

THE CONCEPT OF DUAL CAREER

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Abstract: The interest in issues related to the dual career of students or employees who are also athletes is increasingly significant in Europe. When we talk about a dual career, it refers to an individual who is an athlete and has another career at the same time. On the one hand, there is their role as an athlete, which relates to the sport in which they compete. On the other hand, there is their academic or professional career. A dual career refers to the integration and balancing of an athletic profession with education and/or work. (Geranosova & Ronkainen, 2015). Support provision across sports and nations remains inconsistent, despite increased awareness and acceptance of the importance of dual career support for athletes (Ryba et al., 2020). It can be difficult for an athlete to continue their education while participating in high-performance sports. We are aware that the demands for athletic performance in elite sports are increasing in the modern era. Athletes can experience extreme pressure as a result, often having to decide between achieving their full athletic potential and earning a respectable degree for their post-athletic careers (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000)¹. Since the athlete and the student/employee follow two parallel training paths and involve different professionals who teach the athlete at the same time, in this study we will show through theoretical considerations based on the analysis of the scientific literature and through practical experiences based on a concrete example with the Macedonian women's football team. representation, that the dual career is a field of research in development and has a multidisciplinary character. For the purposes of this research, an anonymous questionnaire containing 20 questions was prepared and answered by the Macedonian women's national football team. The obtained results will be extensively presented in the following text. Considering the fact that the Macedonian national teams do not have professional contracts with the Football Federation of S. Macedonia (with the exception of a few who play outside of the country), and most of them are studying or working, we have drawn conclusions according to which you can see the current situation and how female soccer players manage their dual careers. The holistic approach of this study aims to present the dual careers of athletes and emphasize the necessary support of both, their athletic and non-athletic lives in a balanced and interconnected manner. This approach recognizes that an athlete is not only defined by their sporting performance but also by their personal development, academic or professional ambitions, social relationships, and mental well-being. A holistic approach values the athlete's overall well-being, seeing them as a whole, multi-faceted person, not just a performer.

Keywords: dual career, education, work, women's national football team

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, the topic of athletes with two careers is getting more and more attention. The European Union (EU) has emphasized the value of supporting professional athletes both during and after their careers over the past three years through targeted programs and policy initiatives supported by funding. Because of the athlete's dual status as a professional and a student pursuing a university degree, a special system is necessary that can teach, support, and guide him in both endeavors. Universities, as educational institutions that want to dedicate part of their resources to these athletes, are aware that they need to concentrate on certain organizational and logistical issues in addition to the unique and special content of their curricula related to teaching activities (A., Sánchez 2017). Top athletes face a significant decision regarding their future after high school: whether to pursue university studies, commit to athletic careers, or find a way to balance both aspirations. The aim of the dual career is to combine academic studies with high-level sports, which is an important step for any young talent. Since 2012, the European Commission has championed the "European Athlete Student Dual Career Programme" (EAS), which aims to provide elite student-athletes with the opportunity to seamlessly integrate their top sporting ambitions with their educational pursuits. , without overloading. Institutions and educational systems that manage both sports and academics are currently under

review, as it seems unproductive to discuss effective integration between the two areas when skills acquired in one domain have no value or serve as resources in the other domain.

2. AIM

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the personal experiences of the Macedonian women's national football team as athletes who have a dual career. As a national context that has not been examined in previous research on dual careers in our country, this study has the potential to bring new culture-specific knowledge about the career trajectories of athletes and the role of education and/or work while having a sports career. The following text will present the key findings in an attempt to assess the dual career situation of the Macedonian women's national football team, with recommendations for research and implementation of dual career support programs in our country.

3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Over the past ten years, dual careers have gained attention in sports career studies worldwide. Athletes' individual experiences with multiple careers have also been the subject of an expanding number of European studies. Platts and Smith (2009) in their study investigated the welfare and education of young English professional football players. They contended that football-related subcultural values including globalization, commercialization, and anti-academic sentiments might reduce the effectiveness of tactics used to improve athletes' training and education. According to Sørensen and Christensen (2009), studied how young soccer players in Denmark balanced their obligations to both sports and education. According to the study, athletes felt pressured by outside forces to finish their studies even if they were highly drawn to playing top football. Good academic skills, social support, and a short commute (distance) between home, school, and the club were determined to be the main facilitators of multiple careers.

McGillivray (2006) discovered that as the likelihood of a stable football-related income declined, Scottish football players placed a greater value on schooling. Additionally, it was discovered that a dual career assistance program encouraged professional football players to continue their schooling while playing the game.

4. CONTENT

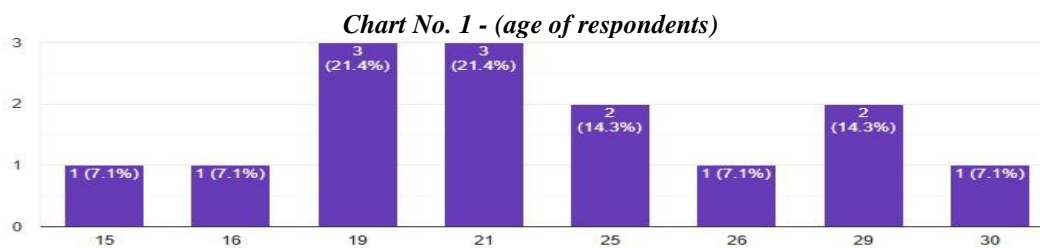
Participants in this study were 14 Macedonian female football players, members of the national team, who are currently facing a dual career, and one of them is also a mother. The sample of respondents is small due to the state of women's football in N. Macedonia. Several of the national team players who play abroad have professional contracts, which is not the case with those who play in the country. They all answered an anonymous questionnaire that contained 20 questions, grouped into 8 groups, as follows:

1. Demographic data
2. Impact on athletic performance
3. Impact on second career study/work
4. Time management and workload
5. Well-being and stress levels
6. Support systems
7. Career goals and future planning
8. Open-mindedness

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting the questionnaire and processing the data, we can present the following analysis of the results:

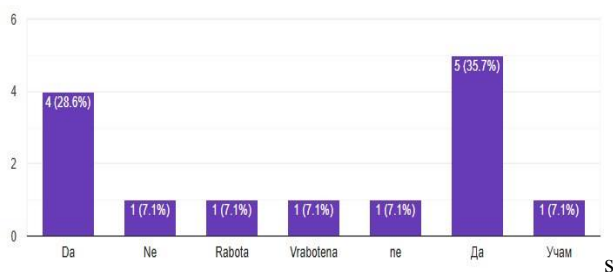
1. The first group of questions contains data on age, years of training, years as a members of the national team, whether they have a professional contract, and whether they are in high school, college, or employed.



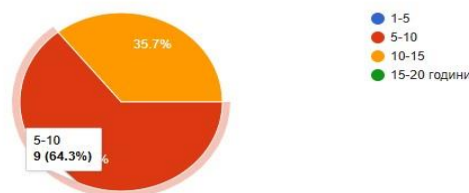
Source: authors' research

The age ranges from 15 to 30 years. Obtaining such a result is based on the small number of women's clubs in North Macedonia, the small number of registered female footballers, and therefore some of them, even though they are 15 and 16 years old, play for all national teams. Nine of them (64.3%) have been training football for 5-10 years, and five or 35.7% for 10-15 years with membership in the national team for 1 to 13 years, of which only two of those who answered the questionnaire stated that they have a professional contract, which also coincides with the data obtained from Chart No 2, where it can be seen that only two of them are not working/studying at the time of filling out the questionnaire, but have previously completed higher education while also being part of the national team and therefore answering the questions.

Chart No.2 - (working/studying)



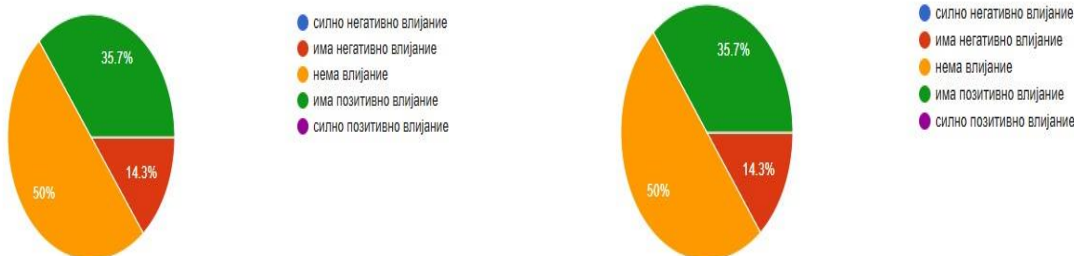
Pie No.1 - (years in the national team)



Source: authors' research

2. The second group of questions can be used to see the impact of a dual career on athletic performance (on the first question), where different answers are noted: 50% have no impact, 35.7% have a positive impact, and 14.3% have a negative impact, and whether they have noticed changes in their athletic performance since starting a dual career (second question), where the answers match completely, i.e. 50% answered that there is no impact, 35.7% that there is a positive impact, and 14.3% that there is a negative impact.

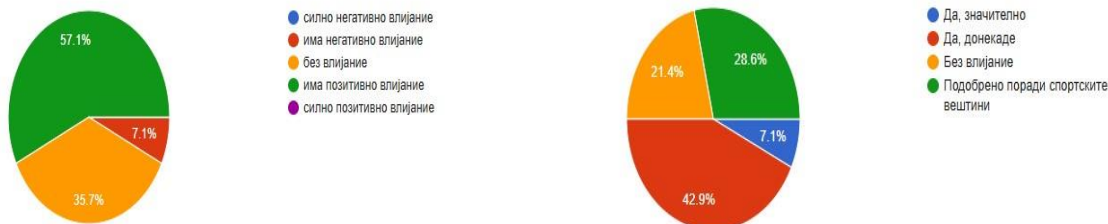
Pie No.2 – (impact of a dual career on athletic performance) Pie No.3 – (changes in their athletic performance)



Source: authors' research

3. The third group of questions concerns the impact of the sports career on their performance in their studies or work and to what extent their academic and professional goals were affected by sports commitments. According to the data presented below, it can be concluded that a larger percentage (57.1%) responded that their sports career had a positive impact, and 28.6% that they also saw an improvement in sports performance as a result of their training. On both questions, 35.7% have a neutral attitude, who believe that the sports career has no impact on their work/study, or 21.4% that their goals are not affected by sports commitments.

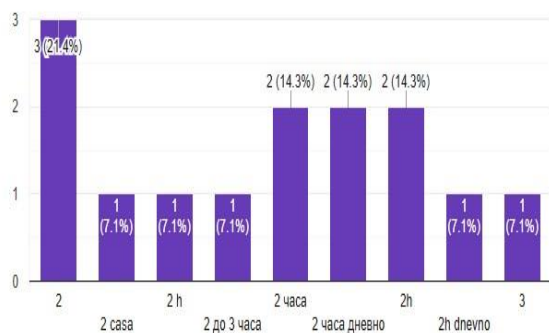
Pie No.4–(impact of the sports career in studies/work) Pie No.5-(academic and professional goals affected by sports)



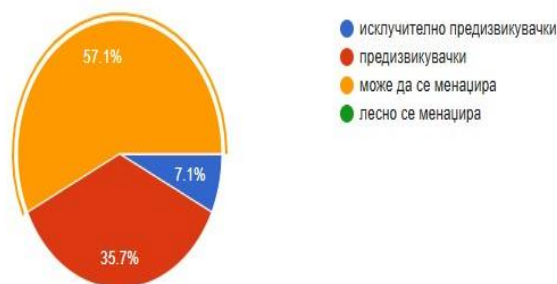
Source: authors' research

4. Time management and workload as the fourth group of questions, gives us data on the time spent on training, from 2 hours to a maximum of 3 hours, and how challenging it is to balance a dual career in terms of time management. 57.1% or 8 respondents answered that it can be managed, 35.7% (5 respondents) that it is challenging to manage and 7.1% or one respondent that it is extremely challenging to manage. Here it can be concluded that a result can be obtained from the fact that some of the respondents are still in high school and have such a large volume of responsibilities that they can balance them with their careers.

Chart No.3 – (training time)



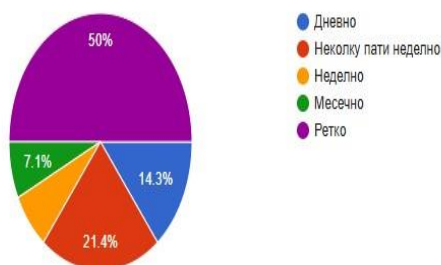
Pie No.6 – (time management)



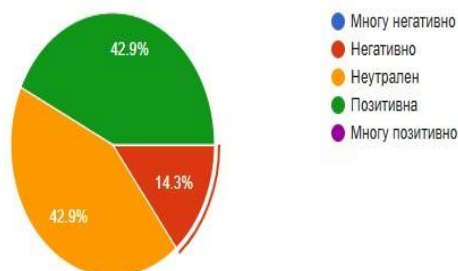
Source: authors' research

5. From the results obtained in the fifth group of questions defined as “well-being and stress levels”, it can be stated that 50% rarely feel stress about managing both roles, while the remaining 50% contain the remaining answers, i.e. that they feel stress on a daily basis (14.3%), weekly and monthly (7.1% each), and several times a week 21.4%. A positive impact on mental health was felt by 6 respondents (42.9%), while the same number of respondents - 6 remain with a neutral attitude, and 2 of them (14.3%) felt a negative impact, which does not lead to the conclusion that female footballers who have a greater volume of responsibilities more often feel a greater burden than the others.

Pie No.6 - (stress levels)



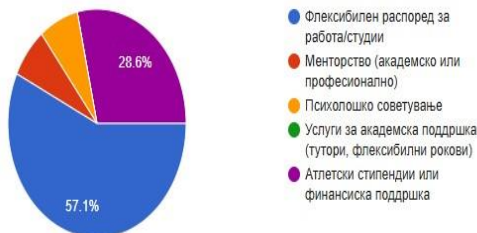
Pie No.7 – (well-being)



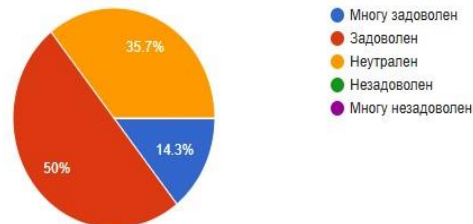
Source: authors' research

6. Support systems is the sixth group of questions that refers to access to support systems, i.e. the level of support received by the national team. Flexible work or study schedules are most frequently mentioned in the responses 57.1% (8 responses), while other support systems also include athletic scholarships or financial support (4 responses), mentoring, and psychological counseling (one response each). From the data obtained, it can be concluded that the tutoring model is not present at all, while in other European countries, it is a frequently applied model. The level of satisfaction with the support received ranges from 14.3% (very satisfied), 35.7% (neutral), to 50% (satisfied). If we compare the data obtained from these two questions, we can link the flexible work schedule to the number of satisfied respondents, and based on the number of neutral responses (five), we can conclude that changes need to be made and new support models introduced.

Pie No.8 – (support systems)



Pie No.9 – (level of satisfaction)



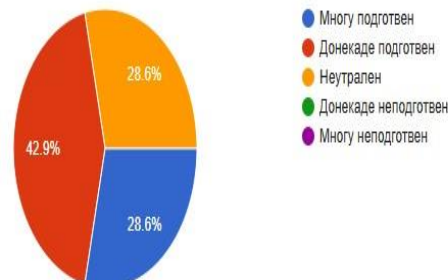
Source: authors' research

7. The seventh group of questions - Career Goals, and Future Planning, provides an overview of the answers to the questions of whether a dual career would be beneficial to them and how prepared they feel for life after their sports career. The answers to these questions show a very positive attitude and belief that a dual career would be beneficial to them (12 respondents), and there is also a high percentage of those who consider themselves very or somewhat prepared (71.5% in total) for life after their sports career. This gives us the right to freely say that having a dual career (studying/working) is very necessary after the end of their sports career, especially for those who do not have professional contracts and need financial independence.

Pie No.10 – (benefits of having a dual career)



Pie No.11 – (are they ready for life after their sports career)



Source: authors' research

8. At the end, they were given the opportunity to briefly give their opinion on how they are facing this challenge, where different answers were received. Most believe that leading a dual career is difficult, that good time organization is required, that they have little time to dedicate to themselves, or that they lack time for family or socializing with friends, there are also those who believe that there is still no appropriate and adequate solution in the educational system for representative female athletes who practice both careers in parallel, but in the end, everyone agrees that the love of sport is what leads them on the path to success and motivates them to persevere in setting goals.

6. CONCLUSION

Dual careers for athletes are a complex phenomenon, related to the individual athlete, his/her interpersonal relationships, and organizational and government policies (quote: K. Laura, G. Flavia 2016- EU study). This research is an attempt to obtain initial data on the state of dual careers in our country. Although in this case was

worked only with one national selection that is still in development, this information will serve for future research with other national selections, as a problem for which appropriate solutions need to be found, as in other European countries. From the obtained results, can be concluded that it is necessary to introduce new models of support. The small number of respondents, two of whom have professional contracts and two are still in high school, cannot give us a clear picture of the general situation in women's football, although according to the results of most questions it can be seen that half of them have a neutral or negative attitude towards support systems, balancing two careers, etc. If a comparison is made between the systems that other European countries have and our country, it can be said that according to the two documents, i.e. the EU Guidelines for Dual Careers of Athletes (EC, 2012) and the Guidelines – Promoting Dual Careers in the EU (DCG) and (EOC, 2011), which highlight the EU's supportive approach to dual careers, there is no implementation of them in our country, which would help athletes to face the challenges more easily. Dual career support is more developed in the old member states (Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Sweden, Great Britain - EC, 2012), but the newer member states also show a recognizable will to undertake activities in dual career support. Romania, Estonia, Slovenia, Poland, and Slovakia are involved in the INTECS network and support this trend, which focuses on dual careers of professional winter sports athletes (RAMK, 2010). Romania and Slovenia show similar efforts by being members of the FIFPro Online Academy, which is an online education program organized for professional football players (FIFPro n.d.), (quote: K., Geraniosova, N., Ronkainen 2015). Also, efforts are being made to bring these EU guidelines and guidelines closer to the Balkan countries. In November (1-2. 2024) in Tirana Albania, the ENSE (European Network of Sport Education) Dual Career Forum was held with the main topic - bridging borders through sports education: The Euro-Balkan-Med Perspective, where unfortunately North Macedonia did not have its representatives. The European Union supports research on the dual careers of athletes and testifies to the importance of this holistic approach (Aquilina & Henry, 2010; Platts & Smith, 2009). This research represents a small step on the path in the process of implementing new systems and models and reorganizing some existing ones by adapting them to the needs and demands of the student/athlete, first and foremost as a human being, and then as a professional.

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