

Impact of the new professional profile of the basic kinesiologist on internal stakeholders

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Purpose: The aim is to measure the effect this reform has had on internal stakeholders (coaches, instructors, personal trainers, educators).

Method: A questionnaire was administered to 60 subjects, comprising former athletes, trainers and technicians in sports. The questions were divided into 3 parts: in the first part identifying the sample, in the second part assessing the sample's knowledge inherent in Article 41 of Legislative Decree no. 36 of February 28, 2021, and finally in the third part assessing the subjects' perception and opinion of the figure of the basic kinesiologist. A descriptive statistic, then a chi-square (χ^2) analysis was performed to check for significant differences in perception.

Results: The results showed a difference of opinion among stakeholders. The 25.4 % who say they are aware of the sports labor reform believe that the figure of the kinesiologist is very important within the corporate context, in contrast to the stakeholders who are not aware of the sports reform, but not in detail (67 %) and consider the presence of the kinesiologist within the corporate organizational chart not important ($P=.001$).

Conclusions: There is a good little knowledge of the reform on the part of internal stakeholders and a general skepticism toward the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist.

Keywords: Kinesiologist, epistemology of sports science, role of stakeholders

Introduction

In the field of sports science in Italy, various professional figures have long been recognized in the field of sports science, which are mainly represented by individuals who have acquired specific training qualifications through national sports federations (NSF) or through sports promotion bodies (SPB) or associated disciplines (AD).^{1,2} With Article 41 of Legislative Decree (L.D) no. 36 of February 28, 2021, the new professional figure of the basic kinesiologist with specific training from the Bachelor of Science in Exercise and Sports Activities (L-22) degree program was created.³ This legislative innovation provides that possession of a university degree is mandatory for practicing as a basic kinesiologist, which current professional profiles (coaches, instructors, personal trainers, educators) are not required to possess in order to practice.⁴ As it is stated in Paragraph 2 of Article 41, *the practice of the professional activity of a basic kinesiologist has as its object: a) the conduct, management and evaluation of individual and group physical activities of a compensatory, educational, recreational and sports nature aimed at the maintenance and recovery of the best conditions of physical well-being in the various age groups through the promotion of active lifestyles; b) the conduct, management and evaluation of activities for the improvement of the quality of life through physical exercise, as well as 'personal training and non-competitive athletic training.* The basic kinesiologist is the latest successful attempt in a series of legislative proposals that began

soon after with Legislative Decree (d.lgs.) no. 178 of May 8, 1998, entitled "Transformation of Higher Institutes of Physical Education (ISEF) and Establishment of the Faculty and Degree Course in Physical Education".⁵ This measure abolished the Higher Institutes of Physical Education (ISEF) and, at the same time, established degree programs in exercise and sports science. These courses of study, as stipulated in Article 2, Paragraph 2 of the Legislative Decree, aimed at the acquisition of "adequate knowledge of cultural, scientific and professional methods and content in the following areas": (a) didactic-educational, aimed at teaching in schools of all levels; (b) prevention and adapted physical education, aimed at subjects of different ages and disabled subjects; (c) technical-sports, aimed at training in the various disciplines; (d) managerial, aimed at the organization and management of sports activities and facilities. After the establishment of degree programs, significant legislative proposals were made as early as the 15th Legislature to regulate the professional figures who, after graduation, would have access to the world of work.⁶ Legislative Proposal no. 1757, submitted on October 3, 2006, and Legislative Proposal no. 2228, submitted on February 7, 2007, aimed to regulate "professional figures in physical and sports activity." The aim was to enhance the figures of sports science graduates to ensure the proper practice of sports activity. Proposal no. 2228 of February 7, 2007, on the other hand, renounces the establishment of registers and merely stipulates the requirement of a bachelor's degree in exercise and sports science in order to work as a professional in physical and

sports activities. The category of exercise science graduates, in the absence of national legislation outlining its traits clearly and unambiguously, has organized itself in associative form in the manner indicated by Law no. 4 of January 14, 2013, dedicated to the so-called unregulated professions.⁷ These professionals, therefore, had the choice of either accrediting themselves in the marketplace according to the parameters set by their associations, obtaining the relevant awards, or carrying out their activities regardless of the certifications.^{8,9} Finally, with legislative decree no. 36/2021, sports work was regulated, in particular, graduates in exercise science were granted the qualifying title to practice the new profession of basic kinesiologist.¹⁰ Previously, those who, after earning the specific L22 degree, wanted to practice as a kinesiologist had to train with CONI, NSF, SPB and AD because there was not yet a requirement to hold the specific degree (L22) for the basic kinesiology profession.^{11,12} This condition may cause confusion among internal stakeholders (coaches, instructors, personal trainers, educators) who, with a direct relationship with the sports science company, in some way direct the actions and results of the activity and can also influence

the outcome of them.^{13,14} The aim of the study is to measure the impact that this reform has had on internal stakeholders, in terms of their knowledge of it, perceptions and opinions about the new professional figure of the basic kinesiologist.

Methods

Study participants

Participants in the study were 60 internal stakeholders, including former athletes, trainers, coaches or other management figures who practice or have practiced their profession in sports.

Procedures

Using Google Forms, a questionnaire consisting of 10 questions was created and sent via email, and it was divided into 3 parts: in the first, the sample is identified, in the second, the knowledge of the sample is assessed, and finally in the third, the subjects' perception and opinion of the basic kinesiologist is assessed. Table 1 shows in detail the 14 questions with the response options.

Table 1. Questionnaire administered to the stakeholders.

	What role do you play in sports activities?
Q1	(a) Athlete (b) Physical/athletic trainer (c) Technician/instructor (d) Other
	What facility do you operate at?
Q2	(a) Gymnasium or swimming pool (b) Amateur Sports Association / Amateur Sports Society (c) Sports promotion organization (d) I do not operate in any facility
	To which institutions have you entrusted your in-service and postgraduate training?
Q3	(a) National sports federation (b) Sports promotion body (c) National health system (d) Other
	Are you aware of the professional position of the basic kinesiologist as defined in the February 28, 2021 Sports Reform Law?
Q4	(a) Yes (b) No (c) Yes, but not in detail
	What does professional practice as a basic kinesiologist involve?
Q5	(a) The organization and planning of particular activities and lifestyles aimed at disease prevention and post-rehabilitation functional recovery aimed at optimizing physical efficiency. (b) The conduct, management, and evaluation of motor activities for improving quality of life through exercise, as well as personal training and noncompetitive athletic training. (c) The planning, coordination, and technical direction of athletic training activities in the competitive arena, up to the highest levels of competition, at sports associations and clubs, Sports Promotion Bodies, institutions, and specialized centers. (d) The conduction and management of public and private facilities where athletic activities, including recreational activities, are carried out.

	What title qualifies one to practice as a basic kinesiologist?
Q6	(a) Master's degree in sports science and techniques (LM-68). (b) Master's degree in preventive and adapted exercise science (LM-67). (c) Bachelor's degree in exercise science (L-22). (d) Qualification acquired from a sports federation.
	What is the expertise associated with the function of the basic kinesiologist?
Q7	(a) Specialist in motor education aimed at prevention and treatment of various diseases. (b) Instructor, personal trainer for motor activities aimed at maintaining health and physical efficiency. (c) Motor performance analyst in competitive and high-performance sports.
	Based on your knowledge on the subject, how important do you think the figure of the kinesiologist is within a sport's corporate context?
Q8	(a) None (b) Sufficient (c) Fairly (d) Very
	What are your thoughts on introducing the kinesiologist within Amateur Sports Associations or Amateur Sports Societies as a professional figure?
Q9	(a) Contrary (b) Indifferent (c) Favorable
	How much do you think the professional figure of basic kinesiologist is in demand in the workplace within the national corporate contest?
Q10	(a) None (b) Sufficient (c) Fairly (d) Very

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the participants' answers in frequency and percentage (%). As the data obtained were qualitative, a non-parametric test, the Chi Square, was used to identify associations between the various participant responses. The null hypothesis (H_0) was that the two variables were independent, i.e., they did not influence each other, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was that the two variables were associated/dependent. Cramer's V was used to measure the degree of association between the variables. $P \leq .05$ was considered

statistically significant. Data analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Science software (IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 25.0. Armonk, NY).

Results

Of 260 professionals contacted in Campania, only 60 were willing to participate in the research. The first part of the questionnaire was intended for 'sample identification.

Table 2. Chi-Square Associations

	Q4. Are you aware of the professional position of the basic kinesiologist as defined in the February 28, 2021, Sports Reform Law?				χ^2	P	
	Yes	Yes, but not in detail	No	%			
Q8. Based on your knowledge on the subject, how important do you think the figure of the kinesiologist is within a sport's corporate context?	Very	12	0	1	21.7%	5.84	.001
	Fairly	3	9	1	21.7%		
	Sufficient	0	2	3	8.3%		
	None	0	29	0	48.3%		
	%	25%	66.7%	8.3%			
	Q4. Are you aware of the professional position of the basic kinesiologist as defined in the February 28, 2021, Sports Reform Law?				χ^2	P	
	Yes	Yes, but not in detail	No	%			

Q9. What are your thoughts on introducing the kinesiologist as a professional figure?	Favorable	10	10	3	38.3%	9.56	.001
	Indifferent	5	4	1	16.7%		
	Contrary	0	26	1	45%		
	%	25%	66.7%	8.3%			
	Q4. Are you aware of the professional position of the basic kinesiologist as defined in the February 28, 2021, Sports Reform Law?						
	Yes, but not in detail	Yes, but not in detail	No	%	χ^2	<i>P</i>	
Q9. What are your thoughts on introducing the kinesiologist as a professional figure?	Favorable	10	10	3	38.3%	9.56	.001
	Indifferent	5	4	1	16.7%		
	Contrary	0	26	1	45%		
	%	25%	66.7%	8.3%			
	Q4. Are you aware of the professional position of the basic kinesiologist as defined in the February 28, 2021, Sports Reform Law?						
	Yes, but not in detail	Yes, but not in detail	No	%	χ^2	<i>P</i>	
Q10. How much do you think the professional figure of basic kinesiologist is in demand in the workplace within the national corporate contest?	Very	7	4	1	20%	7.76	.001
	Fairly	4	5	0	15%		
	Sufficient	3	2	3	13.3%		
	None	1	29	1	51.7%		
	%	25%	66.7%	8.3%			

From the analysis of the responses, it was possible to identify the sample according to the role they play in sports: the most represented figure is the sports coach (46.7%), followed by the figure of physical/athletic trainer (26.7%), athlete (23.3%) and minimally by other roles (3.3%). Data was also recruited with respect to which structure these figures operated and it was found that they mainly occupy a role in Amateur Sports Association or Amateur Sports Society (57.6%), followed by fitness and wellness gyms and swimming pools (20.3%), Sports promotion bodies (15.3%) and to a small extent no role held (6.8%). The most frequently obtained qualification belongs to National Sports Federations (71.7%), followed by those issued by through Sports Promotion Bodies (11.7%) tied with other (11.7%), minimally by the National Health System (5%). In the second part, the questionnaire focused on assessing the sample's knowledge, and the sample mainly expressed knowledge not in detail (67.8%), to a lesser extent complete knowledge (25.4%), and only a few were not aware of this reform (6.8%). Questions 5, 6 and 7 concern knowledge about what skills and training basic kinesiologists should have, respectively for question 5 is 90%, for questions 6 and 7 93.3% answered correctly. In question 6 the correct answer is c "Bachelor's degree in exercise science (L-22)"; in question 7 the correct answer is b "Instructor, personal trainer for motor activities aimed at maintaining health and physical efficiency." The third part of the questionnaire puts the focus on assessing the subjects' perception and opinion of the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist. Question 8 asked how important the figure of the kinesiologist is thought to be within a sports club context, where 48.3% answered not at all, 21.7% very much, 20% fairly and 10% sufficiently. Question 9 asked for opinion on the introduction of the basic kinesiologist within sports organizational charts, noting that 50% were against, 36.7% in favor and 13.3% indifferent. In conclusion, with question 10, thought was asked about the job demand for the basic kinesiologist, noting as answers for 51.7%

nothing, 20% very much, 16.7% fairly and 11.7% sufficiently. Three significant differences in perception among stakeholders emerged from the chi square analysis. The first significance emerged between question 4 (Are you aware of the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist as defined in the February 28, 2021 Sports Reform Law?) and question 8 (Based on your knowledge on the topic, how important do you think the figure of the kinesiologist is within a sports corporate context?). Those who state that they are aware of the 2021 sports reform believe that the figure of the kinesiologist is very important within the corporate context, in contrast to the stakeholders who are not aware of the sports reform and believe that the presence of the kinesiologist within the corporate organizational chart is not important ($P = .001$). Similarly, the remaining significances emerged between question 4 (Are you aware of the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist, defined in the Sports Reform Law of February 28, 2021?) and question 9 (How do you feel about introducing the figure of the kinesiologist within Amateur Sports Associations or Amateur Sports Companies as a professional figure?) and between question 4 (Are you aware of the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist as defined in the February 28, 2021 Sports Reform Law?) and question 10 (How much do you think the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist is in demand in the working environment within the national corporate contest?) (Respectively $P = .001$ e $P = .000$).

Discussion

The study measured the impact of the new professional figure of the exercise science graduate (L22) on internal stakeholders in sports, those whose interests and expectations directly or indirectly direct the activities of ASAs or ASSs on the meaning of professional roles, to clarify whether the figure of the basic kinesiologist would complement the organization's offerings

or, conversely, cover functions already routinely performed by other professional figures. A questionnaire was used because it is the fastest, cheapest and most efficient way to collect data in terms of perceptions and opinions, on a good number of subjects. Some interesting data emerged from the results. First, what was found, is 90 % of the internal stakeholders surveyed, are aware of the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist, defined in the Sports Reform Law, as reported by the question 'What does the professional activity of basic kinesiologist involve?' 90 % answered correctly, from the questions 'What qualification qualifies for the professional activity of basic kinesiologist?' and 'What is the competence associated with the function of the basic kinesiologist?' 93.3%, answered correctly. Nevertheless, it can be ascertained that, especially those working in ASA and ASS, have entrusted their education not only to the university pathway in Exercise and Sports Science, but also and especially more frequently to NSF (71.7 %), followed by SPB (11.7%) tied with other (11.7 %), minimally by the National Health System (5 %). Among the latter is the acquisition of subjects who preferred training outside the university pathway, which incentivizes subjects to prefer training and qualifications issued by NSFs. This can also be seen from the first significance that emerged between the question 'Are you aware of the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist, defined in the Sports Reform Law of February 28, 2021?' and the question 'Based on your knowledge on the subject, how important do you think the figure of the kinesiologist is within a sports club context?'. Those who state that they are aware of sports labor reform believe that the figure of the kinesiologist is very important within the corporate context, in contrast to stakeholders who are not aware of sports reform and consider the presence of the kinesiologist within the corporate organizational chart to be unimportant ($P = .001$). Similarly, the remaining significances emerged between the question 'Are you aware of the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist, defined in the Sports Reform Law of February 28, 2021?' and the question 'How much do you think about introducing the figure of the kinesiologist within Amateur Sports Associations or Amateur Sports Companies as a professional figure?' and between the question 'Are you aware of the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist as defined in the Sports Reform Law of February 28, 2021?' and the question 'How much do you think the professional figure of the basic kinesiologist is in demand in the working field within the national corporate contest?' ($P = .001$). It appears from the data that, the topic of the basic kinesiologist, is quite discussed among the stakeholders surveyed, since in the third part of the questionnaire, where the focus is on assessing the subjects' perception and opinion of the figure of the basic kinesiologist, in the question 'Based on your knowledge on the topic, how important do you think the figure of the kinesiologist is within a sports corporate context?' the question on how important do you think the figure of the kinesiologist is within a sports corporate context, returns that for 48.3 % answered not at all; 21.7 % very much; 20 % enough and 10 % sufficiently; continuing in the question 'What do you think about introducing the figure of the kinesiologist within Amateur Sports Associations or Amateur Sports Companies as a professional figure?' opinion was asked about the introduction of the basic kinesiologist within the sports organizational charts, noting that 50 % were against; 36.7 % in favor and 13.3 % indifferent; in conclusion, with the question 'How much do you think the professional figure of basic kinesiologist is in demand in the working field within the national corporate contest?' , the thoughts on the job demand for the basic kinesiologist were asked, noting as answers for

51.7 % not at all, 20 % very much, 16.7 % fairly and 11.7 % sufficiently. Thus it was found that more than 50 % were against the introduction of the basic kinesiologist in the various sports contexts, calling him a superfluous figure compared to those already present. It is clear from the responses that several stakeholders currently prefer federally licensed coaches as a professional figure within amateur sports associations or amateur sports clubs rather than kinesiologists. In this sense, article 27 of the recent legislative decree, intervening on article 41 of Legislative Decree n. 36 of 2021, clarifies the respective professional competencies: kinesiologists must deal with the movement of the body of those who perform motor activities; trainers of specific sports disciplines must deal with the performance of competitive sports activities.¹⁵ Thus emerges the legislature's desire to recognize equal legal weight between trainers of sports federations and graduates in exercise and sport sciences. In such a complex scenario, there are critical issues in the contents of the decree that do not allow for a correct application of the rules, especially regarding the possible equivalence between the title of kinesiologist and the specific professional qualification. These critical issues have also been highlighted by the Conference of Autonomous Regions and Provinces (CARP), which recently called for a thorough evaluation of the implementation of the new regulations.¹⁶ As can be appreciated from the results of this study, at the moment, it is still unclear what concrete effects this reform will have on the professional future of kinesiologists but more importantly on the effective health protection of citizens who participate in sports. Encouraging proper physical and sports practice in citizens of all ages is important given its benefits, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ In order to achieve maximum benefits, the technical-practical skills and expertise of the kinesiologist are crucial. Greater clarity is required from the institutions concerning the profile of the sports practitioner in the hope that proper attention will be paid to the opinion expressed by the territory (CARP) and that the suggested changes will help to give due value to the more than 100,000 sports science graduates who have been trained in these 20 years.

Practical application

The study verified that the impact of the establishment of the new professional profile is also of interest with respect to the definition of the roles of the various professional figures within health and sports companies. This evidence may help in accompanying the reform with the necessary corrections regarding the rationalization of the use of the kinesiologist. In addition, it gave food for thought regarding the need to improve the academic training offer, which should provide more professionalizing courses of study that adequately respond to the points defined in Article 41 of the d.lgs. of 28 February 2021, which defines the competences that these professions must have acquired at the end of the academic course. A limitation of this study is represented by the difficulty of formulating an ad hoc questionnaire that would include the greatest number of elements in order to respond to the problems identified and to achieve the objective of the study. Another limitation is represented by the sample size which is unrepresentative. Hence, there is a need for further studies with larger sample sizes and greater sophistication in the questionnaire.

Conclusions

This study found that internal stakeholders have a good understanding of the Sports Labor Reform Act, but, nevertheless, preference is given to behavior that predates it. Individuals with trainings other than or outside the basic kinesiology are still preferred in sports to fill certain professional roles. Internal stakeholders also continue to prefer training and titles from outside the university, not considering the figure of the kinesiology to be so important as to have the consideration of wanting to place them within sports organizational charts. This study can be considered as a starting point for future research, trying to overcome the limitations represented by the questionnaire construction and the limited sample number.

Ethical Committee approval

The use of these data did not require approval from an accredited ethics committee, as they are not covered by data protection principles, i.e., they are non-identifiable, anonymous data collected through an anonymous questionnaire. In addition, based on Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council on 27 April 2016 on the protection of individuals concerning the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (which entered into force on 25 May 2016 and has been compulsory since 25 May 2018), data protection principles do not need to be applied to anonymous information (i.e., information related to an identifiable natural person, nor to data of a subject that is not, or is no longer, identifiable). Consequently, the Regulation does not affect the processing of our information. Even for statistical or research purposes, its use does not require the approval of an accredited ethics committee.

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Author-s contribution in according to ICMJE

Rosario Ceruso, Doctor LM68, made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work; the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data for the work; drafting and revising the work critically and to the final approval for the version to be published. He agrees to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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