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EXAMINATION OF PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES' VIEWS ON BURNOUT IN SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

The aims to examine the views of professional athletes on burnout in sports. In line with this objective, the sample group of the study consists of 6 athletes engaged in sports professionally. The research is conducted in the phenomenology model, which is a type of qualitative research design. In order to explore the athletes' views on burnout, a semi-structured interview form consisting of 7 questions was prepared by Sabah and Derelioğlu (2021). The collected data were transferred to the Nvivo program and analyzed using the descriptive analysis method. In the study, it is determined that participants mainly focus on strength, speed, and technique training in their training programs, and the programs are organized and planned according to periods, often resulting in limited social life during this process. Additionally, participants describe sports as health, power, discipline, necessity, planned living, value, center of life, and character development, and it is found that in case of failure, the majority of participants do not face external pressure. Furthermore, it is identified that most participants experience burnout; they tend to quit sports due to factors such as loss of motivation, injury, interpersonal conflicts, and not receiving the rewards for their efforts. When symptoms of burnout syndrome are observed in athletes, early intervention and appropriate treatment methods can help overcome burnout syndrome without negatively affecting skill development. Simultaneously, the content of training programs prepared by coaches should be planned to enhance not only athletes' physical endurance but also their psychological resilience.

Keywords: Professional athlete, sports, burnout

INTRODUCTION

The concept of burnout is called a syndrome that has significant effects in both physical and psychosocial contexts (Shin et al., 2013). Developing a negative attitude towards life, restlessness, distraction, introversion, indifference, etc. are among the symptoms of burnout syndrome (Özler and Dirican, 2014). Burnout syndrome can also occur due to long-term stress, heavy workload, high expectations, low self-esteem, lack of social support, and dissatisfaction (Billeter Koppanen, 2005). As a matter of fact, this situation is usually associated with the conditions of the individual. This can occur with intense stress and pressure, mostly in the work environment, school environment or sports. In the process, people may lose their energy and motivation over time, their work performance may decrease, and they may experience symptoms of restlessness and depression.

Among the causes of burnout syndrome are factors such as excessive workload, role conflict in the environment, insufficient support and rewards, insufficient appreciation by the management, dissatisfaction, lack of social support, lack of self-esteem and instability in private life (Bridgeman et al., 2018). For these reasons, burnout syndrome is usually associated with the working conditions of the person. However, burnout syndrome can be experienced not only in business life, but also in personal life. Conditions such as intense pressure, anxiety, stress, health problems, financial difficulties, family problems in your personal life can also cause burnout. Burnout syndrome can usually occur due to the person's living conditions, working environment, social life and other factors.

The concept of burnout in sports is generally associated with symptoms such as role conflict, performance decline and the meaninglessness of sports. The fact that the athletes are under constant performance pressure and participate in intense training programs and competitions to meet high expectations can cause burnout syndrome. Role conflict can occur as a result of athletes failing to balance their own expectations with the expectations of coaches and teammates. In this case, the athletes, on the one hand, try to improve themselves, on the other hand, try to comply with the expectations of their coaches and teammates. This conflict can make athletes feel tired and exhausted. Performance decline is also known as one of the symptoms of burnout syndrome (Schaufeli, 2003). Burnout syndrome in athletes may occur due to factors such as intense training programs, high performance expectations, disability, injury, insufficient sleep, nutrition and rest (Yıldırım, 2019). Focusing on the success and performance of the athlete, fear of failure, problems related to social and family life, and adaptation problems within the team can also cause burnout syndrome. In addition to these, athletes may encounter various problems in their education life. In addition, the interruption of social life, being away from the family, exam anxiety experienced during the education process, career expectation are among the other reasons that cause burnout (Biricik, 2023). In particular, athletes with high mental endurance are less prone to this syndrome (Madigan and Nicholls, 2017). On the other hand, in addition to mental endurance, a decrease in endurance may occur as a result of excessive effort, and burnout may occur in athletes due to fatigue (Brenner, 2007).

Athletes with burnout syndrome usually show symptoms such as loss of motivation, non-compliance with the training program, decrease in performance, anxiety, depression, fatigue, weakness, and sleep disorders. These symptoms can negatively affect the performance of the athlete and complicate the sports life. In order to prevent burnout syndrome in athletes, it is necessary to pay attention to factors such as appropriate training programs, adequate rest, sleep and diet. In addition, providing a supportive environment that will keep the motivation of the athletes high and helping them to spare time for their social lives can also help prevent burnout syndrome. Failure to meet expectations, inability to handle the intensity of the training, family, community, trainer, etc. Feeling pressure due to factors, thinking that one cannot succeed, and financial issues can increase the burnout of the athlete (Sabah et al., 2021). On the other hand, during the process, the athletes act within various plans and programs in the process of reaching the goal they have determined. However, in this process, they may lose their motivation due to various factors, become desensitized or tend to quit sports. Athletes can of course quit the sport for many reasons. Burnout syndrome is just one of them. Depression, low self-esteem, psychological or emotional weakness, negative reaction, etc. subjects can be cited among examples in this context (Guvendi, 2020).

Burnout is a situation in which athletes experience long-term fatigue, insensitivity and loss of motivation, and it can negatively affect sports life. Especially professional athletes take on much more responsibilities due to their position. In this context, it is necessary to examine the motivations of the athletes, their education, their social lives, their anxieties, the obstacles they encounter, briefly the factors that will affect their burnout.

Therefore, in this study, qualitative research method was used in order to obtain in-depth information to examine the burnout status of elite athletes who actively do sports or to determine the factors that will cause them to experience this situation. In other words, it was given importance to conduct a more flexible research process apart from standardized interview forms. Especially the athletes who contribute to the country's sports; In this process, it is necessary to examine the factors that cause or trigger their anxieties, tendency to leave to sports, financial fears, in short, burnout and take necessary precautions.

As a matter of fact, the study; Based on the opinions and experiences of the athletes on this issue, it is important to investigate the causes of this situation in depth and to present the solution proposals in a healthier way. Therefore, in the light of all this information, the study aims to examine the opinions of professional athletes about burnout in sports.

METHOD

Research Model

The study is in the phenomenology model, which is a type of qualitative research management. This approach is explained as examining how objects and events appear to them based on their own experiences (Holt and Sandberg, 2013). At the same time, these phenomenological studies are a research model that aims to investigate the phenomena that we cannot fully comprehend (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). Therefore, in the

study, phenomenology design was used in order to determine the factors affecting the burnout state based on the experiences of professional athletes.

Participants

The universe of the study consists of professional athletes, and the sample group is within the scope of 6 professional athletes. The sample group in the study was determined by the criterion sampling method. Here, the criterion or criteria can be created by the researcher. Apart from this, a previously prepared criterion can be used in the selection of the sample (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). The criterion in the study is the condition of the people participating in the research to be professionally involved in sports. The athletes included in the sample group of the study were informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary and they could leave at any stage of the study if they wished.

Data Collection Tools

The conduct of this study was approved by the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Amasya University with the ethics committee decision dated 24/06/2022 and numbered 77317. In the study, a semi-structured interview form consisting of 7 questions was prepared by Sabah (2021) in order to examine the opinions of professional athletes about burnout in sports. Semi-structured interview forms, which have a certain level of standardization and flexibility, allow to remove limitations and to examine people's ideas on certain issues in depth (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2003).

Data Analysis

First of all, in the first stage of the study, an interview form was prepared within the scope of the research problem. With the prepared 7 questions, interviews were conducted with professional athletes and were carried out simultaneously. In this process, the simultaneous execution of the data collection process and the analysis process in the research is aimed not to cause data accumulation. Interviews varied between 60-80 minutes, and audio recordings were taken in order not to cause data loss during this process. After the interview, the recordings were transcribed. The data that were transcribed were transferred to the Nvivo program and analyzed by descriptive analysis method. Content analysis is a research method used to make valid inferences (Krippendorff, 2004). In the content analysis process, similar data are brought together within the framework of themes. These concepts are interpreted in a way that the reader can understand (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). However, the descriptive analysis method allows the resulting coding to be assigned to previously created themes. In addition, the statements of the participants are frequently included in this process. Afterwards, the findings are interpreted and the cause-effect relationship is examined (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). The code list that emerged as a result of the analyzed data was assigned to the appropriate predetermined themes. In the coding process, only participant expressions were coded using "basic coding methods". In addition, the code list has been assigned to the appropriate themes as sentences or words that

fully reflect the answers given. In the last stage of the research, the analysis of the data was checked and the results were reported.

FINDINGS

In this part of the study, there is information about the analysis process of the data.

Table 1. Demographic Information about Participants

	Age	Gender	Sports Age	Sports Branch	Education Level	Degrees
P1	23	Male	13	Muay Thai	Degree	Europe 2. Turkey 1. and 2.
P2	21	Male	14	Taekwondo	Degree	Europe 2
P3	20	Female	12	Taekwondo	Degree	Turkey and Balkan Champion, European and World 2.
P4	22	Male	11	Hokey	Degree	Europe 2
P5	22	Female	6	Taekwondo	Degree	Amasya 1. 2. 3.
P6	21	Male	14	Taekwondo	Degree	Taekwondo Poomsae Europe 2.

Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants. The research was carried out within the scope of 6 athletes, 4 male and 2 female participants. The age of the participants varies between 20 and 23, and the age of sports varies between 6-14. Athletes with undergraduate education are interested in Muay Thai, Taekwondo and Hockey branches.

Table 2. Athlete views on Training Planning

Theme	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Training Planning	Node	15	Force Flexibility Technical Individual training Annual training daily training Preparation period rest period Competition period
Reports			

Table 2 shows the views of the athletes on training planning. As a result of the analysis of the data obtained, the participants state that they work especially on strength, speed and technique in their training programs, and that the programs are organized and implemented as annual, daily, preparation, rest and competition periods.

Below are sample quotations from the statements of the participants.

K2: "... I do our trainings in a planned and programmed way. I work on schedule in my strength, flexibility and technical days."

K6: "... We continue our training in accordance with the annual and daily training plans prepared by our trainer. According to the competition calendar published by the world and European federations, our possible competition periods are determined and plans suitable for our preparation, rest and competition periods are prepared according to these dates. Our trainings are carried out in accordance with the needs of each period."

Table 3. Athletes' Opinions According to The Social Life Restriction of The Training Program

Theme	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Restriction of Social Life	Node	44	I'm getting tired Workouts conflict with my social activities My circle of friends is broken We can't socialize because of the camps I've been separated from my family and friends I adjust it according to my daily life It allows me to live programmed
Reports			

Table 3 shows the opinions of the athletes according to the restriction of social life of the training program. As a result of the analysis of the data obtained, the majority of the participants stated that their social life was restricted due to the camps and training sessions, that they were separated from their families and friends during this process, and that this process exhausted them. On the other hand, some participants (2 people) stated that they adjusted their training programs according to their daily lives and that they ensured that they lived in a planned way.

Below are sample quotations from the statements of the participants.

K1: "... When I get tired after the training and when my training time coincides with the time I will do social activities, I get negative feedback from my friends because I cannot participate in social activities and this upsets me."

K4: "... My social circle is according to me and I plan according to my trainings."

Table 4. Athletes' Views on The Importance of Sports

Theme	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Importance of Sports	Node	27	Value Success Obligation Health, Power, Money Discipline Character development Planned living I earned medium Sport comes after my family My life is sports Center of my life
Reports			

Table 4 shows the opinions of the participants about the importance of sports. As a result of the analysis of the data obtained, the participants state that sports are important for them in the form of health, strength,

discipline, obligation, planned living, gaining an environment, value, the center of life, and character development.

Below are sample quotations from the statements of the participants.

K2: "... After all the value it has added to my life in this sports branch in which I am successful, this sport has become a compulsory job for me."

K4: "... Sports is in the first place for me after my family. The place I am in now, the environment I am in, everything I earn is thanks to the sport I do."

Table 5. Athletes' Views on The Pressure Situation Encountered As A Result Of Failure

Theme	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Oppression	Node	35	My own thoughts came to the fore I experienced family pressure I put pressure on myself I'm depressed I'm nervous I didn't feel pressure but I was sad On the contrary, I am more motivated
Reports			

Table 5 shows the opinions of the participants regarding any pressure situation in case of failure in the process. As a result of the analysis of the data obtained, the majority of the participants (4) stated that they did not encounter any pressure, but they put pressure on themselves during this process, their psychology was broken, and they were uneasy that they would not be able to achieve the same success again. On the other hand, some participants (2 people) state that they are pressured by their families in case of failure, and that their own thoughts are at the forefront in case of any pressure.

Below are sample quotations from the statements of the participants.

K1: "... I have never met. On the contrary, they always stood by me and supported me because they knew that I could succeed so that I could work harder and be more motivated."

K3: "... I got some reactions from my environment and it saddened me. I didn't feel any pressure on me, but I was upset. But I realized that I should think about my past achievements and work harder."

Table 6. Athletes' views on burnout

Theme	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Exhaustion	Node	34	I lived on your surtrain Sometimes I wasn't strong enough in training I experienced exhaustion and fatigue When I train too often financial concerns Not enough support My goal kept me afloat I'm fresh
Reports			

In Table 6, the views of the athletes regarding burnout during the process are given. As a result of the analysis of the data obtained, the majority of the participants (4) complained about overtraining, financial concerns, frequent training, lack of adequate support, fatigue, etc. They report that situations have an effect on their burnout. On the other hand, some participants (2 people) express their views that their goals keep them alive in this process and that the process does not tire them but on the contrary keeps them vigorous.

Below are sample quotations from the statements of the participants.

K5: "... When sports had no purpose for me, yes, I wanted to quit. I thought this way when I was very tired and could not get the reward of my work."

K6: "... Since the support and encouragement for sports in our country is only against olympic sports and non-olympic branches are not even substituted for sports, we, the athletes, ask the question "What are we striving for?" brings questions to mind. No matter how much we do it because we love sports, we have to maintain our lives as human beings, so we need an income. While our state gives extremely high incentives and supports to national athletes in the Olympic branches, the fact that they do not even put us in the place of athletes breaks our desire, enthusiasm and enthusiasm. That's why we often ask, "What are we fighting for?" It makes us think twice about asking the question and encouraging the young people who grow up under us to sports and the work we do. These situations sometimes cause us to alienate from sports and experience burnout syndrome."

Table 7. Athletes' Views on The Desire to Quit Sports

Theme	Node Type	Coded Words	Coded Text
Quitting Sports	Node	31	Not getting paid for my hard work don't fail When I lose my motivation when i'm injured when i'm so tired When there are bilateral disputes I didn't want to leave
Reports			

Table 7 shows the views of the athletes regarding their desire to quit sports during the process. As a result of the analysis of the data obtained, the majority of the participants (5) reported that they tended to quit sports during the process due to situations such as loss of motivation, injury, bilateral disagreements, and not being able to get paid for their efforts.

Below are sample quotations from the statements of the participants.

K4: "...Yes, there were times when I wanted to quit. I thought of quitting sports when I was unsuccessful and when I couldn't get my money's worth."

K5: "... There were many times when I wanted to take a break. At that time, I had lost my motivation and was fed up."

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

In this study, it is aimed to examine the opinions of professional athletes about burnout in sports. For this purpose, the results of the study are included in this part of the research, and at the same time, the findings of the studies carried out on this subject in the literature are interpreted by comparing them.

In the research, it is determined that the participants especially work on strength, speed and technique in their training programs, the programs are planned and arranged in accordance with the periods, and their social lives are mostly restricted in this process. In addition, it is determined that the participants describe sports as health, power, discipline, obligation, planned living, value, center of life, character development, and that most of the participants do not face environmental pressure in case of failure. In addition to all these, the majority of the participants experienced burnout; It has been determined that they tend to quit sports in the process due to situations such as loss of motivation, injury, bilateral disagreements, and not being able to get paid for their efforts.

There is no qualitative study on this subject and scope in the literature. When other studies on this subject in the literature are examined, for example; there is no significant difference between the levels of burnout in sports in terms of sports type, level of sports, and educational status (Sabah et al., 2021); Çaloğlu and Yalçın (2020), found that the burnout levels of the athletes were low in their study; It is concluded that as the education level of the people increases, the burnout situations increase in parallel (Elitok, 2016); It is concluded that high level of burnout is associated with lack of motivation, on the other hand, high level of intrinsic motivation is negatively related to burnout (Raedeke and Smith, 2001).

There are also studies in which gender and personality traits are among the factors affecting burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). For example, when examined in terms of gender, it was seen that women experienced more burnout than men (Gümüş, 2013). This situation can be interpreted as a result of the responsibilities imposed on them, especially at home, whether they are employees or housewives. Again, Heidari (2013) stated that the burnout level of female athletes is higher in terms of gender. There may be more than one reason why the burnout level of female athletes is higher than that of male athletes. First, it is thought that female athletes may experience more role conflicts than male athletes. For example, female athletes may have to take on the role of athlete and mother at the same time. This situation can increase the stress levels of female athletes and cause burnout syndrome. Second, female athletes may have less social support networks than male athletes. This may cause female athletes to have more difficulty coping with challenging conditions. Third, it can be said that women generally carry a higher emotional load and may experience more burnout under emotional stress. However, it is not correct to say that burnout syndrome is a gender-specific condition. Burnout syndrome can be seen in athletes of both sexes (Demirci, 2018). On the other hand, there are studies in the literature that

male athletes, apart from female athletes, experience burnout more. For example, it is stated that male athletes, older athletes and athletes who wear the national jersey for many years should receive support from psychologists in order to eliminate or reduce their burnout (Guvendi, 2020). In addition, there are suggestions that the concepts of endurance and psychological well-being should be applied to sports in order to prevent athlete burnout (Biricik, 2023). Particularly, male athletes' professional interest in sports and maintaining it as a profession may increase their responsibilities and cause them to feel pressure. Therefore, in this case, it may cause burnout, especially in male athletes.

In the literature, it has been determined that the burnout levels of perfectionist athletes are higher than other athletes (Aghdasi, 2014). In the study of Kelecek and Yıldırım (2020), which is among the researches that support this situation; They concluded that the motivation and perfectionism levels of the athletes play a role in determining their burnout. Although a high level of perfectionism is an important source of motivation for athletes to achieve their performance goals, it can also be said to cause burnout syndrome. If an athlete has a high level of perfectionism, he may constantly set very high standards for himself and blame himself for any setbacks in achieving his goals. This can create excessive stress and pressure on the athlete and cause burnout syndrome over time. Likewise, the motivation levels of the athletes can also have an effect on their burnout. The motivation level of the athletes determines how much they are willing to reach their goals and how much they give importance to these goals. If an athlete does not get enough support to reach their goals or has difficulty in achieving their goals, this may cause burnout syndrome. Therefore, it should be considered that the motivation and perfectionism levels of the athletes play a role in determining their burnout. As a matter of fact, the finding of the study by Smith et al., (2010) that burnout affects the motivation level of athletes negatively supports this interpretation. In another study, it was determined that the roles of the athletes, especially in team sports, may negatively affect their burnout levels (Çankaya et al., 2021).

Li et al., (2017) stated that burnout affects talent development. Athletes with burnout syndrome usually feel physically and psychologically tired (Türkman, 2017). This may cause poor performance and lack of motivation in athletes. In addition, when the athlete experiences burnout syndrome, he no longer does sports for pleasure and sees sports as a necessity. This can lead to meaninglessness and loss of motivation for the athlete. This may adversely affect the athlete's ability development. Therefore, physical and psychological endurance should be at the desired level. For example, it has been determined that burnout is less common in resilient athletes (Lu et al., 2016). As a matter of fact, this result shows that physical endurance also affects burnout. On the other hand, in the study of Madigan and Nicholls (2017), it was determined that athletes with high mental endurance are less prone to burnout syndrome. High mental resilience in athletes can help them cope more effectively with the physical and psychological stress required by sportsmanship. In this context, it can be thought that athletes with high mental endurance experience less burnout when coping with difficult training and competition processes. At the same time, athletes with high mental resilience exhibit a more positive attitude towards their environment and can move forward by setting their goals more clearly.

SUGGESTIONS

Athletes need to take preventive measures before they get burnout syndrome.

- ✓ It is important to keep the training programs balanced, to set goals realistically, to continuously increase the motivation of the athletes, and to create a social network that supports the athletes in order to minimize the effects of burnout syndrome.
- ✓ Taking measures such as stress management techniques to protect the psychological health of the athletes and getting professional help when necessary can be beneficial in overcoming the burnout syndrome.
- ✓ When burnout syndrome symptoms are noticed in athletes, early intervention and appropriate treatment methods can also help overcome burnout syndrome without negatively affecting skill development.
- ✓ In order to prevent the athletes from experiencing burnout syndrome, it is important that they increase their mental endurance levels and improve their ability to cope with stress.

ETHICAL TEXT

The rules of journal writing, publication guidelines, research and publication ethics, and journal ethical standards have been adhered to in this article. Any potential violation related to the article is the responsibility of the author(s)."

The conduct of this study was approved by the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Amasya University with the ethics committee decision dated 24/06/2022 and numbered 77317.

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