



**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

## The impact of athletics sports identity on the prevalence of emotional abuse

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Received: 13-12-2025; Accepted: 7-1-2026; Published: 10-02-2026

**Abstract.** The present study investigates the impact of athletic identity on the prevalence of emotional abuse among track and field athletes in Khorasan Razavi Province. Volunteer participants (N=100) completed Brewer's *Athletic Identity Measurement Scale* (1993) and the *Emotional Abuse Questionnaire* developed by Dietz et al. (2016). Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis. Results showed that the mean level of emotional abuse among track and field athletes was 3.99, indicating a moderate level. The average athletic identity score was 2.92, suggesting a moderate-to-low identification with the athlete role. Female athletes reported slightly higher levels of emotional abuse than males, with the highest prevalence observed among athletes aged 19–26 years and those with 5–10 years of experience. A significant positive correlation was found between athletic identity and emotional abuse, indicating that stronger athletic identity is associated with greater exposure to or internalization of emotionally abusive behaviors. Athletes with a stronger athletic identity appear to be at higher risk of enduring or normalizing coaches' abusive behaviors. Therefore, educational programs on professional ethics and communication skills should be integrated into coach development curricula nationwide.

**Keywords.** Track and field, Normalization, Abusive behaviors, coach development curricula, psychological knowledge.

### Introduction

Recent research examining athletes' psychological well-being and the influence of coaching behavior has highlighted abuse in sport as an urgent ethical concern requiring systematic investigation. Studies have



increasingly reported the occurrence of various forms of abuse within sporting contexts, demonstrating that athletes are not immune to experiences of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse (Saffari & Jafari, 2018).

For example, Rayat Sarokolaei et al. (2022) found that more than half of Iranian adolescent football players had experienced emotional abuse, which in some cases led to psychological distress and even withdrawal from the sport. Similarly, Bidi, Vaez Mousavi, and Aminzadeh (2023) revealed that a very high proportion of retired professional athletes had experienced emotional abuse from their coaches, resulting in significant psychological and functional harm. Comparable patterns have been observed internationally. Studies conducted in Canada report that abusive behaviors are deeply embedded within sports structures (St-Pierre et al., 2022; Battaglia, 2015).

In the Netherlands, Jacobs et al. (2018) found that some sports organizations and officials normalize emotionally abusive coaching behaviors, regarding them as acceptable or even as hallmarks of professional rigor, while deflecting responsibility onto athletes and parents. Consequently, abuse in sport is not confined to any single culture or region—it represents a global issue that demands comprehensive prevention and intervention efforts (Parent & Vaillancourt-Morel, 2021).

Abuse in sport can be defined as a recurring pattern of physical, sexual, or emotional mistreatment—or neglect—by an individual in a position of authority, such as a coach, leading to actual or potential harm to an athlete (Saffari & Jafari, 2018). Emotional abuse specifically refers to deliberate, non-contact behaviors within the coach–athlete relationship that are intended to exert control and cause psychological harm (Rayat Sarokolaei et al., 2022). These behaviors may include physical intimidation (e.g., throwing objects, punching walls), verbal aggression (e.g., ridicule, humiliation), withdrawal of attention or support (e.g., ignoring or withholding feedback), threats, isolation, and inducing guilt (Stirling & Kerr, 2013).

Gervis and Dunn (2004) identified yelling, threats, and humiliation as the most prevalent forms of emotional abuse experienced by athletes. Such experiences can lead to both immediate and long-term psychological and physical harm, making it essential to address emotional abuse to safeguard athletes' well-being (Stirling & Kerr, 2013).

The most commonly cited justification for emotional abuse is that it is a disciplinary strategy aimed at correcting undesirable behaviors (Battaglia, 2015). However, because athletes vary in personality and resilience, emotional abuse can cause serious emotional and psychological harm (Bidi et al., 2023). Recent studies have started to examine the factors that increase athletes' vulnerability to abuse, one of which may be *athletic identity* (Parent & Vaillancourt-Morel, 2021; Fournier et al., 2022).

Athletic identity is defined as the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role and seeks validation of that role from others (Brewer et al., 1993; Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). Individuals with a strong athletic identity are more likely to devote themselves to sport participation and performance (Brewer et al., 1993). However, such athletes may also be less inclined to report emotional abuse, fearing that doing so might jeopardize their athletic identity or career (Alexander et al., 2024). As emotional abuse by a coach increases, it may become internalized and distort the athlete's self-concept, leading to guilt, shame, and normalization of the behavior (Rayat Sarokolaei et al., 2022).

Over time, younger athletes may incorporate these experiences into their sense of self, perceiving them as inherent to the sporting culture. As Stirling and Kerr (2008) noted, a strong athletic identity may reduce an

athlete's ability to recognize and respond to emotional abuse. Similarly, research by Muhonen, Stirling, and Kokkonen (2024) demonstrated that athletes with prominent athletic identities are more likely to experience and less likely to disclose emotional abuse. Consequently, a strong athletic identity can serve as a *risk factor*, exposing athletes to emotionally harmful coaching practices (Kokkonen & Holopainen, 2022).

As athletic identity becomes more central to an individual's self-concept, athletes may increasingly normalize hostile or aggressive coaching behaviors, adhering to sport-specific norms that valorize toughness and obedience (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Emotional abuse, such as yelling or intimidation, may thus become accepted as a "normal" feature of competitive sport (Stirling & Kerr, 2013). Athletes may tolerate these behaviors due to motivations for success, denial, fear of consequences, or conformity to sport culture (Kerr, 2023; Douglas & Carless, 2009).

Given that coaches serve as powerful role models, particularly for youth athletes, there is a risk that these abusive coaching practices will be perpetuated across generations. Therefore, considering the increasing prevalence of emotional abuse and its normalization within sport, it is imperative to examine the relationship between athletic identity and emotional abuse to inform prevention strategies and protect athletes' psychological well-being (Tomlinson & Strachan, 1996).

Based on the aforementioned literature, the present study aims to investigate the impact of athletic identity on the prevalence of emotional abuse among track and field athletes in Mashhad, Iran.

### **Methodology**

**Participants.** The participants in the present study consisted of all professional and semi-professional track and field athletes in the city of Mashhad, aged 12 to 40 years. They voluntarily participated in the study with the cooperation of the Khorasan Razavi Province Track and Field Board and specialized track and field sports clubs across the city. Moreover, a snowball sampling method was used to recruit entitled participants. Subsequently, considering the statistical population, the sample size was determined to be 100 individuals using Morgan's table. An examination of the participants' demographic characteristics indicates that the Gender distribution in the sample was equal, with 50% of participants being female and 50% male. Regarding Age, the highest frequency was in the 33 to 40-year-old group (28.5%), while the lowest was in the 26 to 33-year-old group (23%). In terms of Professional Field, the majority of participants competed in Long-Distance Running (56.5%) and Sprinting (31%), while disciplines such as Long Jump (1%), Pole Vault (0.5%), and Discus Throw (1.5%) established a small portion of the sample. Concerning the Highest Athletic Rank level, the highest frequency was at the Provincial level (44%), followed by the National level (25.5%). Additionally, 19% of the participants were Unranked, while a small percentage had competed at the Asian (7%) and Universal (4.5%) levels. In the relation of Athletic Experience, the largest share belonged to the group with 1 to 3 years of experience (25%). Groups with less than one year (19.5%) and more than 10 years (19.5%) of experience were equally described, while 16% had 3 to 5 years and 17% had 5 to 10 years of Athletic Experience.

**Table 1- participants 'demographic characteristics**

Demographical Variable	Category	Frequency Percentage
Gender	Female	50
	Male	50
Age	12- to 19-year-old	24.5
	19- to 26-year-old	24.0
	26- to 33-year-old	23.0
	33- to 40-year-old	28.5
Professional Field	Sprinting	31.0
	Long-Distance Running	56.5
	Long Jump	1.0
	Pole Vault	0.5
	Shot Put	9.5
	Discus Throw	1.5
Highest Athletic Rank	Unranked	19.5
	Provincial	44.0
	National	25.5
	Asian	7.0
	Universal	4.5
Athletic Experience	1 to 3 years	25.0
	3 to 5 years	16.0
	5 to 10 years	17.0
	More than 10 years	19.0

**Instruments.** In order to collect the required data, a demographic questionnaire was first used to gather participants' personal information such as age, gender, professional level, and specialized track and Professional Field.

**Brewer's Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS).** This questionnaire, developed by Brewer et al. (1993), consists of 10 items and 4 components (Social Identity, Self-Identity, Exclusivity, and Negative Emotional Vulnerability). Responses are scored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The sum or average of the item scores is considered as the index of Athletic Identity. Moreover, the test-retest reliability of the Athletic Identity scale was reported as  $r = 0.89$  and the convergent validity was established through its moderate correlation with the Self-Role Scale (Curry & Weaner, 1989;  $r = 0.61$ ) and the three subscales of the Sport Orientation Questionnaire (Gill & Deeter, 1988;  $r = 0.26$  to  $0.53$ ). In addition, results represented that there is no significant correlation between the Athletic Identity scale and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1968;  $r = -0.01$ ) as well as the

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subscales of the Physical Self-Perception Profile (Fox & Corbin, 1989;  $r = -0.03$  to  $0.19$ ), indicating the scale's discriminant validity. Given the number of items and the Likert scale, data from this instrument are generally analyzed as interval data in most studies.

*Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (CAREMS)*. This instrument, developed by Dietz et al. (2016) as a self-report tool, consists of 19 items and 5 components (Performance Degradation, Direct Personal Humiliation, Shaming Behaviors, Indirect Personal Humiliation, and Intimidating Behaviors). Responses on this questionnaire are documented using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never Experienced) to 7 (Always Experience). The sum or average of the items is calculated for each subscale and the total score. Furthermore, the reported reliability for the questions in this questionnaire is 0.96, and its validity has been assessed using the Questionnaire on Emotional Response in Sport (Q-RES) by Graves (2009). Considering the multi-item nature and the 7-point scale range, the resulting data are regarded as interval-level data, and analyses have been conducted consequently.

*Procedure*. The present study is applied in purpose and descriptive-correlational in nature. Firstly, the researcher provided explanations with regard to the research topic and the variable of Emotional Abuse to inform the participants. Following this, the athletes were asked to complete the demographic questionnaire. Subsequently, the research questionnaires were distributed to the athletes. In this study, the content validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by three expert professors. Their reliability was also reviewed and confirmed after a pilot study with 15 individuals, using Cronbach's alpha( $r$ ). The researcher distributed 125 questionnaires during the year 2025 and after discarding invalid questionnaires, 100 completed questionnaires were analyzed.

*Analysis*. In the descriptive statistics section, Central Tendency Indicators, Dispersion Indices, Percentages, and Frequency Distribution tables were reported. Moreover, for a more precise analysis of the research variables, the gathered data were examined through statistical comparisons. Quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS software, version 27. A one-way ANOVA test was used to compare the research variables and the participants' demographic characteristics. Further, an Independent Samples T-test was used to evaluate the difference in the two variables of Emotional Abuse and Athletic Identity between the male and female participants of the study. Then, to examine the relationship between the two variables of Emotional Abuse and Athletic Identity, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used. In addition, linear regression was utilized to investigate whether the Athletic Identity variable could be a suitable predictor for Emotional Abuse.

## **Results**

This study included 100 track and field athlete participants from the city of Mashhad, comprising 50 females and 50 male athletes, with an age range of 12 to 40 years. Firstly, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the reliability of the research instruments. The test results showed that the research instruments, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.878, possess desirable and acceptable reliability and are considered appropriate tools for measuring the research variables.

**Table 2-1 Data Differences Report**

Variable		Gender	
		Male	Female
Mean	Emotional Abuse	3.97	4.02
	SD	0.59	0.61
Mean	Athletic Identity	2.93	2.92
	SD	0.35	0.42

Based on Table 1-2, the findings indicated that the Emotional Abuse experienced by female athletes, with a mean of 4.02, was statistically higher than that of male athletes, with a mean of 3.97, while the difference was not substantial. In contrast, the Athletic Identity variable for female athletes, with a mean of 2.92, was nearly equal to that of male athletes, with a mean of 2.93.

**Table 2-2 Data Differences Report**

Variable		Age			
		19-12	19-26	26-33	33-40
Emotional Abuse	Mean	3.93	4.18	3.93	3.99
	SD	0.55	0.67	0.61	0.60
Athletic Identity	Mean	2.91	2.97	2.87	2.94
	SD	0.37	0.45	0.35	0.38

According to Table 2-2, the evaluation of participants' age ranges revealed that the highest level of experienced Emotional Abuse, with a mean of 4.18, was in the 19 to 26-year-old age range. In contrast, the 12 to 19-year-old and 26 to 33-year-old age ranges reported equal means of 3.93. Moreover, the results indicated that regarding the Athletic Identity variable, the most notable Athletic Identity belonged to the 19 to 26-year-old age range with a mean of 2.97, while the lowest mean belonged to the 26 to 33-year-old age range with a mean of 2.87.

**Table 2-3 Data Differences Report**

Variable		Athletic Experiences				
		Less than 1 year	1-3 years	3-5 years	5-10 years	More than 10 years
Emotional Abuse	Mean	3.84	4.06	4.06	4.08	3.92
	SD	0.67	0.61	0.66	0.62	0.48
Athletic Identity	Mean	2.96	2.90	3.05	2.87	2.87
	SD	0.40	0.45	0.96	0.34	0.32

Accordingly, Table 2-3, the results revealed that the highest rate of experienced Emotional Abuse, with a mean of 4.08, belongs to athletes with 5 to 10 years of sports experience. In contrast, the lowest mean of experienced Emotional Abuse relates to athletes with less than one year of sports experience. Additionally, the most prominent reported Athletic Identity relates to athletes with 3 to 5 years of experience, reported with a mean of 3.05, while the lowest mean belongs equally to the ranges of 5 to 10 years and more than 10 years, both with a mean of 2.87.

**Table 2-4 Data Differences Report**

Variable		Highest Athletic Rank				
		None	Provincial	National	Asian	Universal
Emotional Abuse	Mean	4.07	3.97	3.92	4.21	3.88
	SD	0.58	0.56	0.65	0.680	0.33
Athletic Identity	Mean	2.96	2.90	2.88	3.14	2.94
	SD	0.32	0.42	0.36	0.43	0.35

As the table above indicates, the highest percentage of experienced Emotional Abuse, with a mean of 4.21, belongs to Asian-level medalist athletes, while the lowest mean of 3.88 belongs to Universal-level medalist athletes.

**Table 2-5 Data Differences Report**

Variable		Professional Field					
		Sprinting	Long Distance	Long Jump	Pole Vault	Shot Put	Discus Throw
Emotional Abuse	Mean	4.4	3.97	4.00	4.00	3.94	2.90
	SD	0.55	0.64	0.0	0.0	0.62	0.50
Athletic Identity	Mean	2.90	2.92	3.15	2.80	3.04	2.90
	SD	0.42	0.37	0.21	0.0	0.36	0.50

Conversely, Asian-level medalist athletes, with a mean of 3.14, possess a more prominent Athletic Identity; however, the lowest reported mean for Athletic Identity, at 2.88, belongs to national-level medalist athletes.

According to the data comparison reported in Table 2-5 concerning the specialized Professional Field, it can be stated that the highest mean of Emotional Abuse belongs to the Sprinting with a very negligible difference, the Long Jump and Discus Throw, with a mean of 4.00, have the highest statistical means.

**Table 3- The Independent T-test Emotional Abuse Variable**

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Female	50	4.02	0.62	-0.58	98	0.56
Male	50	3.97	0.59			

According to Table 3, the results of the Independent T-test showed that the mean of Emotional Abuse in women (M=4.02) was slightly higher than in men (M=3.97), but this difference was not statistically significant. Thus, it can be concluded that gender did not play a determining role in the rate of Emotional Abuse experienced among the track and field athletes.

**Table 4- The Independent T-test Athletic Identity Variable**

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Female	50	2.92	0.42	0.199	98	0.843
Male	50	2.93	0.35			

Moreover, the results of the Independent T-test indicated that the mean Athletic Identity in men (M=2.93, SD=0.35) and women (M=2.92, SD=0.42) did not show a significant difference (P=0.843). Therefore, gender did not have a significant effect on the Athletic Identity of the track and field athletes in Mashhad.

**Table 5- Data Correlation Results**

Variable	Pearson Correlation	Sig
Emotional Abuse	0.364	0.001
Athletic Identity		

Subsequently, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to evaluate the relationship between the variables. According to the table mentioned above, the results revealed a significant positive correlation between Emotional Abuse and Athletic Identity ( $r = 0.364, p = 0.001$ ). This finding suggests that as Emotional Abuse increases, the level of Athletic Identity also increases.

**Table 6- Linear Regression**

Indicator	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	STD
Amount	0.364	0.132	0.128	0.565

The results of the linear regression analysis in Table 6 show that Athletic Identity can predict Emotional Abuse ( $R=0.364$ ). The coefficient of determination ( $R^2=0.132$ ) indicates that approximately 13% of the variance in Emotional Abuse is explained by Athletic Identity. Thus, Athletic Identity is a significant predictor of Emotional Abuse.

## Discussion

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the impact of Athletic Identity on the prevalence of Emotional Abuse among track and field athletes in Mashhad. Its results indicate new horizons in understanding the dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship and the necessity for supportive interventions. The findings revealed that the average level of Emotional Abuse among Mashhad's track and field athletes was at a moderate level (3.99), and their Athletic Identity was reported as moderate to low (2.92). These figures alone sound a serious alarm; because even at a moderate level, Emotional Abuse can have profound negative consequences on individuals' psychological well-being and athletic performance (Stirling & Kerr, 2013; Lundqvist et al., 2024; Willson et al., 2021).

The results of the Independent T-test in this study revealed that the mean was slightly higher than in men ( $M=3.97$ ), but this difference was not statistically significant ( $p=0.56$ ). Additionally, the results related to

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Athletic Identity indicated that the mean Athletic Identity of men ( $M=2.93$ ) and women ( $M=2.92$ ) did not differ substantially from each other, and this difference was also not significant ( $p=0.843$ ). These findings overall demonstrate that, contrary to what has been suggested in some studies, the variable of gender did not play a determining role in the experience of Emotional Abuse or the level of Athletic Identity among the track and field athletes in Mashhad. One possible reason for the lack of a significant difference between women and men may relate to the nature of track and field. This sport, compared to some team or high-contact sports, involves less direct and prolonged interaction between the coach and the athlete. Consequently, the likelihood of Emotionally Abusive behaviors happening might be generally similar for both genders. In other words, the individual nature of track and field could mean that the psychological and behavioral pressures from the coach are not distributed based on gender, creating almost equal conditions for all athletes. From the perspective of Athletic Identity, the absence of a significant difference between women and men could reflect a similar process of athletic socialization in contemporary society. Given the increased participation of women in professional sports in recent years and the closer alignment of opportunities and facilities in training, competition, and achieving championship titles, it is expected that women and men would not show a marked difference in constructing their Athletic Identity. This finding aligns with some recent studies that have shown Athletic Identity is influenced more by factors such as duration of sports participation, competition level, and social support than by gender (Muhonen et al., 2024). These findings, while perhaps seeming straightforward at first glance, carry fundamental theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, they indicate that we must avoid stereotypical views of Emotional Abuse in sports. It is not the case that women are inherently more victimized by Emotional Abuse or that men are immune to it. Rather, environmental conditions, the nature of the coach-athlete relationship, performance-related psychological pressures, and the cultural structure of clubs and federations play a more significant role in this context (Adams et al., 2024; Smits et al., 2018). Therefore, preventive and supportive interventions should be designed to encompass both genders and not focus solely on one group. On the other hand, the findings of this study are also consistent with some international results. For instance, research conducted in Finland and Canada has also shown that gender differences in the experience of Emotional Abuse are not very prominent, and that the intensity of the coach-athlete relationship and the organizational culture of clubs are more determining factors (Kaski et al., 2023; Willson et al., 2021). This consistency in findings reveals that the phenomenon of Emotional Abuse in sports has a transnational and global nature and should generally be addressed at the macro level of sports.

Another key finding of the study was the significant positive correlation between Athletic Identity and Emotional Abuse ( $r=0.364$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). This finding indicates that as Athletic Identity increases, the likelihood of experiencing or internalizing Emotional Abuse also increases. This aligns with previous theories and research emphasizing the high importance of Athletic Identity in athletes' lives and its role in their persistence and commitment to sports (Brewer et al., 1993; Muhonen et al., 2024). Athletes with a stronger Athletic Identity may be less likely to report abuse or may even normalize coaches' abusive behaviors due to their deep commitment to the athlete role and fear of losing this identity (Adams et al., 2024). This normalization, also mentioned in the introduction (Jacobs et al., 2018; Smits et al., 2018), can

trap the athlete in a vicious cycle of enduring abuse. By confirming this hypothesis, the present study reinforces the critical necessity of raising awareness among athletes, particularly those with a stronger Athletic Identity, to identify and confront harmful behaviors. Further analysis revealed that female athletes experienced slightly more Emotional Abuse than males. This finding, consistent with some prior research (Alexander et al., 2024), highlights the need for deeper investigation into gender-related factors influencing the experience of abuse in sports. Moreover, the highest levels of emotional abuse were observed in the 19-26 age group and among athletes with 5-10 years of experience. This age and experience group, which often encompasses the peak of athletic performance and professional ambitions, might be more vulnerable due to greater pressure to succeed and a heavier reliance on the coach. Interestingly, athletes with 5-10 years of experience had the highest mean Emotional Abuse score (4.08), while the lowest mean belonged to athletes with less than one year of experience. This suggests that with increased time in the sports environment and perhaps a deepening relationship with the coach, the likelihood of experiencing Emotional Abuse increases. Regarding the highest sports achievement, Asian-level medalists experienced the highest level of Emotional Abuse ( $M=4.21$ ) and simultaneously possessed the most prominent Athletic Identity ( $M=3.14$ ). This could confirm the hypothesis of the normalization of inappropriate behaviors at higher levels of sport, where athletes might accept psychological pressure and abusive behaviors as part of the path to championship in order to maintain their position and achieve further success. This situation requires special attention from sports institutions to support this group of athletes. The results of the linear regression analysis also showed that Athletic Identity can predict Emotional Abuse ( $R=0.364$ ), with 13% of the variance in Emotional Abuse explained by Athletic Identity ( $R^2=0.132$ ). Although this percentage of variance explained might seem low at first glance, given the complexity of the phenomenon of Emotional Abuse and the involvement of numerous psychological, social, and environmental factors, the importance of Athletic Identity as a significant predictor is noteworthy. This finding means that the more athletes define themselves by their athletic role, the more vulnerable they become Emotionally Abused, which further underscores the necessity of developing awareness programs and support systems to safeguard athletes' mental health.

### **Practical Suggestions**

Based on the study's findings, it is essential to propose practical solutions for preventing and addressing Emotional Abuse in sports environments:

*Training Programs for Coaches:* It is crucial to implement ongoing workshops and training courses for coaches focusing on professional ethics, effective communication skills, sports psychology, and identifying signs of Emotional Abuse. These trainings should emphasize creating a respectful and empathetic environment and help coaches improve athlete performance without resorting to abusive behaviors. As a result, training in anger management techniques, providing constructive feedback, and understanding the psychological needs of athletes should be prioritized.

*Establishing Support Mechanisms and Safe Reporting Channels:* Federations and sports organizations must provide confidential and safe reporting systems for athletes, enabling them to report abuse without fear of negative consequences. These mechanisms should also include psychological and legal support for victimized athletes. Creating support hotlines, independent ethics committees, and employing sports psychologists within sports organizations can contribute significantly to this goal.

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*Enhancing Athletes' Psychological Awareness:* Educational programs should help athletes develop a healthy Athletic Identity and avoid defining themselves solely by their sporting role. More, these programs should enhance their ability to recognize abusive behaviors and improve their coping skills. Training in resilience, stress management, and self-awareness can be effective in this regard.

*Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:* Sports organizations must regularly monitor and evaluate the status of Emotional Abuse and Athletic Identity among athletes to ensure the effectiveness of intervention programs. This monitoring can be conducted through periodic surveys, interviews with athletes and coaches, and analysis of data related to complaints or reported cases.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Like any research, the present study had limitations that could inspire future investigations:

*Population of the Study:* This research focused on track and field athletes in the city of Mashhad. To generalize the findings, conducting similar studies in other sports fields and different geographical regions of the country is essential. Additionally, including athletes at various levels (amateur, professional, national) could add greater diversity to the findings.

*Data Collection Methods:* The use of self-report questionnaires may be subject to biases. Employing qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, could provide a richer understanding of athletes' experiences. Moreover, direct observation of coach and athlete behaviors in the training environment could offer new perspectives.

*Influential Factors:* Although Athletic Identity was identified as a fundamental predictor, other factors could also play a role in the prevalence of Emotional Abuse (e.g., coach's leadership style, social support, and athlete's personality traits). Future research could explore multivariate models. For example, investigating the role of the athlete's self-efficacy, their attachment style, and the support from family and friends in moderating the relationship between Athletic Identity and Emotional Abuse could be particularly valuable.

*Study design:* This study was descriptive-correlational in nature and does not establish a cause-and-effect relationship. Conducting longitudinal studies can contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of changes in Athletic Identity and the experience of Emotional Abuse over time. Following athletes from the early stages of their entry into sports to higher levels could dynamically illustrate changes in Athletic Identity and the likelihood of Emotional Abuse occurrence.

*Coaches' Perspective:* Examining the phenomenon of Emotional Abuse from the viewpoint of coaches, including potential reasons for these behaviors and the obstacles they face in adopting supportive approaches, could yield valuable results. Understanding coaches' perspectives regarding their expectations of athletes, the pressures they themselves face, and their knowledge of sports psychology can contribute to designing more effective interventions.

By considering these suggestions, more effective steps can be taken towards creating a safe and supportive environment for all athletes in the country, thereby fostering their growth and development while safeguarding their psychological well-being. This research marks the beginning of this important path, and

it is hoped that through its replication and expansion, a fundamental reduction in instances of Emotional Abuse and an enhancement of psychological health within the nation's sports community will be witnessed.

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