

Unveiling the Motivations and Challenges: an Introspection into Women's Football in Hungary

Motivációk és kihívások feltárása:
betekintés a női labdarúgásba Magyarországon



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Abstract: The article evaluates the current state of Hungarian women's football. It recognizes progress in the women's game while addressing persistent challenges like social perceptions and financial disparities. The research aims to comprehend the motivation of Hungarian adult female football and futsal players, exploring aspects such as the supportive environment and reasons for sustained engagement (N=175).

Findings reveal the dual nature of women's football in Hungary, encompassing both competitive and recreational aspects. We delve into players' sentiments, thoughts of quitting, and future plans within the sport. The motivation analysis underscores the prevalence of intrinsic motivation rooted in genuine interest, with elite players exhibiting stronger extrinsic motivation.

The study emphasizes football's positive impact and advocates for promoting physical activity and lifelong engagement. In conclusion, we call for further development in women's football, addressing challenges and promoting recreational aspects. It advocates for strategies to reduce dropout rates and highlights football's potential for positive societal changes.

Keywords: women soccer, women futsal, motivation, post active career plans

Absztrakt: A cikk a magyar női labdarúgás helyzetét vizsgálja. Bemutatja a női labdarúgás fejlődését és a pozitív fejlemények ellenére kitér az olyan kihívásokra is, mint a társadalmi megítélés, a pénzügyi egyenlőtlenségek és a női labdarúgók különböző problémái. A kutatás elsődleges célja a magyar felnőtt női labdarúgó- és futsaljátékosok motivációjának megértése, melyben olyan szempontokat vizsgál, mint a támogató környezet, az abbahagyással kapcsolatos gondolatok és a sportág aktív pályafutás utáni folytatásának motivációi (N=175). Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a magyar női labdarúgás verseny- és rekreációs szempontokat egyaránt magában foglal. Kitérünk a játékosok futballal kapcsolatos érzelmeire, az abbahagyással kapcsolatos gondolataikra és a sportággal kapcsolatos jövőbeli terveikre. A motiváció elemzése azt mutatja, hogy az elit szintű játékosok általában erősebb extrinzik motivációt mutatnak. Összefoglalásként hangsúlyozzuk a női labdarúgás fejlesztésének fontosságát a szabadidős és amatőr versenysport terén. Stratégiákat sürgetünk a lemorzsolódási arányok csökkentésére, és kiemeljük a labdarúgás lehetséges szerepét a különböző társadalmi szempontok pozitív változásainak ösztönzésében.

Kulcsszavak: női labdarúgás, női futsal, motiváció, aktív pályafutás utáni tervek

Introduction

The 2022/2023 season was an outstanding one for women's football, with the European Championship in the summer of 2022, postponed due to the coronavirus, and the World Cup a year later, both events showing that women's football has come on leaps and bounds in recent years (FIFA, 2023). Whereas ten years ago, if a girl chose football as her sport, she could often only play with boys and her environment was not necessarily supportive, today women's football is becoming more accepted, and the opportunities are widening. International and national football organisations are also increasingly involved in the development and promotion of women's football, with a growing number of development programmes and campaigns (Móczik & Patakiné

Bősze, 2023). The increase in volume has also brought an increase in the quality of the game, and the positive change is increasingly reflected in the number of spectators (Figure 1) (UEFA, 2022). Bukta & Gósi (2020) note that the increase in the number of certified female athletes is followed more slowly by the number of female coaches and other positions. (Figure 1 / 1. ábra)

However, beyond this, women's football continues to face several problems. Here, we would like to draw attention not only to general conflict situations in the field of sports, which were also discussed by Méhes & Német (2023). Social perceptions, financial appreciation that is far below that of men's football, atrocities aga-



Figure 1: Large crowd at Italian women's first division football matches
 Forrás/Source: own footage (2023)

1. ábra: Nagyszámú néző olasz női elsőosztályú futballmérkőzéseken

inst women footballers - whether negative comments from the outside world or internal conflicts and excesses (CNN, 2023). It is also important to note that despite progress, women's football is still an untapped field from a scientific point of view, which is why it offers a lot of scope for research and study (Móczik & Patakiné Bószé, 2021).

Football is one of the world's most popular sports, accessible to virtually all ages, whatever their level. Football is as much about the fans, the amateur competitive athletes or the children kicking the ball around on the pitch, as it is about the international players in the professional leagues or the national teams. Football therefore plays an important role not only in competitive sport but also in recreational sport, and this dichotomy is not negligible for women's football (MLSZ, 2021). In the field of physical recreation, the number of people who play some kind of sport, including football, with more or less regularity in their free time cannot be neglected (Bószé & Fritz, 2011). This is also confirmed by the fact that football is still a constant, gender-independent element also of the sports programs offered in the areas of tourism animation, e.g. in wellness hotels (Magyar, 2017b) both in Hungary and abroad (Magyar, 2013; Magyar, 2017a; Magyar, 2023).

Motivation is one of the fundamental drivers of sport and physical activity and has been studied from many angles. Understanding what motivates someone to take up, continue or stop playing a particular sport, what drivers are at work in a particular athlete or sporting community, can play an important role not only in enhancing sport performance, but can also help to improve healthy lifestyles and quality of life through sport in leisure time.

While in a previous study we have discussed in more detail the theoretical basis for the investigation of possible motivational factors in women's football in general (Móczik & Patakiné Bószé, 2022a). In the present study, based on the theory of Ryan and Deci (2000) and Pelletier (1995), we distinguish three types of motivation: intrinsic, extrinsic and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation means that a person engages an activity because enjoys it or get personal satisfaction. Extrinsic motivation on the other hand is driven by external factors like reward something or avoid punish-

ment. Amotivation can be defined as the lack of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The aim of this research is to investigate and understand the motivation of Hungarian adult female football and futsal players related to their own sport. Although there have been several domestic studies on football, most of them are related to men's football, and only a few have investigated the motivation of footballers, despite its important role in both competitive and recreational sports (Móczik & Patakiné Bószé, 2021). To better understand the results, we briefly discuss the domestic situation of women's football.

Questions, hypotheses

One of the central hypotheses of the research, the distribution of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, was defined considering the domestic situation of women's football. The fact that in our country the majority of women's football is considered recreational and that the competitive part of the sport is still far behind men's football in terms of external support and recognition may have an influence on the motivation of the players.

In this light, I assume that:

H1: Adult Hungarian female football and futsal players are more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically motivated.

H2: Players who play football at a competitive level are more likely to be extrinsically motivated than players who play recreationally.

We also sought answers to a few other questions that have an impact on motivation and, through this, on retention in sport and lifelong physical activity attitudes.

Our main questions were:

Q1: To what extent does the environment in which they play support the player?

Q2: How common is the idea of quitting among Hungarian women footballers?

Q3: How motivated are the players to stay in the sport after their active careers?

Methods

The domestic situation in women's football

For a brief overview of the domestic situation of women's football, we have used the strategy of the Hungarian Football Association and articles on women's football published

on its official website, as well as the online match database of the association, which contains all official matches organised by the national board or a sub-organisation of the association from the 2003/2004 season onwards. From 2003, when the site was launched, to the most recently completed league season, the 2022/2023 season, it has been used to compile an excel sheet of all the women's championships, both at junior and senior level, broken down by county and the number of teams involved.

Motivation of adult Hungarian female football and futsal players related to their own sport

The target group of the research consisted of adult female Hungarian football and futsal players who play in a national or regional high-court or reduced-court football, or futsal tournament organised by the Hungarian Football Association (MLSZ) or its organisation. The minimum age was set at 18 years of age, with no upper age limit. Participants were recruited partly through clubs and coaches and partly online, mainly via social networking sites. The target population of the research was convenience sampling. Two hypotheses were formulated in relation to motivation and tested using the SPSS program and the confidence interval was set at 95%.

Questionnaires used

The questionnaires to be filled in by the participants (N=175), approved by the Ethics Committee of Eötvös Loránd University with the licence numbers KEB 2022/45 and KEB 2022/456 respectively, consisted of two large thematic units, a self-questionnaire, and a sports motivation questionnaire. The first thematic unit consisted of a small part of questions on the participants' basic characteristics and sporting background, and a larger part of questions on their feelings and thoughts about their sport and their post. The questionnaire consisted of three smaller sub-sections, the first of which included questions on demographic data and background information. This was followed by two sport and post-specific sections, the first half of which asked respondents to answer short-answer questions, and the second half of which asked two questions specifically related to their own post, where they could respond in their own words at greater length. The questionnaire was available on a separate interface for goalkeepers and field players and was merged when the answers were analysed.

The other thematic unit of the questionnaire was the so-called H-SMS questionnaire, i.e., the Sports Motivation Scale, developed and validated in 2017 by Paic and colleagues, which examines different types of motivation. In this questionnaire, participants had to indicate on a scale of 1 to 7 how true the statements listed were for them (Paic et al., 2018).

Limitations of research

As the research used convenience sampling, partly based on acquaintance and partly through online social networking, the members of the target group were contacted, so the research cannot be considered representative, and the results of the questionnaire cannot be used to draw general conclusions for the whole Hungarian women's football society. The results and conclusions presented in this paper can only be applied to the group of those who filled in the questionnaire. However, taking into account the results of the

questionnaire, the suggestions and future plans developed on the basis of the results can be widely used and can be of general validity for the expansion of opportunities for women's footballers and possible development programmes, even for women's football as a whole. Another limitation of the research is the categorisation of the free responses.

Results and discussion

The current state of Hungarian women's football

Women's football is unique in our country in terms of the relationship between competitive sport and recreational sport, as both segments are very strongly present. Competitive or performance sport aims at achieving the best possible performance, surpassing the achievements of others, and operates in a system that allows for the comparison of the performance of different athletes. In many cases, sport is a career and a way of life for the elite athlete. It also includes the time spent training and preparing, the contribution of professionals, coaches and, where appropriate, spectators and sponsors. In contrast, the basic function of recreational sport is to provide pleasure, to spend leisure time in a useful way or even to maintain health (Balogh, 2015, cited in Kiss, 2018). In addition to the concept of recreational sport, recreational sport is also a typical term. The latter is a multifaceted concept and does not only include the sport activity itself. In practice, recreation is a way of spending leisure time that leads to physical and mental replenishment, develops physical and mental abilities, and also improves well-being and quality of life (Révész et al., 2015).

Hungarian women's football has undergone a lot of development, one of the main indicators of which, apart from the number of certified players, is the quantitative and qualitative development of the championships – as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. However, it is also worth looking at the competition system in the light of recreational and elite sport. It can be said that there are national championships at both adult and junior level which can be classified as competitive, and which are intended to serve women's football as a top sport. At the post-school level, this includes the three age groups that meet international standards, U15, U17 and U19, whose Hungarian national teams also participate in international competitions (MLSZ, 2022a). The picture is also somewhat more nuanced at the adult level, and the two disciplines are not uniform in their position in the field of football and futsal.

The Simple Women's League NB I, i.e. the national first division for women's soccer, should definitely be considered as a top-level sport, since winning the league means qualification for the Champions League, the adult women's national team is made up mainly of players from the teams competing in this competition, and the teams receive considerable support and the players are paid, so in their case it is a question of a career in sport. In addition to the teams in the first division, some teams in the second division, i.e., Women's National League II, can also be included in this category. This statement is supported by the decision of the federation to extend the first division league to 12 teams from the 2022/2023 season, allowing second division teams that have been consistently excelling for years to be promoted to the top (MLSZ, 2022b). (MLSZ Adatbank, 2023).

In practice, it can be said that, with a few exceptions, the adult women's football leagues from the national second division upwards are below the level of competitive sport,

even though they all have a competitive system. However, apart from the first division and the outstanding second division teams, women’s football in Hungary is typically more of a leisure and recreational sport. The players in these leagues are basically interested in spending their leisure time in an active and enjoyable way, sharing experiences with their team-mates, enjoying physical exercise, or even maintaining physical and mental fitness. For these players, football is not a career or a source of income, and in many cases, they prepare for weekend matches with one training session a week. However, the competitive system allows them to compete and weekend matches add a new aspect to football as a leisure sport. And futsal can be seen as even more recreational, as there are a number of clubs where teams competing in the high level or reduced pitch league also play in Nb2 or lower-level futsal leagues, often without any specific futsal training.

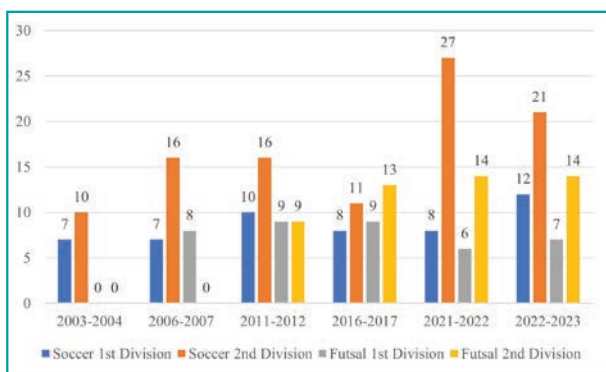


Figure 2: Number of adult teams participating in women's national championships from 2003 to 2023
 2. ábra: Nemzeti bajnokságban résztvevő felnőtt női csapatok száma 2003 és 2023 között
 Forrás/source: own edit (2023)

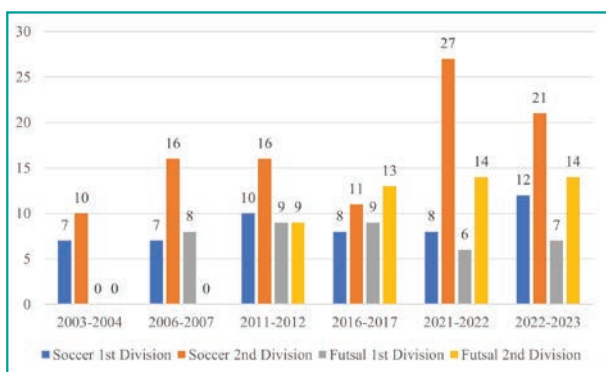


Figure 3: Number of adult teams participating in women's regional championships from 2003 to 2023
 3. ábra: Regionális bajnokságban résztvevő felnőtt női csapatok száma 2003 és 2023 között
 Forrás/source: own edit (2023)

In addition to the official competitions, there are also an increasing number of women’s football tournaments and cups, in which many teams from friendly associations take part alongside the clubs. In the case of football, it is also important to point out that, as it is a team sport, which in principle requires some facilities, it is easier to play in an association setting, where the conditions are right and coaching supervision is available. In men’s football, it is common for groups of friends to rent a pitch and play football together on a weekly basis, and there are several small-sided football leagues with a regular weekly fixture (Újbuda League, etc.), but this is not yet widespread at the women’s level. All in all, it can be concluded that a higher percentage of Hungarian women’s football can be described as a recreational sport

than as a competitive sport. This type of sport is known within football as Grassroots. Grassroots is also one of the principles of youth training, which seeks to embody the former so called ‘grundfoci’ in an organised setting and aims to give all children the opportunity to play football. This principle is also present in adult football; in practice, recreational football is Grassroots itself, which is as important a part of football as competitive football in terms of preserving quality of life, the enjoyment of physical activity and the experience of community life (UEFA, 2014).

Motivation of adult Hungarian female football and futsal players related to their own sport

A total of 216 players filled in the questionnaire on the motivation of adult Hungarian women’s football and futsal players related to their own sport until 31.10.2023, of which 41 were under the age of 18, making the final sample 175. Nearly 70% (69.7%) of respondents are aged 18-26, nearly 25% (24.6%) are aged 27-35, and about 6% are over 35. Overall, 95% of respondents are aged between 18 and 35, which roughly covers the active career period. Older age groups are mostly playing as goalkeepers or possibly defenders - goalkeepers may have a more extended career (Móczik & Patakiné, 2022b).

The majority of respondents, 45.7%, have a school leaving certificate and 25.7% have a tertiary education. Another explanation for this could be age, as most of the respondents are between 18 and 26 years old, so a good proportion of them are presumably still in higher education.

Looking at the distribution by sport, the largest percentage of respondents, 59.4%, play football, almost a third (27.4%) play both, while the percentage who play only futsal is 13.1%. These figures virtually mirror the situation of Hungarian women’s adult football in Hungary, with high level football enjoying far greater support and popularity than futsal, which for many is seen as a complementary sport. The high proportion of football may also be explained by MLSZ’s regulations on the relationship between high-football and futsal, which prohibit futsal at all levels for Nb1 players in high-football, while futsal players in the first division are allowed to play football from high-football second division downwards (MLSZ, 2018). This regulation by the federation, in force since 2018, goes some way towards professionalising high-level football and making elite women’s football a more competitive recreational sport in the country, while reducing the confusion between categories. However, it should also be noted that futsal is completely absent from this professionalisation drive, as the development of women’s futsal is neither included in the MLSZ development strategy nor as a separate strategy (Móczik & Patakiné, 2022a, Móczik & Patakiné, 2022b).

In terms of league division, 44.2% of respondents play in the first division, while the proportion of respondents playing in the second division or in the county or regional championship is roughly the same, 27.3% and 28.5% respectively. It could therefore be said that most respondents fall into the competitive category, but it is important to bear in mind that this includes players who play futsal, which is also the sport that is most likely to be classified as recreational in terms of the highest league division. This fact is confirmed by the high disparity in match results (13-0, 16-0, 18-0) in

this year’s championship (MLSZ Adatbank, 2023)

In terms of position, the distribution is roughly equal, with 30.3% playing in attack, 33.7% in defence and 36% in goalkeeping, so from this point of view we have a relatively representative picture.

For 44% of the respondents, football is a source of some kind of financial support, but 26.3% of them also work in addition to football, with only 17.7% of players considering it as their only source of income. However, for the majority of respondents, 56%, football does not provide any financial income (Figure 4). It can therefore be said that most of them do this form of sport in their free time, on a voluntary basis.

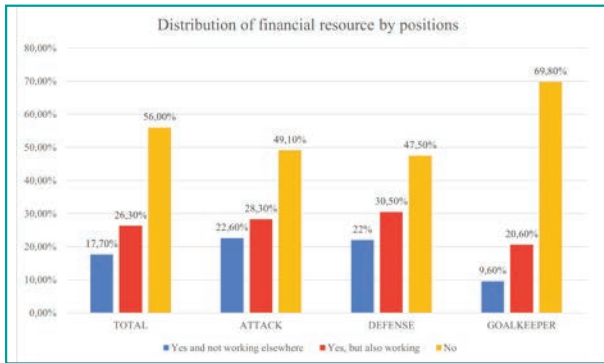


Figure 4: Distribution of financial resource by position 4. ábra: A labdarúgás mint bevételi forrás posztonkénti megoszlása Forrás/source: own edit (2023)

Asked how they would feel without football, 64% of respondents said they could not imagine their life without football, 20.6% would feel worse off, while 15.4% would feel no big change, neither better nor worse off.

91.4% of the respondents feel that they play sport in a supportive environment, while 8.6% do not feel supportive at all. 40% feel absolutely supportive, 32.6% supportive, 18.9% average, 5.7% unsupportive and 2.9% absolutely unsupportive of the environment in which they play sport. Regarding how well respondents felt at first about football, the average score was 4.41 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 82.5% feeling good or very good, 13.1% average and 3.5% feeling bad. In contrast, when asked how they currently felt about football, on a scale of 1 to 5, we obtained a slightly lower average of 4.23. Nearly 80% of respondents still feel very good or good, although slightly lower than at the start, with 17.7% feeling average and 4.6% feeling bad or very bad.

57.1% (attack) of respondents have thought about quitting football or futsal during their active career.

55.4% of the players surveyed (52.8% - attack; 55.9% - defense; 55.9% goalkeeper) would like to stay in football as a coach or professional after their active career, while 28.6% (35.8% - attack; 20.3% - defense; 30.2% - goalkeeper) would like to play the sport as a leisure activity. A small proportion (6.3%) would like to play some other sport as a leisure activity, while nearly 10% have no further plans for the sport (Figure 5). The latter figure is important to pay attention to, as physical activity and sport are an essential part of a healthy lifestyle.

Motivation

Intrinsic motivation mean 4.93 (SD 1.48). Effective intrinsic mean 4.74 (SD 1.51). Cognitive intrinsic mean 5.12 (SD 1.59).

Extrinsic motivation mean 4.32 (SD 1.07). Extrinsic mean

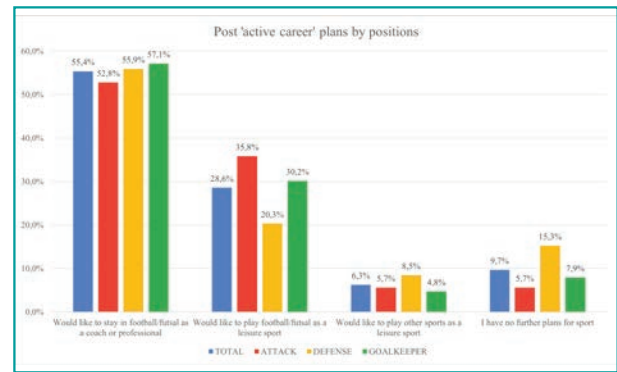


Figure 5: Post 'active career' plans of the players by positions 5. ábra: A játékosok aktív pályafutást követő megoszlása posztok szerint Forrás/source: own edit (2023)

2.02 (1.14). Introjection mean 5.13 (SD 1.49). Identification mean 5.11 (1.51). Integration mean 5.00 (1.56). Amotivation mean 2.19 (SD 1.36).

The mean of motivation types per post was as follows:

Offensive post players:

- Intrinsic motivation 4.5 (SD 1.51)
- Extrinsic motivation 4.1 (SD 1.19)
- Amotivation 2.1 (SD 1.31)

Defensive post players:

- Intrinsic motivation 5.2 (SD 1.47)
- Extrinsic motivation 4.4 (SD 1.13)
- Amotivation 2.2 (1.23)

Goalkeepers:

- Intrinsic motivation 5.2 (SD 1.38)
- Extrinsic motivation 4.5 (SD 0.89)
- Amotivation 2.2 (SD 1.53)

Offensive players have slightly lower averages than defensive or goalkeeping players for each of the motivational types, while the averages for the latter two positions are almost identical. The most striking difference is for the intrinsic motivation type, where the average for defenders and goalkeepers is 0.7 points higher than for forwards (Figure 6).

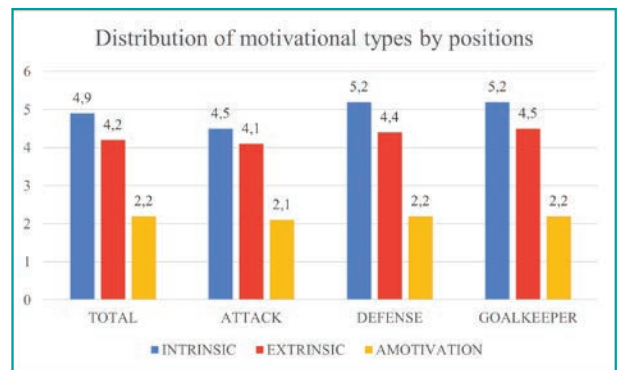


Figure 6: Distribution of motivational types by position / 6. ábra: A motivációs típusok posztonkénti megoszlása Forrás/source: own edit (2023)

Taking into account the current state of women’s football, our first hypothesis assumes the dominance of intrinsic, i.e. intrinsic motivation in the sample studied. Since normality testing revealed that we are talking about a sample with a non-normal distribution, we used the Wilcoxon test, a non-parametric pair of the matched sample T-test, to test this hypothesis. A p < .001 was obtained for the sample of 175 individuals, i.e. the mean of intrinsic motivation was significantly higher than that of extrinsic motivation.

Our second hypothesis is that the presence of extrinsic motivation is stronger for those who play football at the elite level than for those who play recreationally. In this case, too, we used a non-parametric test because normality is violated. The results of the Mann-Whitney test showed a significant difference in the two groups in favour of competitive sport in terms of extrinsic motivation. Thus, it can be concluded that extrinsic motivation is stronger at the level of competitive sports than at the level of recreational sports. Overall, therefore, intrinsic motivation is predominant in the sample studied, while the mean for amotivation is very low. The latter is also in line with the fact that players find the environment basically supportive and feel comfortable in the world of football. However, on the question of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, we should also note that, when broken down into sub-categories, the average for the extrinsic motivation categories is high, with one exception. In the case of extrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is considered to be the most admissible form, i.e., it is the one that is most attributable to external regulation (Pelletier, 1995). Introjection is still strongly externally regulated, but in the case of introjection the individual begins to project the external regulator inwards, while identification is more strongly oriented towards intrinsic motivation and integration, in which the external factor is integrated into the personality and is almost an intrinsic factor, is on the borderline between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These findings show that we found high averages for two sub-types of extrinsic motivation, which are already moving towards intrinsic motivation, which also supports the hypothesis that domestic adult female football and futsal players are typically intrinsically motivated. In relation to extrinsic motivation, it has also been shown to be stronger for those who play football at the elite level, i.e. in the first division, than for those who play at the second division or lower, i.e. amateur or recreational level. This finding is confirmed by the growing trend of support for women's football in the country and by the Football Association's ambition to move the top league towards professionalism.

Conclusion and suggestions

The results of the research show that the majority among our footballer respondents at the adult female level play recreational football. This fact is supported by the fact that more than half of the respondents play in the second division or lower and that for most of them football does not provide any or only supplementary income. However, even though a large percentage of women's football is related to recreational sports, in 5 of the 19 counties there is no possibility at all to participate in amateur competitions because the county association does not organise a women's league. As mentioned earlier, women's football is still far behind men's football, not only in terms of acceptance and support, but also in terms of infrastructure and organisation. Women's teams often lack access to suitable pitches, and training dates and facilities are often problematic. However, such difficulties can be offset by a supportive environment, a sense of community and intrinsic motivation. 90% of respondents consider that they play sport in a supportive environment and for many, experiencing a sense of community is a particularly important aspect of playing football. The data on post-active career plans is also positive, with a large proportion of players planning to stay in

the sport for the long term, whether as coaches, professionals or recreational athletes. This aspect reflects the attitude of lifelong physical activity, which is not only relevant for the sport itself but also for society. However, it is also important to pay attention to the data that show a less positive picture. One is also linked to post-active career plans. 10% of respondents have no plans to continue playing sport after an active career, either in football or in any other sport. It would be worth developing some kind of strategy to reduce this proportion. A key role in this can be played by promoting physical activity from an early age (ifj. Tóth et al., 2012). The other data relates to drop-out from sport. Nearly 60% of respondents have seriously considered quitting football in their career. The reasons are very varied, but a good number of them could be reduced or eliminated with the right attention. In the future, it would be worth looking into these reasons in more detail and suggesting some solutions to help people stay in the sport.

As mentioned earlier, football, as one of the world's most popular sports, can have an impact in many other areas and can be a catalyst for positive change. Among other things, it can play an important role in promoting regular physical activity and developing attitudes towards lifelong physical activity. One of the cornerstones of this is the development and strengthening of intrinsic motivation. In addition, the development of recreational and amateur competitive women's football is also essential for regular physical activity. Women's football is in constant development in terms of competitive sport, but the recreational segment still has many problems, and its development would be important in the future.

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