

EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFECTIONISM AND SPORT AGGRESSION AMONG FOOTBALL PLAYERS

¹Mahrokh Dehghani ²Mehrdad Moharramzadeh ³Ayoub Behtaj

^{1&3}Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey

²Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran

ABSTRACT

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality construct that has been linked with various forms of maladjustment. Perfectionism is commonly conceived of as a personality style characterized by striving for flawlessness and setting of excessively high standards for performance accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations of one's behavior. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between perfectionism and aggression in male football players in Iran. A total of 138 male football players (age 23.75±3.51 years old; body height 177.72±6.73 cm and body weight 74.68±12.77 kg) completed the surveys. Three kind of personal information, Sport Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale and Bredemeier Athletic Aggression Inventory were used to collect the information. In order to analyse the data were used descriptive and inferential statistics. The result of research showed that: there was a significant association between the concern over mistakes dimension of perfectionism and the hostile aggression($r=0.824$; $p<0.05$). No other dimensions of perfectionism (personal standards, perceived parental pressure and perceived coach pressure) were found to be correlated with aggression.

Key Words: *Perfectionism, Hostile Aggression, Personality and Football.*

INTRODUCTION:

Perfectionism is a personality disposition characterized by striving for flawlessness and setting exceedingly high standards for performance accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations (Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Frost et al,1990). Moreover, perfectionism is a common characteristic in competitive athletes (Dunn et al, 2005). Perfectionism is a characteristic that varies along a continuum; an individual may have varying amounts of overall perfectionism and varying amounts of each characteristic of the subscales (Frost, et al. 1990).

Perfectionism has been associated with a wide variety of personal adjustment problems, including depression (Sherry et al., 2003), suicide (Blatt, 1995; Hewitt et al, 1994), anxiety disorders (Antony et al, 1998), and eating disorders (Cockell et al., 2002; Sherry et al, 2004). Perfectionism has also been linked with problems in interpersonal and family functioning (Haring et al, 2003), and maladaptive coping strategies (Dunkley et al, 2003).

However, research has suggested that two major dimensions be differentiated (Stoeber & Otto, 2006): a positive dimension which has been described as normal, healthy, or adaptive perfectionism and a negative dimension which has been described as neurotic, unhealthy, or maladaptive perfectionism (Hamachek, 1978).

Adaptive perfectionism has been found to be related to positive affect (Terry-Short et al,1995). Conversely, maladaptive perfectionism has been found to be related to negative affectivity, such as anxiety and depression (Bieling et al, 2004). Moreover, perfectionists often put great importance on the evaluation by others and feel pressured to perform to the highest standards to avoid significant others' disappointment and disapproval (Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

Hewitt and Flett (1991) found moderate correlation between anger and socially prescribed perfectionism (feeling that others place unreasonable standards of one's behavior; maladaptive) but weak correlations between anger and self-oriented perfectionism (setting high goals for oneself; adoptive). However, the result of Saboonchi and Lundh (2003) showed that trait anger was associated with self-oriented perfectionism rather than socially prescribed perfectionism. Also in a study on 242 students of age 18-29, Saleh and Besharat(2010) showed that self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism were positively associated with anger dimensions, and negatively associated with anger control dimensions. No significant correlation was found between other-oriented perfectionism and dimensions of anger and anger control. In the sport context, Dunn et al (2006) examined the relationship between athletes' perfectionist orientations and their dispositional tendencies to experience anger in sport. The results revealed a profile of maladaptive perfectionism (i.e., high personal standards combined with high concern over mistakes and high perceived coach pressure) that was significantly correlated with competitive trait anger and the tendency to experience anger when playing poorly.

Valance et al(2006) found that heightened perfectionist orientations were associated with heightened competitive trait anger and a significant situation-criticality main effect was also observed, with athletes anticipating higher levels of anger following personal mistakes in high-as opposed to low-criticality situations.

Sinclair et al (2006) examined the relationships between the dimensions of perfectionism and various aspects of anger, such as state, trait, and the expression of anger, for collegiate springboard divers. Only trait anger, and the subscale trait anger/ angry reaction, were found to have significant relationships with the concern over mistakes dimension of perfectionism. The perfectionism personal standards subscale was also correlated with trait anger/ angry reaction. Stirling and Kerr (2006) found significant associations between specific mood state scores and various dimensions of perfectionism. Although hostility and anger are conceptually related to aggression, these terms are not synonymously used in research related to aggression(Öngen, 2010). Unfortunately, very little is known about perfectionism and aggression especially in sport. To date, only two study has examined the relationship between aggression and perfection. One study was conducted by Öngen (2009). Öngen investigated the relations between perfectionism and aggression in a sample of 445 high school students. The results revealed that, discrepancy was the positive predictor of anger, physical aggression and hostility while order was the negative predictor of anger, physical and verbal aggression. High standards were found to be the negative predictor of hostility and positive predictor of verbal aggression. Byrd (2011) examined the relationship between perfectionism, anxiety, and anger on reactive aggression in male, contact sport athletes. The results showed that the Sport-MPS subscales of perfectionism predicted levels of reactive aggression, specifically the concern over mistakes subscale and the organization. Also, it was found that higher levels of reported state-anger, anxiety, and perfectionism significantly predicted higher levels of reactive aggression. Therefore, it can be argued that little is known about how perfectionism is related to sport aggression.

The aim of the present study, was to examine the relations between dimensions of perfectionism and aggression among football players using sport MPS and Bredemeier Athletic Aggression Inventory . In the present study, it was hypothesized that dimensions of perfectionism (Personal Standards, Concern Over Mistakes, Perceived Parental Pressure and Perceived Coach Pressure)

would be related to aggression: (a) The Personal Standards would be related to dimensions of aggression (b) The Concern Over Mistakes would be related to dimensions of aggression (c) The Perceived Parental Pressure would be related to dimensions of aggression (d) The Perceived Coach Pressure would be related to dimensions of aggression

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Sample- A sample of 138 football players, consisting of males (age 23.75 ± 3.51 years old; body height 177.72 ± 6.73 cm and body weight 74.68 ± 12.77 kg) are selected randomly from the statistical population in league competition class two (2011-2012) in Iran.

Measures-

Demographic variables- Participants completed a demographic information section, which included questions on age, weight, height, weekly hours they engaged in football, and the number of years they had been playing football.

Perfectionism- To measure perfectionism, participants completed the Sport Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS; Dunn et al 2006). The Sport MPS contains 30 items (on a 5-point Likert) and four subscales. The Personal Standards (PS) subscale measures the tendency to set high and exacting standards of personal performance in sport and contains seven items (e.g., "I have extremely high goals for myself in my sport"). The Concern Over Mistakes (COM) subscale measures the tendency to become overly concerned about personal mistakes and to view mistakes in sport as unacceptable and contains eight items (e.g., "If I play well but only make one obvious mistake in the entire game, I still feel disappointed with my performance"). The Perceived Parental Pressure (PPP) subscale measures perceptions of parents being overly demanding and critical and contains 9 items (e.g., "In competition, I never feel like I can quite meet my parents' expectations"). Lastly, the Perceived Coach Pressure (PCP) subscale measures the belief of coaches being overly demanding and critical and contains six items (e.g., "Only outstanding performances in competition is good enough for my coach").

Sport aggression- The short form, the BAAGI-S (Bredemeier, 1975), has 15 hostile and 15 instrumental items. Items are answered on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strong agreement" to 4 = "strong disagreement." Lower scores represent higher levels of aggression for

each subscale. However, during the present investigation, scores were reversed so that higher scores would indicate higher levels of aggression. In order to analyse the data was used pearson correlation test. Analysis was performed using SPSS 18.

RESULTS:

Pearson correlation test results showed that there is positive significant correlation between the concern over mistakes subscale of perfectionism and hostile aggression. This result confirm the research`s second hypothesis. Other subscales of perfectionism had no significant correlation with any dimentions of aggression.

Table 1 shows the results of descriptive statistics for 138 football players.

Table1- The means and standard deviations of subscales of perfectionism and aggression of football players

	M	SD
The Personal Standards	25.17	5.14
Concern Over Mistakes	24.53	7.12
Perceived Parental Pressure	27.03	5.66
Perceived Coach Pressure	18.90	3.65
Hostile aggression	36.08	7.38
Instrumental aggression	45.72	5.18

Note. N=138

Table 2 shows the results of pearson correlation test between subscales of perfectionism and aggression in research`s survey.

	Instrumental aggression	Hostile aggression
Personal Standards	-0.010	-0.047
Concern Over Mistakes	-0.045	0.824*
Perceived parental pressure	-0.134	-0.034

Table 2. Pearson correlation between perfectionism dimentions and aggression subscales

Note. N=138 *P<0.05

DISCUSSION:

This study was designed to investigate the relations between perfectionism subscales and aggression among 138 Iranian football players in class two league. Perfectionism is hypothesized to influence an athlete's aggression because it has been found that as perfectionism levels increase, so do athletes' dispositional tendencies to experience anger in sport (Byrd,2011;Dunn , et al.2006; Vallance et al, 2006).

The results of this study showed that COM has positive relation with hostile aggression. This result is consistent with Byrd (2011) and Ongen's study(2009). This finding is described upon the following possibilities:

Players who have higher scores on concern over mistakes subscale of Perfectionism, have more focus on mistakes, and tend to show a lot of self-positive to others. Therefore, athletes who have higher scores in this dimension are less able to banish sport negative perceptions of their mind. So COM (Concern over Mistakes) is positively associated with hostile aggression. On the other hand, this assumption that experienced or perceived frustration may intensify and continue anger emotion via triggering autonomic nervous system, conforms to theories which describe anger as the product of triggering this system(Saleh and Besharat, 2010).

The research results showed that personal standards has no significant correlation with sport aggression. This finding, which is unlike to research's first hypothesis, and conforms to prior researchers (Stirling and Kerr,2006 ; Sinclair et al, 2006 ; Hewitt et al. 2002; Vallance and Dunn, 2002), is described upon the following possibilities:

When goals are fully established internally, athletes feel they have more control over gaining objectives and because these high standards are not experienced from others as imposed external standards, then they are not concerned in dealing with other standards and as a result they are not suffered from emotional responses such as anger and aggression.

The findings of this study showed that PPP and PSP have no significant correlation with sport aggression. This finding is consistent with Sinclair et al's study (2006) but is not consistent with the findings of Stirling and Kerr(2006) and Hewitt et al (2002). It can be because of differences in methodology, age and the kind of sport . Stirling and Kerr (2006) stated the reason of this relation: When goals are set internally, athletes may feel they have more control over their goal

attainment, whereas perceived external pressures to succeed may be associated with a lack of control, and consequential increased levels of anger-hostility.

According to the results of the current research, we can say that almost unhealthy perfectionists always believe that they "can and must do-better". This feeling that a person can or must do better is the first qualification for anger and aggression. So, it is suggested that, the coaches and athletes develop a philosophy by which they consider remission for some faults in the competition (ignore some faults). In other words, it is suggested that coaches and athletes diagnose the faults are the complementary part of performance environment, and the expectation of performance without any fault in sport, causes harm to the athletes in encountering the angers responds. Although, if the anger is controlled and the suitable ways are chosen, there will be a potential for improving action, but the anger has much more potential for preventing performance by distressing the person or by leading the people toward aggressive or hostile behaviors which might causes damage to the others or penalties in the competition.

In conclusion, this is an important area of study due to the severe implications sport aggression can have on sport and athletes. From a practical perspective, given the results of this study, coaches and athletes should recognize that high perfectionistic profiles in conjunction with high state anger may be a recipe for exhibiting reactive aggression in sport. Reactive aggression in sport can have detrimental effects such as fines, suspensions, penalties, and injury(Byrd, 2011).

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