



PSYCHOSOCIAL PREDICTORS OF BURNOUT AMONG NORTHERN-CENTRAL NIGERIAN ELITE ATHLETES

^{12}OLOWOLENI Victor Ben, ¹AYODELE Kolade Babatunde, ¹ABUBAKAR Mohammed Ndakotsu, ²OLASEINDE Peggy-Joe Nwanefuru, ²ADETOYE, Grace Temitope & ¹SUNDAY Francis Adavize*

1. Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State, NIGERIA
2. Department of Human Kinetics, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, NIGERIA

*Corresponding Author

Olowoleni Victor Ben

Email: olowoleni.vb@ksu.edu.ng

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/000-0001-5915-9866>

ABSTRACT

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that develops in response to chronic work-related stressors resulting from negative perception of the stressor. The study aimed to find the psychosocial predictors of burnout among elite athletes ($M = 27.35$ years; ± 4.12). Descriptive cross-sectional design was adopted for the study. Maslach Burnout Inventory and a researcher developed questionnaire was used to collect data. Percentages, mean and standard deviation was used to analyze demographic data, while correlation matrix was used to test hypotheses. Findings showed that conflict in values had a positive correlation (.282), while the years of experience did not (.093) in predicting burnout among elite athletes. with burnout. Athletes in North-Central Zone experience high levels of burnout, their duration in sports was not responsible for the high levels of burnout and conflict is value had a positive correlation with burnout and may have accounted for the high level of burnout. Creating a supportive training environment should be created to train and increase athlete's enthusiasm towards sports

Keywords: Burnout, Conflict in value, Elite athletes, Psychosocial, Sport

Introduction

Athletic burnout is a phenomenon that has been explored overtime in many studies and psychological settings (Adegbesan et al., 2019; Coakley, 1992; Nelson, 2005). However, most cited definitions describe burnout as a psychological, physical, and emotional withdrawal from an enjoyable activity as a result of excessive stress. Stress is viewed as a mismatch between the perceived demands of a situation and one's perceived resources and capabilities for meeting those demands (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). Therefore, when coping and adaptive skills are either inadequate or outweighed by stressors, the result could lead to maladaptive stress patterns (Holden et al., 2016). Since burnout is an athlete's negative perception of stress, it can be said that the state of burnout interacts with mental health including; attention, perception and judgment. It is a psychological syndrome that develops in response to chronic work related stressors (Maslach et al., 2001).

Psychosocial involves individual's (athlete's) psychological development in relation to their social environment (Adegbesan et al., 2019). It is the psyche of athletes in relation to social interactions and

stimuli in sport settings. For the purpose of this study, the psychosocial predictors of burnout are duration of participation and conflict in values.

Prior research has determined younger, less experienced athletic coaches tend to have higher levels of perceived burnout than more experienced coaches (Holden et al., 2016). Such findings could be attributed to young coaches' lack of coping skills or simply because young coaches leave the profession when the stressors become too demanding. However, when it comes to athletes and their level of experiencing burnout, the notion is much different. It is assumed by many sport coaches that the longer an athlete competes in a sport, the greater chance for athlete to burnout and encounter potential negative health consequences (Reme et al., 2008). Junior athletes need to cope with multiple stressors on their pathways towards elite sports (Olowoleni et al., 2021; Mellalieu et al., 2006; Moen et al., 2019) since, they are exposed to high physiological loads, social hassles, demanding tasks, and potential difficulties relating to their peer-groups caused by training and competitions.

Individual athlete's beliefs or principles guiding their values includes; ethics, standards, practices and norms accrued over time from their participation in sport environment (stadia, fans, coaches, task difficulty and other athletes). The incongruence between own values and those of an organisation can deplete the workers on a psychological level daily (Gascón et al., 2021). According to Altun, (2002) nurse's professional and personal values, play an important role in the level to which they are burned out. Athletes may disagree with the coaches' training modules and tactics or the club management's decision as it comes to staffing and recruitments. The phenomenon is common among individuals with a strong vocational character, where conflicting in values may trigger the need to make decisions (Gascón et al., 2021; Montero-Marin et al., 2013).

Studies exist on the effect of burnout on variables that affect participation; job loss and workload (Adegbesan et al., 2019), affective and cognitive stress (Moen et al., 2019), years of participation (Holden et al., 2016) and personality (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010) among others. With so many factors affecting the likelihood of athletes to experience burnout and few number of athletes that attain elite sports status in the North Central Zone of Nigeria, it is worthy to study whether duration of participation and conflict in values influence burnout among elite athletes.

Research Question

What is the level of burnout of elite athletes?



Hypotheses

H₁ Duration of participation will not significantly influence the level of burnout in elite athletes

H₂ Conflict in values will not significantly influence the level of burnout in elite athletes

Materials and Methods

Design

Descriptive cross-sectional design was adopted for the study.

Participants

The population of the study consisted of all sport councils in North Central, Nigeria. There are six (6) sport councils, controlled by each state. Athletes that presented each state in sports, were registered and on the payroll for the last one year of each state were considered elite athletes. Two hundred (200) elite athletes from the sports councils made up the sample for the study. Sample was determined in two stages;

Simple random sampling technique of fish-bowl with replacement was used to select 4 sports councils (Kogi, Kwara, Niger and Plateau).

50 elite athletes were randomly selected from each sports council but also limited to football players. Informed consent was obtained and signed by each athlete and their coaches

Instrument

Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 2001), a 22- item questionnaire that covers the 3- subscales of burnout with a 6-response format was adopted for the research work. The second was a 9-item researcher – developed instrument. Test-retest was used to determine validity ($r=.74$). The researchers and three (3) trained research assistants administered the questionnaires to the athletes in their various states. The consent of each respondent was sought and confidentiality assured.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics of percentages, mean and standard deviation was used to analyze demographic data, while correlation matrix was used to test hypotheses.

Results

Table 1: Demographic distribution of the respondents

| Item | Variable | Frequency (N=185) | Percentage (%) | Mean |
|---------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Age | 21-25years | 66 | 35.63 | 27.35 years |
| | 26-30years | 87 | 47.07 | |
| | 31-35years | 22 | 11.9 | |
| | 36-40years | 10 | 5.4 | |
| Gender | Male | 122 | 65.9 | |
| | Female | 63 | 34.1 | |
| Sports Council | Kogi | 50 | 27.03 | |
| | Kwara | 45 | 24.32 | |
| | Niger | 40 | 21.62 | |
| | Plateau | 50 | 27.03 | |
| Sport participation | 0-5years | 23 | 12.43 | |
| | 6-10years | 62 | 33.51 | |
| | 11-15 years | 89 | 48.1 | |
| | 16-20years | 11 | 5.94 | |

Table 1 shows the demographic distribution of the respondents. A total of 185 respondents with a mean and standard deviation of 27.35 ± 4.12 . Majority 87 (47.07%) were aged 26-30 years; most, 112 (65.9%) were males; the least respondents 40 (21.62%) were from Niger State Sports Council; most 151 (81.61%) had participated between 6-15 years in their sports.

Table 2: Relationship between burnout and duration of participation

| Variable | Mean | S.D | N | R | P |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-----|------|------|
| Burnout | 74.32 | 10.21 | 185 | .093 | .301 |
| Duration of Participation | 10.92 | 4.06 | | | |
| | | | | | n.s |

Table 2 shows there was no significant relationship between burnout of elite athletes and duration of participation ($r=.093$, $N= 185$, $P>.05$). Duration of participation did not influence burnout of elite athletes.

Table 3: Correlation matrix showing relationship between burnout and conflict in values

| | Burnout | Conflict in Values | Mean | S.D |
|--------------------|---------|--------------------|-------|-------|
| Burnout | 1 | | 74.32 | 10.21 |
| Conflict in Values | .282** | 1 | 10.92 | 4.06 |

** Sig. at .01, * Sig. at .05 level

Table 3 showing the correlation between burnout and conflict in values of elite athletes in North Central zone of Nigeria. It shows that there is a positive relationship between burnout and conflict in values.

Discussion

Findings reported showed that elite athletes experienced high levels of burnout (mean = 74.32). This result is scored as aided from the research (Fares et al., 2016; Maslach et al., 1997; Maslach et al., 2001), on the relationship between burnout and mental health, it is deduced that high score means on the burnout questionnaire denotes high levels of burnout and low mental health. The results from this study show that elite athletes are in a state of experiencing low mental health, unless checked, will reduce their coping skills and eventual withdrawal from sports.

Findings of the study also revealed that duration of participation in sports are not correlated ($r = .093$) with the levels of burnout of elite athletes in North Central States of Nigeria. Prior researches examined that junior athletes have to cope with stressors which become overwhelming (Mellalieu et al., 2006; Moen et al., 2019) and potential overuse injuries and negative perception of stress (DiFiori et al., 2014). However, it agrees with some other findings, that the duration of participation of athletes, does not predict burnout (Holden et al., 2016). Therefore, the length of experience or duration of participation in sports was not predictive of the high levels of burnout the participants of the study experienced. However, other psychological variables which predict the behaviour of athletes, might have been responsible for such.

The hypothesis that conflict in values will not significantly influence the level of burnout in elite athletes was rejected. Findings from the study showed a positive correlation with burnout. The incongruence between own values and those of job settings can erode the individual's psyche, not through physical over-exertion, but emotionally and on a daily basis. The phenomenon is common among professions with a strong vocational character, where there is a continuous clash between the ideals that initially guided the person towards activity and the obligation to carry out different activities, particularly contrary to his or her personal ideals (Gascón et al., 2021; Montero-Marín et al., 2013). The values -rules, culture, status quo- in organizing sports teams within North Central Nigeria should be evaluated and a nexus be drawn with athletes' own beliefs, norms or personality to enable sport attain maximal heights and participants, optimum attainment of goals.

Limitation of the Study

First, the study used a self-reporting instrument that has the potential to introduce bias. However, anonymity and confidentiality were assured to all respondents. Second, the research was done in the North-Central Zone of the country and may not be generalizable to other regions. Third, some questionnaires were retrieved online via WhatsApp due to increase in insecurity in the study area. Research assistants were recruited from each state. This also amounted to the loss of 15 out of the initial 200 questionnaires to be sampled.

Conclusion

Athletes in North-Central Zone experience high levels of burnout. The duration of sports participation in was not responsible for the high levels of burnout among elite athletes. Conflict in value had a positive correlation with burnout and may have accounted for the high level of burnout. This study did not measure the effect of age, location or sex that may likely predict burnout. It is recommended that a supportive training environment should be created to train and increase athlete's enthusiasm towards sports.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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