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**THE JOY AND SORROW OF SKI COACHING:
WHY WOMEN DO IT
(OR DON'T)**



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**A research about Women in Alpine Skiing Coaching,
Conducted in the frame of ERASMUS + project:
EWAS - "Empowering Women in Alpine Skiing"**

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To know more about EWAS



<https://www.empoweringwomeninalpineskiing.org>

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1. Introduction

In Alpine Skiing, female coaches and senior administrators remain scarce. This in turn leads to few role models for female athletes, contributing to higher dropout rates among girls as compared to boys. Past projects ([ESKI](#)) highlighted that boys' ambitions to coach strongly influence their persistence in the sport, whereas the lack of female role models leads girls to quit prematurely. Moreover, the challenging entry exams for ski instructors and coaching in Alpine skiing in Europe deter girls who quit before turning 18 from pursuing these careers. To break this cycle, it is crucial to support women in coaching and leadership roles, fostering inclusivity in Alpine skiing.

By creating training programs and skill development opportunities for women, the EWAS project ([Empowering Women in Alpine Skiing](#)) aims to improve their coaching abilities and enhance their recruitment prospects based on merit. Ultimately, this EU-funded initiative aims to increase women's employability and promote diversity within Alpine skiing, providing aspiring female athletes with role models and pathways to coaching careers.

In order to better do that, one of the aims of our project was to re-examine the main barriers to inclusion and investigate the challenges faced by women in Alpine skiing, be it as athletes, coaches, or sport administrators. The research results will serve as a valuable aid in shaping training policies, especially for new coaching staff. Additionally, they will help develop policy recommendations and best practices to foster inclusivity and gender parity, starting from grassroots clubs to national federations.

This report presents the findings from a survey conducted as part of the EWAS project, aimed at empowering women in alpine skiing coaching roles.

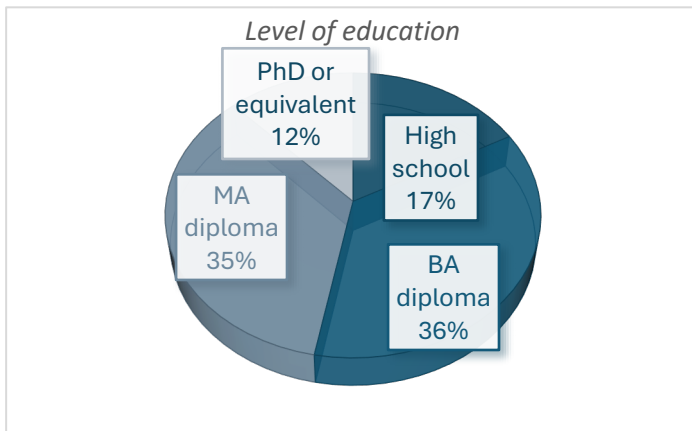
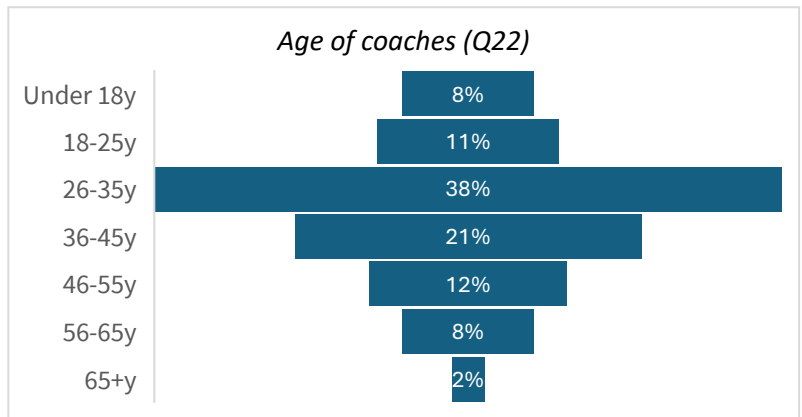
2. Survey Overview

The survey titled EWAS "Women in Alpine Skiing Coaching" was prepared in the *1ka* academic platform and was analysed with its tools, as well as with Excel (Microsoft). The survey encompassed 28 questions with 101 variables. It was created in English and was open for three months, from April 23, 2024, to July 23, 2024.

Out of 1542 people who entered the introduction, and 518 who entered the first page, 430 partially responded and finally 240 female coaches completed and provided valid responses. Considering how small the women Alpine coaching community it is, it was a great turnout. The average time to complete the survey was almost 10 minutes (mean: 9 minutes 55 seconds).

2.1 The survey sample

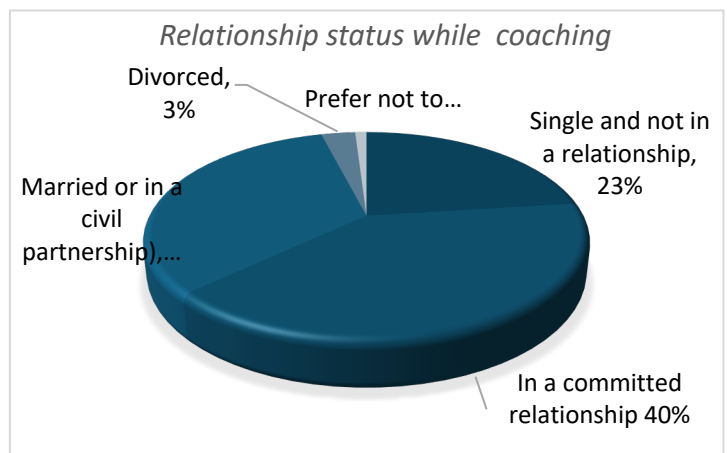
Age groups: The data indicates that female coaches mostly belong to the 26-35 years age group, followed by the 36-45 years age group. Together, these groups make up nearly 60% of the total, highlighting the prevalence of women in coaching roles during these prime working years. The presence of women decreases gradually in both younger and older age groups, with minimal participation from those over 65 years of age. This distribution may reflect career progression, with a peak in coaching activity during the late 20s to mid-40s.



Education level (Q23). Most respondents have completed higher education, with 71% holding either a BA or MA diploma. A smaller, but still notable, group of 17% has a high school diploma as their highest academic qualification. Meanwhile, 12% of respondents have attained a PhD or equivalent, reflecting a highly educated subset within the group. This distribution underscores a strong emphasis on higher education among the respondents, with

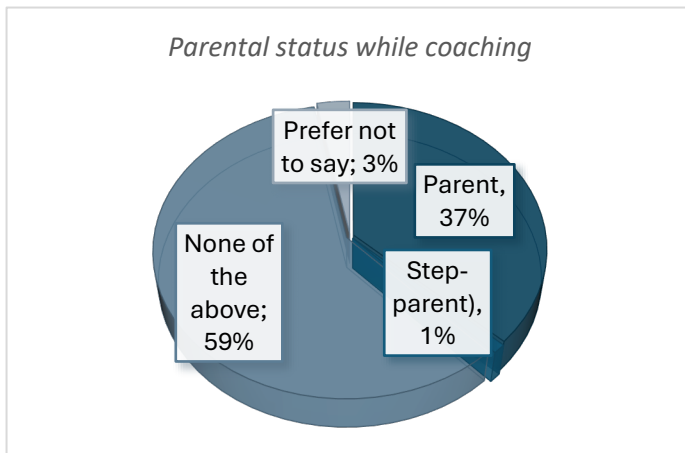
a substantial portion having pursued advanced degrees.

Personal relationship status: The largest group, 40% of respondents, reported being in a committed relationship. A third of the respondents were married or in a civil partnership, so this, combined with those in a committed relationship, indicates that substantial number of coaches (73%) have stable, long-term partnerships, which could provide emotional and logistical support. Nearly a quarter of the respondents (23%) indicated that they were single and not in a relationship while coaching. This



suggests still a significant portion of the coaching community may be balancing their professional commitments without a partner. In opposite a small percentage (3%) of respondents were divorced,

none of the respondents reported being widowed and very small number of respondents (1%) chose not to disclose their relationship status.



Parental Status while Coaching (Q25): Most female coaches (59%) apparently have no kids, as only 37% identifying as parents. This might indicate that most women see parenthood and coaching as alternative to each other.

Number of Children (Q26): Only 29 female coaches responded to this question. Of these, 10 (34%) have one child, 7 (24%) have three children, and 8 (28%) reported having four or more children.

Age Ranges of children while coaching (Q27): Respondents reported a total of 103 children. The age distribution showed that younger age groups dominate, with 54% of the children being 12 years old or younger. The adolescent group (13-18 years) accounts for 21% of the sample, while the oldest group (19 years or older) represents 24%. That would suggest that women get involved in coaching when their kids enter the sport.

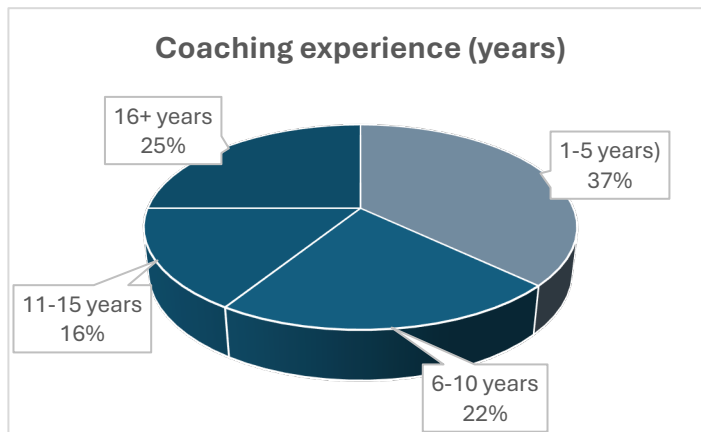
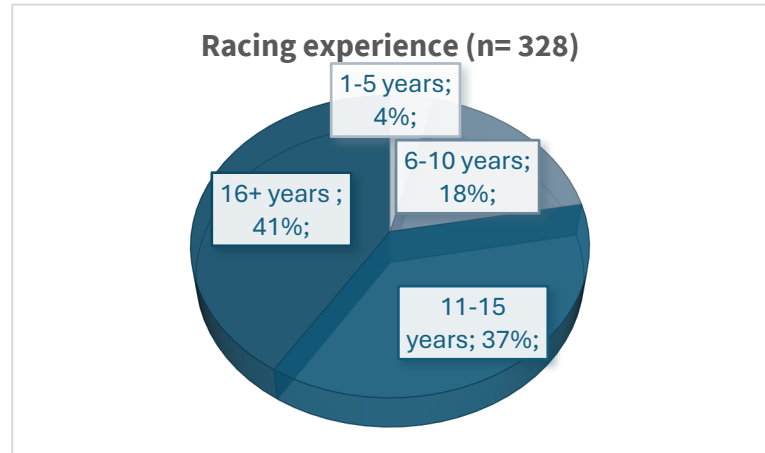
Coaching qualifications

Regarding *coaching qualifications*, more than half of the respondents reported holding an Alpine Coach Level 2 certification (55%, n=192). A smaller percentage reported higher qualifications, such as Alpine Coach Level 3 (14%). Additionally, 9% (n=21) reported holding other types of national classifications, which are diverse and difficult to compare. Interestingly, almost 18% reported lower levels of qualification, including Pre-Coach (1%), Alpine Coach Level 1 (14%), and even 3% (n=11) with no qualification at all.



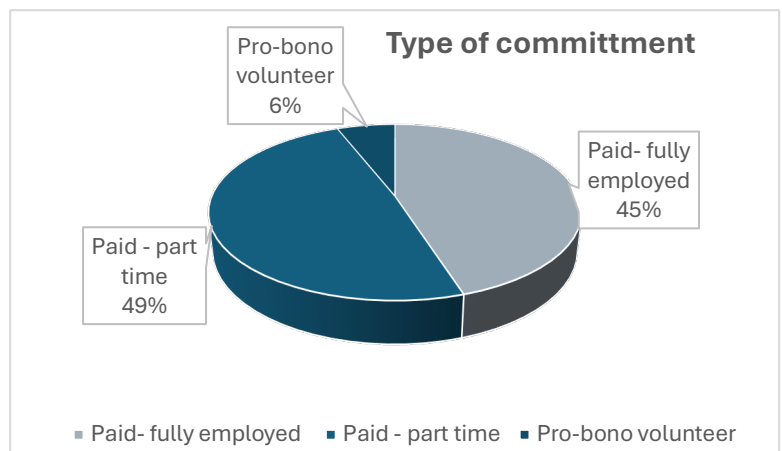
Coaching experiences: The respondents replied that the vast majority (98%; n= 363) of them are or were coaching alpine skiing, with only a small number (1%) having also coached snowboarding and Free style. None of them reported coaching or having coached Ski cross/BX.

Additionally, the data reveals that most respondents has had significant past *ski racing experience*, with 78% having raced for more than 10 years, including 41% who have been ski racing for more than 16 years. 18 percent ski raced for 6 to 10 years, while a very small portion (4%) had a shorter racing career (1-5 years). This highlights the continuum between racing and then coaching and, once again, the need to keep girls in the sport as long as possible.

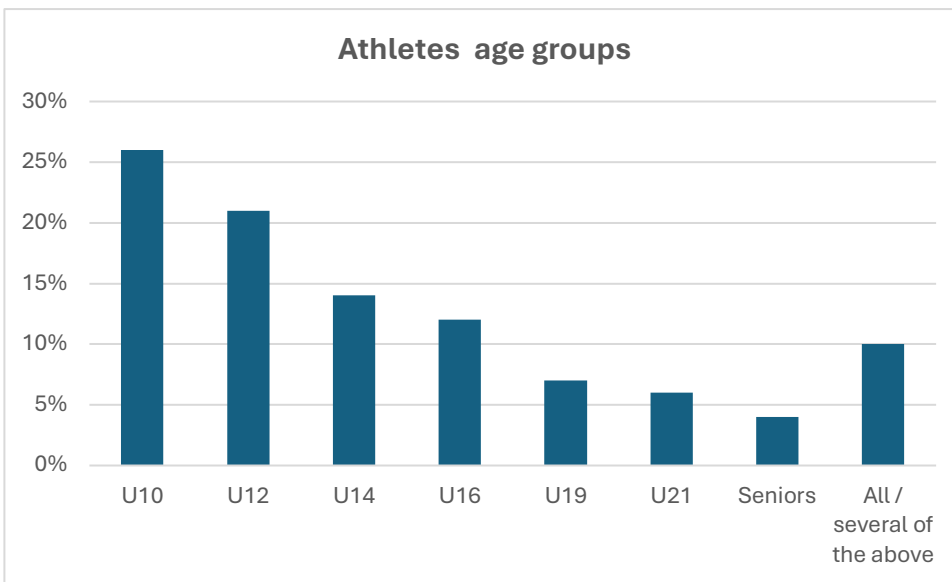
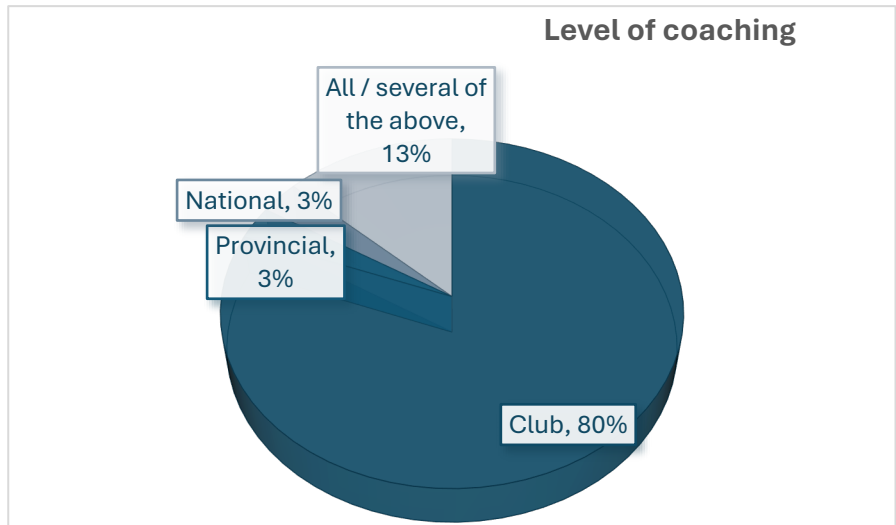


Duration of coaching greatly varies, with the highest percent (37%) of the respondents reporting having coached for 1 to 5 years. On the other side of the spectrum, a quarter of the respondents reported coaching for more than 16 years (25%) and a bit less than a quarter (22%) to have coached for 6 to 10 years.

Type of commitment (Q8). Women coaching seems to be mainly a paid, professional endeavour, with numbers almost evenly split between coaches employed full time (45%, n= 158), and part time (49%; n=171). Only 6% (n=21) of respondents work as pro-bono volunteers.



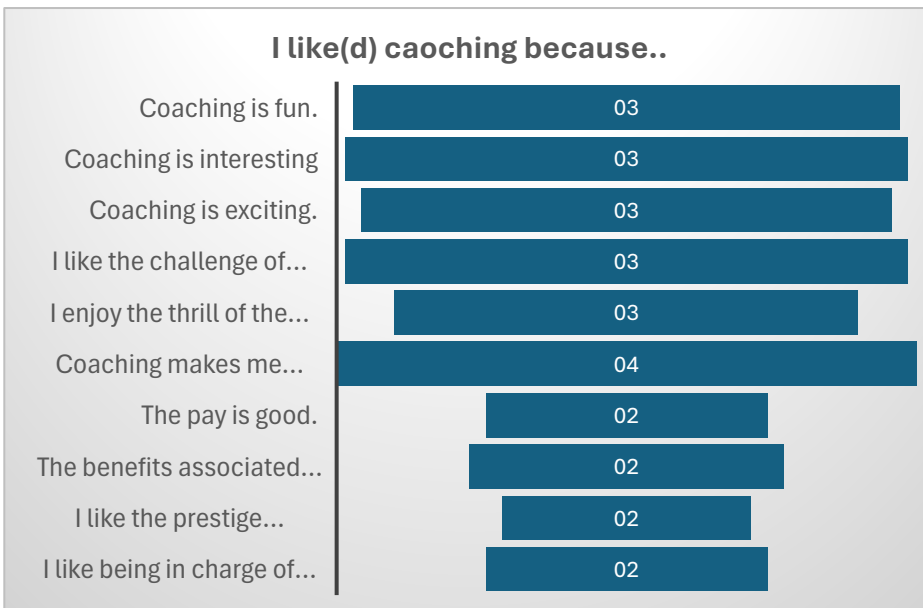
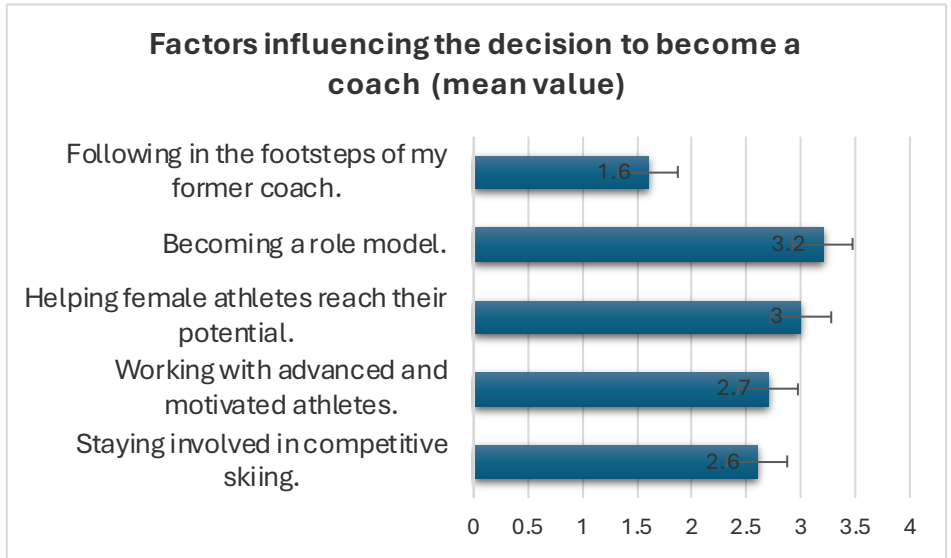
The data also indicates that most women coaches operate at the club level (80%). Coaching provincial/regional/national teams is far less common (only 3%). However, 13% of the respondents reported experience across multiple levels. This distribution likely reflects the broader availability and accessibility of coaching opportunities at the club level, with fewer positions available as one moves up to provincial and national levels.



Age groups: The respondents reported that they have mostly coached or are coaching the youngest age groups, U10 - U14: women coaching progressively diminish as the athlete's age grows. Just 10 % reported experience of coaching across several age groups.

3 PART B: JOYS & DIFFICULTIES IN COACHING

One important question (Q13, N=245) focused on the factors influencing the decision to become a coach. Using a Likert scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (most important), the respondents indicated that “*Becoming a role model (M=3,2)*” and “*Helping female athletes reach their potential (M=3,0)*” are the most common factors influencing the decision for a woman to become a ski coach. Meanwhile, the factor “*Following in the footsteps of my former coach (M=1,6)*” did not prove to be an important motivation factor for becoming coach.



In addition (Q14), the respondents rated what they like most in the profession. Women coaches feel that 'Coaching makes [them] happy' (M=3.5) that they enjoy 'the challenge of coaching'. They also think that coaching is 'interesting' (M=3.4), 'fun' (M=3.3), and 'exciting' (M=3.2). On the other hand, they do not seem to care about 'the prestige associated with coaching' (M=1.5), or that

fact that coaching mean 'being in charge of others'. Factors like 'the pay is good' (M=1.7), and 'the benefits associated with my coaching job are good' (M=1.9) not to seem to matter, admittedly because overall the pay is not good, and the benefits are little (see below).

Another important set of questions investigated why women quitting coaching (Q15). Seventeen factors were listed, and respondents categorized some as least important (1) and most important (5).

The most important reasons listed for quitting are “Lack of financial incentives (m=2.7)”, “Too little time with family and friends (m=2.5)”, “Discriminatory practices by administrators (m=2.3)”, “Discriminatory practices by peers”, and “Increase in the amount of time required for coaching (m=2.2)”.

Factors categorized as least important or having an unimportant influence on quitting coaching were: “Too much time spent on recruiting”, “My coaching skills/techniques were inadequate for athletes” (M=1.0), “Unsupportive family” (M=1.1), “Unsupportive partner, and discriminatory practices by the athletes” (M=1.3).



Figure 12: Factors for quitting coaching (by importance)

We have further organized the additional open responses (n=45) regarding other reasons for leaving coaching into the following categories with the individual statements:

1. Gender Discrimination and Sexism

- Sexism Among Coaches: “Prevalent sexism impacts female coaches’ experiences”.
- Professional Growth: Women face limitations in professional growth and are often confined to coaching younger children.
- Perception of Ability: “Male coaches are considered superior, regardless of results”.
- Role Models: “Lack of female role models in the field”.
- Treatment by Colleagues: “General unprofessionalism and mistreatment of female coaches”.
- Nepotism: “Male-dominated field with favouritism towards male coaches and friends”.

2. Economic Challenges

- Lack of Financial Support: “Insufficient economic support for equipment and resources”.
- Pay Disparities: “Men doing less work are paid equally or more than women”.
- Equitable Opportunities: “Lack of equitable pay and opportunities for advancement”.
- Job Security: “Inconsistent schedules, lack of benefits, and job insecurity”.

3. Work-Life Balance and Family Planning

- Health Insurance: “Lack of health insurance and inability to afford it”.
- Work-Life Balance: Poor work-life balance and inability to match ski coaching schedules with other jobs.
- Family Responsibilities: Pregnancy, child-rearing, taking care for old parents and family planning pose significant challenges. (“Difficult to work as a head coach at higher levels (FIS) while being a mom”).

4. Physical Demands and Health Concerns

- Physical Job: “The job’s physical demands make it challenging to remain competitive”.
- Health Issues: Injuries (e.g., knee problems) and degenerative health issues (e.g., joint problems) limit capabilities.
- Age: Concerns about being too old to continue in the role.

5. Professional Environment and Resources:

- Lack of support and resources from ski resorts, poor leadership and decision-making by boards without technical knowledge, broken progression system, catering only to financially elite families.
- Coaching Environment: General attitudes and the culture of the “boys’ club” negatively affect the work environment.

6. Personal and Professional

- Other Interests: Pursuit of other life interests or new opportunities or personal growth.
- Time Management: Full-time job outside coaching leaves insufficient time for coaching.
- Relocation: Changes in location impacting job continuity.

7. External Factors

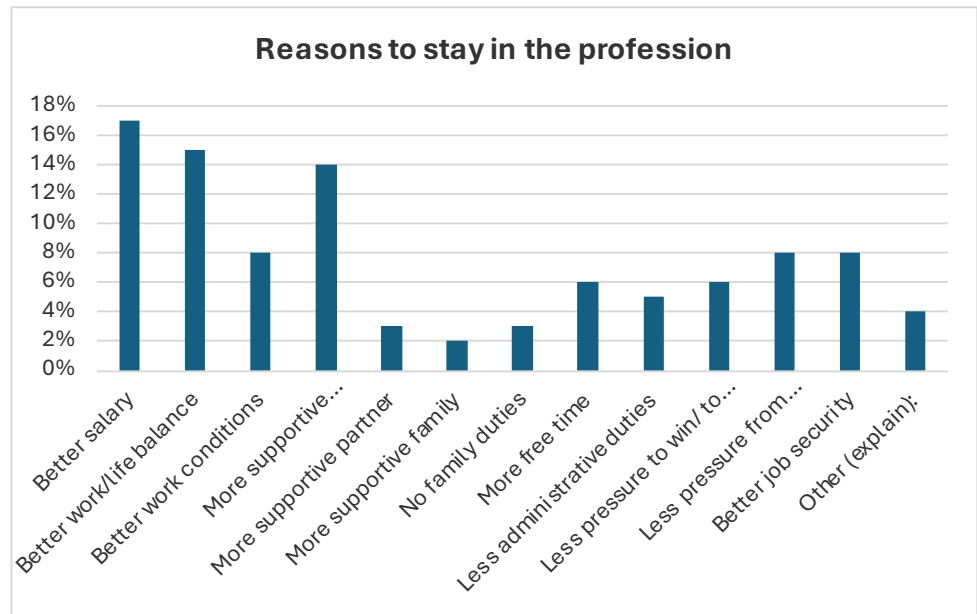
- refers to National Governing Bodies Politics and its politics and poor leadership. Country-Specific Issues i.e. “in countries like Argentina, poor payment and lack of federation support hinder the profession”.

These summarized points highlight the multifaceted challenges faced by women ski coaches, ranging from systemic sexism and economic challenges to personal health and work-life balance issues.

Reasons to stay in the profession (Q16)

We also examined the factors helping to stay in the job or facilitating a return to it (Q16 *If you quit or are thinking of quitting: what would it take for you to come back (or stay) in the profession?*)

The data clearly shows that financial compensation, work-life balance, and a positive professional environment are the primary drivers that would encourage individuals to stay in or return to the profession. Addressing these areas could significantly improve retention and job satisfaction.



The analysis of the question “Reasons for Considering Returning to or Staying in the Coaching Profession” (n=814, multiple answers) provides insights into what it would take for women to consider returning to or remaining in the coaching profession. The most reported factors are: 'Better Salary' (17%), indicating that many professionals feel underpaid. Respondents also prioritize 'Better Work/Life Balance' (15%) and highlight the need for a 'More Supportive Professional Environment' (14%), emphasizing the importance of a better work culture and of support within the workplace.

Moderately important factors include: 'Better Work Conditions' (8%) and 'Less Pressure from Athletes' Families' (8%), which shows that stress from athletes' families is a notable concern, as well as 'Better Job Security' (8%), indicating that stability in employment is critical for many professionals.

More free time (6%) emphasizes the desire for more personal time outside of work. “Less Pressure to Win/Achieve Top Results (6%) is significant for some professionals. A less frequently mentioned factor was “Less Administrative Duties (5%).

Other factors (4%, n=24) included increased safety for athletes to reduce athlete’s injury risks; improved training methods, equipment; and less intense competition schedules; fairness and camaraderie; fair

treatment and inclusivity among the coaching staff; a positive and supportive team environment; female boss and possibly medical support.

Former women coaches also expressed a desire for ongoing professional development, and support in career advancement, like assistance in obtaining and maintaining coaching certifications and qualifications, as well as stability in living arrangements to be better able to focus on coaching responsibilities. Also, less physical strain was mentioned and foregoing non-coaching responsibilities, such as arranging athletes' accommodation and transfers, to focus on the athletes' development and coaching duties.

External factors mostly referred to the recognition and support for coaching expertise, possibly through official certifications and improved benefits, improved governance and leadership within the National Governing Bodies, and more support from the ski resorts.

Just a small percentage feel that "family responsibilities (3%)" hinder their professional life and that "Support from a partner" is essential (3%), while only 2% think family support is an important factor.

4. OBSTACLES / HINDRANCES IN COACHING

The survey also extensively focused on the obstacles/ hindrances faced by women in the profession, for which we defined four different categories:

1. Minority/ Gender Biases
2. Nature of Coaching
3. Conflicts with others
4. Professional Issues

Respondents rated their influence, with 1 meaning not at all an obstacle and 9 meaning absolute hindrance.

1. Minority / gender biases (Q17)

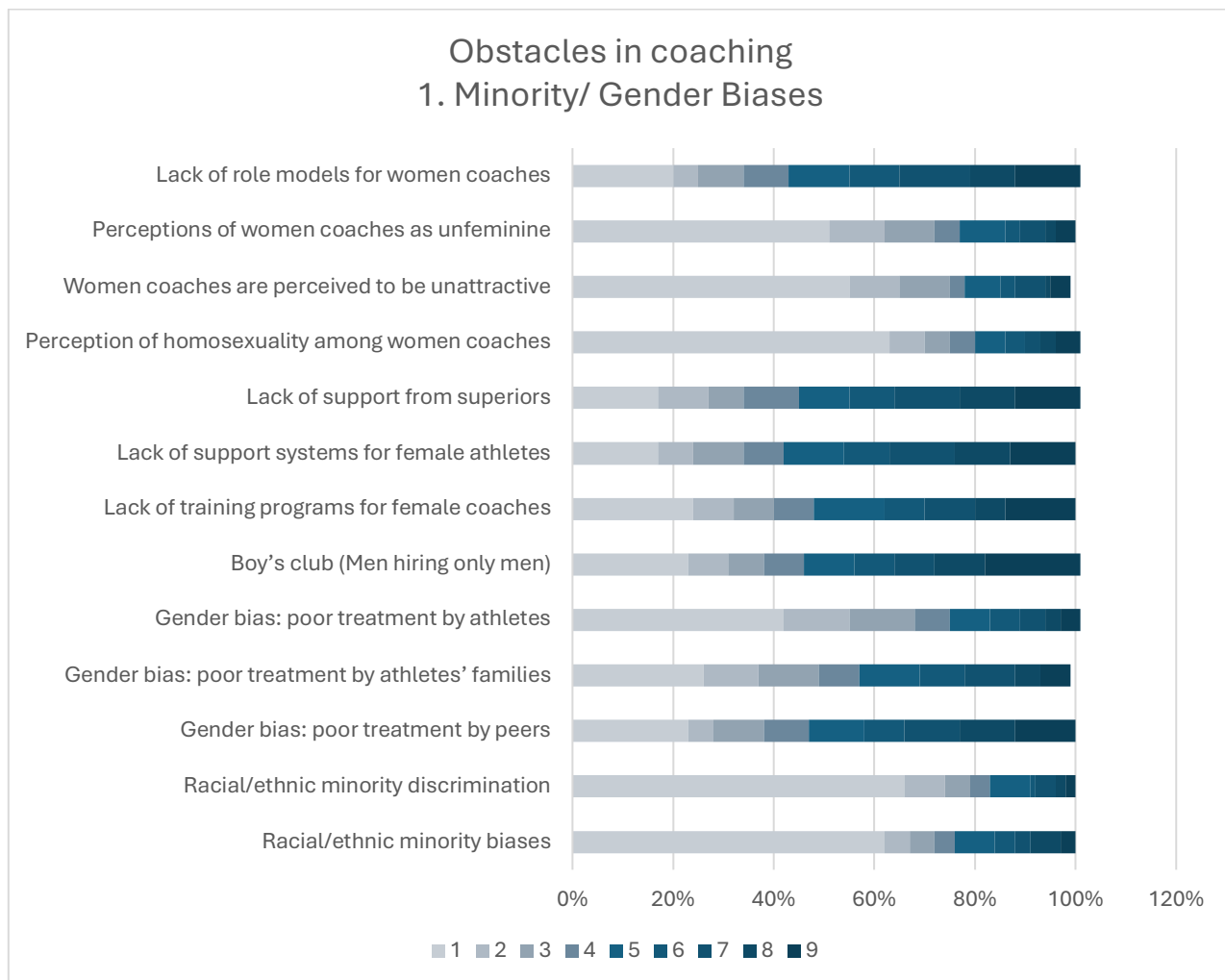


Figure 14: Obstacles/Hindrances in coaching: Minority/Gender Biases

The results suggest that racial/ethnic minority discrimination (m=2.2); racial/ethnic minority biases (m=2.6); perception of homosexuality among women coaches (m=2.5) are relatively low on the scale,

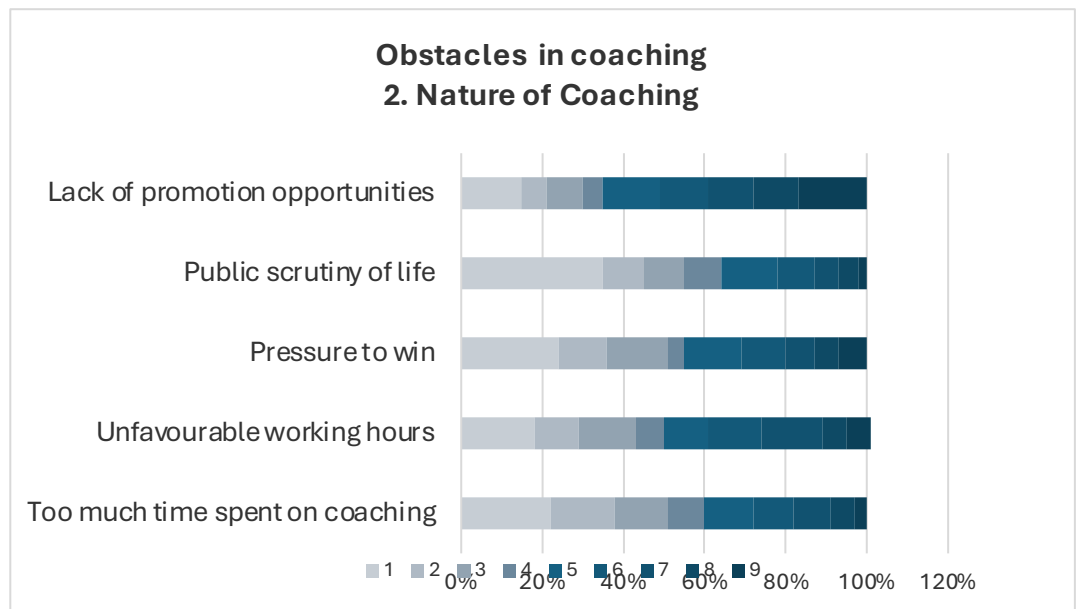
while lack of support systems for female athletes (m=5); lack of support from superiors (5), lack of role models for women coaches (5), Boy’s club (Men hiring only men) (4.9) are by far the toughest obstacles to overcome for women coaches.

Notably, factors such as the "boy’s club" environment (SD ± 3), poor treatment by peers (SD ± 2.84), and the lack of training programs for female coaches (SD ± 2.84) exhibited the highest variability in responses, indicating diverse experiences among the respondents.

In addition, the lack of support for female athletes and coaches—encompassing issues like the "lack of role models" and "insufficient support from superiors"—emerged as significant concerns. Interestingly, stereotypes related to appearance and femininity were generally not perceived as major problems.

Obstacles/Hindrances: Nature of Coaching (Q18) (n=235)

For what is related to the very nature of coaching in Alpine Skiing, factors like "Public scrutiny of life" (m=3.5) or "Too much time spent on coaching" (m=3.9), do not seem to be relevant obstacles. On the other side, the "Lack of promotion opportunities"

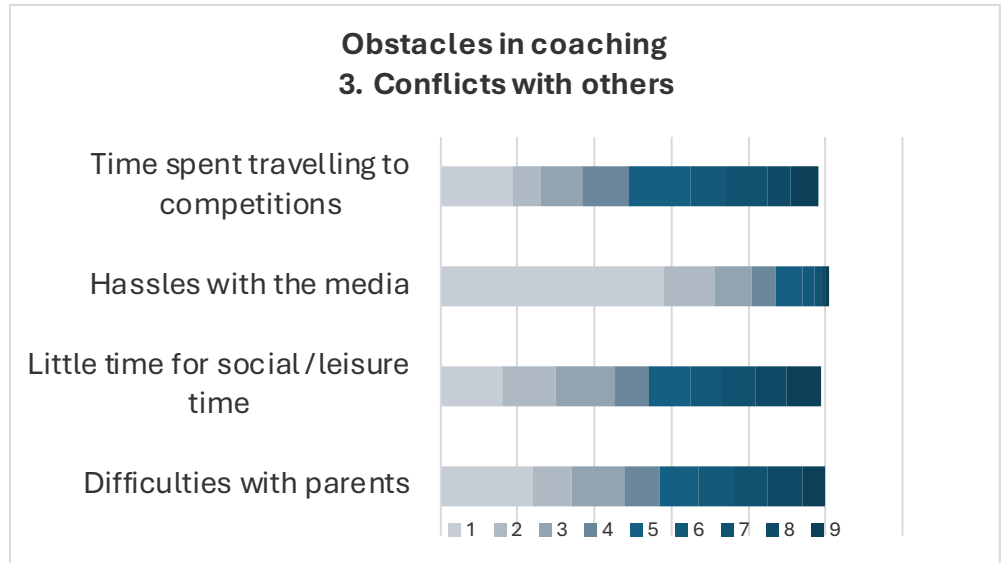


(m=5.3), "Unfavourable working hours" (m=4.4; SD=±2.53), "Lack of promotion opportunities" (SD=±2.74), "Pressure to win" (SD=±2.58) appear to be by far the most relevant negative variables.

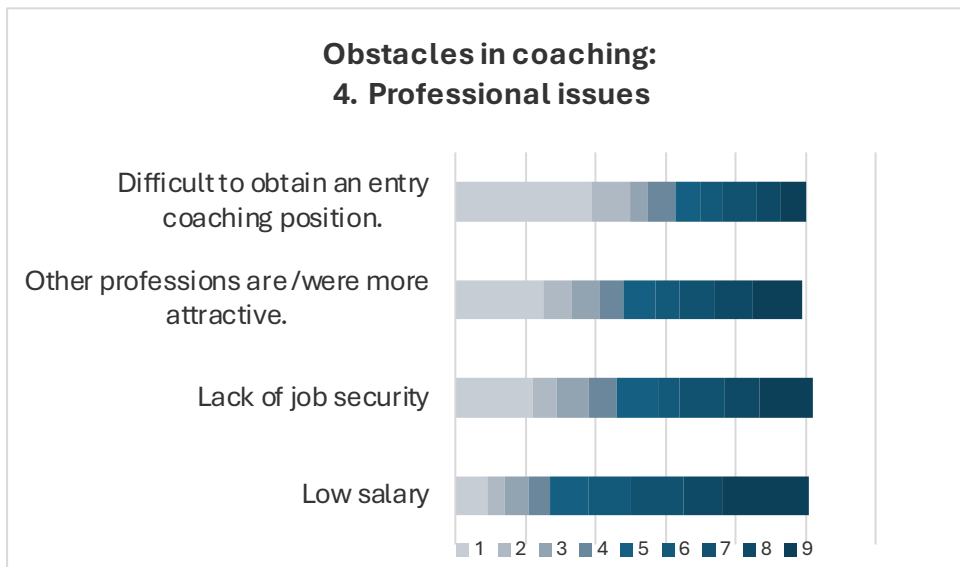
In a nutshell, when it comes to the nature of coaching, factors like "Too much time spent on coaching" and "Public scrutiny of life" are generally seen as minor problems. The spread of ratings however indicates that while these are not major issues for most, they are still significant for some. Factors like "Unfavourable working hours" and "Pressure to win" showed moderate hindrances with high variability in responses, suggesting diverse experiences and a significant impact on a substantial number of respondents. Issues like "Lack of promotion opportunities" displayed the highest average rating and variability, pointing out a critical issue that severely affects a large portion of women coaches.

2. Obstacles/Hindrances: Conflicts with Others (Q19); (n=237)

When it comes to “Difficulties with others”, “Difficulties with Parents” only one in four coaches (24%) do not see it as a problem, while the others perceived it as a moderate to high problem, thus reflecting the importance of this factor. The lack of social/leisure time is a just moderate problem for most respondents, as is, surprisingly, “Time Spent Travelling to Competitions”.



3. Obstacles: Professional Issues (Q20), (n=238)



One in four respondents consider low salaries one of the most significant negative variables in the job, with 25% rating it as an absolute problem (9) and a significant spread of ratings across the scale. Low salary is perceived as a major issue (m=6) by most respondents (more than 50% rate 7 or higher). Also “Lack of Job Security

Lack” is a significant obstacle for many, with just one in five (22%) not considering it as relevant, and a substantial number rating it high (from 7-9, 38 %, n=4.9).

Three out of four respondents consider “other professions to be more attractive”. Obtaining an entry position seems to be relatively easy though, and the ratings spread across the scale (m=3.7, SD±,2,84) indicate mixed experiences with this issue.

Summarizing the most significant obstacle to coaching is the low salaries. Additionally, "Lack of Job Security" and the "Attractiveness of Other Professions" are also considerable concerns, affecting many

respondents. Interestingly, the factor "Difficulty in Obtaining an Entry Position," while a significant issue for some (7%), also shows the most varied responses, with a substantial proportion not finding it an obstacle at all (39%).

Comments, Personal Reflections, and Suggestions (Q28)

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to add personal comments, reflections, and suggestions, in total anonymity.

We received quite a few responses (n=24), which largely confirm the need to highlight the issues of women in the male-dominated world of alpine skiing coaching. We also received some interesting suggestions, which we have summarized and highlighted into several areas:

- *Sexism and Gender Bias*: women are often limited to coaching young children ("baby"); Male coaches are considered better, despite the success of female-coached athletes; Female coaches are not considered for national team positions.
- *Economic Challenges*: Lack of financial support for equipment; Inequitable pay compared to male coaches; Inconsistent schedules and lack of benefits; Inability to afford health insurance and lack of job security; Ski coaching is not considered a real job, especially for women.
- *Work Environment and Professionalism*: Unprofessionalism and lack of collaboration among coaches; Male-dominated culture with nepotism; Negative attitudes and behaviours from male colleagues; Board decisions made without technical knowledge.
- *Work-Life Balance and Health*: Difficulty balancing ski coaching with another job; Incompatibility with family planning and child-rearing responsibilities; Physical demands leading to health concerns (e.g., joint problems); Lack of support from resorts and federations.
- *Personal Reasons*: Other interests and a desire to move on; Pregnancy and maternity; Having children and the inability to work as a head coach while being a mother; Aging and physical inability to ski.
- *Systemic Issues*: No clear goals for the ski system; Broken system of progression favouring financially elite families; Nepotism in hiring decisions over merit.
- *Specific Remarks*: Some responses noted the "boys' club" culture. In some countries, like Italy and Argentina, ski coaching is poorly paid and lacks support from federations. Additionally female coaches cited the unprofessionalism of colleagues and the inability to collaborate effectively. Also, financial insecurity and lack of benefits were significant concerns, along with health insurance issues.

These points reflect the multifaceted challenges, mostly reported problems and obstacles female alpine ski coaches face, encompassing sexism, economic difficulties, work environment issues, work-life balance, health, and systemic problems within the ski coaching industry.

4. Conclusion

The survey results reveal significant challenges faced by women in alpine skiing coaching, including gender biases, professional obstacles, and personal circumstances such as parental responsibilities. These insights are crucial for developing strategies to empower women in this field and enhance their opportunities for professional growth and support.

Addressing these obstacles, especially those related to gender biases and support systems, could help improve the coaching environment for women. The varied experiences highlight the need for targeted interventions to support those who face these challenges most acutely.

Particularly, the lack of professional growth opportunities and the unfavourable working hours are prominent obstacles that, if addressed, could lead to a more positive and supportive environment for coaches. The variability in responses underscores the necessity for tailored interventions to meet the specific challenges faced by different individuals.

Moderate and significant obstacles, such as managing time for social activities and travel, as well as parental difficulties, also need attention to improve the overall experience and effectiveness of coaches. Additionally, addressing significant issues like low salary and job security is essential for better retention and satisfaction among coaches.

5. Proposed Strategies for Improving the Environment for Women in Alpine Skiing Coaching

To effectively address the challenges faced by women in alpine skiing coaching, we propose the implementation of targeted programs and initiatives aimed at the following objectives:

- a) *Addressing Gender Biases*: Develop and implement targeted programs specifically designed to combat and reduce gender biases in alpine skiing coaching. These programs should include training and awareness campaigns to foster an inclusive and respectful environment.
- b) *Enhancing Support and Resources for Female Coaches*: Provide better support and resources for female coaches, including access to professional development opportunities, mentorship programs, and networking events. This will help them build their skills, gain confidence, and advance in their careers.
- c) *Promoting Equitable Pay and Professional Growth Opportunities*: Ensure that female coaches receive equitable pay and have access to the same professional growth opportunities as their male counterparts. This includes transparent salary structures, regular performance reviews, and clear pathways for promotion.
- d) *Facilitating Work-Life Balance for Coaches with Parental Responsibilities*:

Introduce policies and programs that facilitate a better work-life balance for coaches with parental responsibilities. This could include flexible working hours, parental leave, childcare support, and family-friendly workplace practices.

- e) *Increasing Visibility and Support for Female Role Models*: Increase the visibility and support for female role models in alpine skiing coaching. Highlight their achievements and contributions through media coverage, award recognitions, and public speaking opportunities. Encourage their involvement in mentoring the next generation of female coaches.

By implementing these targeted strategies, we can create a more equitable, supportive, and thriving environment for women in alpine skiing coaching, ultimately leading to greater retention, satisfaction, and professional success.