



## Trayectoria de Aprendizaje y Desarrollo de Entrenadoras y Asistentes Técnicas en la Liga de Baloncesto Femenino de Brasil

*Learning and Development Journey of Coaches and Assistant Coaches in the Brazilian Women's Basketball League*

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** The underrepresentation of women in coaching and assistant coaching roles in Brazil highlights significant challenges in the sports field. The Brazilian Women's Basketball League (LBF) presents a scenario that requires a deeper understanding of the career trajectories of female professionals in coaching.

**Objective:** The aim of this study was to analyze the learning and development journey of female coaches and assistant coaches in the LBF, using the Journey of Learning and Development of Coaches (JADT) model as a reference.

**Methodology:** A retrospective questionnaire was applied to four professionals to collect data on their learning experiences and career development across three key phases of the JADT model.

**Results:** In the pre-professional phase, the influence of family, friends, and previous experience as athletes played a crucial role. In the professional education phase, all participants met the legal requirements for the position, with postgraduate specialization highlighted as a relevant factor. In the professional development phase, practical experience in clubs, women's sports, and early career opportunities in São Paulo and Santa Catarina were decisive for career advancement.

**Discussion:** The findings revealed limited development opportunities and structural barriers that hindered professional growth. When compared to previous studies, the results reinforced the need for specific policies and inclusive initiatives to promote women in sports coaching.

**Conclusions:** A comprehensive understanding of the learning and development processes of female coaches is essential to foster gender equity and expand professional opportunities in the sports field.

### Keywords

Challenges; conditions; opportunities; representation; career trajectories.

### Resumen

**Introducción:** La baja representación de mujeres en los roles de entrenadoras y asistentes técnicas en Brasil planteó desafíos significativos en el ámbito deportivo. La Liga de Baloncesto Femenino de Brasil reflejó un contexto que requería una comprensión más profunda de las trayectorias profesionales femeninas en la dirección técnica.

**Objetivo:** Analizar el proceso de aprendizaje y desarrollo de entrenadoras y asistentes técnicas en la Liga de Baloncesto Femenino de Brasil, tomando como referencia el modelo Journey of Learning and Development of Coaches (JADT).

**Metodología:** Se aplicó un cuestionario retrospectivo a cuatro profesionales para recopilar datos sobre sus experiencias de aprendizaje y desarrollo profesional en tres fases clave del modelo JADT.

**Resultados:** En la fase de aprendizaje preprofesional, influyeron de manera decisiva la familia, los amigos y la experiencia previa como atletas. En la etapa de formación profesional, todas las participantes cumplieron con los requisitos legales para el cargo, y se destacó la especialización de posgrado como un factor relevante. En la fase de desarrollo profesional, la experiencia laboral en clubes, el deporte femenino y las primeras oportunidades en São Paulo y Santa Catarina fueron determinantes para su avance profesional.

**Discusión:** Los resultados revelaron oportunidades limitadas de desarrollo y barreras estructurales que dificultaron el crecimiento profesional. Comparando estos hallazgos con estudios anteriores, se evidenció la necesidad de políticas específicas e iniciativas inclusivas.

**Conclusiones:** Comprender en profundidad los procesos de aprendizaje y desarrollo de las entrenadoras es esencial para fomentar la equidad de género y ampliar las oportunidades profesionales en el deporte.

### Palabras clave

Condiciones; desafíos; oportunidades; representación; trayectorias profesionales.

## Introduction

The involvement of women in the sports field throughout history has encountered different scenarios compared to men, both for athletes, with a history of prohibitions on their practice in the Brazilian case, such as a Deliberation in the year 1965 (Brazil, 1965), and for coaching and assistant coaching positions, wherein, due to the delayed involvement of women in sports, various barriers have arisen for accessing leadership positions (Amaral et al., 2021).

In the scientific realm, the discussion about women in leadership positions has received particular attention in recent years (Adriaanse, 2016; Evans & Pfister, 2020), suggesting that the low representation of women in these roles is more related to marginalization and the association of leadership with masculinity, rather than a lack of training among female coaches. Specifically, in the host country of this study, Brazil, publications have been recurrent (Amaral et al., 2021; Ferreira et al., 2013; Passero et al., 2019) and the Brazilian Olympic Committee (BOC, 2022) itself has released its sports development document highlighting specific strategies for the development of female coaches, motivated among other factors by the low presence of women in different events: in the Tokyo Olympic Games (2021), women were represented by only 26% of coaching staff, while in the Junior Pan American Games in Cali (2021), they accounted for only 16% (BOC, 2022).

In this context, Learning and Development Journey of Coaches (JADT) (BOC, 2022) is characterized by the unique experiences, circumstances, and meanings of each professional's personal trajectory, organized into three stages of learning: a) pre-professional learning, where experiences precede career choice, e.g., learning through family, community and sports contexts; b) professional training, involving access to certification for entry into the profession; and c) professional development, the process in professional practice, considering demands and competencies (BOC, 2022).

Thus, considering that the formative process is intrinsic and extends throughout life (Trudel et al., 2016), women face considerable challenges, especially in the internal landscape of women's basketball, where only 24% held coaching positions in the country's premier league, the Brazilian Women's Basketball League (LBF) (Passero et al., 2020). Other studies relate the low presence of female coaches in Brazilian sports to obstacles that resemble a labyrinth (Barreira, 2021), with the scarcity of representation discouraging more women from pursuing the path of coaching, perpetuating a vicious cycle (Dos Santos et al., 2023).

In light of this scenario, the aim is to analyze the learning and development journey of coaches and assistant coaches in the LBF, seeking to understand the path that led them to the premier women's basketball league in Brazil.

### *The women's basketball in Brazil*

The Brazilian women's basketball has enjoyed a prominent period as an international powerhouse, characterized by a series of notable achievements over several decades. Among these milestones are the 1994 World Championship title, the runner-up position in the 1996 Olympic Games, and third place in the 2000 Olympics (FIBA, 2024).

However, the contemporary landscape of Brazilian women's basketball is characterized by absence in international competitions, with the last Olympic participation occurring in 2016, when Brazil was the host country, and failures to secure berths in the 2018, 2020, and 2022 World Championships, further deepening Brazil's representational gap on the intercontinental stage (FIBA, 2024).

Despite setbacks, concerning tournaments within the American continent, Brazilian women's basketball has demonstrated competence, as evidenced by consecutive victories in the Pan American Games of 2019 and 2023, as well as the 2023 AmeriCup title, a tournament that grants qualification to the Pre-Olympic event.

The current situation of Brazilian women's basketball can largely be attributed to various factors such as a lack of dedicated infrastructure for athlete development (Mazzei et al., 2015), which hinders both talent renewal and the training and empowerment of coaches, particularly women. In an effort to contribute to the restructuring of women's basketball, the LBF was established in 2010, responsible for the premier elite women's basketball championship in Brazil, currently in its 14th edition. However, considerable challenges persist in the development of the LBF, notably the underrepresentation of



women in coaching positions. This aspect is the primary focus of the present study, which identified that only 24% of leadership positions in the LBF are held by women (Passero et al., 2020).

### ***Learning and Development Journey for Coaches (JADT)***

For the present research, the BOC document on Sports Development will be adopted as a reference, with a focus on the training of coaches within the context of high-performance sports. The aim of this framework is to establish a set of principles related to the performance, learning, training, and development of coaches.

The document incorporates the JADT, which is characterized by the specific experiences, circumstances, and meanings of each individual's personal trajectory. Following this perspective, the JADT encompasses three distinct phases:

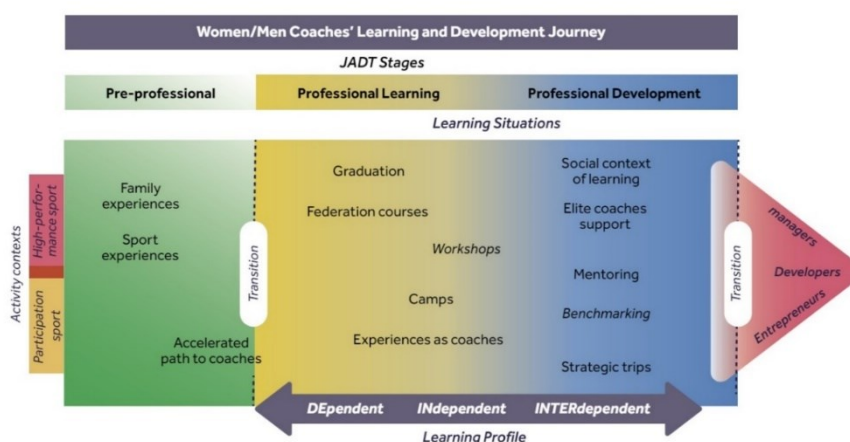
*a) Pre-professional Learning:* This phase is characterized by experiences preceding formal education and professional certification, such as physical and sports experiences within the family or community environment, as well as formal sports experiences like classes, training, and competitions. These experiences shape the initial perceptions of the coaching profession, potentially incorporating beliefs and skills implicitly.

*b) Professional Formation:* This stage involves initial training for career development, encompassing the pursuit of professional certifications and courses to expand technical knowledge.

*c) Professional Development:* This process focuses on professional practice and the identification of competencies that require further development, taking into account the demands and requirements of performance within the high-performance sports context.

According to Figure 1:

Figure 1. Women Coaches' Learning and Development Journey.



Source: Sport Development Framework from Brazil Olympic Committee, by the Brazilian Olympic Committee, 2022.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

This study involved four participants, comprising one head coach (the only one among the teams participating in the league this year) and three assistant coaches from the LBF during the 2022 season. Inclusion criteria were: being female; serving as a head coach or assistant coach in the LBF during the year of the research.

### ***Procedure***

This research was submitted to and approved by the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Subjects of the Federal University of São Paulo under number 0400/2021.

Initially, we forwarded the research proposal via email to the administration of the League, with the purpose of clarifying the study objectives and all associated legal procedures. However, we did not receive a response through this communication channel. Faced with the lack of feedback, we sought contact through social media with the women who comprised the coach staff (CS) of the participating teams, with only three teams having a total of 4 female members. We directly contacted these women, presented the research and its objectives, and after their acceptance to respond to the questionnaire or expression of doubts, we provided the link to the questionnaires.

### Instrument

Due to the timing of data collection, which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, we opted to use a questionnaire for data collection, adhering to public health guidelines at the time. The questionnaire, of a retrospective and qualitative nature (Côté et al., 2005) with closed questions, consisted of 15 questions addressing the LDJC through its stages: Pre-professional Learning, Professional Formation, and Professional Development (Table 1).

### Data analysis

The data analysis involved tabulation and non-aprioristic categorization (Abraham et al., 2006) of responses in Excel Sheets according to the three learning stages grouped in accordance with the JADT stages (BOC, 2022).

The answers were organised in Excel spreadsheets and subjected to systematic analysis, thereby enabling the identification of patterns and emerging categories. This process was structured in accordance with the three stages of learning defined by the JADT model, as outlined by BOC (2022), thereby facilitating a direct connection between the data collected and the theoretical framework adopted.

Table 1. Questionnaire Variables in Accordance with the JADT

Pre-professional Learning	Professional Formation	Professional Development	
		<i>First general experience</i>	<i>First adult experience</i>
Influences for becoming a coach	Academic background	First experience at CS (when I was still an athlete, trainee...)	City/State of first adult CS experience
First roles in the CS	Level of education	Place of first CS experience (school, club...)	Place of first adult CS experience (school, club...)
Experience as an athlete		First experience with F, M or mixed	CS of the national team (youth or adult)
		City/State of first CS experience	
		Category with first experience	

CS = Coach Staff, F = Female, M = Male

## Results

The results are presented within the framework of the JADT proposal, carried out by the BOC. Preliminarily, we present data on the average age of the first CS experience in life and the average age of the first adult experience (whether LBF or not); then we present the organizational chart with the results, divided into Pre-professional learning, Professional training and Professional development.

The mean age of the CS at the time of data collection was 37 years old. The average age at their first CS experience in life was 27.25 years old, while the average age at their first adult experience (whether LBF or not) was 35.25 years old, a difference of approximately eight years, as observed in other studies (Abraham et al., 2006; Perondi et al., 2022, 2023), a period of 10 years can be considered as a coach with expertise. All participants have previous experience as athletes, with an average duration of involvement of 14.5 years.

The subsequent Flowchart-1 outlines three phases of JADT learning. In the first stage, referring to pre-professional learning, the influences that led to the transition to coaching included guidance from coaches, family influence, interaction with colleagues and experiences as athletes, covering both head coaches and assistant coaches. It should be noted that all the participants had previously played as

basketball players. Another significant aspect was the inaugural roles they assumed in the CS, which encompassed performances as athletes, facilitating the activities of youth teams, and experiences as head coaches and assistant coaches.

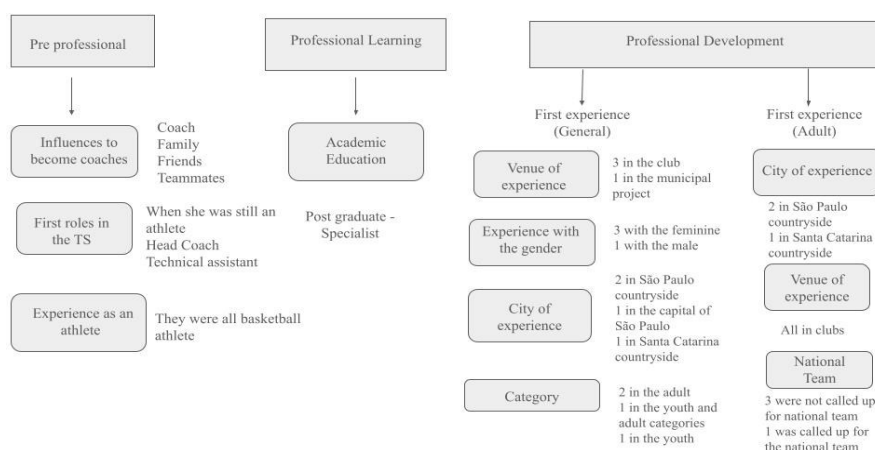
In the second stage, which pertains to professional training, academic training emerges as a prominent factor, in other words, all the coaches have a degree in Physical Education and with all the volunteers citing a level of specialization.

The third stage, concerning professional development, was subdivided into two axes. The first axis deals with the first general experience, which includes the place of experience on the coaching staff, showing experience both in clubs and in the town hall. It also covers experience with men's or women's teams, with women's experience predominating. The cities where the experiences took place are in the states of São Paulo (SP) and Santa Catarina (SC), with a presence in both adult and youth categories.

The second axis of professional development is concerned with the initial experience at the adult level, which it indicates was primarily confined to cities in the interior of São Paulo and Santa Catarina. These experiences took place in clubs and only one of the participants was selected for the Brazilian national team (at either the youth or adult level).

The flowchart provides a summary of the trajectory of the participants, from their previous influences and academic training to their initial experiences in the professional field.

Figure 2. Flowchart with the questionnaire results.



## Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyze the learning and development journey of coaches and assistant coaches in the LBF, seeking to understand the path that led them to the premier women's basketball league in Brazil. An analysis of the learning and development path of female coaches in LBF CS allows us to gain insight into the environment in which these women's careers unfold, from their initial athletic pursuits to their ascension to leadership roles in the adult category. Their experiences can inform strategies to enhance the representation of women in high-performance basketball.

1) Pre-professional learning: This stage encompasses the experiences that precede the professional choice. These experiences play a pivotal role in shaping the coaches' approaches, and the family context exerts a considerable influence on the formation of values (Tozetto et al., 2017).

### *The motivation to pursue a career as a coach*

With regard to pre-professional learning, where experiences precede the professional choice, the influences for becoming a coach were primarily derived from their commanders. This is because coaches have a close relationship with athletes, spend a significant amount of time together, and become influential figures in their professional careers (Adibpour et al., 2020).



The influence of family members, teammates, and friends is significant in the context of systematized sports practice, which typically occurs during childhood and is often facilitated by family members (parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, and so on). These individuals often provide resources to engage in and maintain sports practice (Vargas, Rinaldi & Capraro, 2022; Tozetto et al., 2017; Brasil et al., 2015; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). During childhood and early adulthood, the support of family members and the positive influence of friendships are found to be significant sources of emotional support in various aspects of life (Perondi et al., 2022; Nash & Sproule, 2009). These individuals become irreplaceable due to the emotional challenges that may arise during the process, whether among athletes or during the transition between athletic and coaching careers (Perondi et al., 2023).

### ***First roles at CS***

In regard to their initial roles in a CS, it was observed that they had their inaugural experience when they were still athletes and provided assistance in the youth categories. These initial contacts, which precede the pursuit of a degree in Physical Education or even the attainment of the role of head coach, are consistent with the findings of the study by Coelho et al. (2006) in which the coaches had their initial experiences when they were still athletes. However, the coach had her first experience in a CS only after becoming head coach of an adult men's team in an amateur championship and after graduating in Physical Education, and another when she became assistant coach of an adult women's team also after graduating in Physical Education. This diversity demonstrates the distinctive nature of the coaches' careers, as evidenced by the presence of unique characteristics and trajectories, despite the occurrence of shared events (Cunha et al., 2021; Galatti et al., 2019).

From the point of view of having experience after graduating in Physical Education, Darvin et al. (2019) suggest that experience as an assistant coach is one of the most important requirements for obtaining a future head coaching position. For women, this role can signify a continuity in their work with Sport (Brandão et al., 2008), in contrast to the trajectory experienced by men, which progresses through different sporting spheres in a markedly less circuitous manner. This is particularly evident when one considers the discriminatory culture that persists in the field of sport, which presents a significant obstacle for women (Mesquita et al., 2022).

### ***Experience as an athlete***

A career in assistant or sports coaching is often preceded by involvement in the sporting context from an early age. This suggests a correlation between a background as an athlete and an interest in coaching the same sport (Cortela et al., 2013). While experience as an athlete is undoubtedly an important factor in professional development (Moletta et al., 2019), it is not the sole determining factor. This is particularly evident when examining the careers of basketball coaches in Brazil (Cunha et al., 2021; Favari et al., 2021; Moletta et al., 2019).

A closer examination of the data reveals that all participating coaches had experience as athletes in the sport for an average of 14.5 years, which is consistent with other studies on coaches' experiences as athletes (Favari et al., 2021; Cunha et al., 2014; Rodrigues et al., 2017). This finding suggests that the experiences gained during a career as an athlete can facilitate the transition to the role of coach (Trudel et al., 2022).

In alignment with the JADT stage, these characteristics are pivotal to comprehending the intricacies inherent to this trajectory. In this phase, distinguished by the considerable impact of third parties, a constructive relationship and enriching experiences have the potential to motivate and guide the formation of novel professional pathways.

2. Professional Learning: The objective is to pursue certification in order to gain access to the profession, participate in designated courses, and avail oneself of other learning opportunities.

Checking their learning, all the professionals have completed higher education in Physical Education, evidence also found in other studies (Rodrigues et al., 2017; Moletta et al., 2019), since higher education in Physical Education is provided for by law and requires a bachelor's degree (Milistetd et al., 2015).

In addition to their involvement in higher education, the coaches in our study demonstrated a Specialization level. This necessity for further learning may be consistent with the findings in the national literature, where Physical Education courses are characterized by a generalist approach



(Milistetd et al., 2014). The pursuit of specializations appears to serve as a means of seeking support in the specific intricacies of the profession.

Furthermore, a study (Favari et al., 2021) examined the pathways of basketball coaches at different stages of life and found that women were more likely to engage in formal activities and pursue postgraduate studies, corroborating this study, in which all the professionals had postgraduate degrees. Women's postgraduate learning seems to be an additional requirement to hold the position of coach and assistant coach, given that men at a similar point in their careers did not have this condition (Favari et al., 2021). This phenomenon is linked to the socially constructed perception that only men possess the requisite skills to work as coaches (Ferreira et al., 2013). Consequently, women must undergo more extensive learning in order to attain the same position in the sports context (Guimarães et al., 2023).

The pursuit of professional certification and postgraduate degrees plays a crucial role in the JADT stage, as the knowledge acquired by women attempts to at least level the playing field with men. Furthermore, it underscores the necessity for the implementation of targeted measures aimed at addressing the needs, participation, and advancement of women in the realm of sports.

**3. Professional Development:** This stage is typically the longest, encompassing professional practice and work demands. Consequently, this stage will address the initial general experience and the initial experience in the adult category, with consideration of the coaches' integration into high-performance environments.

The findings of this study indicate that women coaches tend to begin their careers in women's teams, with only one coach starting out in a men's team. Despite the relatively low number of girls participating in the training ranks of Brazilian women's basketball (Antonelli et al., 2012; Galatti et al., 2015; Leonardi et al., 2021), the data suggests that women have the opportunity to start their coaching careers in women's teams. The observation that the majority of coaches are male, particularly in the context of women's and men's teams, indicates the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes and the subjective belief (Darvin et al., 2018) that men are inherently more suited to coaching than women. In this context, the individual performance of professional basketball players led by women and men was analyzed. The findings suggest that there is no influence by the gender of the coach or head coach and both women and men had similar levels of success with their athletes (Darvin et al., 2018).

The points raised in the previous paragraph are also evident in the Brazilian scenario (Ferreira et al., 2013; Guimarães et al., 2023), with the worsening reduction in the number of women practicing basketball (Antonelli et al., 2012; Galatti et al., 2015), associated with the restricted access to systematized basketball practice by girls and young people (Leonardi et al., 2021) and the decline in results at international level (Cunha & Pêgo, 2015): as a consequence of the low number of practitioners, we also have a low participation of women as coaches (Passero et al., 2019).

Another noteworthy aspect of Brazilian women's basketball is the prevalence of city hall, school, and club settings for training athletes (Beneli et al., 2017; Galatti et al., 2021). However, with regard to the initial coaching experiences of the participants in this study, the club emerged as the most common starting point, with only one individual beginning their coaching journey in the city hall. This may be attributed to the fact that joining a club is less bureaucratic than joining a public body such as a town hall or school, which usually occurs via a public examination. In the adult category, all the initial experiences were in clubs, which reinforced the restriction of spaces that encourage the systematic practice of basketball for adults.

With regard to the city and state in which they had their inaugural participation (the interior and capital of the state of São Paulo, and the interior of the state of Santa Catarina), it can be observed that only two states were suitable for this inaugural event.

In a previous study conducted by Galatti et al. (2021), the sociodemographic indicators of LBF athletes were observed. The state of São Paulo was identified as the primary center of training and development of the sport, with over 70% of athletes initiating their practice in this state. Additionally, the development of competitions (Beneli et al., 2014; Faria et al., 2021) was identified as a significant contributor to access to coaching positions.

These initial experiences as a coach did not necessarily originate from the grassroots level. Indeed, coaches may have their first experiences at the grassroots level and also at the adult level. It could be



argued that there is no obligation for coaches at the start of their careers to work exclusively with one age group. Furthermore, it may be more feasible for coaches to progress to higher categories during their careers.

### ***Participation in the National Team***

Finally, one of the participants has already served as a member of the coaching staff of the Brazilian national team. This position is highly sought after and comes with significant responsibilities, as it is a crucial avenue for ensuring that the national team achieves optimal results (Adibpour et al., 2020). A body of research in the international field has identified a set of skills that are deemed to be essential for coaches to be selected for their country's national team. These skills include competitiveness, communication, self-confidence and personality (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

The fact that we have a recognized coach with such characteristics, and therefore occupying a space in the CS of the Brazilian national team, suggests that further in-depth studies on her case be conducted in the future. This could be in a similar vein to the Brazilian taekwondo and judo women coaches who were investigated by Brazilian researchers (Perondi et al., 2022; Perondi et al., 2023).

In terms of professional practice and work demands, this stage of the JADT is marked by a concentration of scenarios and spaces. Women have had greater access to coaching positions in women's teams, particularly given that these teams are located on the São Paulo and Santa Catarina axis and the space that permeates these practices is the clubs.

### **Conclusions**

This study examines the learning and development journey of female basketball coaches working in LBF technical commissions. In the pre-professional learning phase, the influence of external factors, such as family and friends, was found to be a significant factor in generating interest in becoming a coach. Additionally, the study observed an important experience of coaching committees when they were still athletes, indicating alternative pathways for staying in the sport and contributing to its development.

With regard to professional development, a university degree is in compliance with the relevant legislation. However, the fact that all of them have a postgraduate degree intensifies the discussion about the need for women to demonstrate greater training in order to access leadership positions in the sports environment. This is particularly relevant in the context of the limited number of female coaches even in the women's league. Consequently, there is a clear need for policies to promote women to the position of coach.

Professional development identifies scenarios that indicate potential for growth in clubs, with the majority having experience with women's basketball. The state of São Paulo is identified as a promising location for the initial experience, along with Santa Catarina, in adult category technical commissions. The necessity to advance women's basketball in the South-Southeast is urgent, and even more so outside of it.

With regard to the category that marks the commencement of this professional journey, it was observed that the youth and adult categories were the predominant ones. This highlights the importance of a more clearly defined career path. Furthermore, only one coach had experience with the national team, which calls for further studies on this subject.

Given the dearth of women in leadership positions in sport, an understanding of the learning and development opportunities of those who have reached such positions can provide indications that can pave the way for more women. Further studies in different sports in the Brazilian context are encouraged, allowing for a set of information that brings singularities of trajectories and similar characteristics of the training path that favor clearer guidelines for the development of female coaches in the country.



## Financing

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