance and acceptance of women in the world of football and the sports press. In order to do this, we address topics that seek to offer a broad view of women in the football world, society's view of women and the visibility given to women by the media, both as players and as journalists.

In fact, we're looking here to reflect on issues related to gender equality and, when it comes to football, the scene is dominated by the male gender. Similarly, in sports journalism, men's football is largely the most covered topic in the sports journalism section, which not only takes away news space from all other sports, but the vast majority of this content is written by a man, while other smaller sports end up being worked on by female journalists.

In this way, this exploratory study seeks to understand the role of women in Portuguese football, the emphasis that the media places on women's football in Portugal, as well as its integration and acceptance by Portuguese society.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Women's Football in Portugal

Women's football in Portugal has its first record in March 1935, with a match between two women's teams, Paços de Brandão and C. D. Feirense. It wasn't until 1985 that the Portuguese Football Federation created the National Women's Football Cup. In 1993/1994, the Knock-Out tournament was replaced by the current National Women's Football Championship, with the winning club qualifying for the UEFA Women's Football Champions League, while the last two places in the relegation group were relegated to the Women's Promotion Championship (Portuguese Football Federation).

It was on 24 October 1981 that the women's national team took part in the first qualifier for the Women's European Championship, playing against Italy, France and Switzerland. Three years later, the team qualified for the first women's European Championship. It wasn't until 1995 that the women's team managed to achieve better qualifications to take part in the Women's European Championship. Later, regulated by the Portuguese Football Federation, the women's national football team took part for the first time in the final phase of the

European Women's Football Championship in 2017 and qualified for the first time for the final phase of the Women's Football World Cup in 2022.

From here it can be said that the barrier of prejudice has been overcome, football has transcended the gender barrier and has increased interest and practice in what is considered the most popular sport in the world (Carvalho, 2018).

The entry of women into male-dominated football has opened up not only socially, but also socio-culturally and economically, thereby easing the social stigma and discrediting of the female gender in women's football. However, it is a growing sport, and the number of women practising it is visible, but there are still few official championships (Carvalho, 2018).

2.2 Women in Sports Journalism

Sport has grown, become mediatised and demarcated its position, with football being the sport that gets the most press coverage in Portugal, and also the sport that has the most fans. Due to all the enthusiasm derived from sport, the media began to expand into this field of information in order to respond to the needs and interests of spectators (Daniel, 2016).

Sports categories emerged gradually and began to take on real importance towards the end of the 19th century. The first sports news appeared in generalist publications, which later became a supplement in the sports area. Although inseparable from political history, sports clubs emerged in Portugal at the same time as the Portuguese associative space was growing and differentiating itself until the second half of the 19th century. Carlos Calisto, a sports chronicler, had his first sports section in 1892 in the *Diário Ilustrado* (Pinheiro, 2009).

On 1 March 1893, the first sports newspaper *O Velocipedista* appeared, but it was short-lived. Even so, it was a reference point for a new aspect of the sports press in Portugal. New newspapers appeared in the 20th century, such as *A Bola* (1945), *Record* (1949) and *O Jogo* (1985) (Pinheiro, 2009).

The field of sport has always been aimed at men, and journalism associated with sports has followed suit. It is undeniable that sports journalism is one of the most consumed types of specialised journalism in Portugal.

Until the 1960s, most of the women working in newspapers were assigned to the production and creation of women's newspapers and pages. Confining women's work to matters considered feminine made it difficult for them to climb the career ladder and restricted the possibility of personal and professional development (Carvalho and Cruz, 2007).

For centuries, women were seen as wives and housewives. Her physical condition was only to serve, to carry out domestic and reproductive duties. Society has created a stereotype that women don't have enough skills to win in sport, nor do they perform an efficient job compared to men in news coverage and newsrooms (Henriques and Melo, 2021).

It wasn't until 1981 that the first women members of the International Olympic Committee joined, and later, in 1997, a woman became president. In 1995, the International Olympic Committee set up a working group called Women and Sport, which proposed the active participation of women in sport and the Olympic movement. The sporting panorama is overwhelming, with only 3% of women reaching management positions in federations (Pinheiro, 2011).

Regarding the role of women in Portuguese journalism, more specifically in sports, Filipa Subtil and Maria João Silveirinha (2017) discuss the process of feminisation and the obstacles facing the journalistic profession in Portugal, namely the growth and development of relations between men and women. In fact, for many years it was difficult for women to enter newspaper editorial offices (Correia & Baptista, 2007). On the other hand, when women finally entered journalism, there were disparities in the labour situations and distributions between men and women, with horizontal and vertical segregations persisting, distinct gender relations and an "undeniable inequality" in terms of the presence in positions of responsibility and the performance of professional tasks, which were socially devalued (Subtil and Silveirinha, 2017).

Cecília Carmo, Céu Freitas, Edite Esteves, Leonor Pinhão, Maria João Duarte, Natália Oliveira and Teresa Montserrat are considered pioneers in sports journalism.

Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of women in Portuguese sports newsrooms, which is considered a secular struggle to achieve the equal rights and opportunities that have been so widely proclaimed. According to data collected by the Journalists' Professional Card Commission, the total number of professional

journalism card holders as of 1 June 2022 in Portugal is 3132 male journalists and 2189 female journalists. If we talk about the presence of women in sports-related professions, the imbalances are evident. Considering the positions of managers in sports organisations, sports journalists, association leaders and federative players, the inequalities are even more striking (Associação Portuguesa Mulheres e Desporto, 2009).

2.3 Women on and off the Football Pitch

Over the centuries, men and women have played different roles in society and have been assigned different functions. In this way, the social markers that were assigned in the past remain in the social roots of today. Women had roles that were socially considered to be feminine: housework, mother, wife and carer, while men had to work and support the household. However, the 19th and 20th centuries were marked by the growth of the feminist movement, especially the fight for political rights, demands for access to education and equality in the labour market (Loureiro, 2014).

There have been many achievements for women, from acceptance into society, freedom of love, divorce, the right to vote and the labour market, but the struggle still continues for equal pay and better positions, and what is associated with women is devalued. While men are seen as confident, determined and assertive in the workplace, these same attributes are viewed with hostility and coldness towards women (Loureiro, 2014).

The growth in women's football in Portugal has increased significantly in recent years. This increase in the number of professionals means that there is more justification for greater investment in this sector, but it also reinforces the need to intensify pedagogical intervention by recreating new values for this new generation, so that new values, less prejudice and more acceptance are captured. When we talk about salaries, and the disparity between the women's league and the men's league is notorious by far, the highest paid player in the BPI League earns around 8,000 euros a month, while if we talk about the amateur and semi-professional levels, salaries are around 665 and 800 euros a month. However, there are players who have green card contracts, which still reflects the inability of many clubs to meet the needs of their players, and is the most affordable way for them to save some money to stay in the game. According to a study carried out by Sapo Desporto, the salary figures of the Portuguese football league were compared, in which 55.3 per cent of the men's sector earn more than 2,500 euros a month, compared to only 6.4 per cent in the women's league.¹

For many, professional dedication, success and recognition are synonymous with personal prioritisation, which leads them to put motherhood and fatherhood to one side in order to achieve professional success. Family dynamics have changed, taking into account the needs of the new generations and other external factors. Work has become a priority for many women, not only for financial freedom, but also for its difficulty and necessity, autonomy and social growth. We can therefore say that women don't put aside the possibility of having children because of their professional career, they just postpone that moment to a time when they are more emotionally and economically stable, and if that is really their choice, to be mothers (Silveira, 2019).

According to a report in *Diário de Notícias*², Patrícia Gouveia, a former footballer, was forced to abandon her football career at the height of her professional career due to her pregnancy. She had been involved in a number of lawsuits in defence of her basic rights as a professional and as a woman in the world of football, as she claims that not all members of the club took her pregnancy very well.

According to the Players' Union³, FIFA approved new rules to support and protect maternity on 1 January 2021. The measures implemented were discussed internationally by various representatives of football organisations, leagues and players. FIFA's new regulations accompany the growth and need for the sport. In a global approach, women's football is expanding by leaps and bounds, but gradually in some countries due to their beliefs, religions and other impositions that don't cover my social rights, and in many countries the first step begins with allowing

¹ Available in <https://desporto.sapo.pt/futebol/primeira-liga/artigos/maioria-dos-futebolistas-ganham-acima-de-2-500-euros-e-nao-terminam-ensino-obrigatorio>

² Available in <https://www.dn.pt/educacao-do-dia/28-dez-2020/a-ultima-conquista-o-direito-a-ser-mae-sem-dizer-adeus-aos-relvados-13172443.html>

³ Available in https://sjogadores.pt/?pt=news&op=OP_SHOW_DETAIL&id=11110

women to play the sport. The transformations in women's lives were their own choices, thought out and considered, and these and other dissimilar tasks to be performed can be done with the same perfection and to the same extent as someone else (Silveira, 2019).

3. Methodology

The general aim of this research is to investigate the image of women in national football and their representation in the sports press, as well as their importance and acceptance within society. In this way, the research problem is related to the intention of understanding the difficulties that women encounter in gaining acceptance in the context of football in Portugal, which is why the research question is: "What difficulties do women encounter in gaining acceptance in the context of football and in the sports press in Portugal?"

From here, the following specific objectives were defined:

1. To analyse the role of women football players in Portugal;
2. To understand the position of women's football in Portugal;
3. To find out how Portuguese sports journalism treats women's football;
4. To investigate the role of communication in publicising women's football in Portugal;
5. To understand the perception of women's football in Portugal.

To achieve these objectives, two data collection techniques were used: a questionnaire survey, applied to the general population, with the aim of understanding their vision and perception of women's football and the role of women and how it is treated by the sports press; the second technique consisted of collecting sports news articles on women's football.

As such, the study aims to understand the regularity with which the image of women as football players is transmitted to society by analysing the content of news articles published by the three specialised media of reference - *A Bola*, *Record* and *O Jogo*. The news was collected over a period of six months, from 1 January to 30 June 2022, in order to gain a broader and more substantiated view of the amount of news and how often women's football is covered by journalists. A total of 707 news items dealing with women's football were analysed. On the other hand, to analyse society's acceptance of and interest in women's football by analysing a questionnaire survey applied to the general Portuguese population on the subject. The questionnaire was applied to the general population using a non-probabilistic convenience sample, with the aim of understanding the perception, acceptance and information about women's football in Portugal. The sample consisted of 218 respondents. The questionnaire was designed on the "Google Forms" platform, and was subsequently shared and publicised on various media such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, which were considered media accessible to the general public, not only because of their ease of access but also because of the larger population area covered. The questionnaire was answered by 218 people in the timeframe from 23 March 2022 to 19 April 2022.

4. Analysis and Discussion of Results

4.1 Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire was answered by 218 people between 23 March 2022 and 19 April 2022. Of the 218 respondents, 52 per cent (114) are female and 48 per cent (104) are male, and the sample is mostly made up of young people (97 of the respondents (43 per cent) are aged between 26 and 33, followed by 45 respondents (21 per cent) aged between 18 and 25; the 34 to 41 age group accounts for 14 per cent; 9 per cent are in the 50 to 57 age group; and 3 per cent are in the 58 to 65 age group; only 2 per cent are under 17 and 1 per cent are over 65.

The data obtained through the survey emphasised that there is still a long way to go in terms of the evolution of women's football in Portugal. Football is considered the king of sports, but it must be stressed that players should be recognised as athletes and not as men or women (Daniel, 2005). Nevertheless, some of the opinions obtained show that women's football is evolving, albeit with some points that need to be assessed and improved. In the case of the statement "Among the games I watch, some are for women's football.", it can be seen that there are already people who enjoy women's football, but more than 55% of our sample does not pay the same attention to women's and men's football.

Online media and television were the most popular means of accessing football content (Figure 1). In fact, 150 respondents (24% of total responses) chose the online medium to find out about football content. In turn, with 143 respondents (23%), television was the second most chosen medium, followed by social networks, with 134 respondents (21%). Next, football matches were chosen by 112 respondents (18%). Finally, newspapers were chosen by 58 respondents (9%) and radio by 29 respondents (5%).

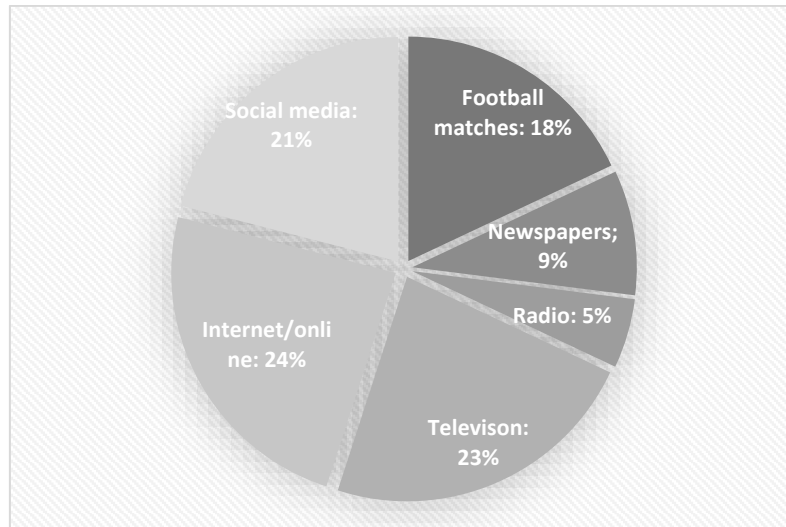


Figure 1: Media used to obtain football content (*self-elaboration*).

Indeed, these media are a means of dissemination and influence for the vast majority of the population, so there should be a greater focus on these media to publicise women's football to society. According to Reiffel (2003), observing the ways in which ICTs are appropriated has already given us a glimpse of the influence of these new media on individuals and society.

The other questions asked throughout the questionnaire were primarily aimed at understanding the degree of acceptance of women's football and the role that women play in this field. It was clear from analysing the questions that the vast majority of respondents accept the role that women play in national football, as well as in sports journalism.

However, when statements such as: "A woman's opinion on football is just as well received as a man's"; "There are still constraints on the acceptance of women in sports journalism"; "People have a prejudiced and/or negative attitude towards women's football"; and "Currently, women are discredited in the performance of sporting functions", the vast majority ticked the Agree options, and it can thus be concluded that there is still a large percentage of people who still have no interest in or openness to the acceptance of women's football, showing that there is still prejudice in its acceptance. This corroborates the idea that society still discriminates against women (Loureiro, 2014), not only in sports, but also in the performance of journalistic duties within the area of sports journalism (Ventura, 2009).

When asked if "women who play football have the same benefits and visibility as men" (Figure 2), 47% of respondents totally disagreed, 25% disagreed and 8% disagreed slightly. In fact, with regard to the benefits and visibility of women who play football, the vast majority of respondents disagree that women have the same visibility and benefits as men. In addition, the majority of respondents are in favour of equal pay in national football (76% of respondents agree with this).

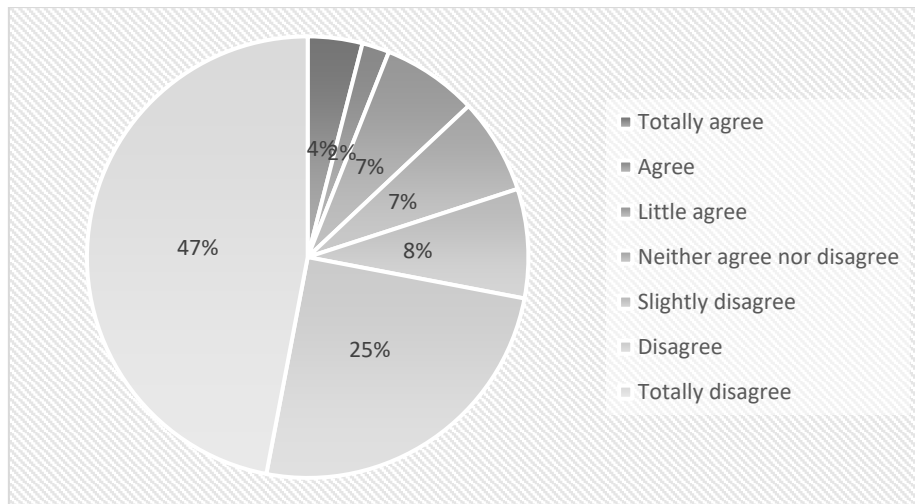


Figure 2: Women who play football for a living have the same benefits and visibility as men (self-elaboration).

As for the statement "Female athletes have the same physical preparation and motor skills as male athletes to play the sport" (Figure 3), the most selected answer was Totally Agree with 65 respondents (30%); followed by Agree with 56 respondents (26%); Disagree with 23 respondents (10%); Slightly Agree with 21 respondents (9%); Neither Agree nor Disagree with 19 respondents (9%). Finally, Slightly Disagree and Totally Disagree, both with 17 respondents (8%). It is clear that the respondents believe that female athletes have the same physical qualities and capabilities as male athletes.

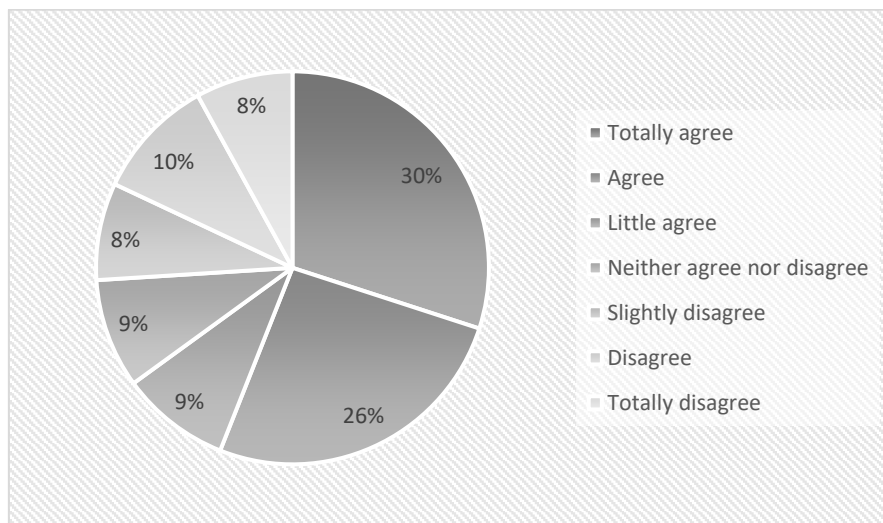


Figure 3: Female athletes have the same physical preparation and motor skills as male athletes to play the sport (self-elaboration).

With regard to whether a woman's opinion on football is as well received as a man's, our sample did not show a consensus of opinion. However, 51 per cent of respondents disagreed with the idea that a woman's opinion on football is as well received as a man's.

With regard to the significant increase in the number of women involved in sports journalism and the fact that they play the same role as men when it comes to covering sports content, the answers most selected by the respondents were Totally Agree and Agree, and it can be concluded that they believe that women involved in sports journalism play the same role as men in this medium.

With regard to the statement "News coverage of women's football matches is given the same prominence as men's football matches" (Figure 4), respondents show disagreement, since the most selected answer was the option Totally Disagree with 85 respondents (39%); followed by the option Disagree with 70 respondents (32%).

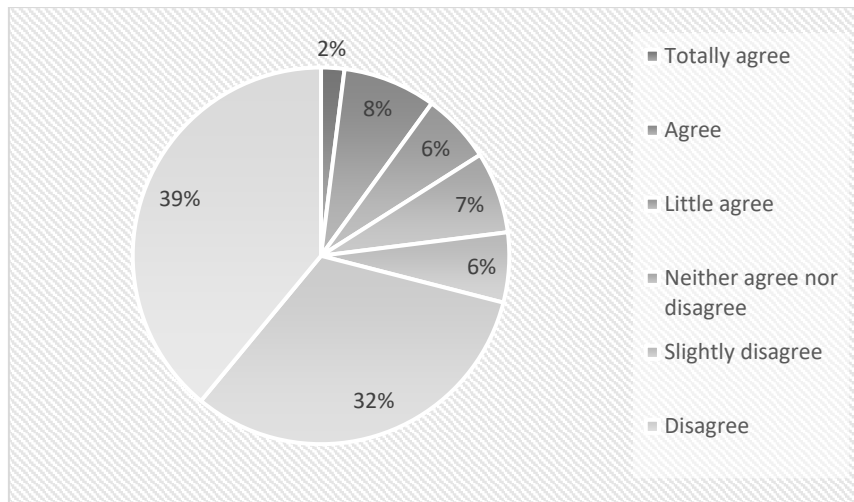


Figure 4: News coverage of women's football matches is given the same prominence as men's football matches (self-elaboration).

When asked "Do people have a prejudiced and/or negative attitude towards women's football?", the majority of respondents (68%) agreed with this statement. Basically, the respondents agree that there is prejudice and/or a negative attitude towards women's football in Portuguese society.

Finally, when asked about the discrediting of women in sporting roles, more than half of the respondents (62%) agreed with this discrediting, with only 3% totally disagreeing and 15% disagreeing.

4.2 Analysis of Sports Newspapers

In order to check the amount of news and how often journalists cover women's football in Portugal, we carried out a content analysis of Portuguese sports newspapers, collecting all the news articles relating to women's football. The news was collected over a period of six months from the online newspapers *Record*, *O Jogo* and *A Bola*, from 1 January to 30 June 2022. A total of 707 news items dealing with women's football were analysed over the six months. In January, 86 news items were analysed; in February 87 news items; in March 145 news items; in April 152 news items; in May 49 news items; and in June 125 news items. April and June were the months with the most news dedicated to women's football.

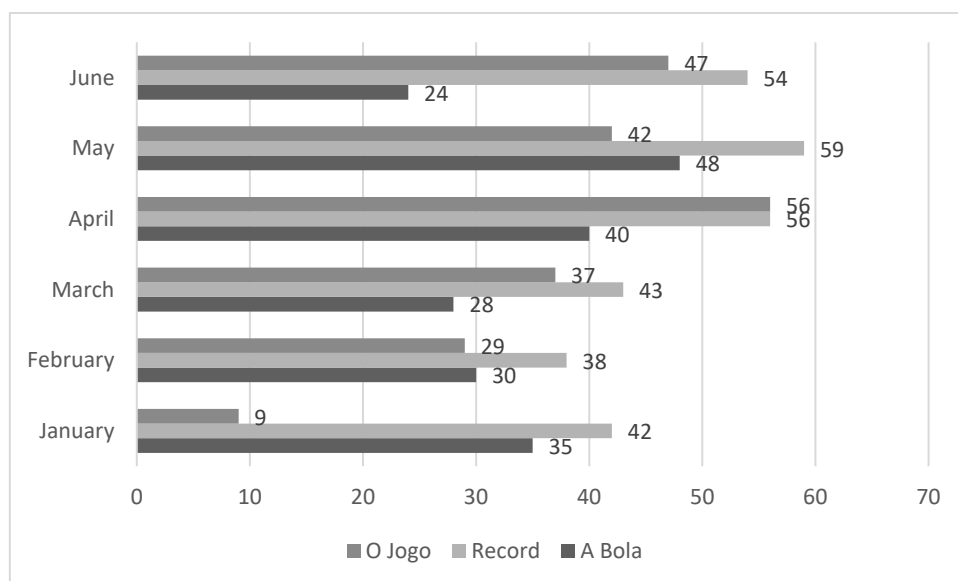


Figure 5: Number of news items collected from each online sports newspaper (self-elaboration)

As can be seen in Figure 5, *A Bola* was the newspaper that devoted the least space to producing and publishing content about women's football in the six months analysed, with 205 stories. *Record* was the newspaper that

stood out from the other two newspapers analysed, with the most space devoted to producing and publishing content about women's football, with a total of 292 stories. *O Jogo* was a newspaper that was very similar to *A Bola*, with only a small margin of difference between the publications that were made, with a total of 210 articles on women's football.

On the other hand, in the three newspapers analysed, there were very few, if any, times when a story about women's football featured prominently on the front pages of websites and/or on the front pages of newspapers. From January to June, the only sports newspaper that featured a front page dedicated to women's sport was *A Bola*, on 7 March 2022, the day before Women's Day, which presented two front page proposals to its readers, one of which featured women's football and the upcoming matches in the sport (Figure 1). On 8 March 2022, none of the newspapers chose to highlight any women's sport in the world of sport.



Figure 6: One of the front pages of the newspaper *A Bola* on 7 March 2022..

Only later, in May 2022, the month that marks the end of the football matchday, did the newspaper *A Bola* once again highlight women's football by running a front page dedicated to the winning club of the 2021/2022 women's football matchday, Sport Lisboa e Benfica (Figure 2). The newspapers *O Jogo* and *Record*, on the other hand, only made a small reference at the end of the front page of the daily on 9 May 2022.



Figure 7: Front page of the newspaper *A Bola* on 9 May 2022.

5. Discussion

With regard to the survey, this sample highlights that there is still a long way to go in terms of the evolution of women's football in Portugal. Football is considered the king of sports, but it must be stressed that players should be recognised as athletes and not as men or women (Daniel, 2016). Some statements throughout the questionnaire proved that women's football is evolving, although there are some points that need to be assessed and improved.

The main purpose of all the statements made during the questionnaire was to understand the degree of acceptance of women's football and the role that women play in this area. It was clear from analysing the questions that the vast majority of respondents accept the role that women play in national football, as well as in sports journalism. However, there is still a large percentage of people who are neither interested in nor open to accepting women's football, showing that there is still prejudice against its acceptance. Thus, there is

remarkable agreement with the literature review, in the sense that society still discriminates against women, not only in sport but also in the performance of journalistic duties within the area of sports journalism (Ventura, 2009).

On the other hand, analysing the three online sports newspapers showed that the media coverage is not equal. The lack of news about women's football means that the public is not aware of what is going on in the sport, thus creating disinterest and misinformation about the sport.

6. Conclusions

As such, the data collected by the surveys was very enlightening, and it can be concluded that women's football in Portugal still needs a lot of development and acceptance. The media is responsible for the lack of publicity and promotion of women's football in Portugal, which means that the majority of the population has no knowledge or information about what goes on in women's football. There is also still a certain stigma regarding the presence of women in sports journalism. Analysing the three leading sports newspapers in Portugal (A Bola, Record and O Jogo) allowed us to reflect on the current state of women's football. It can be concluded that, in the six months of analysing sports newspapers, there is little news about women's football, and few if any are highlighted to the reader.

Given these results, when it comes to football, the male gender is still dominant. Throughout the research, we realised that differences exist and that something needs to be done to eliminate or at least mitigate them. In this sense, the media must take on a leading role in changing mentalities and paradigms. It is therefore hoped that this exploratory study will be a lever for future questions about the reality of women's football in Portugal. Fundamentally, it is hoped that gender and football, as well as gender inequalities and conditioning, can be thought of differently and that there will be an evolution towards improving football dynamics in Portugal and around the world.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that this exploratory study seeks to contribute to gender studies, particularly in the world of football. In fact, football is considered the king sport, but when it comes to women's football, the dynamics and publicity are completely different. This study therefore seeks to highlight the inequality in the support given to the women's game, as well as its publicity in the media, which is still scarce given the need for the sport to grow.

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