

Field Study

Burnout and Perceived Stress among University Coaches in Lithuania

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Abstract: Burnout and Perceived Stress among University Coaches in Lithuania: Romualdas MALINAUSKAS, et al. Lithuanian Academy of Physical Education, Lithuania—Objective: To investigate the associations between burnout, gender, working experience and perceived stress among university coaches in Lithuania. **Methods:** A random sample of university coaches (N=203) was investigated (136 male and 67 female coaches; 131 coaches, with 10 yr or more work experience, and 72 coaches with less than 10 yr job experience). Two questionnaires—the Coach Burnout Questionnaire (CBQ) and Perceived Stress Scale—10 (PSS-10)—were used. The statistical hypotheses were tested by the independent samples *t*-test and binary logistic regression analysis. **Results:** Statistically significant differences at the 0.01 level for burnout among coaches with 10 yr or more (burnout average score and standard deviation 2.28 ± 0.42), and coaches, who less than 10 yr job experience (1.97 ± 0.35) were found. No differences were observed between males and females with regard to burnout. The odds ratio (OR) of perceived stress for burnout was 1.92; 95% CI 1.01–3.64. **Conclusions:** Significant association between burnout and job experience of 10 yr or more as compared to less than 10 yr among the university coaches was observed. High levels of perceived stress among university coaches are significantly related to burnout. (*J Occup Health 2010; 52: 302–307*)

Key words: Burnout, Job experience, Perceived stress, University coaches

High levels of perceived stress and burnout have been reported in a variety of human service and help professions, such as psychologists, teachers, social

workers, medical personnel, coaches, managers, police officers, lawyers, etc¹). Burnout has been characterized as a chronic condition that develops when a subject works too hard for too long in high-pressure situations. Negatively perceived events occurring over a period of time lead to negative psychological responses such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, loss of interest in work, difficulties in interpersonal relationships and deteriorating physical condition²). Five categories of symptoms are associated with burnout syndrome: affective (e.g., tearful, depressed mood, hostility), cognitive (e.g., feeling helpless, cynicism, impaired attention and memory), physical (e.g., exhaustion, illness), behavioral (e.g., absenteeism and impaired performance), and motivational (e.g., disillusionment, lack of enthusiasm)²). Maslach claims that burnout is emotional exhaustion caused not by stress in general, but by stress conditioned by interpersonal relationships³). Therefore, burnout is more prevalent in occupations, associated with intensive long-term communication^{4,5}). The syndrome of burnout is usually conceived as a state of emotional, psychological and physical exhaustion which has been formed under the influence of long-term unresolved stresses developing in job situations⁶). It is a syndrome which develops against a background of chronic stress, gradually sapping the emotional (energetic) and personality resources of the subject. Burnout develops over a long span of time through accumulation of negative emotions, especially if no “discharge” of these emotions is efficiently achieved.

In contrast to the high number of studies examining burnout in various occupational settings^{2, 7–9}), a limited number of studies have examined burnout among athletes and sports coaches. A recent systematic review of burnout among coaches reported 23 studies including 6,460 coaches¹⁰). Also, there are 27 located studies on athletes’ burnout comprising a total population of 2,448 with 22 independent samples. Samples tended to be mixed gender and included athletes from a range of competitive levels and types of sport. North American samples have

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historically dominated the literature. The exclusive focus on North American populations is a serious limitation in terms of cross-cultural perspectives.

The scientific literature states that among various areas of educational activity, the occupation of a coach is one of the most demanding¹⁰. Therefore, sports coaches are at risk of development of burnout¹¹. They are pressed by the necessity to achieve victory, they face order and personal relationship issues, and they have to travel a lot¹². When questions are posed about feelings are related to burnout, coaches and sportsmen usually refer to intrinsic and extrinsic sources of pressure, physical and mental exhaustion, mood alterations, increased anxiety and the lack of social support¹². Studies have reported moderate to high levels of burnout among female coaches^{13, 14}.

The development of burnout syndrome is usually a long-term process. Various attitudes to the stages of this process and their number are manifested. Golembiewski and Munzenrider¹⁵ describe five stages in this process, while Cherniss¹⁶ reports three and Freudenberg¹⁷ singles out twelve. Studies^{12, 18} have reported that the work of a sports coach experiencing stress was unlikely and the stress level was predictive of all 3 subscales of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment¹⁹. The excessive workload, multiple requirements at work including maintenance health, teaching and administration, limited staffing and financial resources for the procurement of adequate support, emotional pressure of other individuals (other coaches, members of sportsmen's families), and conflicts with colleagues and administration are mentioned as fundamental sources of burnout¹¹. Researchers show that burnout may increase (become more profound) if a sports coach does not feel that his/her work effort is acknowledged, well-regarded, or when she/he does not receive adequate remuneration¹⁸. Coaches suffering from burnout syndrome commit mistakes, forget their own appointments, and find it hard to relax. Consequently, they may abuse alcohol or drugs in order to free themselves from stress¹⁸. The following symptoms of burnout are well-established: persistent tiredness, sleeplessness, increased absence from work, aches or pain in muscles and skeleton, migraine, dyspepsia issues, persistent bouts of cold and flu, loss of responsibility for the trainees, family members, colleagues and friends, frequent boredom, decreased self-esteem, mood disturbances, revaluation of virtues, emotional detachment from others and increased anxiety¹⁹. Three types of possible consequences of burnout have been studied: ill-health, negative job attitudes, and impaired organizational behaviour²⁰. Cross-sectional studies show that burnout is related to such indicators of ill health as depression, psychosomatic complaints, distress, and physical health problems²⁰.

Research in sports settings has concentrated on two groups: high level athletes and elite athletes' coaches, both very people-intensive jobs with a high potential for burnout. Most of the studies in sports settings have focused on elite levels. However, the most critical issue limiting a more comprehensive understanding of university coach burnout is the absence of studies about burnout among university coaches. This study contributes to the research on perceived stress and burnout as experienced by coaches at the university level in Lithuania.

Even though it may seem that it is easy to sketch the portrait of a coach who has suffered burnout, this phenomenon has not been fully conceptualized and thus is depicted in a wide variety of ways²¹.

The aim of the present research was to examine the associations between burnout and independent variables: gender, job experience and perceived stress among university coaches in Lithuania.

Subjects and Methods

Participants

We performed a questionnaire survey among university coaches in Lithuania in 2008. After receiving approval from the Medical Ethical Committee of the Kaunas University of Medicine, 250 university coaches were randomly selected from the Register of the Lithuanian Sports Federation (there are 530 university coaches in Lithuania). The selected sample corresponded to the investigated population in respect to gender. Coaches were invited by mail to fill in the anonymous questionnaire. The confidentiality of each participant was assured in the cover letter. A self-addressed stamped envelope was included in the packet. In total, 203 university coaches (136 males and 67 females) filled in the questionnaire (response rate 81.2%). Fifty-eight coaches were younger than 30 yr, 91 coaches were in the 30–39 age range, and 54 coaches were 40 yr old or older. As the mean age of coaches was 35 ± 9.6 , and following the *a priori* statement that burnout symptoms in coaches appear in a short period of time, the cut-off for work experience was chosen as 10 yr. The work experience of 131 coaches was 10 yr or more, and 72 coaches had less than 10 yr work experience.

Measures

Burnout

The *Coach Burnout Questionnaire* CBQ²² was chosen as the specific questionnaire for coaches' burnout. It has been translated into Lithuanian and adaptation has been performed. The questionnaire consists of 15 statements. Each of them has 5 answer variants assessed in points from 1 to 5 (1=almost never; 2=rarely; 3=sometimes; 4=frequently; 5=almost always). A total average score (the burnout indicator) was calculated for each

Table 1. Average scores of Lithuanian university coach burnout (N=203) according to gender, job experience and perceived stress

Subjects	M ± SD	t value
Males (N=136)	2.20 ± 0.43	1.44
Females (N=67)	2.11 ± 0.39	
Job experience of less than 10 yr (N=72)	1.97 ± 0.35	-5.29**
Job experience of 10 yr or more (N=131)	2.28 ± 0.42	
Low levels of perceived stress (N=81)	2.10 ± 0.36	-2.01*
High levels of perceived stress (N=122)	2.22 ± 0.45	

M=mean; SD=standard deviation. * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$.

respondent. The distribution of the values of this burnout indicator conformed to the normal distribution (mean 2.17 ± 0.42). Dichotomization at the mean score was performed and the participants were divided into two groups: no burnout (under 2.17) and burnout (2.17 or more). The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.79).

Perceived stress

Perceived stress was assessed using the *Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)*, which consists of 10 questions. This scale assesses the level of overall perceived stress in subjects²³⁾ and measures thoughts and feelings about stressful events, control, coping, and experienced stress, as well as how often individuals feel or think in a stressful manner. PSS-10 items are designed to tap the degree to which respondents find their lives unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloading. These three issues have been repeatedly found to be central components of the experience of stress. Respondents indicated how often they had felt or thought in a certain way on a five point Likert scale (0=never, 1=almost never, 2=sometimes, 3=fairly often, 4=very often). The points were summed and the respondents were divided into 2 groups at the median score: low level of perceived stress (under 24) and high level of perceived stress (24 or more). The questionnaire has been translated into Lithuanian and adaptation has been performed. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.88).

Statistical analyses

The comparison of quantitative values was performed with the independent samples *t*-test. Logistic regression was performed to determine the association between gender and burnout, the association between job experience and burnout, and the association between perceived stress and burnout. The odds ratios (ORs) and their 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were calculated. A significance level of 0.05 was chosen. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social

Sciences (SPSS) version 13.

Results

Means and standard deviations for CBQ are given in Table 1. Differences between the groups of coaches according to gender, job experience and perceived stress with the independent samples *t*-test. The results of CBQ demonstrate that burnout is more common among university coaches whose job experience was 10 yr or more ($p<0.01$); the mean score of their indicator was 2.28 ± 0.42 . When job experience was less than 10 yr, the mean score of burnout was 1.97 ± 0.35 . It was also established that the level of burnout in male and female coaches did not differ significantly ($t=1.44$; $df=201$; $p>0.05$). According to the burnout scores statistically significant differences among university coaches with low levels of perceived stress and coaches with high levels of perceived stress were indicated.

In order to assess the impact of gender, working experience and perceived stress on burnout among university coaches, binary logistic regression was performed. The risk of burnout as caused by every single factor was calculated. They were expressed as the adjusted odds ratios (ORs) and their 95 % CI (Table 2).

The association between job experience of 10 yr or more and burnout was statistically significant (OR=5.57; 95% CI=2.79–11.13; $p<0.01$). High-level perceived stress was associated with burnout OR=1.92 ($p<0.05$). A tendency for male coaches to burnout more frequently than their female colleagues was revealed; however, the difference were not statistically significant ($p>0.05$) (Table 2).

The analysis of the dependence of male university coaches and of university coaches with job experience of 10 yr or more on burnout showed the following results: burnout was typical in 42.6% (58/136) of male coaches and not typical in 57.4% (78/136); burnout was prevalent among 51.2% (67/131) of the university coaches who had worked for over 10 yr, while it was shown by only 9.7% (7/72) with less than 10 yr work experience; and 44.3% (54/122) of university coaches with high levels of

Table 2. The associations between gender, job experience, perceived stress and burnout among Lithuanian university coaches (N=203)

Variables	Burnout		No burnout		OR	95% CI
	N	%	N	%		
Gender						
Males (N=136)	58	78.4	78	60.5		
Females (N=67)	16	21.6	51	39.5	0.53	0.27–1.04
Job experience						
Less than 10 yr (N=72)	7	9.5	65	50.4		
10 yr more (N=131)	67	90.5	64	49.6	5.57**	2.79–11.13
Perceived stress						
Low levels (N=81)	20	27.0	61	47.3		
High levels (N=122)	54	73.0	68	52.7	1.92*	1.01–3.64

OR=odds ratio; 95% CI=95% confidence interval. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

perceived stress experienced burnout while 55.7% (68/122) did not.

Discussion

Burnout research among coaches has indicated that coaches experience medium levels of burnout^{24, 25} and professional burnout of university coaches is a habitual phenomenon typical of the teaching profession²⁶. This study focused on the associations between burnout, gender, job experience and perceived stress among university coaches in Lithuania.

We found no significant association between gender and burnout in our present study. Our data contradicts the data of some authors showing that female coaches suffer from burnout more commonly^{27, 28}. Thus, our findings are consistent with the findings of Zijlstra and De Vries²⁹, who showed, that no differences were observed between males and females in a national representative sample of the Dutch working population. Some authors³⁰ claim that burnout depends on gender-imposed social roles; i.e. males burn-out more rapidly in work situations which require narrowly defined masculine traits such as physical power, determination, persistence or emotional continence. Meanwhile, females are more sensitive to stress in such work situations which require them to demonstrate empathy, teaching skills or obedience³¹. As the relationship of gender and burnout is not interpreted straightforwardly, further research into coach gender are promising and important.

After examining the burnout of coaches in terms of work experience, it became evident that university coaches with work experience of 10 yr or more face an almost 6-fold higher risk of burnout than university coaches who have worked for less than 10 yr. The received results of our present study support the claim that university coaches working for less than 10 yr still possess sufficient potential, strength and prospects for

work. We believe that with only short-term work experience coaches (less than 10 yr is not very long in the coaching profession) are not as sensitive to the pressures from the people surrounding them and the stress of work. Consequently, their stress levels are lower. The fact that coaches working for more than 10 yr typically show higher levels of burnout supports the statement that coaches working for a long time are unable to adapt to ever-more-demanding requirements; they are unable to overcome competition and consequently surrender to the pressure imposed by the people surrounding them. The ability of overcoming hardship at work may be referred to as a strategy which is discovered by some coaches in order to overcome stress and professional burnout^{32, 33}. If a coach suffers from burnout at work, is able to overcome it and not to terminate the activity of coaching, then she/he acquires certain skills for overcoming burnout in the future as well.

Our study confirmed consistent associations between perceived stress and burnout among coaches. Other researchers came to a conclusion that stress and burnout might overlap and although both constructs indicate an imbalance between resources and demands at work, the consequences of burnout can be more severe than those of stress¹⁹. The effects of perceived stress on the relationship between adaptive and maladaptive forms of perfectionism and burnout were examined among USA college coaches and it was found that maladaptive forms of perfectionism resulted in more threatening perceptions of stress, potentially leading to the experience of burnout³⁴.

Cultural differences among coaches in various societies may exist. Overall, Lithuanian society experiences higher levels of stress than welfare countries, because the transition economy and new cultural values are sometimes sources of additional stress. The number of universities in Lithuania grew 3 times after 1990, when independence

was declared, and increasing competition between universities had an impact on university coaches working conditions and job stressors. The data received in our present study once again corroborates the claims of other researchers³⁵⁾ that burnout is an increasingly topical issue faced by coaches.

Limitations and future directions

The present study is a cross-sectional study not an experimental investigation. Because of the correlational nature of the study, it is difficult to prove causal conclusions about the effects of perceived stress on burnout. However, the study design does enable examination of associations among variables. As the present research evaluated high levels of burnout according to the work experience of the subjects, further exploration of this area should be performed in terms of age differences of university coaches. Also, further studies are needed to understand the long-term health effects and possible social impacts of university coaches' occupational stress and burnout.

Conclusions

The association established between university coaches' job experience of 10 yr or more and burnout refers to the likelihood of higher burnout level as compared to university coaches employed for less than 10 yr. High levels of perceived stress among university coaches was significantly related to burnout.

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