

Fitness Professionals: Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

The increasing number of fitness professionals is one of the results associated with the growth of this industry. Understanding the sociodemographic characteristics and different variables related to the intervention of fitness professionals in Portugal will increase the knowledge about this work activity and can also contribute to the improvement of their working and living conditions. This study aims to carry out a narrative review in order to identify the main characteristics of fitness professionals. This identification will allow the building of the conceptual bases necessary for the construction of an instrument that will help to characterize these professionals. The research obtained seven results, three of them reports and four descriptive studies. Most of the characterization variables of fitness professionals refer to age, gender, place of residence and qualifications regarding sociodemographic aspects. Regarding aspects related to the profession, the professionals were characterized mainly in terms of hours of work, salary and the functions performed. Based on the results, the main characteristics were identified and allow us to propose a new evaluation instrument: a questionnaire that will characterize fitness professionals in Portugal - "VIDAPROFIT".

Keywords: fitness professionals, narrative review, sociodemographic data, characteristics of the profession

INTRODUCTION

The number of places that provide fitness services and of participants of this type of activity has increased sharply (EHFA, 2012). Fitness related professions have grown in response to this increase (Papadimitriou & Karteroliotis, 2000). The provision of a quality service that leads to the satisfaction of its participants is necessary, with industry professionals playing a very active role in this regard (Viallon et al., 2003). The objective of this study is to carry out a narrative review on the characteristics of fitness professionals (FPs), revealing the most used variables for this purpose. From this narrative review we intend, along with other methodological steps, to construct and validate the questionnaire "VIDAPROFIT" (questionnaire characterizing the FPs in Portugal).

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MATERIAL AND METHODS

For this study, studies and reports were searched on the databases MEDLINE/PubMed, SCOPUS, DIALNET, Web of Science and Google Scholar from the year 2000 to the present day, as well as on the websites of relevant international organizations of the fitness industry. The keywords used were "fitness professionals", "fitness instructors", "exercise professionals", "exercise physiologists", "exercise experts" and "personal trainers (PTs)". The words "report", "profile", "characterization" and "characteristics" were also associated. The selection of the studies was based on the following inclusion criteria: a) reports and b) descriptive studies. The exclusion criteria established were articles written in other languages besides English, Spanish or Portuguese.

RESULTS

The research strategy led to seven results, of which three were reports and four were descriptive studies (Table 1).

Table 1 – Reports & Descriptive Studies

Reports (name/year/country)	Sample Results
<i>Profile of the Fitness Industry in Australia</i> 2016 Australia	Sample: 27500 FPs 56% women and 44% men Average age = 32 years old Most worked in Victoria 32% FPs full-time Wage per week, gross = AUD 692 Majority did not have a contract of employment Majority had certificate level III/IV, 21% bachelor degree and 14% with graduation in the sport area FPs with more qualifications had more working hours Majority worked in chains of gyms, own business or paid income.
<i>Salary Report for Health & Fitness Professionals</i> 2013 United States of America (USA)	Sample: More than 3000 FPs 75% of FPs had bachelor degree or academic background Most functions performed by the FPs were PT and instructor of group lessons (59% of the total of the two) Health benefits, medical leave and holidays are more frequent in more educated FPs Since 2010, the hourly and annual value earned by FPs has remained similar, with the exception of those who have achieved advanced certifications.
<i>Report about FPs 2018</i> Portugal	Sample: Approximately 14000 FPs 62% men and 38% women Average age = 35 years old 50% live in Lisbon and Porto About 65% of the foreigners are Brazilian and about 25% are from the European Union.
Descriptive Studies (name/year/country)	Sample Results
<i>Personal Trainer Demographics, Current Practice Trends and Common Trainee Injuries</i> 2016 USA	Sample: 605 PTs 54.5% women and 45.5% men Average age = 39.8 years old 64.2% had a degree, 41.6% had a master's degree and 89% had a certificate in PT The most common certifications were taught by ACSM (59.2%) and NSCA (28.9%) Average experience = 13.4 years Weekly hours of work = 32.4 hours The profession of PT represented the main job for 84.03%.
<i>PTs profile in the city of Caçador</i> 2013 Brasil	Sample: 26 PTs 57.7% were under 30 years old and were single 30.8% were graduates in physical education and 42.3% were postgraduates Places where they worked were gyms/health clubs (88.5) and studios (11.5%) Value / hour earned in gyms / health clubs was, for 50% of the sample, up to 35 reais, for 30.8% 26–45 reais and for 19.3% 46–55 reais Amount/hour outside the gym ranged from 36 to 45.
<i>Chronicling the Transient Nature of Fitness Employees: An organizational Culture Perspective</i> 2012 Canada	Sample: 436 FPs 76.7% women and 22.8% men Average age = 37.6 years old 11.4% worked in a women's exclusive gym / health club, 70.3% in a mixed gym/health club and 17.4% in a hybrid club (facilities with a separate women's area) 45.9% worked in a fitness chain and 36.1% in a non-chain gym / health club 21.2% worked in the management area, 27.2% were PTs, 39.5% were fitness instructors.
<i>Professional Profile of workers at fitness centers in Spain</i> 2015 Spain	Sample = 1662 FPs 49.3% women and 50.7% men Average age = 32.1 years old Average experience = 9.3 years Majority were located in Madrid (19%) 61.3% reported having another job 24.3% degree in physical activity/sport and 31.2% have technical courses 54.9% of FPs had a fixed-term contract and 5.8% one of indefinite duration, 13.5% were self-employed workers and 1 in 10 had no contractual

relationship | Average hours of work per week = 27.2 hours | Working hours varied between fixed discontinuous (23.3%), continuous fixed (21.1%) and flexible (14.7%) | 40% perform their functions in gyms belonging to chains and the rest in non-chain gyms | There were significant differences between 1) age and performed function in the coordinator function, which had a significantly higher age in relation to the other functions, 2) training and performed function, with coordinators, PTs and room exercise instructors possessing degrees in the areas of physical activity/sport | The role of group classes instructor was mostly performed by women, presenting FPs with less academic training in relation to the other functions presented.

DISCUSSION|CONCLUSIONS

Most of the characterization variables of the FPs refer to sociodemographic aspects such as age, gender, place of residence and training. Regarding aspects related to their profession, the professionals were characterized mainly in terms of hours of work, salary and functions performed. This review allowed us to verify that there is a set of sociodemographic and other variables, related to specific aspects of FPs, that are presented in several studies/reports that can also be useful for making inferences about fitness professionals in different countries. This review intends to serve as a basis for the definition of variables that will constitute the questionnaire “VIDAPROFIT” (questionnaire characterizing FPs in Portugal), and thus contribute to an increasing knowledge about these professionals and allow the subsequent improvement of their working and living conditions.

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