The perceptions of physical education coaches on the reasons behind burnout

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the phenomenonof burnout from coaches' perspectives, and attempted to identify factors that contributed to their burnout. It utilized a qualitative approach to create an in-depth picture of the burnout experience and possible contributing factors.The participants (n = 3)who were found to be burnout were purposefully selected for this study. They ranged between 28 to 35 years of old and had taught different sports for at least 10 years in high schools in Iran. Semi-structured in-depth interview were conductedto know their viewpoints on the reasons of their burnout. Qualitative data on causes of burnout were obtained through interviews with selected participants. The results of thematic analysis identified emotional and physical exhaustion, working condition and social factors as three main factors that contributed to powerful emotions that inevitably led to the burnout of the 3 coaches in this study. Additionally, financial issue had been mentioned as another related factor. The findings provided evidence on important reasons of burnout among high school coaches and had important implications for improving the coaches' positive attitude and job satisfaction through considering the factors that result in burnout.

Keywords: Burnout; Coaches; High School, Qualitative Research

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INTRODUCTION

A number of different fields of research have been exploring the phenomenon of burnoutamong coaches. What has emerged from most of the research is that burnout is multidimensional and characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment [1-3]. The experience of burnout may lead individuals to experience a decline in their quality of work and also physical and psychological health which can be very costly for both individual worker and everyone affected by that person [4].

The phenomenon of burnout has also been experienced by both athletes and coaches inthe world of sport. Research on burnout in sport has focused primarily on athlete burnout from sociological, physiological, and psychological perspectives [5-7]. However, coach burnout has also emerged as a topic requiring more attention [8]. Coaching, by nature, is challenging and complex, and is known as a capricious profession[9]. The profession consists of endless dilemmas and decision-making, requiring constant planning, observation, evaluation, and reaction[10].

Coaches must also come to understand their athletes, learn how to best motivate them, and are often expected to provide both personal and academic experiences for their athletes[11]. The environment in which coaches operate is often one that expects themto perform under high levels of pressure, operate under intense public scrutiny and holds themto extremely high standards [12]. The nature of coaching, which encompasses continuous and copious demands and requirements, may ultimately lead coaches to neglect theirown desires and those of their families [12]. Simply put, coaches are working inan environment where they should be able to solve the problems rather than succumbing to them [13].

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Since limited research in the field of coach burnout has been conducted [14]there is an essential requirement for conducting research on coaching stress and burnout and related reasons[11].The purpose of the present study was to explore the phenomenon of burnout from coaches' perspectives. It utilized a qualitative approach to create an in-depth picture of the burnout experience and possible contributing factors.

Literature Review

Burnout, as defined by Harris and Harris [15] is a state when individuals become fed up withwhatever they are doing, and refuse to continue their job (p. 170). This multidimensional phenomenon affects individuals in various professions ranging from nursing, social work, police work, psychiatry, psychology, teaching, law, mental health work [16] and coaching, often due to an imbalance in the situational demands and the available resources [17].Freudenberger and Richelson [18]state that individuals who fall prey to burnout have good intentions and strive to reach their goals (p. 12). They identify this type of individual as one who has busy schedules and they can be counted on to do more than their responsibilityin all projects or jobs (p. 12). Furthermore, the individual is burning out because they've pushed themselves too hard for too long and started out with great expectations and refused to compromise along the way (p. 12).

Around the same time as Freudenberger's research on burnout, Maslach, a social psychology researcher, began her study of burnout. She focused on human service specialists, studying the emotional stress related to the specialists' occupation, by engaging in extensive interviews with these workers [1].Maslach found that coping strategies had a significant and positive impact on the specialists' vocation. In a study she conducted on lawyers assisting indigent clients, Maslach described the three dimensions of burnout as an overwhelming exhaustion, senses of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a feeling of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment [1].Maslach and her colleagues also contributed to the knowledge base of burnout by developing the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

The Maslach Burnout Inventory is the only measure that assesses all three of the core dimensions [19] of burnout, and is the most widely accepted and used instrument in the study of burnout in among professionals [20]. The MBI is used to quantify emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment, which are measures of burnout. Of the three characteristics of burnout, emotional exhaustion was the central quality of burnout and the most obvious manifestation of this complex syndrome and most widely reported and the most thoroughly analysed [19]. They also mentioned that the feelings of being exhausted often is considered as getting burnout, in most of people. Depersonalization, or cynicism, is the interpersonal component of burnout, and refers to a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to various aspects of the job (p. 399). The third component of burnout is decreased personal accomplishment, which is also known as reduced efficacy. This isthe self-evaluative element of burnout, and encompasses feelings of incompetence and a lack ofachievement and productivity at work (p. 399). Maslach [1] summarizes the threedimensions of burnoutwhich is as follows:

Exhaustion and cynicism tend to emerge from the presence of work overload and social conflict, whereas a sense of inefficacy arises more clearly from a lack of resources to get the job done (e.g., lack of critical information, lack of necessary tools, or insufficient time), (p. 190). In an extensive review of literature on burnout, Schaufeli and Buunk [21] found that there were five primary categories of symptoms experienced when an individual began to burnout. These categories are affective, cognitive, physical, behavioral, and motivational symptoms. Affectivesymptoms refer tobeing in a depressed mood or being hostile.

Cognitive symptoms includedtwo symptoms experienced in the physical domain. Behavioural indicators associated withburnout consisted of a decline in performance and an increase in absenteeism. Symptoms associated with motivation incorporated a lack of interest and pessimism. Furthermore, Dale and Weinberg [22]noted that "exhaustion is present and often takes multiple forms such asphysical, mental, and emotional", and include symptoms such as "loss of concern, energy, interest, and trust" (p. 69).

Burnout and Coaches

Coach burnout is an area of increasing interest for researchers. Burnout results indecreased coach longevity, reduced effectiveness and productivity, and may result in a coachleaving his or her sport prematurely [23]. Researchers in the sports domain have supported the notion that burnout in the sports world can manifest itself in many forms. Most notably and as previously stated, it is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment [23].

Questions
1. Is your work emotionally exhausting?
2. Do you feel burnout because of your work?
3. Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work?

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4. Do you feel that every work hour is tiring for you?
5. Do you have enough energy for family and yourself during leisure time?
6. Tell me about the reasons that caused you feel burnout.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants
The selection criterion for this study was coaches who had experienced high levels of burn out. In order to determine whether participants meet this criterion, a work Burnout questionnaire was used to assess the participants' level of burnout. Three male and female coaches were found to be burnout and asked to cooperate in this study. They ranged between28 to35 years of old, and hadtaught different sports forat least 10 years.

Interview Guide
This qualitative study aimed at interviewingcoaches as an appropriate source of informationand obtain an ''insider perspective'' of the burnout phenomenon[24].In order to improve the efficiency of the interview and its results, an interview guide was adapted from Gustafsson, Kenttä [25]. Initial phase of interview prompted the participants to describe their career in detail. The interview guide was designed to obtain coaches' reasons of their decision to withdraw from sport, demonstrate symptoms culminating in burnout, determine responses to perceived demands, and explore perceived motivation, social relations, and significant others.

Procedure
Semi structural interview was used for this study because this format allows researcher to lead the interview according to the objectives in the study. It is also possible for researchers to use prompts or clarification questions to obtain thorough information on the issues that arise during a semi structured interview. In other words, semi structural interview deem as an appropriate instrument for qualitative research in that unlike structured interview, it depicts a complete picture of phenomenon under study, while it still focuses on the aim of study[24]. The selection of this kind of format for interview was to explore feeling of participants toward their work thoroughly. This format allows for exploring novel areas and is likely to produce rich data [26]. Participants were asked to determine the appropriate location and time for the interview. In order to make interview appear more of a conversation than an interview, the researcher started each interview session with an informal interaction[27].At the beginning of each interview, there was a description of the objectives and the procedure and coaches were assured that their identity will remain anonymous and they had right to refrain from answering questions or stop providing their cooperation at any time of the study.

Data Collection
Data was collected by conducting one individual semi-structured interview with eachparticipant. The individual interviews created dialogue between the participant and theresearcher, which allowed the participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions abouttheir experience with burnout.One face-to-face semi-structured interview of one hour to one and a half hours in length,discussing coach demographics and personal history, coaching experience, and the topic ofburnout, was conducted and audio recorded with each participant.

Data Analyses
The analysis process undertaken in this study was that of thematic analysis. Thematicanalysis is a method for recognizing, evaluating and reporting patterns (themes) within data [28]. Thematic analysis is comprised of six-phases, which includebecoming familiar with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes,defining and naming themes, and finally, producing the report. The first phase involvedtranscribing each interview verbatim, followed by reading and re-reading each transcript tobecome immersed in the data and familiar with the content, and lastly, making phase, involved coding as many potential patterns as possible and to code extracts of datainclusively - i.e., keep a little of the surrounding data if relevant (p. 89). The third phaseentailed searching for themes once all of the data had been coded, followed by gathering andseparating the codes into possible themes. This allowed for the researcher to find out the relationship between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes(i.e., main overarching themes and sub-themes within them) (p. 89-90). Reviewing the themeswas the next phase of analysis, which involved evaluating each theme to determine if themescould be broken down to form a new theme and to ensure that each "theme" was actually atheme. Through this process, four themes were developed: the multiple demands of the coachingrole, lack of support, emotions and burnout, and navigating burnout. This step in the analysisprocess provided in-depth insight into how the coaches in the present study experienced burnout.The fifth phase involved defining and naming themes, and further refining the themes generatedby the researcher. Involved with the refinement process, the researcher had to identify potentialsub-themes and under what theme each sub-theme would fit. The final phase of thematicanalysis required the researcher to illustrate the findings in a manner that "convinces the readerof the merit and validity" of the

analysis (p. 93), providing a "concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account" (p. 93) of the data within each theme by using quotations fromeach participant.

Table 1. Coaches' Perception

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code	C1	C2	C3
Emotional Exhaustion	Loss of Enjoyment	-Not getting enough enjoyment	x	x	
		-Loss of desire		x	x
		-Loss of passion	x		
	Loss of Exciting	-Boring and same working days	x	x	x
		-Boring coaching for the armature teams	x	x	
	Demand of Time	-No time for self and family	x		x
		-No separation between work and family	x		x
		-Couldn't do what wanted to do in limited time		x	x
Working condition	Poor Facilities	-Lack of the sport facilities			
		-lack of suitable sport environment-	x	x	x
	Organization Issue	-Too many students in the class	x	x	x
		-Handle too many classes in different school	x		x
	Salary	-Low salary and financial condition	x	x	x
Social factors	Weak Background	-Poor physical ability of student	x	x	x
		- lack of knowledge about importance of sport	x	x	
		-Dealing with parents		x	
	Lack of Support	-Lack of respect from school staffs	x	x	
		-Insufficient attention paid to sport	x	x	x
		-Lack of standard and homogenized approach toward sport	x	x	x

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to explore the phenomenon of burnout from coaches'perspectives. It utilized a qualitative approach to create an in-depth picture of theburnoutexperience and possible contributing factors. By conducting in-depth interviews withcoaches who had experienced this phenomenon, it was anticipated that the researcher would be able tobuild on our understanding of the burnout experience.The results are divided into four sections. The first three sections discuss the main themes that developed from the thematic analysis of the interviews, including numerous sub-themes under each of the main themes. The three main themes were the multiple demands of the emotional and physical exhaustion,working condition, social factors (lack of support)and other factors. At the end of each quote in the following sections, the coach who provided the quote will be represented by 'CI', 'C2', etc. This allows the reader to refer to and review the demographic information and coaching background of the coach in Tables 1.

Emotional Factors
Loss of enjoyment:
All of the coaches stated that they were not happy in the last years of their work.
''...I lost the joy of coaching and teaching when I found that I had to work with student who never had had a sport teacher" (C1) she also revealed: 'I felt that coaching is very exciting but it is very boring in school".

Another coach also said that she felt really tired and she did nothave time to rest and recharge her batteries (C2). The coaches had problem with the time that they needed to spend with their family or for their free time.
''...I was responsible for training the teams for competitions while they never had a sport teacher in their previous school years. Then I had to spend alot of time in the gym and school..."

One of them noted that ''most of the time I feel exhausted even to talk to my kids and I have the same argument with my husband regarding the fact that I am not on the mood to even talk to him.

The emotional themes the coaches in this study experienced as burn out ranged from "a lossof enjoyment of coaching", "fatigue and feelings of being worn out", to" try too hard to meet one's own and other's expectations". As defined by Price and Weiss [2], emotional exhaustion inrelation to burnout includes feelings of being overwhelmed, emotionally depleted, and lack of energy (p. 392), and this definition 'fits' the coaches in this study. Many of the coachesspoke of their passion for coaching, and how that passion had disappeared as a result of manyfactors, some of which included lack of sport ability in students, not getting enough enjoyment and loss of passion. One coach in particular revealed he felt he was too tired to be creative, which was an aspect of coaching that was important to him. It was quite discouraging for these coaches to feel loss of passion and loss of enjoyment for a profession that they had all spent years dedicated to and loved. These findings are certainly consistent with previous research on the emotional aspects of burnout [29, 30].

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Working Condition:

Working condition is another major factor that most coaches complained about:

''...I am under so much pressure now because of the lack of sport facilities in the schools that I teach. First of all there are too many students to deal with...'' (C1) and 2 other coaches stated that they cannot use their experience and ability because they don't have enough sport facilities in school. (C2, C3).

Moreover lack of suitable sport environment was another important limitation in teaching sport skills in school. Regarding this issue (C3) proclaimed:"...Most of the schools do not have indoor or outdoor court specially designed for students to play or do exercise in..." (C3)Confirming (C3)' statement, (C2) put emphasizes that students had to play volleyball or basketball in the middle of the school yard where they were surrounded by many other students who interrupt them. (C2) (C1) addressed the different dimension of problems faced by coaches' burnout. She pointed out:

"...Sometimes due to heavy rain or exhausting sunny day students lose their interest to even thinking of playing outside. They keep looking for different excuses to sit indoor and do anything but playing..."

It is an apt comment by Goodger, Gorely [31] that much of what appears to contribute to coach burnout is contained within the coaching environment, and reflects the time-demanding nature of the role and the intense pressure that coaches find themselves under to produce results (p. 554).

Social Factors

Additional point needs to be taken into consideration is the weakness of sport ability and knowledge which impinges upon coaches motivation.

"...It is very tiring to work with students who don't have any athletic backgrounds because in their prior schools they did not even have sport teachers to teach them the basic rules therefore it is very difficult and challenging for them to pick up the new sports and learn the new technique. Most of them do not even know what sport they are interested in..."(C2).

Since the students are not educated about the benefits and the advantages of being physically active most of the time they misunderstand the aim and goals of doing any kind of activity during the sport time .Insufficient attention paid to sport and physical education is a significant reason to burn teachers out. Due to lack of enough exercise in childhood oryears beforestudents constantly face muscle. Construction and parents blame sport teachers for being in experienced and cruel.

All 3 coaches also spoke of financial issues they encountered in regards to being under paid for the position and responsibilities they undertook.(C1) revealed: "I was only being paid a small amount to do a lot of responsibilities. I had no pension, benefits or job stability". (C3) indicated that the salary that he received was not enough to afford his life.

Decreased personal accomplishment, "feelings of incompetence and a lack ofachievement and productivity at work" [19], is the third dimension of burnout. The majority of coaches in this study revealed they felt they were not meeting their own expectations or expectations that had been outlined for them by the administration. For instance, two of the coaches felt that, by not achieving their own expectations, they were letting down those around them. Another coach felt that as a result of not having adequate funds, he was not able to meet his own expectations and achieve his goals with his athletes. In addition, many of the coaches in this study spoke about the lack of support they experienced from their athlete director or board of directors. For these coaches, this absence of a support system and acknowledgment of the hard work accomplished on a daily basis may have led to a sense of futility and feelings of ineffectiveness.

Leiter and Maslach [32]in their study classified six areas of organizational risk factors thatcontribute to burnout. One of these domains includes work overload. One of the many thingsknown about the profession of coaching is that coaches may "find themselves in theuncomfortable position of having to satisfy various'' [13].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the purpose of the present study was to find the reasons of burnout in high school coaches. Specifically, the main research question that guided this study was: "Tell me about your experience with burnout." The results identified key factors that contributed to powerful emotions that inevitably led to the burnout of the 3 coaches in this study. Each coach had their own unique story to tell of the frustrations and exhaustion that were built

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until they became reasons for burnout. All 3 coaches in this research were full-time.

They had little support, financially and from a human resources perspective, and several had the difficult task of trying to balance their time between coaching and family. Therefore, to paint a picture of a coach who may be experiencing burnout, we would see that they have multiple roles because of the nature of the coaching profession; they take on too much because of the passion that drives them to succeed and meet their own and other's expectations, and a support system that severely lacking from an organizational standpoint. On top of all of this, coaches and the resultsof their work are in the public's eye every day. It should come as no surprise that each of thesecoaches eventually experienced burnout.

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