

## **Experiences of Retired Professional Female Athletes of Emotional Abuse by their Coaches in Mashhad**

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**Abstract:** the present study investigates the prevalence of emotional abuse among professional athletes by their coach in Mashhad city of Iran.

the current study is applied research, about 40 professional retired athletes have participated voluntarily in individual sports (swimming and martial arts) and team sports (handball and basketball). The semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

the results have shown that about 70 percent of participants have experienced various emotional abuse by their coach over years of playing professional sports and the maximal statistics belonged to criticism and reproach variables but just a few of them had reacted to their coach emotional abuse that entailed concentration disorders, performance and motivation decline, and ability obtainment issues.

the results have shown that a high percent of athletes have experienced emotional abuse by their coach that encompassed many psychological and performing damages. Therefore, it is needed to train athletes' preventable and resistant methods and the way of conveying these offensive behaviors to officials in order to reduce the damages of applied emotional abuse at athletes.

**Keywords:** emotional abuse, concentration, motivation, function, normalization, work ethics.

## 1. Introduction

The coach is one of the significant elements among athletes' success in sports. A skilled coach using his/her personal knowledge and experience, can improve athletes' performance. Being a coach is one of the complicated professions that someone can hardly ever handle. A coach must have professional knowledge according to his/ her specific field. Furthermore, he/she has to be able to have different skills in various contexts like management, motivation, dominance on different techniques and tactics (Logrsiu, 2021).

The more athletes get more successful, the more time they spend with their coach. Hypothetically, the impact of the coach on the essence and the quality of the athletes is sports experiences and their progress. the general experience that the athletes obtain from his or her coach, needs more investigation in relation to the significant relationship of athlete and the coach (Saffari and Jafari, 1396).

The relationship between the coach and the athletes is a critical relationship. In a sports environment, the coach mostly plays the protector role because providing security, and physical and emotional needs of athletes are the coach's responsibility (Donly, 1993). Accordingly, the coach purposely or purposely might act and behave in a way that results in cognitive damages and negative side effects. Moreover, in many cases, these actions and behaviors constituted as athletes' progress and they have not even reported (Kirby and Gervis and Hankiuski, 2000).

as a result, the coach is in a position that can easily abuse his/her position and make the coach- athlete relationship an abusing one (Rayatsarkalai, Vaez Mousavi and Memarmoadam, 2022).

Gupilan (2017), in his research named when does the coach cross the line? Investigated the relationship of the coach's strict methods and it revealed that there is a difference between strict coaching and offensive coaching. The optimal result showed that: 1) the reflected abusing behaviors on the behalf of athletes are accepted whenever they feel the coach intended to make them successful. 2) The coaches are not trained enough to behave properly to their athletes. 3) Higher rank athletes have more positive responses to the coach's abusing behaviors. The abusing

techniques used by the coach has been transformed to a kind of culture in sports and the athletes tolerate anything which is Results in being successful.

Although some of the studies have reported the existence of emotional abuse, there is still a gap in applied research in order to organize ethical regulation. According to recent studies, there are different kinds of abuse in sports but the most common way of them is emotional abuse (Kirby and Gervis and Hankiuski, 2000).

Stirling and Kerr (2008), interviewed 14 top retired female swimmers aged 19 to 29 who participated in national or international contests and have been retired 3 to 6 years earlier than the interview. The results indicated that 13 out of 14 participants have reported a kind of emotional abuse by their coaches.

Emotional abuse includes a pattern of conscious no-contact behaviors in the relationship between the coach and the athlete in order to control and harm the athletes (Rayatkalani, 1401).

Alexander and Stafford and Lewis (2011) documented these phenomena and reported that about 75 percent of athletes have experienced at least one kind of irritated emotional behavior in sport before the age of 16 (Alexander, and Stafford, and Lewis, 2011)

Moreover, Katy Sterend (2021) proved the existence of emotional abuse among top women in track and field and stated that coaches can really affect the athletes positively and negatively, specifically negative interactions can encompass a various range of undesirable consequences for athletes, accordingly, coaches are not allowed to abuse the players emotionally (Alexander, and Stafford, and Lewis, 2011).

In the light of progressing many studies about emotional abuse among athletes, and as the females' sports is not an exception, and in addition to the existence of ambiguity regarding emotional abuse among female athletes and its differences among individual and team sports provided new insights for further investigations.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Participants: there are 40 professional retired female athletes from Mashhad city of Iran in two groups of

individual sport (swimming and martial arts) and team sport (handball and basketball) aged 18 and higher with at least two years of experience,

practicing with a coach professionally and have been chosen voluntarily to participate in this research.

Table 1: the demography of the research participants

variable	MEAN	MAX	MIN	SD
Age	35.3	58	19	11.80
Activity duration	12.5	24	3	6.50
Professional sports' withdrawal duration	3	17	8.55	3.67

Table 2: describing the participants' competitive levels

Competitive Levels	National	International	Universal
Swimming	10	0	0
Martial Arts	5	3	2
Basketball	8	2	0
Handball	9	1	0
Total	32	6	2
Total frequency	%80	%15	%5

**Instruments**

The present study used the personal information questionnaire to gather the needed data such as age, athlete's training span, the level of competitions, years of experience, the duration of withdrawal and the reason for quitting the professional sport.

Besides, to investigate the above-mentioned variable, the semi-structured interviews were used. The interview's questions were based on Dietz et al, (2016) in research named Development and validation of the coach-athlete relationship emotional abuse scale (CAREMS) in which there were 365 participants answered the questionnaire, and the reliability of the test was 0.96 and its validity was proved by the Greaves emotional response

questionnaire (SER-Q) in 2009. Before the interview and gathering the needed data, 5 participants have been interviewed as a mock to become familiar and evaluate the questions' application.

After the interview represented emotional abuse by the coach, in order to investigate the reaction of participants who experienced emotional abuse, the Rayatsarokalai questionnaire (1401) was used.

Furthermore, to analyze the understanding effects of emotional abuse, (Stirling, Gretchen, and Kerr, 2013) questionnaire was used. According to the interview, the items 6 and 7 were added.

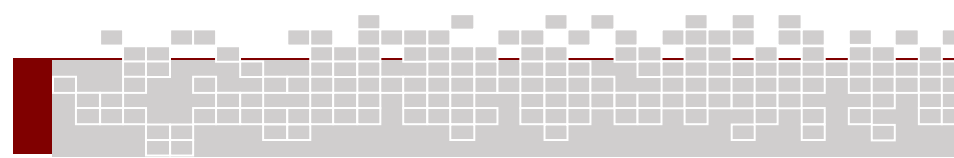


Table 3: The interview questions:

variable	questions
Performance humbleness	1. My coach nullified my team assistance (my coach did not appreciate me enough). 2. My coach stated that others are better than me (in the same situation), in a way that I felt unappropriated. 3. My coach supported less when I did not practice or contest well. 4. My coach intentionally did not pay attention to me. 5. My coach looked at me in an angry way and insulted me. 6. My coach blamed me for other's mistakes.
Individual direct abasement	1. My coach swore at me and called me by unappropriated names. 2. My coach insulted me. 3. My coach gave me (derisive, contemptuous, and insulting) views when we were alone. 4. My coach teased me.
shameful behaviors	1. My coach said shameful/irritating experiences about me. 2. My coach made jokes about me by low levels. 3. My coach made contemptuous jokes about me.
Individual indirect abasement	1. My coach told me I am useless. 2. My coach blamed me for my teammate's failure. 3. My coach abased my family and my friends.
Scary behaviors	1. My coach threatened me to punish during the practice. 2. My coach intentionally told me things to scare me. 3. My coach scared me to do his/her favorite actions.

1. Interview questions to respond to acts of emotional abuse by the coach (Rayatsarikalai, 1401):

1. Remains silent because considers the coach's behavior normal.
2. Remains silent to respect the coach or because of the fear of being dismissed of the team.
3. Remains silent but faced difficulties to continue the practice.
4. Sometimes answers the coach and sometimes not. It depends on the coach's temperature and his/her behavior extremeness.
5. Answers the coach and tries to be logical.
6. Answers the coach but feels guilty after it.
7. Answers the coach aggressively because he/she feels she/he has to protect her/himself.

2. The variables of understood experienced emotional abuse by the coach (Stirling, Gretchen, and Kerr, 2013):

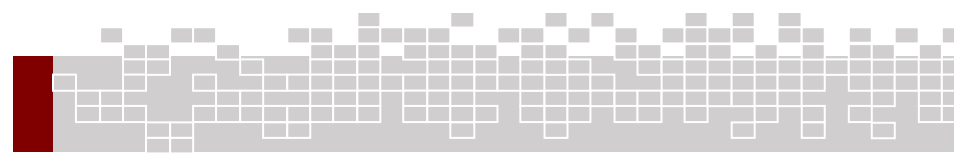
1. Demotivation

2. Concentration disorder

3. Ability obtaining issues
4. Performance decline
5. Performance improvement

**Data gathering**

In accordance with the snowball sampling to select the athletes participating in this research, in line with being introduced by the former participants, the new athletes were asked to be interviewed. Consequently, the time of the interview was set with each participant. It is worth mentioning that this research has been approved by the ethics committee of Imam Reza University with the code of research ethics of IR.IMAMREZA.REC. 1403.004. The participants were ensured that they could leave the interview whenever they wanted. In the beginning, the researcher explained about the topic of the research and the emotional abuse variable to inform the



participants and then it has been asked from the athlete to fill out the personal information questionnaire. Further, the semi-structured interview was held individually with the purpose of concentrating on the target variable and the resulting data was deducted written and recorded.

**Data Analysis**

In this study, in line with the grounded theory, comparative research was applied that data gathering and data analysis are creating, comparing, and evaluating at the same time (Straves and Kurween, 1998). In accordance with the repeated existence of grounded theory, the data gathering and data analysis phases are not only separated, but also happen in concordance.

The descriptive phase of the research based on the grounded theory, will be completed by the coding approach; A) open coding: it is an analytical process that identifies the recognized data requiring the definition of dimensions and characteristics of this category. B) Axial coding: consists of the relation and the categories of the subscales. C)

Selective coding: in a way that codes are transforming regularly, structured and united and are analyzed.

In the comparative approach of the grounded theory, the presented subscales and theories constantly have to be compared to the new data in order for saturation to happen (Straves and Kurween, 1998). Therefore, in order to analyze the data, the descriptive analysis (mean, standard deviation, frequency percent) will be used and correlation with the level of significance of 0.05 that has been gathered by SPSS software version 26.3. **Results**

Finding's categories according to the interviews will be shown as follows:

1. The description of the coach-athlete relationship,
2. Different kinds of abuse used by the coach,
3. The frequency of emotional abuse dimensions used by the coach,
4. The frequency of athletes' experience of emotional abuse in line with their field,
5. The athlete's response to the abuse used by the coach,
6. The deducted side effects of applying emotional abuse by the coach,
7. The reason for withdrawal from doing professional sports.

Table 4: description of the coach-athlete relationship

Relationship description	good	Normal and no-tension	bad
Numbers	14	16	10
mean	%35	%40	%25

In line with the table, about 40 percent of the participants outlining their relationship with their coach, a usual and serene and the least number of participants with about 25 percent reported their relationship inadequate.

Table 5: different abuses used by the coach

Different abuses	Emotional abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	ignorance
Swimming	6	2	0	4
Martial Arts	5	1	0	2
Basketball	9	2	0	4
Handball	8	0	0	3
Total	28	5	0	13
Total Frequency	%70	%12.5	0	%32.5

According to the table, about 70 percent of the participants experienced emotional abuse during the years of doing sports. Therefore, nearly 32.5 percent of them had been ignored and not being paid attention by their coach. Moreover, none of the athletes reported sexual abuse.

Table 6: different emotional abuses used by the coach

variable	Frequency Percent	frequency
Performance Humbleness	%52.5	21
Individual Direct Abasement	%30	12
Shameful Behaviors	%25	10
Individual Indirect Abasement	%32.5	13
Scary Behaviors	%25	10

As stated by the following table, the highest percent of emotional abuse variables applied by the coach reported as performance disparagement with 52.5 percent, individual indirect abasement with 32.5 percent, individual direct abasement with 30 percent, and frightening and embarrassing behaviors with 25 percent.

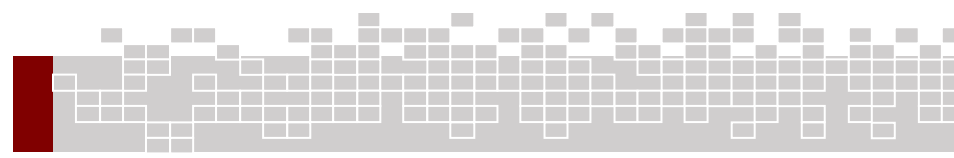
Table 7: the frequency numbers of emotional abuses; variables used by the coach

Subscales	Total Frequency	Total Frequency Percent
Criticism and Reproach (Performance Humbleness)	9	%32
Threatening (Scary Behaviors)	8	%28.5
Swearing (Individual Direct Abasement)	6	%21
Feeling Guilt Induction (Individual Indirect Abasement)	6	%21
Discredit (shameful Behaviors, Performance Humbleness)	6	%21
Lack of Support and Attention (Performance Humbleness)	5	%18
Insulting and Abasement (Individual Direct Abasement, Individual Indirect Abasement)	5	%18

According to criticism and reproach variables by 32 percent reported as the highest subscales of emotional abuse by the coach, the following results are reported as threatening by 28.5 percent, swearing, feeling guilt inculcation, and discredit by 21 percent, lack of support, insulting and abasement by 18 percent.

Table 8: the athletes' reaction toward the coach's emotional abuse

Variable	Remains silent because considers	Remains silent to respect the coach	Remains silent but faced difficulties	Sometimes answers the coach and sometimes	Answers the coach and tries	Answers the coach but feels	Answers the coach aggressively because
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	the coach's behavior normal.	or because of the fear of being dismissed of the team.	to continue the practice.	not. It depends on the coach's temperature and his/her behavior extremeness.	to be logical.	guilty after it.	he/she feels she/he has to protect her/himself.
Total Frequency	9	11	6	5	5	3	1
Total Frequency Percent	%22.5	%27.5	%15	%12.5	%12.5	%7.5	%2.5
Frequency in Swimming	1	2	3	1	2	0	0
Frequency in Martial Arts	2	1	2	1	0	0	0
Frequency in Basketball	3	5	1	2	2	1	1
Frequency in Handball	3	3	0	1	1	2	0
The Mean of Professional Sports Duration	8.5 years	8 years	8 years	6.5 years	6.5 years	5.5 years	3 years
The Mean of sports' Withdrawal Duration	8 years	8 years	5 years	8 years	7.5 years	7 years	4 years
The Mean of the Participants' Age	31.5 years	33 years	31 years	25 years	25.5 years	26 years	22 years

As revealed in the table, the average age of athletes remained silent against their coach's abuses, are between 31 to 35 while the average age of the athletes reacted to abuses are 22 to 26.

Additionally, the usual spent years of professional sports among athletes remained silent against abuses are between 8 to 8.5 whereas the average spent years of professional sports among athletes reacted to abuses are 3 to 6.5.

Table 9: the understood effects of the coach's emotional abuses

Variable	Total Frequency	Total Frequency Percent	Mean in swimming	Mean in Martial Arts	Mean in Basketball	Mean in Handball
demotivation	15	%53.5	2	3	6	4
Concentration Disorder	21	%75	6	5	4	6
Ability Obtaining Issues	9	%32	3	3	3	1
Performance Decline	18	%64	4	4	7	4
Performance Improvement	8	%28.5	2	2	3	1

As the table shows, concentration disorder by the highest frequency of 75 percent, was the most realized consequence of emotional abuse applied by the coach. Subsequently, there are performance decline by 64 percent, motivation decline by 53.5 percent, ability obtainment issues by 32 percent, and the lowest realized consequence was performance improvement by 28.5 percent.

Table 10: the reason of withdrawal of professional sports by the athlete

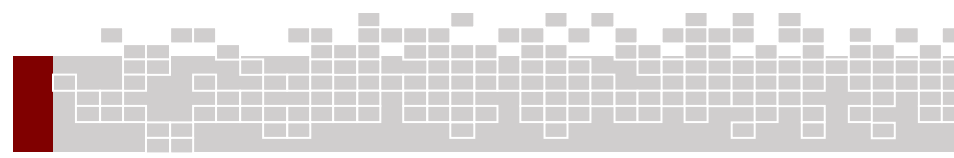
the reason of withdrawal of professional sports by the athlete	The coach's behavior (emotional abuse)	Different reasons
Swimming	1	9
Martial Arts	1	9
Basketball	1	9
Handball	2	8
Total	6	34
Frequency percent	%15	%85

As the table indicates, the participants who described the coach behavior (emotional abuse) as a reason for their withdrawal from doing professional sports were 15 percent and 85 percent of the participants stated other reasons.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of top female retired athletes of emotional abuse in Mashhad city of Iran. Based on the results of the research, most of the participants declared various reasons except the coach's emotional abuse as the main cause for professional sports withdrawal. These reasons included injuries

during the competition or practice, family issues, financial issues, lack of progressing, and 15 percent of them expressed the coach's abuse as the main reason for withdrawal. On the authority of this study's result, it can be concluded that most athletes construed their coach's behavior as a usual one and agree it to be repeated. That is the reason for the lower number of athletes stating their coach's abuse as their professional sports withdrawal rather than



other causes. Since about 70 percent of the participants experienced their coach's emotional abuse, this point reveals normalization after a while. as Kerr and Willson and Stirling (2020) investigated the effect of offensive coaching among female Canada national teams, came into the conclusion that while the athletes were practicing professionally, they tended to normalize their previous experience of maltreating by their coach. Nevertheless, many of the athletes eventually realized that their practicing location is not acceptable and decided to retire from playing professional sports. One of the participants of the study named Jessy claimed that after years of doing professional sports, when I told my friends about my coach's behavior, they couldn't believe me. I was used to that kind of situation in a way that it was unbelievable to me to consider how messy and irritating it was. In the coach-athlete relationship, the athlete will be damaged at the end. Nowadays, there are many ways to prevent possible damages, but in accordance with the conditions provided by the coach, the best way is withdrawal from practicing and having contests.

Related to the study, about 40 percent of the participants described their coach-athlete relationship as usual, without tension over the years of playing sports and about 35 percent of them describe it as a proper relationship. Therefore, it seems that in spite of some cases of coach abuse, athletes still describe their coach-athlete relationship well and consider their coach's maltreating behaviors as a common and essential matter to be successful. In contrast, others assumed the coach-athlete relationship was ineffective and tempt to normalize it and ignore it. They assume that they cannot face their coach abuse, so they focus on their performance. On the other hand, the coach plays a significant role in the athlete's future and can control it. This leads into lack of reports about the coach's abuse. One of the professional handball players who participated in the survey claimed that sometimes my coach threatened me of breaking our relationship and put me aside from the team. This eventually made me try more in order to keep my coach satisfied and stay in the team. The conditions never ruined our relationship because mostly my coach was right. The result of this study showed that athletes of all ages considered their coach's positive behaviors and performance while describing their coach and ignored his/her negative behaviors derived from his/her dominance and power on the athletes. In such a situation, they never fight their coach while they are constantly hurting by them. Even after putting sports aside, they still consider their poor performance as a failure and while describing their coach-athlete relationship they always state that my coach always considered my

success and any kinds of abuse was unconsciously. It was a normal reaction to my performance because it was not good enough. Overall, all athletes 'behavior and actions became consistent with the coach's desire in order not to repeat again. Consequently, there is a need for an athlete-coach relationship and it is better for athletes to be aware of their social rank and have a broad outlook in order to enhance this relationship and reduce abuse applied by the coach.

The major question of this research is the amount of commonness of emotional abuse among professional female athletes. The results revealed that the most kind of abuse applied by the coach was emotional abuse by frequency of 70 percent that contains the highest frequency compared with other kinds of abuse. Hence, the most reported abuse was ignorance by the coach and physical abuse that in comparison with emotional abuse, has the lower frequency percent. In accordance with these results, we can conclude that physical abuse has less currency in sports because it is an obvious action and is not defensive for the athlete and their parents. Also, the coaches cannot name it simply as a usual reaction to progress their athletes. In contrast, Emotional abuse seems more normal in society and the coach can simply consider it as a normal reaction. Furthermore, noticing the results, physical abuse prevalence is 0 percent. Moreover, according to the cultural and social status of the country, the coach and the athletes' gender is usually the same. Furthermore, it is predicted that one of the major reasons for reporting physical abuse by the coach in modern societies is that the coach and the athletes' gender is not the same. Also, according to the societies' beliefs and norms, we can conclude that the physical abuse applied by the coaches will be severe because the athletes will be worried of the transformation of society's outlook on them and they will blame themselves as the reason of the physical abuse. While they are just victims of unfair power of coach and athlete which provides the opportunity for the coach to take control of the athletes. In order to prove these results, Kerby, Grieves and Honkiosky (2000) did an opinion poll in which 266 Olympic Canadian athletes have been interviewed. The result of the interview revealed that 19 percent of them experienced physical abuse and 25 percent of them experienced emotional abuse in sports such as insult, teasing and unappropriated abuses. In this way, all athletes reported a kind of irritating behavior from their coach while they were top athletes and they had experienced abasement and shouting. Relatively, one of the participants who were an 18-year-old professional swimmer claimed that his/her coach used ignorance to improve his/her performance and effort. If he did not have a good performance in practice, the coach ignored him constantly. Another

case who was a professional 24-year-old basketball player stated his coach behavior that he felt sorry for picking me up to the team while I made my best afford. The mentioned cases indicate the higher frequency of emotional abuse among athletes which is more common than other abuses.

Accordingly, related to the experienced abuses, the highest frequency belongs to performance decline contents of subscales such as reproach and criticism, coach's lack of support and attention and discredit. As it is seen in the frequency of performance humbleness, criticism and reproach by 32 percent, lack of support and attention by 18 percent, discredit by 21 percent have been reported by the participants. The coach's insulting behaviors according to (Sterling and Kerr, 2008) are categorized in 3 groups: verbal behaviors (such as contemptuous views or insulting behaviors), physical behaviors (such as throwing objects while being angry or disappointed), or athlete's active ignorance (lack of supervision of athlete's poor performance). In this regard, one professional basketball player participated in the research stating his/her experience of criticism and reproach by the coach revealed that his/her coach undermined his/her effort in order to performance improvement while he/she was one of the best players of the team. The coach constantly pointed out that the player's mistakes can endanger the whole team. The player states: after each error I had, I felt guilty and this leads into the sense of fulfillment. Moreover, one of the professional swimmer's fathers expressed that accepting repeated yelling and personal criticisms were difficult for his daughter. Although these concerning behaviors of the coaches became more and worse during the time (Gretchen, Kerr, and Stirling, 2012). Direct abasement is one of the most common behaviors of the coach among professional sports. The amount of frequency of this scale has been reported 30 percent in this study. This scale itself consists of two subscales of swearing by 21 percent of frequency and insult and abasement by 18 percent of frequency. Growis and Don (2004), held semi-structured experimental interviews with 12 top kids who were used to being athletes and they concluded that yelling, abasement, threatening and insulting are the most common shapes of emotional abuses and there are lots of insulting behaviors reported that applied by the coaches among professional sports. Therefore, shameful behaviors by 25 percent of frequency includes the subscale of discredit by the coach by the frequency of 21. Discredit and shameful the athlete in the coach-athlete relationship is directly related to self-esteem and performance decline as after experiencing this kind of abuse by the coach, the athletes will feel absurdity and incapability and assume their value far less than its real position. This has a severe influence on their

performance participating in contests and practices. A professional swimmer's experience of teasing by the coach demonstrated that: the coach constantly expressed disturbing opinions about my body shape in public and this always embarrassed me, while others had different opinions. Accordingly, the participants of Stirling and Kerr's research (2008) explaining the coaches' abuses remembered how their coaches expressed inappropriate opinions about their body shapes and their weight. Rebecca and Reichle stated that their coaches asked them to lose weight. The frequency of the individual indirect abasement subscale among the research's participants reported 32.5 which itself consists of two subscales of feeling guilt induction by the frequency of 22 percent and insulting and abasement by the frequency of 18 percent. The professional basketball player who was 19 years old while applying abasement by the coach explained that: I used to be very close to the coach once I entered the team. In a way that the coach knew all the information about me and my family and I used to talk about my family issues with my coach, but after a while, if I made any mistakes, my coach undermined my family's situation and abase me in front of all my teammates. This leads into lack of interest to continue and I did not participate in my practices by making any excuses.

Also, the professional 22-year-old basketball player experiencing guilt induction about the coach expressed that: after each failure, the coach blamed me. While I played my best and this resulted in poor performance because I was constantly concerned about my coach's judgment. Subsequently, the coach's scary behaviors subscale by the frequency of 25 percent includes the subscales of threat by the frequency of 28.5 percent was under consideration. The coach's scary behaviors such as different kinds of verbal and physical aggression by the coach. In some cases, the coach, according to the position he/she has rather than the athlete, reveals aggressive behaviors. In the study of Stirling and Kerr, (2008) some of the participants stated their coach's scary behaviors as follows: I always scared of my coach, whatever he/she was saying seemed the best to me because I was terrified by him/her both physically and mentally. Moreover, another participant of this research expressed that the officials chose this coach because he/she was the Olympic player and expert while he/she attacked his/her previous swimmers and constantly hurt them by physical and sexual abuses. Most athletes and sport officials consider the result and success as the main priority. So, most of them consider the coach's abuses without any significance. They believe that the sport success is determined by the result performance. Therefore, the concept of the purpose validates the tools, is true for many athletes and coaches and abuses hide behind

the success. Hence, according to the highest means of the experience of abuses among the participants with different fields, the results declared that the highest applied abuse by the coach by 90 percent is related to the basketball field, then with 80 percent related to the handball field in two group subfields, with the mean of 60 percent related to the swimming field, and 50 percent in martial arts in two individuals' subfields. Therefore, according to the reported means in tables we can conclude that the emotional abuses in team sports by the frequency of 60.7 percent is far higher than individual sports by the frequency of 39.3 percent. Considering the result data and interviews with professional athletes it can be deduced that the athletes of team sports spoke far more about the consequences of negative impacts of the coach's punishments in public. This was lighter among the individual sports members because the coach-athlete two-way relationship provides a friendlier atmosphere. While the members of the team sports were more obsessive about their coach's behavior and most of the abuses reported by the athletes were in public. We can conduct that one of the reasons for the higher numbers of abuse in team sports rather than individual sports is the existence of other teammates while happening an insult, abasement, embarrassing and so on by the coach. Battaglia (2015), stated his personal experience of the coach's emotional abuse as a professional hockey player as follows: since hockey is a team sport, the bench punishment is one of the most hurtful punishments. The interesting point is that in hockey, the bench punishment was one of the worst happenings in my life and influenced me the most. Therefore, the impacts of different kinds of punishment were rarely positive toward my performance. As an example, they limited the numbers of skills and new techniques and this resulted in pulling me away from hockey rather than improving myself. Thus, it can be concluded that the existence of others in understanding the coach's abuse has a higher impact in the sports environment. Accordingly, the coach's abuses have been reported to a greater extent in team sports rather than the individual sports.

Many athletes are silent as a reaction to their coach's abuses. That is because they want to pay their coach's respect or they are worried about their reaction and make them get dismissed. Some athletes declared that they logically answered their coach, but in many cases, they did not react. They expressed that this depends on the coach's temperature or the anger depth to answer their coach. Tomlinson and Strachan (1996), stated that athletes may normalize their coach's abuse especially when it comes to the coach's power. That is because the athlete-coach relationship is an unbalanced relationship. So that the coaches dominate their athletes according to their age,

proficiency, reference access, bounces and previous success. Some of the athletes reported the motivation lost after experiencing the coach's emotional abuse frequently. Ryan and Lane (1997), specified in their research that abuse can affect motivation. Abuse has the potential of transforming the athletes' internal intention to an external one. The negative coaching approach might increase adoption, obey and athlete's external intentions by controlling behaviors such as criticism, reproach and other techniques to pressure others but decreases athletes' internal intentions. As a result, this may be the reason for normalizing the coach's abuses by the athletes because they are worried about losing their current position and their professional future according to the coach's power or they are aware of the reaction of any protest to the coach's behaviors.

As a result, the research of the coach's emotional abuses' impacts, we can state that 75 percent of athletes that experienced an emotional abuse, named the harmful consequences of this behavior as concentration disorder. Moreover, the athletes encounter performance decline as a result of the coach's abuse. They expressed that this behavior not only decreased their motivation, but also damaged their successful performance by the time. Also, about 53.5 percent of the participants named the scale of demotivation to continue professional sports which is a significant factor in sports success. Consequently, the variable of ability obtaining issues by 32 percent of frequency was one of the other understood effects of the coach's abuse. Eventually, some of the athletes entitled the coach's abuses such as insulting, yelling, blaming and threatening as a reason for success. These impacts of the coach's emotional abuse according to the study of (Stirling and Kerr 2013), were organized in 3 main categories of understood mental effects, understood educational effects, and understood performing effects. The negative understood mental effects such as temper variation, self-esteem, self-efficacy, poor body imagination, anger and anxiety. The negative understood educational effects such as motivational variation (demotivation and motivation), enjoyment decline, understanding disorder and ability obtaining issues. While the understood performing effects such as performance decline. In the study of (Stirling, Gretchen, and Kerr, 2013) a professional 24-year-old swimmer expressed about the experience of effects of the coach's emotional abuse as follows: when the coach's yelling constantly, and you are in the middle of it, you cannot return to your usual framework and this practically results in practice interpretation. Furthermore, in a study about a professional 22-year-old swimmer, he/she stated about losing attention in practice according to the coach's abuses as follows: I distracted repeatedly because my coach became angry constantly and I lost the practice. (Gervis and

Don, 2004) entitled about the impact of harmful coaching in a way that the coach's yelling is scary and results in not practicing properly. Additionally, (Stirling, Gretchen, and Kerr, 2013) have reported the performance decline of 6 athletes as a result of the coach's emotional abuse. A professional 26-year-old gymnasts pointed out about his/her coach's abuses in this way: I always knew I could perform better without my coach's yelling. After a while, I remained silent encountering the coach's reaction and it was obvious throughout my performance. The professional basketball player who participated in the research declared about the performance decline as a result of the coach's annoying behaviors that his/her coach tried to provoke him/her by yelling and insulting behavior in order to perform more accurately. While these behaviors were happening in front of his/her friends' eyes, irritated him/her at the end and decreased his/her performance. She/he never confines in the coach. There are various opinions about the relationship of the coach's emotional abuse and the athletes' experiences. Many of the athletes discussed the ways of the irritating coach-athlete relationship which influenced negatively on being successful. (Stirling, Gretchen, and Kerr, 2013) while 3 professional athletes have reported the performance increase as a result of the coach's emotional abuse. A professional 25-year-old gymnasts stated: I needed my coach yelling to get to the next level and make progress. Other studies about the experiences of athletes 'feelings, had the same results. As the participants in the study of (Gervis and Don, 2004) expressed their feelings as a result of their coach's abuses in this way: all the athletes felt instable, lowness, depression, low self-confidence, abasement, depression, fear and anger. Also, the other athletes in variant studies have reported that encountering an irritating sport environment, affected their mental health. Specifically, athletes described their harmed feelings that were caused by the coach's irritating behaviors as follows: fear, anxiety, anger, dissatisfaction, depression, and sometimes suicide (Kerr, Wilson, and Stirling, 2020). Eventually, in accordance with the importance of the role of coach among athletes, the opportunity for the coach's emotional abuse is provided because the athletes depend on their coach' approval to be successful. That is why mostly athletes do not report many abuses by the coach to the sports authorities. Finally, the results of this research are consistent with the previous studies and the emotional abuses among women is an obvious fact in this research. Furthermore, there are many cases about the emotional abuses' reports for instance the athletes' perception of their coach's behavior is far different from each other. According to lack of knowledge among athletes about ethical and emotional points about sports and individually, it is accurate for coaches and athletes to acquire the

needed training and it is suggested to learn the proper solutions facing emotional abuses either by the coach or sports authorities and how to convey the information to the athletes with all ages. Moreover, the coaches must be acknowledged by the mental effects of the emotional abuse on athletes because these behaviors not only damage the athlete's mental health, causes performance decline and not obtaining the positive result, but also will not be appropriate neither for the coach and the athlete. Hence, in line with the present study, which represents the high numbers of emotional abuse's prevalence among retired professional female athletes, it is necessary to provide the required actions to train athletes and coaches and to accomplish this critical and impressive issue in sports.

### **Limitations of the study**

According to the collected data of the study throughout interviews, there is a possibility of the absence of some of the coach's abuses ' reports.

Furthermore, in line with the research topic and the procedure which was done by interviews, there was much time spent to detect qualified participants and volunteers to be interviewed while this research could have been held in a more extended range

### **Suggestions for further studies**

In accordance with the present study, it is essential to investigate the privilege of emotional abuse in different levels of the sport from beginner to professional among team sports and individual ones.

Besides, as the coach's emotional abuse caused lack of desire to continue professional sports, this research might assist preventing emotional abuses of the coaches and result in enhancing athlete-coach relationships.

Considering emotional irritating coaching approaches are a fundamental research era, one of the roles parents play or must play related to their children's sports experience is to assist interpreting emotional experiences of their children in sports. Therefore, parents can play a significant role in exposing their children's emotional abuse by their coaches throughout their children's experiences. Hence, there can be research based on the parents' opinions regarding the coaches' emotional abuses in professional sports, and this kind of research might have a discovery and informing content.

Finally, one of the significant components to design a scale for evaluating emotional abuse among different sports groups will be beneficial for researchers' capability to investigate emotional abuse

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## تجربیات ورزشکاران زن حرفه ای بازنشسته از سوء استفاده عاطفی توسط مربیان خود در

## مشهد

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**چکیده:** پژوهش حاضر به بررسی شیوع آزار عاطفی در بین ورزشکاران حرفه ای توسط مربی خود در شهر مشهد می پردازد.

مطالعه حاضر از نوع تحقیقات کاربردی است، حدود ۴۰ ورزشکار حرفه ای بازنشسته به طور داوطلبانه در ورزش های انفرادی (شنا و رزمی) و ورزش های تیمی (هندبال و بسکتبال) شرکت کرده اند. برای جمع آوری داده ها از مصاحبه نیمه ساختاریافته و برای تجزیه و تحلیل داده ها از آمار توصیفی استفاده شد.

نتایج نشان داد که حدود ۷۰ درصد از شرکت کنندگان در طول سال ها ورزش حرفه ای، آزارهای عاطفی مختلفی را توسط مربی خود تجربه کرده اند و بیشترین آمار مربوط به تغییرهای انتقاد و سرزنش بوده است، اما تعداد کمی از آنها به آزار عاطفی مربی خود واکنش نشان داده اند که منجر به تمرکز می شود. اختلالات، کاهش عملکرد و انگیزه و مسائل مربوط به کسب توانایی. نتایج نشان داده است که درصد بالایی از ورزشکاران مورد آزار عاطفی مربی خود قرار گرفته اند که آسیب های روانی و عملکردی بسیاری را به همراه داشته است. بنابراین لازم است روش های قابل پیشگیری و مقاوم ورزشکاران و نحوه انتقال این رفتارهای توهین آمیز به مسئولان آموزش داده شود تا از آسیب های ناشی از سوء استفاده عاطفی در ورزشکاران کاسته شود.

**واژه های کلیدی:** سوء استفاده عاطفی، تمرکز، انگیزه، عملکرد، عادی سازی، اخلاق کاری

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این نماد به معنای مجوز استفاده از اثر با دو شرط است یکی استناد به نویسنده و دیگری استفاده برای مقاصد غیرتجاری.

