

Enhancing Participation Pathways for Female Coaches

Dr Pam Kappelides, Professor Russell Hoye & Hayley Baxter

Research overview

This research was delivered by La Trobe University researchers, in partnership with Northern Football Netball League, Basketball Victoria and Football Victoria, with funding from the Victorian Government's Office for Women in Sport and Recreation.

The researchers' previous review of research into the experiences of women coaches within community sport¹ highlighted that:

- women coaches are under-represented in community sport, despite increased participation rates of women and girls in sport.
- the sport coaching environment is not a positive, nor a welcoming one for many women coaches.

Three stage research design

1.

Stage 1 – Coaching Policies and Practices

Detailed content analysis of the policies and practices of each sport organisation in relation to the governance of sport coaching and their recruitment strategies for women coaches.

- How effectively are women represented in the governance networks that oversee community sport coaching?
- What recruitment strategies do sport organisations use to attract women coaches and are they designed in relation to the motives of women coaches?

2.

Stage 2 – Coach Recruitment Practices

Structured interviews of key managers and staff from each organisation each focused on the efficacy of current recruitment practices for women coaches and their understanding of the barriers faced in increasing participation rates for women in coaching roles.

- Do policies and practices match up with the experiences of women coaches?
- How effective are the current recruitment practices for women coaches?
- How do they understand and manage barriers for women coaches in the sport they manage?

3.

Stage 3 – Experiences of Women Coaches

Semi structured face to face interviews with 20 current women coaches from each sport focused on their individual experiences in sport coaching.

- How do women coaches navigate coaching pathways in comparison to their men counterparts?
- What education, training and support programs are required to support the development of women coaches?
- What relationships (e.g. mentor, peer-support) are critical for women coaches to feel supported in their role?
- What supports are needed for women coaches of various identities to overcome potential biases or barriers (age, race, ability etc.)?

Understanding the current environment for women coaches

This research identified that women coaches experience a range of challenges and barriers as a community level coach. These influence their opportunities to take on coaching roles, through to their development pathway and remaining as a coach in sport.

Challenges and barriers for women coaches in community sport



- Women and girls are not well represented in the governance networks that oversee community sport coaching.



- A culture of leadership dominated by men at club level, especially amongst club presidents, who make decisions about coaching appointments.
- Selection processes for coaches are very informal and do not provide a transparent process for women to apply or express interest for coaching roles.



- Lack of targeted strategies used by sport organisations to attract women and girls to coaching roles.
- Limited understanding of the messages that would resonate with prospective women coaches and policies to support a more inclusive environment for women coaches.



- Women coaches struggle to navigate coaching pathways in comparison to men coaches, citing time constraints and the scheduling of coach training not accommodating care responsibilities.
- Women and girls often have unstable tenure in coaching appointments and experience a continual pressure to prove their worth as a coach compared to men coaches.

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Actions to improve environments and pathways for women coaches in community sport

This research identified there are a range of actions that can be taken to improve the environment for women coaches in community sport.



State sporting organisations

State sporting organisations provide the policies, training and development, and resources to support community clubs and associations in engaging women and girls in coaching roles.

Improve the inclusion of women and girls as community coaches

- Ensure women coaches have a voice with state sporting organisations.
- Ensure greater inclusion of women in coaching, which may require special pathways or assistance (such as subsidised costs) for women coaches.
- Ensure equality in state sporting organisations' media and publicity, including representation of women coaches.

Have policies, practices and resources to support women coaches in community clubs

- Implement gender equity policies for coaching that have clearly stated goals for achieving gender equity in the state sport organisation, develop plans for achieving these goals, and monitor progress.
- Develop and share best practices and policies around culture and support for a safer coaching environment.
- Define and reinforce the term coach as non-gendered, through generational and cultural change, so that people making coach appointments are focused on ability rather than gender.



Community sporting clubs and associations

Community clubs and associations have the greatest influence in the recruitment and retention of women and girls into coaching roles, as well as providing a supportive club culture.

Key factors that improve club culture to be supportive of women coaches

- 1. Governance** - Ensure women and girls are represented in the governance networks that oversee community sport coaching. *Example:* coach selection committees.
- 2. Parental attitudes** - Improving supportive attitudes of parents towards having women and girls in coaching roles. This includes a focus on reducing men wanting to provide unwarranted advice about how women should coach. *Example:* showcase supportive behaviours towards women and girls.
- 3. Men as allies** - Enabling men to be allies in supporting women and girls in coaching roles, which is seen as central to changing the culture and attitudes towards women as coaches within clubs. *Example:* men speaking up to advocate for equal participation.

Steps to recruit and retain women coaches

