

Exploring the aspirations of women working in Outdoor Education in the UK

Background and Introduction

- Women continue to be a minority in Outdoor Education, especially in terms of senior leadership roles and high-level outdoor leadership National Governing Body qualifications:
 - Only **17%** of the general membership of **The Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC)** are female, and only **25%** of their executive committee are female (Webster, 2018).
 - Only **26%** of **The Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL)** Accredited Practitioners are women (Webster, 2018).
 - The following are the percentages of registered female leaders (Mountain Training and British Canoeing websites, 2021):
 - **Mountain Leader – 13.8%**
 - **Rock Climbing Instructor – 11.5%**
 - **Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor – 9.9%**
 - **British Mountain Guide – 5.8%**
 - **British Canoeing-endorsed Canoe Guide – 6.7%**
- As the statistics show, very few women reach senior management positions within national Outdoor Education companies or achieve the higher-level outdoor leadership qualifications.
- So far, research into the subject suggests that this is because family-life can be incompatible with an Outdoor Education career however, this does not explain why more women do not make it to office-based senior management roles.



Aims and Objectives

- The aim of this study was to explore the experiences and aspirations of women currently working in the Outdoor Education industry in the UK in order to establish if there are any common reasons that women do not pursue long-term careers in the outdoors and high-level outdoor leadership qualifications.
- A secondary purpose of the study is to identify areas and topics for further research.



Sophie White 1903537
BMOE 7004



Methods

Due to the time-frame, the scope of this study was relatively small and is to serve as a starting point for further research. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data that was then subjected to a narrative analysis to identify common themes and experiences.

Setting and Participants:

- 4 women, aged between late 20s and early 40s, who are currently working, or have recently been working, in Outdoor Education all over the UK

Data Collection:

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore their experiences in the industry so far and their aspirations for the future

Ethical Considerations:

- The interviews were conducted in line with institutional ethical considerations, and consent forms were collected to demonstrate the participants thoroughly understood their rights, due to the personal nature of some of the topics of discussion (i.e., sexual harassment, discrimination, pregnancy and child-rearing, etc.)

Initial Findings and Conclusion

- 75% of participants had experienced some form of harassment or discrimination due to their sex
- The women who trained and worked in outdoor centres with 50/50 gender splits experienced and witnessed less sexist behaviour and discrimination
- 100% of participants agreed that women delay taking qualification assessments until they are sure they will pass, which sometimes never happens
- 0% of the women are pursuing high-level careers in Outdoor Education (i.e., management), and the lack of female senior management in Outdoor Education was identified as a problem
- All participants identified *confidence* and *societal culture* as a key barriers to higher-level qualification and career prospects for women in the Outdoor Education industry
- 100% of participants agreed that female-only training, assessment and recruitment could be counterproductive

Conclusion:

Women can be dissuaded from pursuing long-term careers and high-level qualifications in Outdoor Education due to a lack of confidence, which can be traced back to experiencing sexist and discriminatory behaviour from others in the industry and in society in general.

