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The Relationship between Perfectionism and Burnout in Junior-Elite Athletes

Mohammad Taghi AGHDASI

Associate Professor, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Tabriz, IRAN E-mail: mt_aghdasi@tabrizu.ac.ir

Abstract

The purpose of the present investigation was to examine the relationship between multidimensional perfectionism and athlete burnout. The target population of research consisted of 168 elite handball players who participate in National Junior Championships. 123 athletes were selected randomly as the sample. We used a multi-section inventory to collect data, contained measures of multidimensional perfectionism, dispositional achievement goals, athlete burnout, perceived satisfaction with goal attainment and perceived coach satisfaction with goal attainment. In this study was used Pierson correlation and Hierarchical regression for the analysis of collected data. Regression analyses revealed that socially prescribed perfectionism demonstrated a significant positive association, and self-oriented perfectionism a significant negative association with burnout dimensions. In conclusion, in this study were not supported the hypotheses of the moderating influence of Perceived satisfaction with goal attainment and achievement goal orientations on the relationship between multidimensional perfectionism and athlete burnout.

Key Words: Perfectionism, burnout, junior-elite athlete



1. Introduction

While most researchers have claimed the large number of elite players during their professional sports are suffering burnout, but a few studies has been done that confirm the validity of this claim. In a preliminary analysis based on limited several studies, it is known that between 1 to 7 percent of elite athletes likely at this level have high rates of burnout while over 15 percent of their show moderate symptoms of burnout syndrome. Although, relatively low level of the incidence of phenomena of burnout syndrome have reported in professional level but it has caused concerns due to its devastating physical and psychological effects (Gustafsson *et al*, 2007).

An athlete's burnout can be in the form of a combination of severe physical and psychological pressure in professional level and it often occurs when the athlete thinks that he/she can not to achieve his/her goals. Some researchers have claimed that burnout in elite junior athletes are more likely if the character and self-worth to be defined according to athletic success (Gould and Dieffenbach, 2002).

Others have argued that although these features may be important but chronic stress is probably the main factor of burnout in junior athletes. These problems cause the feelings like misery, frustration and lake of motivation in athlete. The symptoms of burnout occur when athletes feel that he is unable in release of such circumstances so this fact is as a threat to self-worth (Lemyre *et al*, 2008). There is little knowledge about the psychological background of athletes burnout. Although is suggested different models of burnout process but each of these models have focused on a particular aspect of burnout. Recently, Raedeke and Smith (2004) have defined the syndrome of burnout as multidimensional process that it includes emotional and physical exhaustion, decrease performance (low performance) and neglect and fatigue to exercise (Raedek and Smith, 2004).

Most of researches in this area have done according to Smith's (1986) burnout model. Accordingly, Lazarus 1993 states that some aspects of personality are useful to create a perceptual approach and it helps to the assessment process and identify of this problem whether athletes are prone to stress? Smith suggests that athletes will suffer from acute stress when they consider effort for success in form of threat for individual value. Chronic stress appears if this attitude persists and it causes reduced motivation to succeed and behavioral commitment and increase of the kind of emotional, cognitive and physical neglect that expresses burnout (Raedek and Smith, 2004). However, Smith's model also emphasizes the importance of character and motivation but so far have not been studied the research for the studying of effect of personality characteristics of athletes on athletes' analysis of burnout exception Raedeke and Smith's (2004) research. Perfectionism is one of personality characteristics that increase the risk of burnout in athletes (Lemyre et al, 2008). Perfectionism has been described as a personality disposition characterized by striving for flawlessness and setting excessively high standards for performance accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations of one's behavior (Stoeber et al, 2008). Various authors have referred from the structure of perfectionism as multidimensional feature and they



believe that main factor is not just adjustment of various shapes of effort for success but is adjustment of special psychological processes that causes normal and abnormal consequences (Terry *et al*, 1995). There is no doubt that perfectionism has energy generated on effort for success (Frost *et al*, 1990). Hajloo *et al* (2011) showed that job burnout will be decreased by improving positive dimensions of perfectionism such as organization and personal standards. It is believed that people are able to maintain of the normal patterns of cognition, emotion and behavior when they are trying to achieve the perfection and they are away from negative thoughts and automatically react to the non-perfection. On the other hand, because perfectionism people have more high standards and image irrational believes for success these characteristics likely to lead to criticism, ruminative, self-focusing and personal incompetence when the result of performance do not comply with desired goals. This not only increases the level of stress but also increase the risk of burnout that this issue is due to not meeting the needs of successful and expectations of individual performance (Flett and Hewitt, 2006; Stoeber *et al*, 2008; Stoll *et al*, 2008).

Initial investigations have shown that the dimension of abnormal self-assessment was clearer than other dimensions of perfectionism in table tennis burn out athletes. Gould *et al.* (1996) found that the parental high expectations (Gustafsson *et al.* 2008) and criticism, and excessive importance increase wrongly the risk of burnout (Gould *et al.* 1996). Recently, Lemyer *et al.* (2008) suggested that athletic burnout may be from the unavoidable consequence of abnormal motivational framework that follows with the excessive high standards and fear of failure and it causes the sense of lake confidence. About this discussion, they argue that this pattern appears when success to be defines in terms of normative norm that the person has little control over it. Lemyer *et al.* (2008) showed that athletes with high experience of burnout had higher scores in two dimensions of individual goals and the perception of success that is task-oriented (Lemyre *et al.* 2008).

Hill et al. (2008) examined this issue based on Campel and Di Paula (2002) theory that how the critical self-assessment of dimension of perfectionism may be to causes burnout. They concluded that two dimension of Flett and Hewitt's dimensions perfectionism has abnormal consequences. Self-oriented perfectionism comprises beliefs that striving for perfection and being perfect are important and is characterized by setting excessively high standards for oneself. The key characteristics of self-oriented perfectionism are a strong personal motivation to strive for perfection and a need to be perfect. In contrast, socially prescribed perfectionism comprises beliefs that striving for perfection and being perfect are important and is characterized by setting excessively high standards for oneself. The key characteristics of self-oriented perfectionism are a strong personal motivation to strive for perfection and a need to be perfect. In contrast, socially prescribed perfectionism comprises beliefs that others have excessively high standards for one and that acceptance by others is conditional on fulfilling these standards. The key characteristics of socially prescribed perfectionism are concern over others' high standards and concern over living up to these standards, driven by fears of losing approval and acceptance from



others if one is not perfect (Stoeber *et al*, 2008). Hill *et al*. (2008) found that self-oriented perfectionism has negative correlation with athlete burnout and socially prescribed perfectionism has positive relationship with athlete burnout. In addition, self-acceptance caused the moderation of relationship between these two dimensions and burnout. These findings confirm the findings of past researches that claimed if goal attainment considers the necessary for validity and self-worth, the standards of perfectionism has the weaken influence that will lead to stres (Hill *et al*, 2008).

One of interesting findings of Hill *et al*'s research is positive relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and burnout that past researches did not imply it. They argued that this is due to a moderation influence of perception of goal attainment (Hill *et al*, 2008). This issue is consistent with this view that self-oriented perfectionism is a vulnerability factor that will have devastating consequences on the performance if it associated with another mediator variable (Besser *et al*, 2004). It is clear that we should do more research to determine the moderating variables and prevention of the negative effects of perfectionism on performance.

Flett and Hewitt (2005) believed that the experience of success has protective role against the damaging effects of perfectionism. On the other hand, goal attainment and satisfaction plays probably an important moderation role in preventing of harmful consequences of self-oriented perfectionism. The chance of success increases since it is believed that self-oriented perfectionism causes a sense of personal control on outcomes of success because the success defined individually and goals are adapted with a proactive manner. The perception of success had not only an important motivational influence and causes to increase self-worth in the success but it causes the creation of a kind of resilience in against probable debilitating perceptual factors (Flett and Hewitt, 2005). Therefore, we assumed that the satisfaction with goal attainment has a moderation influence in relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and burnout (Enns et al, 2005). In contrast, it is assumed that the satisfaction with goal attainment has any a moderation influence in relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and athlete's burnout. The perception of person control over outcome of success is based largely on external factors since socially prescribed perfectionism emphasize on acceptance by others. Therefore, by others replace any positive impact on perceptions of success with anxiety of acceptance and a moderation influence of satisfaction with goal attainment seems unlikely in relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and burnout (Flett and Hewitt, 2006).

In addition, they showed that central goal has a moderation influence on controllable factors and self-reference standards and assessment of success through mastery and skill due to increasing of athlete's concentration (Flett and Hewitt, 2005). A direction of task-oriented has a moderation influence on effects of self-oriented perfectionism because it leads the attention to the process of success instead of concentration on outcome, distinction between performance and or personal incompetence (Dunn *et al*, 2002).



Moreover, a direction of task-oriented moderates effects of socially prescribed perfectionism through Loss of consciousness and the prevention of authentication of self-worth (Kaplan and Maehr, 1999). Also, reduce of self-centered has a similar moderation influence on comparison model and an emphasizing on proving of ability by reducing of individuals' concentration. Although, the researchers have shown the different dimensions of perfectionism has relationship with profile of outcome of success (Van Yperen, 2006). Nevertheless, so far no research has examined the issue that the approach of goals of task-oriented can provide the kind of resilience in comparing with the approach of goals of self-centered against the destructive effects of perfectionism and subsequently burnout. By attention to considered issues, the purpose of this study is to examine of this issue whether satisfaction with goal attainment or athlete's goal-oriented can moderate any relationship between self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism and athlete's dimensions burnout.

2. Methods

Design and participants

The methodology of this research was correlational. Statistical population of this research was all handball players participating in National Youth Championships of country. They were 168 people that we selected 123 athletes as the sample group by simple random sampling.

Measurements

We used four questionnaires in this research:

- 1- Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale: in this study were used Flett and Hewitt's (1991) multidimensional perfectionism scale questionnaire for measurement of two dimensions of self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism. Each dimension was comprised of 15 questions. This questionnaire has been graded on base of Likert 7-point scale (1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree).
- 2- Perception of Success Questionnaire: Robert *et al.*'s (1998) perception of success questionnaire was used for assessment of success goals in between athletes. This questionnaire consisted of 12 cases that six cases measures task-oriented and six measures cases self-oriented.
- 3- Perceived satisfaction with goal attainment and perceived coach satisfaction with goal attainment: we used Flett and Hewitt (2006); Hill *et al.* (2008) proposed method for assessment of satisfaction with goal attainment perceived coach satisfaction of athlete.



3. Results

The results showed that athletes have high level of self-oriented perfectionism moderate level of socially prescribed perfectionism. In addition, they showed High levels of task-oriented in comparison with self-centered. On the other hand, they had relatively poor level of decrease performance and failure and level of athletic fatigue was in low level (Table 1).

Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between dimensions of perfectionism and burnout (Table 2). The results of analysis of correlation showed that there is positive and significant relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and decrease performance (r = 0/29, P = 0/01), emotional and physical exhaustion (r = 0/29, P = 0/01) and fatigue (r = 0/30, P = 0/01). On the other hand, there was negative correlation between self-oriented perfectionism with decrease performance (r = -0/18, P = 0/01) and athletic fatigue (r = -0/16, P = 0/01).

In addition, there was positive relationship between self-oriented perfectionism with ego-goal oriented (r = 0/35, P < 0/001) and task-goal oriented (r = 0/26, P < 0/001). However, there was no significant relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism with task-goal oriented and ego-goal oriented but satisfaction with goal attainment (r = -0/20, P < 0/001) and coach satisfaction (r = -0/24, P < 0/001). We used regression analytical hierarchy process to determine multivariate correlation between the scores for perfectionism, goal-oriented, statistician and burnout. The interactional effect between dimensions of perfectionism and achievement goals and the effect of interaction between dimensions of perfectionism and satisfaction entered in the three analysis of regression. The results showed that in first stage, leaner combination of dimensions of perfectionism, satisfaction with goal attainment and perceived coach satisfaction explain 39 percent of the variance of decrease performance. The results of regression analytical hierarchy process showed that self-oriented perfectionism (B = -0/17,P < 0/01), satisfaction with goal attainment (B =-0/13, P <0/01) and perceived coach satisfaction (B =-0/25, P <0/01) are negative prediction index of decrease performance. In against, socially prescribed perfectionism (B = 0/14, p < 0/001) was positive prediction index of decrease performance (Table 3). The results of regression analysis showed that selforiented and socially prescribed perfectionism explain respectively 13 percent of the variance related to exhaustion and 22 percent of the variance related to athletic fatigue. According to results of table 3, self-oriented perfectionism was a negative prediction index of burnout in both dimension of exhaustion (B =-0/13, P <0/05) and athletic fatigue (B =-0/19, P <0/05). On the other hand, socially prescribed perfectionism a positive prediction index of exhaustion (B =0/22, P <0/01) and fatigue (B =0/22, P <0/01). We can conclude that perceived satisfaction with goal and goal-oriented have no effect in relationship between perfectionism and burn out as regards, interactional effect between perfectionism, satisfaction and goal-oriented was not significant in explaining of variance of athletic fatigue and physical and emotional exhaustion.



4. Discussion

Previous experimental studies have shown that perfectionism is one of important factors of burnout (Lemyre *et al*, 2008; Terry *et al*, 1995; Hill *et al*, 2008). It is assumed that this relationship moderates through situational factors and personality and it causes athletes' more resilience in against the destructive consequence of perfectionism (Flett and Hewitt, 2005). It was based on this hypothesis that the study examined this issue, whether satisfaction with goal attainment and achievement goals affect the relationship between perfectionism and burnout or not.

According to the data of descriptive statistics, the study clarified that the relatively small number of athletes surveyed in this study had high level of burnout. However, the examination of the rate of variability in scores of dimensions of burnout among athletes showed that few junior-elite athletes have experienced debilitating symptoms of burnout. The result of this study is consistent with Black and Smith's (2007) results that were done on college students and Hodge et al (2008) results. The results of regression analysis showed that and socially prescribed perfectionism has positive relationship with all three dimensions of burnout whereas, self-oriented perfectionism has inverse correlation with the dimensions of burnout. This result is consistent with the finding of Appleton et al. (2009) that they expressed socially prescribed perfectionism has a significant positive association, and selforiented perfectionism a significant negative association with burnout dimensions. In addition, according to the results of regression analysis was clarified that satisfaction goal attainment has participation in explaining of variance related to decrease performance. The main hypothesis was that the relationship between multidimensional perfectionism and athlete's burnout moderates by two factors, satisfaction and task-goal oriented that this hypothesis was not supported according to the results of regression analysis. However, this interactional effect was significant when there was combination of low level of self-oriented perfectionism and high level ego-goal oriented that it was appeared as decrease performance of athletes. In against, lower decrease performance reported in athletes when high level of self-oriented perfectionism was combined with high level of goal-oriented self-centered. The issue that socially prescribed perfectionism is one of factors of burnout in junior-elite athletes by Hill et al. (2008) proved in a studying on football players. This issue is also consistent with the results of other studies and shows that probably will play an important role in the athlete's motivational factors when strengthens the perfectionism, critical assessment, great importance to mistake and loss of confidence and parental pressure. However, positive relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and burnout shows that abnormal cognitive processes are reason of athlete burnout and cause increasing of social expectations and this process is more complex than that Gould et al. (1996) and Lemye et al. (2008) mentioned in their studies. Especially, Campbell and Di Paula (2002) believed that the destructive effect of socially prescribed perfectionism is due to accepted by others. It means that possibility of experience of motivational debilitating increases in such people and it will lead to burnout when increases fear of negative evaluation and rejection by others. The



risk of burnout is in such circumstances very high because the evaluation of effort for achievement is continually undesirable and low and it take external motivation. The issue also became clear in this study is that socially prescribed perfectionism had inverse relationship with athlete satisfaction with goal attainment and perceived coach satisfaction of athlete. The effort for deceptive and unreal standards will continue only poor motivational factors such as avoiding of failure and negative evaluation whenever apathy is more in development towards goals. It is clear in such conditions that there are not effective coping strategies in against destructive effects, this shape of perfectionism prone athletes to burnout (Lemyre *et al*, 2008; Hill *et al*, 2008; Flett and Hewitt, 2005).

The negative correlation was seen less between self-oriented perfectionism and burnout while past researches have presented strong evidences on relationship with the role of socially prescribed perfectionism in athletes' burnout. One possible reason for this issue is that we can express self-oriented perfectionism reflects normal motivational properties that are more consistent with effort for success in comparison with avoiding of abnormal evaluation (Slaney et al, 1995). Although Flett and Hewitt (2002) have said that, dimension of perfectionism is weakening actually a personality trait that causes destructive stress, but others believe that effort for success often leads to positive results as outcome of self-oriented perfectionism. These consequences are likely to present the mechanisms that enhance athlete's resilience in coping with stress (Enns et al, 2005). For example, it is believed that a background of success increase efficiency, reduce of treats and damaging effects of failure. This process enables individual to reduce the risk of weaken through appropriate coping strategies and this factor is that causes negative correlation between selforiented perfectionism and burnout (Dunkley et al, 2000). This ratiocination is consistent with Stoeber et al.'s (2008) view that claim self-oriented perfectionism may play the role of facilitators in the athlete's performance when people are willing to effort towards progress and therefore have ability to cope with the wane (Stoeber et al, 2008). According to the results of this investigation and Hill et al.'s (2008) findings, it is reasonable if we conclude that self-oriented perfectionism is not inherently debilitating. However, we should consider Hewitt and Flett's (2002) ratiocination that claim self-oriented perfectionism likely to cause negative stress and incompatibility when the athlete is faced with the treat or negative consequence. In this study, self-oriented perfectionism showed no relationship with satisfaction with goal attainment and lack of satisfaction may be to hide the described possible role by Feltt et al (2006). Therefore, future studies of sport should determine the possible role of self-oriented perfectionism in burnout by using of longitudinal research designs. On the contrary, of our image, athlete's satisfaction and perceived coach satisfaction with goals attainment was not moderation and effective factor in relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and burnout. Anyway, satisfaction had inversely relation with all three dimensions of burnout and independence of perfectionism was an important factor in predicting of decrease performance. Although these findings provide evidences to support Gould and Rath's (1993) claim that believed the possible of burnout increase when not meet the requirements and performance not go according expectations, but the evidence may be



to know wrong Hewitt, Flett's (2006) claim about moderation of perfectionism. We need probably more variables in studying of dissatisfaction with goals attainment to clarify, whether satisfaction with goals attainment has the mediating influence in relationship between perfectionism and burnout or not. Athlete goal-oriented was not moderation factor in relationship between perfectionism and burnout. However, despite of the results of correlation analysis showed weak negative relationship between decrease performance and athletic fatigue with task-goal oriented but none of goals was not an important prediction of independent burnout of perfectionism. Probably more than goal-oriented in perfectionist people is weak moderation factor is more useful for definition of nature and shape of perfectionist effort. It means that conceptual overlap between different achievement goals and dimensions of burnout may be to present avoiding different strategies and approaches that is associate with perfectionist effort. Some of results in this study support this idea. Self-oriented perfectionism showed significant correlation with both task and ego-goal oriented but only self-oriented perfectionism explained unique variance when all three structures were used as predictor of burnout. These results are consistent with other studies. In a study of Van Yperen (2006) showed that self-oriented perfectionism has relationship with a combination of outcome and performance goals and among students. In other study, Stoeber et al. (2008) proved that perfectionist effort in athletes has correlation with both goals of skill and performance while negative reaction showed wrong positive correlation with performance goal and inverse relationship with outcome goals.

While regression analysis did not support the hypothesis of this study that satisfaction and goal-oriented have the mediating influence in relationship perfectionism and burnout but was observed unexpected interactional effect between self-oriented perfectionism and egogoal oriented that was an important prediction factor of decrease performance. This interactional effect shows that athletes will experience high levels of decrease performance if they have low level of self-oriented perfectionism and high-level task-ego oriented. Such perceptions may be that the athletes who have little experience of successful performance in achieving personal high standards but look to achievement as proof of personal competence and merit, they compare probably personal performance with others that is the factor with negative load and may be to cause more perception of decrease performance. Due to low perception of decrease performance was observed in athletes, who have high levels of selforiented perfectionism and pursuit of personal standards. This subject lead them to high egogoal oriented and cause more control in evaluation of achievement in such people that this also has low perception of decrease performance (Gould and Dieffenbach, 2002). In addition, Hodge and Petichkoff (2000) showed that if high self-centered associates with high taskoriented, it probably will lead to normal motivational consequences.



5. Conclusion

Overall, this study showed that there is positive relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and dimensions of burnout. It expresses that socially prescribed perfectionism is an obstacle in against of athletic performance and progress. This study also showed that self-oriented perfectionism has inverse relationship with dimensions of burnout and this expresses that perfectionism is not inherently debilitating. Finally, the results do not provide support for hypothesis of the moderating influence of satisfaction with goal attainment and task or ego-goal oriented on the relationship between perfectionism and athlete burnout. According to these results, it is clear that we need more researches in this area until we can recognize special variables that have the moderating influence in relationship between perfectionism and burnout.

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Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of dimensions of perfectionism, burnout, perceived satisfaction and achievement among Handball players.

Index	Mean	Standard Deviation
Variable		
Self-oriented perfectionism	5/14	0/74
Socially prescribed perfectionism	3/70	0/76
Decrease performance	2/06	0/67
Emotional and physical exhaustion	2/32	0/78
Athletic fatigue	1/71	0/67
Athlete satisfaction with goal attainment	4/86	1/12
Coach satisfaction	4/98	1/01
Ego-goal oriented	3/78	0/73
Task-goal oriented	4/51	0/48

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between perfectionism, burnout, goal-oriented and satisfaction of handball players.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Self-oriented perfectionism	-								
Self-oriented perfectionism	0/24***	-							
Task-goal oriented	0/26***	-0/09	-						
Ego-goal oriented	0/35***	0/10	0/15*	-					
Decrease performance	-0/18*	0/29***	0/20**	-0/05	-				
Emotional and physical exhaustion	-0/07	0/28***	-0/07	0/04	0/48***	-			
Athletic fatigue	-0/16*	0/30***	-0/19**	-0/03	0/73***	0/56***	-		
Athlete satisfaction	-0/06	-0/20**	0/04	-0/02	-0/47***	-0/21***	-0/27***	-	
Coach satisfaction	0/03	-0/24***	0/12	0/07	-0/55**	-0/22**	-0/28**	0/69***	-



Table 3. The results of regression analytical hierarchy process of dimensions of perfectionism, achievement goals and satisfaction for dimensions of burnout. SPP:

Criterion	F	\mathbb{R}^2	ΔR^2	SOP	SSP	TAS	EG	AS	CS	non-standard regression coefficients							
Variable						K	O			SOP*T ASK	SPP [*] T ASK	SOP* EGO	SSP [*] EGO	SOP* AS	SPP [*] AS	SOP [*] CS	SPP*CS
DP																	
Stage 1	20/37	/386		-/17* *	/14**	-/06	/02	-/13* *	-/25 **								
Stage 2	9.76	/423	/04**	-/12* *	/12**	-/05	-/01	-/14*	-/23 **	0/00	/04	-/10*	-/04	-/06	/08	/00	-/10
E &P E																	
Stage 1	4/67	/126		-/13*	.22**	01	-/06	-/09	-/07								
Stage 2	2/39	/152	/03**	-/11	/23**	-/01	-/06	-/11	-/06	-/04	-/03	-/09	/08	-/03	/09	/00	/03
Fatigue																	
Stage 1	8/53	/209		-/19* *	/22**	-/07	/04	-/11	-/08								
Stage 2	4/10	/236	/03**	-/15*	/18**	-/07	/02	-/12	-/08	/04	/10	/09	-/04	-/03	-/03	-/05	-/09

Socially prescribed perfectionism, SOP: Self-oriented perfectionism, TASK: Task-goal oriented, EGO: Ego-goal oriented, DP: Decrease Performance, E & PE: Emotional & Physical Exhaustion