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THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL ROAD CYCLING IN THE CONTEXTS OF MEDIA AND FINANCE¹

Abstract. The article aims to present the current situation of women in professional road cycling with a special focus on areas of inequality in media and finance. The research had two main objectives: (1) to analyze the situation of women in road cycling based on secondary data and (2) to gather opinions from women in the cycling community regarding the current situation of women in professional road cycling. Two research methods were used to achieve the stated research objectives: survey and desk research. The survey included 145 women between the ages of 19 and 56 who declared that they ride a road bike or gravel bike. The results indicated that the majority of female respondents were aware of existing inequalities in the areas of finance and media visibility. To explore areas of inequality in more detail, an analysis of the secondary data was also used. The results indicate significant inequalities in prize pools between men's and women's races, in favour of the first category. Furthermore, media coverage of women's cycling remains notably underrepresented.

Keywords: professional women's road cycling, gender inequality, financial dimension, media dimension, media-sports complex.

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SYTUACJA Kobiet W PROFESJONALNYM KOLARSTWIE SZOSOWYM W KONTEKŚCIE MEDIÓW I FINANSÓW

Abstrakt. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie obecnej sytuacji kobiet w profesjonalnym kolarstwie szosowym ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem obszarów nierówności w kontekście mediów i finansów. Ponadto określone zostały dwa główne cele badań: (1) przedstawienie sytuacji kobiet w kolarstwie szosowym na podstawie analizy danych zastanych oraz (2) poznanie opinii kobiet związanych ze środowiskiem kolarskim dotyczącej obecnej sytuacji kobiet w profesjonalnym kolarstwie szosowym. Do realizacji wyznaczonych celów badawczych posłużyły dwie metody badawcze: metoda ankietowa oraz desk research. W badaniu ankietowym wzięło udział 145 kobiet w wieku od 19 do 56 lat, które zadeklarowały jazdę na rowerze szosowym lub gravelu. Wyniki wskazały, że większość respondentek ma świadomość występujących nierówności w obszarze finansów i widoczności medialnej. W celu bardziej precyzyjnego zbadania obszarów nierówności wykorzystano również analizę danych zastanych. Wyniki wskazują, na znaczące nierówności w wysokości puli nagród w wyścigach mężczyzn i kobiet, na korzyść pierwszej kategorii oraz niedoreprezentowanie treści medialnych dotyczących kolarstwa kobiet.

Słowa kluczowe: profesjonalne kolarstwo szosowe kobiet, nierówności płciowe, wymiar finansowy, wymiar medialny, *media-sports complex*.

1. Introduction

In 2023, Demi Vollering won the Tour de France Femmes, earning a prize of 50,000 euros, while the winner of the men's edition of the Tour de France (Jonas Vingegaard) received 500,000 euros. This represents a tenfold difference in prize money, despite both being one of the world's most lucrative and recognizable cycling races.

The situation of women in sports can be examined in various contexts, such as, competition organization, working conditions, media, and finance. This article presents the situation of women in sports, specifically focusing on road cycling, and considers the roles of media and finance in this regard. Women's road cycling is not a frequently researched subject, although some publications cover and describe some aspects of women's cycling (e.g. Ryder 2021; Ryder, Mc Lachlan, McDonald 2021). In her thesis, Ryder highlights the dominance of men in professional road cycling, both in terms of the preponderance of male riders and the significant male dominance in the sport's power structures (e.g., governing bodies of clubs, associations, federations and sports organizations). Ryder also notes further inequalities in women's cycling: fewer races, significantly lower wages, and fewer sports clubs. The second publication focuses primarily on the financial conditions of the riders, addressing issues such as health insurance, equipment, and visa costs, which are often borne by the riders themselves. Additionally, interviews with female cyclists reveal the sexism that athletes frequently encounter in their work. The article aims to partially address the scientific gap in this area by describing

the current situation of female riders and pointing out areas that need to be changed for women's cycling to gain better development opportunities.

The article is divided into four subsections. The first subsection highlights the inseparability of sports and the media, analyzing selected studies on the representation of women's sports in the media. The second subsection is dedicated to the research methodology. The third subsection describes the financial situation of women in road cycling, while the fourth discusses it in the media context. The final part of this article focuses on discussion and concluding thoughts.

2. Media-sport complex and the representation of women's sports in the media

The choice of the research area was not accidental, and the selected dimensions (media and financial) are closely related, as explained by the concept of the media-sport complex, created by Sut Jhally in 1984. The researcher pointed out the commercial and ideological symbiosis between sports and the media (Jhally 1984). According to this concept, for a sport to gain popularity and visibility in the public spaces, it must receive greater media exposure. However, achieving this requires sponsorship, which in turn demands access to the necessary financial resources. This creates a vicious circle: a sport without a media presence cannot attract sponsors, leading to limited financial resources, which further limits media visibility.

In addition, the media area interested me because of the overrepresentation of men's sports media coverage and the underrepresentation of women's sports.

The media exacerbates the lack of visibility of women in sports with less frequent and much shorter coverage of women's events. Men's achievements dominate articles, television broadcasts, radio, or websites (e.g., Antunovic 2021; Cooky et al. 2021; Cranmer et al. 2014; Musto et al. 2017). Research on sports coverage in traditional media confirms the overrepresentation of male sports content. In Poland, research conducted by Dziubiński, Organista, and Mazur (2019) between 2010 and 2013 analyzed 2,997 articles published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Out of the analyzed articles, the substantial majority (84%) concerned men's sports, while only 12% covered women's sports. Additionally, more than half of the articles were related to men's football, which is not surprising considering it is the national sport of Poland. The Polish study also showed the dominance of male athletes in new media (Organista, Halter-Bogołębska 2016).

Research conducted longitudinally since 1989 approximately every five years by Cooky, Messner, and Musto (Cooky et al. 2010, 2013, 2015; Messner et al. 1993, 1996, 2003, 2006; Musto et al. 2017) provides substantial knowledge about the marginalization of women's sports. Until 2014, the research focused solely on television sports content. News segments and sports reviews were recorded on local television stations in Los Angeles (KCBS, KNBC, and KABC), the research

team also recorded the SportsCenter broadcasts on ESPN. However, in 2019, two new sources of sports information were additionally analyzed – daily online sports newsletters (cbssports.com, nbc sports.com, ESPN.com, espnW.com) and content posted on social media by official television networks accounts on Twitter (@cbssports, @nbc sports, @ESPN, @espnW). The results indicate that the airtime for women’s sports remains low, constituting 5.1% on TV news and 5.7% on SportsCenter in 2019. Moreover, coverage of women’s sports on online and social media, excluding platforms specifically dedicated to women’s sports (espnW), mirrors the level of airtime on TV news and SportsCenter. When researchers included content from espnW, media coverage increased to 8.7% for daily newsletters and 10.2% on Twitter. It was also noted that the coverage continues to be dominated by the men’s “Big Three” of football, basketball, and baseball. Moreover, when a story about women’s sports appears on television, *it is usually a case of “one and done,” a single women’s sports story obscured by a cluster of men’s stories that precede it, follow it, and are longer in length* (Cooky et al. 2021: 1). In addition, the way women’s sports are reported has been transformed over the years. Studies conducted in the late 20th century (1989, 1993, 1999) *revealed that women’s sports, women athletes, and even women spectators were habitually insulted as objects of derision, trivialization, infantilization and humorous sexualization* (Cooky et al. 2021: 12). By 2004 and 2009, there was a noticeable decline in humorous sexualization and overt insults directed at women’s sports, but there was an increased emphasis on the roles of women athletes (as mothers, wives, and girlfriends), rendering less visible those women athletes who had a non-heteronormative sexual orientation or were childless. Since 2014, a new phenomenon called gender-bland sexism, has emerged in the way women’s sports are presented in the media (Musto et al. 2017). Gender-bland sexism, as explained by the authors, is the phenomenon where commentators cover women’s sports in a monotone voice, displaying far less excitement and involvement compared to their coverage of men’s sports, making women’s coverage seem boring and rendering their accomplishments as less impressive and interesting than men’s (Musto et al. 2017).

The marginalization of women’s sports in the media means they receive less funding than men’s sports. In the 2023 Forbes list of the world’s highest-paid athletes, only one woman, Serena Williams, ranked 49th on the list of 50. Forbes rankings from 2021 to 2023 consistently show that the highest earnings predominantly come from men in sports such as football, basketball, golf, boxing, and tennis. For women, tennis is the primary source of high earnings, but golf, gymnastics, and basketball also appear. In 2022, Naomi Osaka topped the list of the world’s highest-paid female athletes with \$51.1 million, while Cristiano Ronaldo led among men with \$115 million (Birnbaum, Knight 2023; Knight 2023). The findings underscore the significant gender pay gap and show that even the biggest female sports stars earn significantly less than men.

3. Methodology

The analysis of the literature on the subject concludes that women in road cycling are not treated equally to men. Based on this, two main research objectives were formulated: (1) to present the situation of women in road cycling based on an analysis of secondary data, and (2) to gather opinions from women within the cycling community regarding the current state of women in professional road cycling.

Two research methods were used in this study: the survey method and desk research. The desk research method was used to collect and analyze the secondary data on professional road cycling in the contexts of finance and media. The data primarily comes from online sports magazines, the official Union Cycliste International (UCI) website, articles, and specific regulations (roadbook) regarding the organization of cycling races. I utilized data gathered from online magazines, the UCI website, and roadbooks to conduct a quantitative comparison of the financial aspects between men and women in road cycling. Meanwhile, data collected from articles were used to provide statistics on the length of broadcasts and viewership levels of women's and men's competitions. Data was sourced by entering the relevant phrase into web browsers such as Google, Firefox, and Yahoo.

For the survey method, the research tool was an online questionnaire designed to capture the opinions of women associated with the road cycling community (those who ride road or gravel, follow cycling races, or are interested in road cycling) regarding the situation of women in road cycling. Out of the 13 survey questionnaire questions, six were used for the article. The survey was conducted in April 2023 and distributed through social media, primarily Facebook and Instagram. The survey link was posted in cycling groups and directly sent to female cyclists. The sample selection criteria were: self-identification as a woman, and riding a road or gravel bike. The selection process did not impose specific riding criteria, allowing respondents to engage in biking recreationally, as amateurs, or professionally. The declaration by respondents about riding road or gravel bikes increased the likelihood that they participated in group rides specifically dedicated to road cycling and that, as a result, they might have been more interested in professional cycling, such as following it on social media, watching races. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. A total of 152 women aged between 19 and 56 completed the questionnaire. However, the analysis was limited only to responses provided by women who declared riding a road or gravel bike ($N = 145$). Gravel riding was included due to its presence in road group rides. The research findings were gathered and analyzed using Excel spreadsheets. The collected data were used for statistical comparison of the financial and media contexts between female and male athletes. Respondents' opinions on the financial situation of women in professional road cycling were assessed using their level of agreement with survey questions, measured with a Likert scale.

4. Results

4.1. Finance

An analysis of the Gender Pay Gap, or wage inequality related strictly to gender, should consider the salaries of male and female cyclists, the rewards they receive for winning competitions, and any sponsorship and advertising contracts. Due to limited access to the number of salaries associated with advertising contracts, I focused solely on the amount of awards for professional male and female cyclists in my analysis.

The inequality related to prizes between men's and women's races is significant. There is a noticeable difference in the total prize pools for men and women, with men's prize pools being up to 600% larger. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the differences in prize pool amounts between men's and women's races over several years in the World Tour races selected in terms of popularity (UCI World Tour – UWT and Women's World Tour – WWT), which have both women's and men's counterparts. It is important to emphasize that despite the differences in course distance or elevation – the effort, commitment, and skill required to win are at similar levels in both men and women.

Table 1. The amount of the prize pool in multistage World Tour races (amount in euros)

| Race | Number of stages | | 2020 | | 2021 | | 2022 | | 2023 | |
|-------------------------|------------------|----|---------|-----------|---------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
| | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M |
| Giro d'Italia | 10 | 21 | X | 1.370.000 | 50.000 | 1.377.210 | 250.000 | 1.500.000 | 250.000 | 1.500.000 |
| Santos Tour Down Under* | 3 | 5 | 105.000 | 105.000 | 105.000 | 105.000 | 105.000 | 105.000 | 105.000 | 105.000 |
| Tour de France | 8 | 21 | – | 2.293.000 | – | 2.288.450 | 250.000 | 2.282.000 | 250.000 | 2.293.000 |
| Tour de Suisse | 4 | 8 | – | X | 10.575 | 146.450 | 33.490 | 148.250 | X | 130.100 |
| UAE Tour | 4 | 7 | – | X | – | X | – | 180.000 | 100.000 | 300.000 |
| Vuelta a España | 7 | 21 | – | 1.120.000 | – | 1.382.355 | – | 1.112.640 | 130.020 | 1.118.205 |

“W” – Women's, “M” – Man's, “X” – lack of information, “–” no female version of the race
 Bold font – 1st women's edition of the race, * – amount stated in Australian dollars

Source: own elaboration based on online sources (given in bibliography)

The Santos Tour Down Under is the only multi-stage race to offer equal prize pools for men's and women's cycling races. The breakthrough came in 2018, when the Australian Ministry of Sport allocated AUD 90,000 to bring the women's prize pool up to par with the men's, making Australia a forerunner in equal prize funding in the sport. Previously, the women's prize pool was AUD 15,000, thanks to the ministry's budget, it increased to about AUD 105,000 (Gailberger 2018). It is also worth noting that the Women's Tour Down Under gained UCI ProSeries status in 2020 and UCI World Tour status in 2023 – the highest UCI status. The Tour de France, Giro d'Italia, and Vuelta a España, known as the Grand Tours, are undoubtedly among the most prestigious races globally, attracting media attention, sponsors, and viewers. These races also have the highest prize pool disparities between men's and women's cycling at 89%, 83%, and 88% respectively.

Table 2. The amount of the prize pool in one-day World Tour races (amount in euros)

| Race | 2020 | | 2021 | | 2022 | | 2023 | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M |
| Amstel Gold Race | 10.000 | 40.000 | 10.000 | 40.000 | 40.000 | 40.000 | 40.000 | 40.000 |
| Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race | 44.000 | 44.000 | P | P | P | P | 44.000 | 44.000 |
| La Flèche Wallonne | 18.490 | 40.000 | 18.490 | 40.000 | 18.490 | X | 18.490 | 40.000 |
| Liège–Bastogne–Liège | X | 50.000 | 10.505 | 50.000 | 22.020 | 50.000 | 22.020 | 50.000 |
| Classic Brugge–De Panne | 7.700 | 40.000 | 7.700 | 40.000 | 40.000 | 40.000 | 40.000 | 40.000 |
| Paris–Roubaix | – | 91.000 | 7.005 | 91.000 | 50.000 | 91.000 | 49.000 | 91.000 |
| Ronde van Vlaanderen | 5.765 | 50.000 | 5.765 | 50.000 | 50.000 | 50.000 | 50.000 | 50.000 |
| Strade Bianche | 10.000 | 40.000 | 10.000 | 40.000 | 10.000 | 40.000 | 10.000 | 40.000 |

“P” – pandemic, “X” – lack of information, “–” no female version of the race

Source: own elaboration based on online sources (given in bibliography)

The Belgian classic, Ronde van Vlaanderen (also known as Tour of Flanders) deserves special attention and commentary. Following a wave of social protests and criticism of the race, the organizers (Flanders Classic) implemented equal prize money for both women and men starting in 2022. Additionally, from 2023, they equalized the prize pools in the other five Belgian classics in which women also participate – Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, Gent-Wevelgem, Dwars door Vlaanderen, Scheldeprijs and Brabantse Pijl. Another race offering equal prize money regardless of gender is the Australian Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race, affirming Australia's pro-woman policy. Notably the Belgian race (Brugge de Panne) and the Dutch race (Amstel Gold Race), organizers have introduced equal prize pools for professional female and male cyclists since 2022. However, the other races presented in Table 2 indicate a disparity in prize money between men and women, in favor of the first category.

At this point, I will also refer to the results of my research. The survey questionnaire included four items related to finances in professional road cycling. The collected data indicate that the vast majority of respondents (84.14%) are aware of the differences in earnings and prize money between men's and women's cycling. Additionally, a significant majority of surveyed women believe that earnings in women's cycling and team funding should change. Furthermore, addressing the issue of earnings, it is essential to mention the significant role of sponsors, who have a tangible impact on higher earnings for female cyclists. Most respondents (83.44%) believe that the number of sponsors for women's professional teams should be increased.

In anticipation of arguments attempting to justify the differences in prize pools between men's and women's races due to different organizational units, I analyzed this aspect to verify whether indeed the women's counterparts to men's races are organized by different institutions. La Vuelta a España and La Vuelta Femenina are organized by Amaury Sport Organization (ASO) in cooperation with Unipublic. ASO is also the organizer of the Tour de France, Tour de France Femmes, and the one-day classics in the men's and women's race categories: Liège–Bostogne–Liège, La Flèche–Wallonne, Paris–Roubaix. Despite being managed by the same institutions all the mentioned races exhibit significant financial disparities. The Giro d'Italia is managed by RCS Sports, while the Giro d'Italia Donne was organized by PMG Sport until 2023, and from 2024, under a changed name (Giro d'Italia Women), will be managed by RCS Sports. The same institution also organizes the UAE Tour (in cooperation with the Abu Dhabi Sports Council) and Strade Bianche – men's and women's editions, yet they do not provide equal prizes for men and women. However, other races are also under the same organizers and offer equal prizes regardless of gender, such as the Amstel Gold Race under Leo van Vliet, Bruge de Panne under KVC Panne Sportief, and Tour of Flanders managed by Flanders Classic. Given these considerations, I believe that the organizers are capable of providing equal prizes in men's and women's races, and they bear significant responsibility for changing the funding situation for women in the sport. An additional regulation to ensure equal prize pools in men's and women's races could be a requirement by the Union Cycliste International (UCI) to provide equal prizes in both categories of competition. Nevertheless, currently, such an initiative remains in the realm of utopian aspirations.

4.2. Media

When discussing the status of women in professional road cycling, it's essential to address the issue of media visibility and the role of media in promoting the sport. In 2020, the UCI established a legal regulation requiring organizers of races included in the Women's World Tour (WWT) calendar to provide 45 minutes of live broadcasting for each stage of the race (Flottorp, 2020). Failure to meet

this requirement results in the demotion of the race to .Pro² status (Jones 2022). An example of a race facing demotion due to non-compliance is the Giro d'Italia Donne, where organizers in 2020 failed to adhere to UCI requirements, resulting in the demotion of the race to 2.Pro status for the 2021 season (Frattini 2021). Although races with Pro status are not obligated to provide media coverage, the Giro Donne aimed to return to the prestigious World Tour race calendar, necessitating live coverage of the final 15 kilometres of each stage. The UCI approved this form of coverage because it fits into the broader 60-minute live package including the award ceremony, post-race interviews and race analysis (*ibid.*). Eventually, the Giro d'Italia Donne returned to the list of the most prestigious cycling races in 2022.

Most of the men's races are broadcast in their entirety and can be viewed, for example, in Poland on Eurosport, Player, and through the Global Cycling Network (GCN) platform. A report from 2019, covering 12 countries (Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States) indicates that the broadcast of each stage of the Tour de France (men) in 2019 was watched by an average of 10.52 million viewers (Van Reeth 2019). The highest viewership was recorded in France, Italy and Germany. The 2023 Tour de France Femmes attracted nearly 20 million viewers on France Télévisions (Sim 2023a). In addition, Eurosport's coverage of the race reached 15 million viewers, marking a 7.14 percent increase over the previous edition of the race (Sim 2023a). In comparison, the 2023 Tour de France attracted 42.5 million viewers on France Télévisions (Sim 2023b). Van Reeth's analysis of 75 television broadcasts of women's cycling races in 2019 (there were 65 in 2018) indicates that men's cycling races received higher viewership (see Van Reeth 2019). Figures published on the official UCI website show that during the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championships, broadcasts on France Télévisions channel attracted 1.8 million viewers (Men's Elite road races), and the Women's Elite races attracted 1 million viewers – a record since 2013 when viewership was 0.6 million viewers (UCI 2023). Belgium also saw record viewership levels, with VRT registering a viewership share of 71.4% of the men's Elite road races and 66% of the women's Elite road races (UCI 2023). Although data on the viewership of women's and men's races are not exhaustive and indicate a higher viewership level for men's races, there is a noticeable upward trend in the viewership of women's races.

The research I conducted refers to the visibility of women's cycling, considering media visibility, recognition of women's teams and their riders, and viewership of women's races. The survey questionnaire included two questions about

² The UCI distinguishes two categories of races: World Tour (UWT and WWT) and ProSeries, which are divided into: .Pro, .1 category, and .2 category. World Tour races mainly involve WorldTeams (the highest level of UCI licensing), and ProTeams can only participate in World Tour races if they are granted a "wild card" (Tyniec 2022). Approximately 70% of WorldTeam-licensed teams can compete in .Pro category races, with the rest of the teams being ProTeams and ContinentalTeams (Tyniec 2022).

race broadcasting: *Do you watch broadcasts of cycling races?* and *If yes, do you watch broadcasts of men's or women's races?* The survey results indicate that nearly 83.5% of female respondents have watched a broadcast or excerpts of some type of cycling race. Additionally, about 35% of female respondents reported that they watch cycling races several times a year, and more than 20% stated that they watch most televised cycling races. Nearly 18% of respondents indicated that they only watch excerpts of broadcast races. In response to the second question the vast majority of survey respondents (83,6%) stated that they watch both women's and men's cycling races. Nearly 14% of female respondents watch only men's races, while 2.5% claim to exclusively watch women's races.

The survey results indicate that men's UCI WorldTeams are more recognized, but the differences between the recognition of men's and women's teams are not so significant. The teams most recognized by female respondents are the men's team Bora-Hansgrohe and the women's team Canyon Sram Racing. Interestingly, women's teams affiliated with men's teams (Movistar Team Women, Trek-Segafredo, Team Jumbo Visma Women, or EF-Education-Tibco-SVB) are less recognized. In addition, female respondents were asked to select from a pool of the 30 most popular male and female cyclists they recognize. The results indicated a tendency for female respondents to recognize Polish riders and female athletes more often: Michał Kwiatkowski, Rafał Majka, Katarzyna Niewiadoma, and Marta Lach. Male cyclists enjoy greater recognition, with more than half of the female respondents recognizing 11 out of 15 listed male pool riders and four out of 15 listed female cyclists. The lower recognition of female athletes may be attributed to the lower media visibility of women's cycling compared to men's. In addition, the smaller number of fans following the achievements of the top female cycling stars may contribute to the limited presence of this discipline in the media. While high viewership rates benefit media, low ratings may make it economically unfeasible to produce content related to women's cycling. It is worth noting, however, that limited access to media content on women's cycling may further reduce viewership, as published content may not reach potential new audiences that might be interested in following women's cycling.

5. Discussion and concluding thoughts

When discussing the status of women in professional road cycling, it is crucial to emphasize the growing trend towards and equalizing prize pools between women's and men's races. Nevertheless, most races of the UCI Women's World Tour calendar still offer significantly lower prize money, directly leading to lower salaries for female athletes. Moreover, women's earnings are directly affected by the visibility of women's cycling, characterized by a lower level than men's cycling. Greater visibility attracts more sponsors, advertising partners, viewers, and fans, thereby

enhancing the sport's popularity and resulting in longer and more frequent broadcasts of competitions. Although there are legal regulations for media coverage of UCI Women's World Tour races they typically cover only 45 minutes of racing per day, while the races themselves often span from two to four or even six hours, depending on the route's distance and difficulty. The literature presented in the introduction confirms the media marginalization of women's sports. The infrequent and shorter broadcasts of women's sports make it challenging to popularize sports involving women and to close the gender gap.

Some races did not have their first women's editions until after 2020. For instance, the Tour de Suisse Women and Paris–Roubaix Women premiered in 2021, Tour de France in 2022, and UAE Tour Women and La Vuelta Femenina in 2023. While the emergence of new races for women reflects an upward trend in the development of professional women's cycling, current salary discrepancies and the significantly shorter number of stages undermine their standing in the cycling community, perpetuating the dominance of men in the sport. In addition, discussions arise regarding the duration of women's events, with some proponents arguing that women should not receive equal prize money as men due to the shorter duration of their events. However, this argument is countered by examples such as major tennis tournaments. Women play two sets and men three, and therefore spend more time on the court, yet receive equal financial rewards. This underscores the argument that earnings should be determined by the length of competition. However, media exposure and commercialization play a major role in shaping athletes' earnings, forcing sports to adapt to and conform to the prevailing market rules (Jakubowska 2012: 194–195). The media popularized individual sports through the viewing rate, which leads to gender disparity in financial terms (*ibid*). Consequently, the highest earnings are achieved by the most popular athletes, whose achievements and sports attract high audience viewership (Jakubowska 2012: 194–195).

The survey revealed a high level of awareness and knowledge among respondents regarding the situation of female road cyclists. The majority of respondents are aware of the inadequate funding in women's cycling and believe this should change by increasing prize pools in races, securing more sponsors, and providing better funding for teams. As members of the cycling community, surveyed women are interested in professional road cycling for both men's and women's events with some following most race broadcasts and others watch at least a few times a year. Additionally, some female respondents watch excerpts of race broadcasts, focusing on the most important and spectacular parts of the races. However, respondents find it more difficult to recognize female athletes, likely because male athletes dominate media coverage and female athletes are mentioned less often.

Based on my research I identified actions to address financial inequalities and enhance the visibility of women's road cycling in the sport. Firstly, increasing media coverage of women's cycling by expanding coverage of women's races and news in traditional and social media platforms is essential. Additionally, conducting

campaigns to promote women's cycling could help popularize the sport among the public. A crucial aspect is establishing top-down regulations to ensure equal pay and rewards for both women and men, along with developing a strategy to provide greater financial support for women's teams. Increasing the number of cycling clubs dedicated to women is also important to give them better chances for career development. Achieving equality in terms of media presence, and publicity, and increasing the visibility of women's sports events compared to men's events can contribute to convincing a broader audience that women's competition in sports is just as interesting and exciting as that among men.

The publication aimed to fill at least in part the scientific gap in the selected area. To deepen the research on the situation of women in professional road cycling, it would be worthwhile to interview professional female cyclists, compare the coverage between women's and men's cycling in the new media, as well as collect data on viewership levels for individual races on the UCI World Tour calendar.

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