ТЕОРІЯ І МЕТОДИКА ПІДГОТОВКИ СПОРТСМЕНІВ

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ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPORTANCE OF KEY FACTORS IN ATHLETES' SOCIAL ADAPTATION BY SPECIALISTS IN THE FIELD OF PHYSICAL CULTURE AND SPORT

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Annotation

Introduction. Athletes' social adaptation is an important component of their personal and professional development throughout the entire sporting career. It is associated with numerous individual, social, and organizational factors. However, specialists' perceptions regarding the role of these factors in athletes' social adaptation remain insufficiently explored. **The Purpose of the study** was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the views of specialists in the field of physical culture and sport regarding **factors associated with athletes' social adaptation**. **Research methods.** The study employed analysis and generalization of scientific literature, system analysis, an anonymous online survey, and methods of mathematical statistics. A total of 150 specialists working in the field of physical culture and sport in Ukraine participated in the survey. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's chi-square (χ^2) test, and Cramér's V coefficient were applied. Statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$. **Results.** Most specialists identified athletes' age (89.3%), level of athletic achievement (91.3%), social support from family and close social networks (96.0%), sport-specific characteristics (71.3%), and cultural differences (66.7%) as important factors associated with athletes' social adaptation. Gender-related factors received less consistent assessments (54.0%). A statistically significant association was identified between specialists' professional positions and their perceptions of the role of cultural differences in athletes' social adaptation ($\chi^2(6) = 56.35$; $p < 0.001$; Cramér's V = 0.43). **Conclusions.** The findings indicate that specialists perceive athletes' social adaptation as a multifactorial process associated with the interaction of individual, social, and organizational factors. The results may be used to improve athlete support

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programmes, enhance professional training of specialists, and develop comprehensive approaches to supporting athletes at different stages of their sporting careers.

Keywords: career transition; social support; social integration; intercultural competence; sport environment; athlete support.

ОЦІНКА ФАХІВЦЯМИ СФЕРИ ФІЗИЧНОЇ КУЛЬТУРИ І СПОРТУ ЗНАЧУЩОСТІ КЛЮЧОВИХ ЧИННИКІВ СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ АДАПТАЦІЇ СПОРТСМЕНІВ

Анотація

Вступ. Соціальна адаптація спортсменів є важливою складовою їхнього особистісного та професійного розвитку протягом усієї спортивної кар'єри. На її перебіг впливають численні індивідуальні, соціальні та організаційні чинники, однак у сучасних умовах недостатньо дослідженими залишаються уявлення фахівців щодо ролі цих чинників у процесі адаптації спортсменів. **Мета дослідження.** Провести комплексний аналіз уявлень фахівців у сфері фізичної культури і спорту щодо чинників, пов'язаних із соціальною адаптацією спортсменів. **Методи дослідження.** Використано аналіз і узагальнення наукової літератури, системний аналіз, соціологічне опитування (анонімне онлайн-анкетування) та методи математичної статистики. У дослідженні взяли участь 150 фахівців сфери фізичної культури і спорту України. Для аналізу даних застосовано описову статистику, критерій χ^2 Пірсона та коефіцієнт V Крамера при рівні статистичної значущості $p < 0,05$. **Результати.** Встановлено, що більшість фахівців вважає вік спортсмена (89,3%), рівень спортивної майстерності (91,3%), соціальну підтримку з боку сім'ї та близького оточення (96,0%), особливості виду спорту (71,3%) і культурні відмінності (66,7%) важливими чинниками, пов'язаними із соціальною адаптацією спортсменів. Менш одностайними були оцінки ролі гендерних особливостей (54,0%). Виявлено статистично значущий зв'язок між професійною посадою фахівців та їхніми уявленнями щодо ролі культурних відмінностей у соціальній адаптації спортсменів ($\chi^2(6) = 56,35$; $p < 0,001$; V Крамера = 0,43). **Висновки.** Результати дослідження свідчать, що фахівці розглядають соціальну адаптацію спортсменів як багатофакторний процес, пов'язаний із поєднанням індивідуальних, соціальних та організаційних чинників. Отримані дані можуть бути використані при розробленні програм підтримки спортсменів, удосконаленні професійної підготовки фахівців і формуванні комплексного підходу до забезпечення соціальної адаптації спортсменів на різних етапах спортивної кар'єри.

Ключові слова: кар'єрний перехід; соціальна підтримка; соціальна інтеграція; міжкультурна компетентність; спортивне середовище; підтримка спортсменів.

Introduction. Modern sport is an integral part of global society, engaging millions of people worldwide. Sports activity, especially at the professional level, requires athletes not only to possess exceptional physical qualities, technical skills, and psychological resilience, but also the ability for effective social adaptation under conditions of constant change, high pressure, and specific demands of the sporting environment. The adaptation process takes place in conditions of continuous and often unpredictable changes, extremely high competitive pressure that increases with the level of achievement, intensive training regimes, the need for frequent travel, and the specific requirements imposed by the sports environment.

The process of athletes' social adaptation is a complex, multifaceted, and dynamic phenomenon that includes their integration into social groups, assimilation of the norms and values of the sports community, as well as the ability to cope with stressful situations and adapt to new conditions arising throughout their sports careers and after their completion. Despite considerable attention to the physical, technical, and tactical aspects of athletes' training, the social dimension of their development and adaptation – especially in the context of everyday life, identity formation beyond sport, and transition to new roles – often remains underestimated and insufficiently studied. This may lead to difficulties in athletes' personal lives, reduced psychological well-being, and challenges in their further professional and social integration after the end of a sports career.

The dynamic development of elite sport continuously creates unique and often unpredictable challenges for athletes, which may affect their psychological well-being, social relationships, personal identity formation, and overall quality of life. Fundamental works by recognized Ukrainian specialists provide a basis for understanding these processes. It is worth considering in more detail the contribution of Ukrainian and foreign scholars to the understanding of sports careers and their social aspects.

V. M. Platonov is one of the leading theorists in the field of elite sport, and his works, in particular *The Modern System of Sports Training* [1] and co-authored studies [2], provide a comprehensive analysis of athletes' long-term preparation. His contribution to understanding sports

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careers and their influence on social adaptation lies in the following:

- a systemic approach to athlete preparation. V. M. Platonov considers sports training as an integral, long-term system that encompasses not only physical, technical, and tactical components, but also includes psychological and social aspects. This makes it possible to understand that social adaptation is not a separate element, but an integral part of systematic preparation that affects its effectiveness;
- the dynamics of sports form and its psychological impact. His studies on the dynamics of sports form, peaks, and declines indirectly highlight the psychological pressure and stress athletes face, which significantly affect their social interaction and need for adaptation;
- the concept of long-term preparation. His concepts cover selection, orientation, management, and control throughout the entire career pathway, providing a basis for studying adaptation needs at its different stages.

M. M. Bulatova, in co-authored works with S. N. Bubka and V. M. Platonov [2, 3], thoroughly examines the phenomenon of Olympic and professional sport, as well as the functioning of the Olympic training system. These studies expand the understanding of athletes' social adaptation in the context of:

- the place and role of Olympic sport in modern society. Olympic sport is considered an important social phenomenon that influences an individual's life, emphasizing socio-cultural aspects and the need for social adaptation to this specific culture;
- the requirements of the Olympic training system. A detailed analysis of its demands (strict regimes, interaction with numerous stakeholders) reveals unique challenges for social adaptation, as athletes must integrate into a complex social structure;
- the humanitarian dimension of Olympic sport. The studies highlight the formation of values, ethics, and personal development, which are directly related to social adaptation, promoting harmonious integration and the ability to overcome difficulties.

Co-authored works by V. M. Platonov and M. M. Bulatova provide a solid theoretical foundation, highlighting social adaptation as an integral component of long-term athlete preparation and an important aspect of functioning in Olympic and professional sport. They indirectly point to the influence of age, level of achievement, and the necessity of social support. These studies emphasize that sport is not only about physical performance but also a complex socio-psychological process.

The issue of social adaptation becomes particularly acute during and after the transition from an active sports career to post-sport life. This period, known as a "career transition," is often accompanied by significant adaptation difficulties, as athletes face the sudden loss of their habitual way of life, athletic status, source of income, and, most importantly, the identity that has been formed around sport over many years. This critical aspect has become the focus of recent studies by M. M. Pryimak [4, 5]. In her works, the author comprehensively emphasizes the need for an integrated approach to addressing issues of athletes' socio-psychological adaptation, considering this process not only after the end of a sports career but also at different stages of age-related development, namely:

- emphasizes that adaptation challenges vary depending on age and career stage [5, 6];
- focuses on identity crisis, loss of purpose, social support, and financial difficulties, highlighting the need for systematic support, including psychological counseling, career guidance, and life skills development [5, 7];
- examines how the quality and nature of social relationships (family, friends, coaches, sports community) affect an athlete's ability to adapt, emphasizing the role of strong social support [4].

In addition to these fundamental aspects, contemporary scientific literature pays considerable attention to other psychological aspects of sport, such as athlete burnout, stress management, and rehabilitation processes after injuries [8, 9]. However, despite the growing number of studies, a comprehensive understanding of the role of a wide range of individual factors in athletes' social adaptation, particularly within the Ukrainian context and the specific features of its sports system, remains insufficiently developed.

In this context, particular importance is attached to the works of L. O. Radchenko [10, 11] and V. M. Yermolova [12], which establish theoretical and methodological foundations for understanding the fundamental role of social connections and broader social capital in athletes' lives. Their studies consistently emphasize the importance of effective social networks and comprehensive support as vital resources for overcoming life challenges, enhancing psychological resilience, and ensuring successful adaptation to new social and professional conditions.

Special emphasis in the works of L. O. Radchenko and V. M. Yermolova is placed on Olympic education as a key tool for shaping not only sports-related but also universal human values, which is fundamental for athletes' social adaptation both during and after their sports careers. They consider Olympic education not merely as a set of knowledge about the history and ideals of the Olympic Movement, but as an integral component of the national education system [11, 12].

The significance of Olympic education during and after the completion of a sports career, according to the studies of L. O. Radchenko, is manifested as follows:

- during a sports career, Olympic education contributes to the de-

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velopment of essential life skills and qualities such as fair play, respect, self-discipline, stress resilience, responsibility, and team spirit, which are integral to successful integration into the sports environment. It also promotes a broader worldview (including environmental awareness) and social responsibility [12];

- after the completion of a sports career, the skills and humanitarian values acquired through Olympic education become critically important for successful adaptation to post-sport life, helping athletes establish a new identity and achieve self-realization, thus complementing the issues highlighted in the studies of M. M. Pryimak.

Although general research in global practice consistently highlights the importance of social support in athletes' lives – particularly the optimization of family involvement in youth sport for their satisfaction, well-being, and performance [13] – a detailed analysis of its specific role in the adaptation process requires further study. Thus, research by Cheraghian et al. [9] confirms that parental support is essential for psychological resilience. It influences the ability to overcome difficulties both directly and indirectly by fostering hope and active coping skills among young athletes.

At the same time, the study of specific factors such as cross-cultural adaptability [14] remains relevant, focusing on the development of "soft skills" among students in the field of physical education and emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and recognition of cultural diversity for effective international communication and adaptation of athletes in multicultural environments. The importance of psychological and pedagogical support within the "coach–athlete–parents" system [15] is also emphasized, reinforcing the role of family-based social support [16].

Issues related to sustainable career development and athlete transitions, including international support programs [17, 18, 19], complement the research of M. M. Pryimak. Finally, the development of life skills and their application in everyday life plays a crucial role in adaptation [20, 21, 22]. The role of communication, authority, and self-reflection in professional growth is also significant, highlighting the importance of "soft skills" for comprehensive adaptation [23, 24, 25].

Hypothesis. Based on the identified gaps in existing scientific knowledge and considering the multifaceted nature of athletes' social adaptation described in previous research, we hypothesize that specialists in the field of physical culture and sport perceive age, level of athletic achievement, gender, cultural differences, and social support from family and friends as important factors associated with athletes' social adaptation. The findings are expected to contribute to the optimization of existing support strategies and the development of new adaptation programs informed by specialists' perceptions of athletes' social adaptation needs within the Ukrainian sports context.

The Purpose of the Study was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the views of specialists in the field of physical culture and sport regarding factors associated with athletes' social adaptation.

Materials and Methods

Participants. The study involved 150 respondents (N = 150) representing various institutions in the field of physical culture and sport in Ukraine. The sample was formed based on voluntary participation and accessibility, allowing the inclusion of specialists from a broad range of sports-related organizations. Participants represented different professional positions and levels of work experience, providing diverse professional perspectives regarding factors associated with athletes' social adaptation. A detailed distribution of respondents by organization type, years of experience, and positions held is presented in the Results section (Table 2).

Study Organization. The study was conducted from May to August 2025. The research procedure included the following stages: theoretical preparation, development of the research instrument, collection of empirical data through an anonymous online survey, and subsequent statistical analysis.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to their participation in the anonymous online survey. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were ensured throughout the research process.

Research Methods. To achieve the research objective, a set of complementary methods was applied.

Analysis and Generalization of Scientific Literature. This method was used to establish the theoretical foundation of the study through a comprehensive review of national and international scientific publications related to athletes' social adaptation. The literature analysis made it possible to identify the main factors associated with athletes' social adaptation, justify the relevance of the research topic, and identify gaps in previous studies.

System Analysis. The system analysis method enabled athletes' social adaptation to be considered as a holistic and multidimensional phenomenon influenced by individual, social, and institutional factors. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among these components and provided the theoretical basis for interpreting specialists' perceptions regarding athletes' social adaptation.

Pedagogical experiment. The pedagogical experiment consisted of the sequential organization of the research stages, including the development of the research instrument, the survey of specialists, and the analysis and interpretation of the obtained results.

Sociological Research Method. The anonymous online survey served as the primary method of empirical data collection. The study

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aimed to examine specialists' perceptions regarding factors associated with athletes' social adaptation, including age, gender, level of athletic achievement, cultural differences, and social support, as well as the integration of these factors into the activities of sports organizations.

Data were collected using a specially designed questionnaire that included closed-ended questions (multiple-choice and rating-scale items) and open-ended questions for obtaining additional qualitative information. The online survey ensured respondent confidentiality and enabled the involvement of specialists from different regions of Ukraine, thereby minimizing territorial limitations.

Methods of Mathematical Statistics. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used for quantitative analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

Descriptive Statistics. Frequency analysis was performed by calculating absolute (n) and relative (%) frequencies for each response category. This approach made it possible to identify the dominant trends in specialists' perceptions and describe the distribution of responses across all questionnaire items.

Inferential Statistics. Inferential statistical methods were applied to examine associations between categorical variables. Pearson's chi-square (χ^2) test was used to determine whether statistically significant associations existed between respondents' professional characteristics and their perceptions regarding factors associated with athletes' social adaptation.

The degrees of freedom for contingency tables were calculated using the following formula:

$$df = (R-1) \times (C-1)$$

where R represents the number of rows and C represents the number of columns.

Expected frequencies were calculated according to the formula:

$$Eij = \frac{Ri \times Cj}{N}$$

where $E_{(ij)}$ is the expected frequency in cell *ij*, R_i is the total frequency for row *i*, C_j is the total frequency for column *j*, and N is the total sample size.

The chi-square statistic was calculated using the following formula:

$$\chi^2 = \Sigma \frac{(Oij - Eij)^2}{Eij}$$

where $O_{(ij)}$ is the observed frequency and $E_{(ij)}$ is the expected frequency.

The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Because more than 20% of the expected cell frequencies were below 5 in one of the contingency tables, the results of Pearson's chi-square test were interpreted with caution. The original professional categories were retained because they represented conceptually distinct groups and could not be merged without compromising the substantive interpretation of the findings.

To assess the strength of statistically significant associations, Cramér's V coefficient was calculated using the following formula:

$$V = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{N(k-1)}}$$

where N is the total sample size and k is the smaller value of either the number of rows or columns.

The interpretation of Cramér's V values was based on the following criteria: values of 0.10 indicate a weak association, 0.30 a moderate association, and 0.50 or higher a strong association.

Statistical data processing was performed using Microsoft Excel and Statistica software.

Results. Such a professionally diverse composition of participants ensured a comprehensive approach to studying the issue and made it possible to obtain a well-rounded assessment of specialists' perceptions regarding factors associated with athletes' social adaptation.

For an in-depth analysis of the relationships between respondents' professional characteristics and their perceptions regarding factors associated with athletes' social adaptation, Pearson's chi-square (χ^2) test was applied. This method enabled not only the description of the distribution of responses but also the determination of whether the observed differences were statistically significant. Thus, it made it possible to identify statistically significant associations between specialists' professional positions and their perceptions regarding factors associated with athletes' social adaptation.

In particular, a hypothesis was formulated regarding the existence of an association between the specialist's professional position and their assessment of the role of cultural differences in athletes' social adaptation.

Null hypothesis (H_0): Specialists' assessments of the role of cultural differences in athletes' social adaptation are independent of their professional positions.

Alternative hypothesis (H_1): There is a statistically significant association between specialists' professional positions and their assessments of the role of cultural differences in athletes' social adaptation.

The distribution of respondents' answers across these categories is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of specialists' responses regarding the perceived role of cultural differences in athletes' social adaptation according to professional position

Position held	No influence	Some influence	Significant influence	Total
Managers	2	10	13	25
Coaches	10	45	15	70
Lecturers/Researchers	0	5	40	45
Other	3	5	2	10
Total	**15**	**65**	**70**	**150**

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According to the results of the analysis, the obtained χ^2 value was 56.35 with 6 degrees of freedom (df). This value was calculated for a contingency table consisting of four rows and three columns using the formula $(4 - 1) \times (3 - 1) = 6$.

Since the p-value (< 0.001) was lower than the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), the null hypothesis was rejected. These findings indicate a statistically significant association between specialists' professional positions and their assessments of the role of cultural differences in athletes' social adaptation.

The strength of this association, assessed using Cramér's V coefficient, was 0.43, indicating a moderate association between the variables.

Because four out of twelve cells (33.3%) had expected frequencies below 5, the assumptions of Pearson's chi-square test were only partially satisfied. The original professional categories were retained because they represented conceptually distinct groups and could not be merged without compromising the substantive interpretation of the findings. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution.

The analysis of the survey results obtained from 150 specialists in the field of physical culture and sport in Ukraine made it possible to examine their perceptions regarding factors associated with athletes' social adaptation.

The profile of the study participants reflects broad professional diversity, which contributed to a comprehensive assessment of the issue.

The distribution of respondents by the type of institutions they represent demonstrates broad coverage of various sectors of the physical culture and sport system. As shown in Table 2, the largest proportion of specialists represented youth sports schools (36.0%), followed by higher education institutions specializing in physical culture and sport (13.3%) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (12.7%). The remaining respondents represented other sports organizations in smaller proportions, ensuring a broad representation of professional environments.

The distribution of respondents according to their professional experience in the field of physical culture and sport is presented in Table 3. Nearly half of the respondents (47.3%) had more than 20 years of professional experience, while 24.0% had 11–20 years of experience. Specialists with 6–10 years and up to 5 years of experience accounted for 17.3% and 11.3% of the sample, respectively. Overall, the study involved specialists with diverse professional experience, providing a comprehensive perspective on factors associated with athletes' social adaptation.

Regarding the positions held by the respondents, the largest group consisted of coaching staff (43.3%), who interact directly with athletes in their daily professional activities. A substantial proportion of respondents also included heads of physical culture and sport organizations (22.7%) and leading specialists (managers and administrators) (20.0%), while academic and teaching staff accounted for 14.0% of the sample (Table 4). Such a distribution ensured the inclusion of specialists representing different levels of management, education, and practical sports activities.

The results of the survey regarding factors associated with athletes' social adaptation made it possible to identify several important trends (Figures 1 and 2).

A considerable proportion of respondents (45.3%) indicated that differences in social adaptation needs exist among athletes participating in different sports, while 26.0% reported that such differences are significant. Overall, 71.3% of specialists perceived the type of sport as an important factor associated with athletes' social adaptation, whereas only 5.3% believed that no differences exist.

These findings indicate that most specialists recognize the importance

Table 2

Distribution of respondents by type of organization (N = 150)

Type of organization	Number of respondents	% of total
Youth sports school	54	36.0
Higher education institution of physical culture and sports	20	13.3
Ministry of Youth and Sports	19	12.7
Sports clubs	11	7.3
Physical culture and sports societies	10	6.7
City/Regional administrations	9	6.0
School of higher sports mastery	8	5.3
National Olympic Committee/Regional branches	7	4.7
Public/charitable organizations	5	3.3
Municipal physical culture and recreational institutions	4	2.7
Olympic Academy/Regional branches	3	2.0
Total	**150**	**100.0**

Table 3

Distribution of respondents by years of experience in the field of physical culture and sport (N = 150)

Work Experience	Number of Respondents	% of Total
More than 20 years	71	47.3
11 to 20 years	36	24.0
6 to 10 years	26	17.3
Up to 5 years	17	11.3
Total	**150**	**100.0**

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Table 4

Distribution of Respondents by Position Held (N = 150)

Position Held	Number of Respondents	% of Total
Coaching staff	65	43.3
Heads of physical culture and sports organizations	34	22.7
Leading specialists (managers, administrators)	30	20.0
Academic and teaching staff	21	14.0
Total	**150**	**100.0**

of considering the specific characteristics of different sports when developing measures aimed at supporting athletes' social adaptation. This perspective is consistent with the fundamental works of V.M. Platonov, particularly regarding the systemic approach to long-term athlete preparation [1], as well as the studies of V.I. Voronova, who emphasizes the role of personality characteristics in athletic performance [26].

Most respondents also considered athletes' age to be an important factor associated with social adaptation. In particular, 60.8% indicated that age has a certain role, while 28.7% regarded it as one of the key factors. Thus, 89.5% of specialists perceived age as an important factor associated with athletes' social adaptation, whereas only 0.7% believed that it has no role.

These findings suggest that, in the opinion of specialists, age-related characteristics should be considered when planning measures aimed at supporting athletes' social adaptation. This position is consistent with the studies of M.M. Bulatova on long-term athlete preparation [2, 3, 27], as well as the works of M.M. Pryimak, which address athletes' adaptation at different stages of a sports career, including age-related development and socio-psychological adaptation after career termination [4, 5, 7]. The relevance of these issues is further supported by studies devoted to athletes' career transitions [17, 18, 19].

Most specialists also considered the level of athletic achievement to be an important factor associated with athletes' social adaptation. Half of the respondents (50.0%) indicated that it has a certain role, whereas 41.3% regarded it as one of the key factors. Overall, 91.3% of specialists perceived the level of athletic achievement as an important factor associated with athletes' social adaptation, while only 0.7% reported that it has no role.

According to specialists' responses, these perceptions may be related to differences in social expectations, public recognition, and opportunities available to athletes competing at different performance levels. Similar aspects have been discussed in the works of V.M. Platonov devoted to elite sport [1, 2]. Studies addressing the socio-psychological climate in team sports also emphasize the importance of psychological and social factors in athletes' development [28], while the interaction between athletes and their social environment has been identified as an essential component of social adaptation [4].

The role of gender in athletes' social adaptation demonstrated a less uniform pattern of specialists' responses. Although the majority of respondents (54.0%) considered gender to have either a certain (41.3%) or significant (12.7%) role, nearly half (46.0%) regarded its role as minor or absent. Compared with age or level of athletic achievement, for which more than 90% of specialists recognized their importance, opinions regarding gender were more diverse. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that, according to specialists' perceptions, gender should be considered in specific aspects of athletes' social adaptation. This position is supported by the studies of V. Voronova and co-authors [29], as well as I. Zharovska, who examines legal regulation of gender issues in sport [30]. International studies likewise emphasize gender-specific aspects of athletes' career development and adaptation [31, 32], indicating that gender remains an important consideration in contemporary sport.

Specialists' assessments of the role of cultural differences in athletes' social adaptation also varied. Almost half of the respondents (48.7%) considered cultural differences to have a certain role, while 18.0% regarded them as a significant

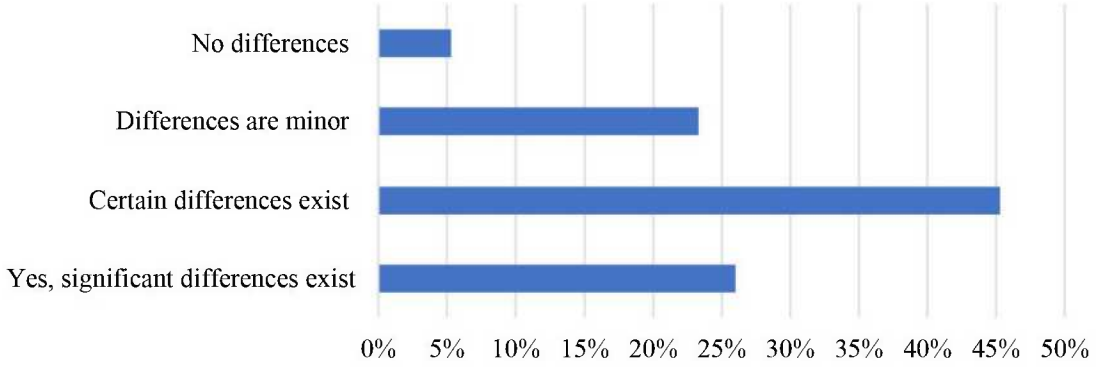


Fig. 1. The existence of differences in the need for social adaptation among athletes of different sports

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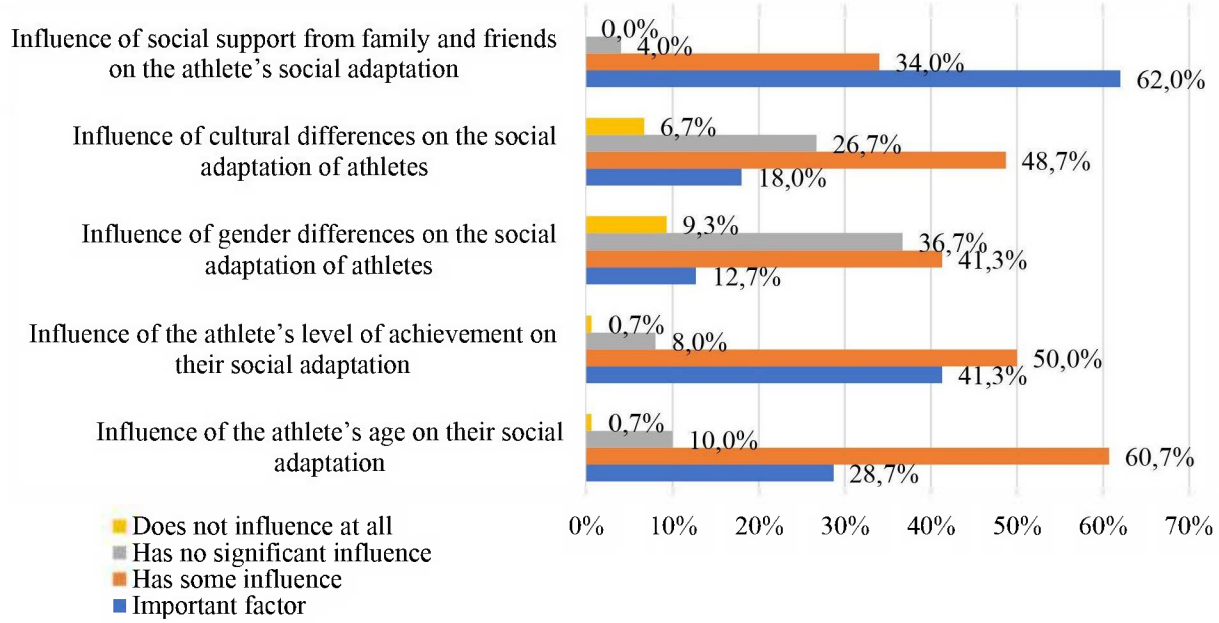


Fig. 2. Distribution of specialists' responses regarding factors associated with athletes' social adaptation

factor. Overall, 66.7% of specialists perceived cultural differences as an important factor associated with athletes' social adaptation. At the same time, 26.7% considered their role to be minor and 6.7% believed that they had no role.

These findings indicate that specialists increasingly recognize the importance of cultural competence in contemporary sport, particularly for athletes participating in international competitions or adapting to multicultural environments [14]. This tendency may also reflect the growing attention devoted to educational initiatives, including Olympic education, which constitutes an important component of the national education system [11].

Among all the factors examined, social support from family and friends received the highest ratings from specialists. The overwhelming majority of respondents (62.0%) considered it extremely important, while another 34.0% regarded it as important. Thus, 96.0% of specialists perceived social support as an important factor associated with athletes' social adaptation, whereas only 4.0% considered it unimportant.

According to specialists' perceptions, social support plays an essential role in promoting athletes' psychological well-being, maintaining motivation, and facilitating successful adaptation throughout different stages of a sports career. These findings are consistent with the studies of L.O. Radchenko, who emphasizes social support as an important resource for overcoming life challenges and adapting to changing conditions, as well as with her research on the educational and cultural dimensions of the Olympic movement [10, 11]. The importance of family and parental support for developing psychological resilience among young athletes has also been demonstrated in previous studies [15, 16]. Furthermore, the development of life skills, communication abilities, leadership, and self-reflection has been identified as an important component of successful athlete development and adaptation [21, 23, 25].

Discussion. The present study expands the understanding of factors associated with athletes' social adaptation by examining the perceptions of specialists working in the field of physical culture and sport. The findings suggest that professionals generally perceive athletes' social adaptation as a multidimensional process associated with personal, social, and contextual characteristics. This perspective is consistent with contemporary approaches in sport psychology and career transition research, which emphasize that successful adaptation in sport extends beyond athletic performance and includes psychosocial functioning, identity development, resilience, and integration into broader social environments.

A key finding of the study is that most specialists recognized age as an important factor associated with athletes' social adaptation. This perception appears theoretically justified, as previous studies indicate that adaptation challenges differ substantially across stages of athletic development. Younger athletes are more likely to experience difficulties related to balancing sport participation with education, socialization, and identity formation, whereas athletes approaching the end of their careers often encounter challenges associated with role transition, uncertainty, and adjustment to life beyond competitive sport. From this perspective, the specialists' responses reflect an understanding of adaptation as a dynamic rather than static process, requiring differentiated support depending on the athlete's stage of development.

Similarly, specialists perceived the level of athletic achievement as an important factor associated with athletes' social adaptation. This finding is consistent with es-

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tablished theoretical assumptions regarding the social demands of high-performance sport. Elite athletes are commonly exposed to greater institutional expectations, public visibility, performance pressure, and stronger identification with their athletic role. These conditions may create distinct adaptation challenges compared with those experienced by amateur or developing athletes. The specialists' assessments therefore support the view that adaptation strategies should account not only for age-related characteristics but also for the competitive and professional context of sport participation.

An important aspect highlighted by the respondents concerns the specificity of different sports. The recognition that adaptation needs may vary depending on sport type suggests that specialists acknowledge differences in the social environments of various sports. Team and individual sports differ in communication structures, interpersonal interaction, organizational culture, and support mechanisms, all of which may shape athletes' adaptation experiences. This finding supports the rationale for designing context-sensitive support programs rather than universal intervention models.

Perceptions regarding gender differences were less consistent, indicating a more complex understanding of this factor among specialists. Although many respondents acknowledged the relevance of gender, the absence of stronger consensus may reflect differences in professional experience, institutional context, or awareness of gender-related challenges in sport. International literature points to persistent inequalities affecting athletes' career trajectories, access to resources, and psychosocial experiences, particularly among women. The variability observed in the present study therefore indicates the need for greater professional attention to gender-sensitive approaches in athlete support systems.

The role of cultural differences represents another important finding, particularly in the context of the internationalization of contemporary sport. Increasing athlete mobility, multicultural training environments, and participation in international competitions make intercultural competence an increasingly relevant component of athletes' social adaptation. The statistically significant association identified between specialists' professional positions and their perceptions of the role of cultural differences suggests that awareness of intercultural adaptation challenges may vary depending on occupational context and professional responsibilities. This finding highlights the importance of integrating intercultural competence into specialist education and continuing professional development.

The strongest consensus among respondents concerned social support from family and close social networks. This result is consistent with extensive literature identifying social support as a critical protective factor contributing to resilience, stress management, psychological well-being, and successful adaptation during different stages of a sports career. Emotional support, practical assistance, and continuity of social identity were widely recognized by specialists as essential adaptation resources. These findings reinforce the importance of involving significant others in support programs aimed at athlete well-being and career sustainability.

The findings also have practical implications for specialists working in the field of physical culture and sport. The identified differences in specialists' perceptions depending on professional position indicate that educational activities, methodological recommendations, and athlete support programmes should be adapted to the specific responsibilities of different professional groups. Such an approach may contribute to more effective cooperation among coaches, managers, educators, and other specialists involved in supporting athletes throughout different stages of their sporting careers.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study reflects the perceptions of specialists rather than the direct experiences of athletes; therefore, the findings represent professional assessments rather than direct evidence of athletes' social adaptation. Second, the use of a convenience sample limits the generalizability of the findings. Third, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal inferences regarding the relationships between the identified factors and athletes' social adaptation. Finally, in one contingency table, more than 20% of the expected cell frequencies were below 5; therefore, the results of Pearson's chi-square test should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Future research should include athlete-centered empirical data, comparative analyses across different sports, and longitudinal investigations of adaptation throughout different stages of a sports career.

Overall, the findings contribute to a better understanding of how specialists perceive athletes' social adaptation within the Ukrainian sports context. The results may contribute to the development of more differentiated educational and practical approaches to athlete support, taking into account age, competitive level, sport-specific conditions, cultural diversity, and the central role of social support systems.

Conclusions. The present study examined the perceptions of specialists in the field of physical culture and sport regarding the key factors associated with athletes' social adaptation. Based on the analysis of survey responses from 150 specialists, the following conclusions were drawn.

The findings indicate that specialists perceive athletes' social adaptation as a multifaceted process associated with a wide range of factors. The vast majority of respondents recognized athletes' age (89.3%) and level of athletic achievement (91.3%) as important

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factors associated with athletes' social adaptation.

Most specialists (71.3%) acknowledged differences in athletes' social adaptation needs depending on the type of sport. These findings support the importance of adopting differentiated approaches when developing athlete support programmes that take into account the specific characteristics of different sports and various stages of athletic development.

Social support from family and friends was identified by specialists as the most important factor associated with athletes' social adaptation, with 96.0% of respondents recognizing its importance. According to specialists' perceptions, these findings emphasize the important role of interpersonal relationships in supporting athletes' psychological well-being, motivation, and adaptation throughout different stages of a sports career.

The role of gender (54.0%) and cultural differences (66.7%) was also recognized by a substantial proportion of specialists, indicating that these factors should be considered when planning programmes aimed at supporting athletes' social adaptation, particularly in the context of the internationalization and globalization of contemporary sport.

The application of inferential statistical methods revealed a statistically significant association between specialists' professional positions and their perceptions of the role of cultural differences in athletes' social adaptation. This finding indicates that specialists representing different professional groups may evaluate adaptation-related factors differently.

The identified association between specialists' professional positions and their perceptions has important practical implications. It highlights the need to adapt educational programmes, professional training, and methodological support for different categories of specialists according to their professional responsibilities. Such an approach may contribute to more effective cooperation among coaches, managers, educators, and other professionals involved in supporting athletes throughout different stages of their sporting careers.

Practical Significance and Future Prospects. The findings provide an empirical basis for designing and implementing comprehensive support programmes aimed at supporting athletes' social adaptation. The results may also be used in the development of educational materials and professional training programmes for specialists working in the field of physical culture and sport.

Future research should include empirical studies involving athletes directly, evaluate the effectiveness of support programmes, and further investigate adaptation challenges experienced by different groups of athletes across various sports and stages of their sporting careers.

Highlights

- Specialists perceive athletes' social adaptation as a multifactorial process associated with age, athletic achievement level, gender, cultural differences, and social support.
- Social support from family and friends was identified by specialists as the most important factor associated with athletes' social adaptation.
- Most specialists recognized differences in athletes' social adaptation needs depending on the type of sport and the stage of athletic development.
- Specialists' professional positions were significantly associated with their perceptions of the role of cultural differences in athletes' social adaptation.
- The findings support the development of differentiated educational and practical approaches to supporting athletes within the Ukrainian sports context.

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Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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