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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COACHES' LEADERSHIP STYLES AND ATHLETES' BURNOUT AMONG UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

Athlete burnout in sports can be greatly exacerbated by specific coaching and leadership styles, especially when they lead to ongoing stress and lower motivation. The present research examines the relationship between coaches' leadership styles and athletes' burnout among Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) athletes. The statistical population for this survey is all athletes who represented UUM in Sukan Institusi Pengajian Tinggi (SUKIPT) 2022. There were 116 athletes, consisting of 67 males and 49 females participated in different individual and team sports. The coaches' leadership styles were measured using the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS), while the Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ) was used to measure the level of athletes' burnout. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using the mean and standard deviation for each item. Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to examine the relationship between coaches' leadership styles and athletes' burnout, with statistical significance set at $p < .05$. The results showed that positive feedback was the most preferred coaches' leadership styles among UUM athletes ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .62$). Results also revealed that the overall score for burnout among athletes was considered low to moderate ($M = 2.63$, $SD = .68$). Meanwhile, among the five leadership style dimensions, only training and instruction demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with athletes' burnout ($r = –.229$, $p = .013$). Furthermore, the analysis revealed that there was no significant relationship between coaches' leadership styles and athletes' burnout ($r =-.162$, $p = .08$). These findings highlight the importance of adopting effective leadership approaches, particularly those emphasizing training and positive feedback, to minimize burnout among athletes. Coaches who balance performance expectations with supportive behaviors can help sustain athletes' motivation, well-being, and long-term engagement in sports.

Keywords: burnout, coach leadership style, positive feedback, athlete burnout

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic world of sport, the relationship between coaches and athletes plays a main role in determining the success and well-being of individuals and teams alike. The influence of coaches' leadership styles on athletes, performance and motivation has long been recognized as a critical factor in achieving peak athletic performance. This view is strongly supported by Chelladurai's Multidimensional Model of Leadership (1980), which emphasizes that athletes' satisfaction and performance are influenced by the alignment of the coach's leadership behaviors with the needs of the

athletes. However, the ever-evolving landscape of sports psychology has revealed a fascinating and somewhat enigmatic aspect of this relationship, its potential impact on athletes' burnout. As athletes continuously strive to excel, the relentless pressure to perform at peak levels can have a negative impact on their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Burnout, a syndrome characterized by exhaustion, reduced accomplishment, and depersonalization, has emerged as a concerning challenge that only affects athletes' performance but also jeopardizes their overall health and happiness (Maslach et al., 2015). For decades, athletes have been concerned about burnout. The term has come to conjure up images of athletes struggling mentally and physically because of their dedicated and intense involvement in sport training and competition (Raedeke, 1997b). According to (Smith, 1986) defined athlete's burnout as an incompatible response given to stress associated with exercise and competition, like the reasons associated with the job of the employees and reasons causing stress. However, athlete burnout is recognised as a growing mental problem that is increasingly becoming a major factor negatively impacting the efficiency of professional athletes across a wide range of sporting disciplines. Burnout is also a psycho-physiological reaction characterised by physical and psychological exhaustion caused by excessive and recurring tension (Dale & Weinberg, 2016; Silva, 1990). It occurs when athletes are overwhelmed and are unable to meet their continuous needs, resulting in decreased sport performance, a reduced sense of accomplishment, and a decrease in participation (Dale & Weinberg, 1990; Gustafsson et al., 2007; Silva, 1990).

On the other hand, the role of the coach is to deliver quality coaching and a positive learning and performance environment, which is accomplished by teaching athletes sport, social, and leadership skills (Bucci et al., 2012). Different coaches have different personalities. Coaches' attitude towards team and individual sports can also be different. Therefore, talking about this issue, as coaches they need to fulfil important roles in sport, being responsible for numerous outcomes relevant to athlete development and performance (Mohd Kassim & Boardley, 2019). The relationships of one's coach with their athletes extend to influence both skill development and psychosocial outcomes (Smith & Smoll, 2017a). Aside from developing and improving players' physical and tactical abilities, coaches also need to consider the psychosocial well-being of their players to enhance players' motivation to compete and perform effectively. To achieve these complex tasks, coaches should determine and understand the athlete's needs and motivational styles, and employ appropriate coaching strategies in a conducive, honest, and collaborative environment. Hence, coaches must be suitable leaders of the team or towards athletes and possess the right leadership knowledge and attitude based on the various personal and environmental situations.

Coaches may be especially important because of the numerous interactions they have with athletes and their ability to influence an athlete's burnout experience (Vealey et al., 1998). For example, coaches who present their athletes with unrealistic expectations, criticism, and pressure to perform well have been shown to lead to burnout in their athletes (Gould et al., 1996). One important aspect of coach styles that can influence an athlete's susceptibility to burnout is their leadership style (Barcza-Renner et al., 2016). As a result, coaches' leadership styles and athletes have been the subject of numerous studies over the last two decades. Despite the growing body of literature on sports leadership and burnout, many questions remain unanswered. This could be considered further study validation of this research's findings and results, indicating the need for more precise and detailed research on this topic. Thus, this study aims to investigate the relationship between coaches' leadership styles and athlete burnout.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Respondents and Research Design

The study sample had been selected using a purposive sampling technique. Respondents for this study were athletes participated in "*Sukan Institusi Pengajian Tinggi* (SUKIPT)" in year 2022. According to Sport Department of UUM, there are a total of 127 athletes from 10 different types of sports including team and individual sports who has represented UUM at SUKIPT 2022. According to Krejcie and Morgan, (1970), a suitable sample size for a population of 127 was 97 samples. To prevent an

irreversible rate or decrease, 20% more of the sample will be added. An additional 20% of the sample is equal to 11 people. As a result, the total sample size for this study would be 116 samples.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: section A related to demographic data, section B is to assess athletes preferred coaching leadership styles, and section C is to assess the athletes' burnout. There are some demographic data required for this study in section A such as gender, categories of sports and education level.

For section B, an adopted Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS) by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) was used to assess the athletes' preferred coaching leadership styles. Leadership Scale for Sport is a 40-items questionnaire and consists of the following subscales: 1) Training and instruction (13 items), 2) Democratic Behavior (9 items), 3) Autocratic Behavior (5 items), 4) Social Support (8 items) and 5) Positive Feedback (5 items). A five-point Likert scale had been used by the participant to answer the LSS. Never (1), Seldom (2), Occasionally (3), Often (4), and Always (5) are the five LSS response categories, with "seldom" 25%, "occasionally" 50%, and "often" 75%.

In section C, Athletes' Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ) adopted from Raedeke and Smith, (2001) was used to assess the athletes' levels of burnout. The questionnaire consists of 15 items and 3 subscales which are emotional and physical exhaustion ("I feel so tired from my training that I have trouble finding energy to do other things"), reduced sense of accomplishment ("I am not achieving much in sport"), and sport devaluation ("The effort I spend in sport would be better spent doing other things"). The items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (frequently), 5 (almost always). The internal consistency reliability of Cronbach's Alpha reported 0.82 for physical and emotional exhaustion, 0.81 for reduced sense of accomplishment, and 0.87 for sport devaluation which exceeded the recommended criterion of 0.70 (Dubuc-Charbonneau & Durand-Bush, 2014).

Data Collection

An approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: REC/376/2023). Next, the researcher obtained a permission from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Student Affair and Alumni, Universiti Utara Malaysia. Prior to data collection, the consent form was distributed to the athletes who participated in Sukan Institut Pengajian Tinggi (SUKIPT) 2022 that was held at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjung Malim, Perak, and they were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they were allowed to withdraw from this study any time. Then, the link to access the Google Form questionnaire was distributed to the participants. A week was given to the participants to complete the questionnaires. The participants submitted the questionnaires to the researcher once all the questions were completely answered.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Windows version 27. The statistical analysis included descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The data were analysed by using means and standard deviation of each item. For the purpose of correlation, Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to investigate the relationship between coaches' leadership styles and athletes' burnout. Statistical significance was set a $p < .05$.

RESULTS

Preferred Coaches' Leadership Styles among UUM SUKIPT Athletes

Table 1 showed the descriptive statistic results of preferred coaches' coaching leadership styles among UUM SUKIPT athletes. Positive feedback was recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.12, SD = .62) followed by training and instruction (M = 4.10, SD = .53), democratic behaviour (M = 3.95, SD = .61), and social support (M = 3.59, SD = .68). Meanwhile, autocratic behaviour was the least preferred with the lowest mean score (M = 3.28, SD = .83).

Table 1: Preferred Coaches' Leadership Styles among UUM SUKIPT Athletes

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Training and Instruction	4.10	.53
Democratic Behavior	3.95	.61
Autocratic Behavior	3.28	.83
Social Support	3.59	.68
Positive Feedback	4.12	.62

Athletes' Burnout among UUM SUKIPT Athletes

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistic of athletes' burnout. The average burnout scores out of a possible score of 5 were computed for each of the subscales. Based on the result below, emotional and physical exhaustion recorded the highest mean score with (M = 2.69, SD = .84) followed by sport devaluation (M = 2.68, SD = .63) and reduced sense of accomplishment recorded the lowest mean score with (M = 2.53, SD = .83). Overall, the mean score for athletes' burnout was (M = 2.63, SD = .68) out of possible score of 5. By using the cut-off score determined by Dubuc-Charbonneau et al. (2014), this score can be considered low to moderate levels of burnout as it was not near or above the mean score of three.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistic of Athletes' Burnout

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional and Physical Exhaustion	2.69	.84
Sport Devaluation	2.68	.63
Reduced Sense of Accomplishment	2.53	.83
Total (Athletes' Burnout)	**2.63**	**.68**

Relationship Between Coaches' Leadership Styles and Athletes' Burnout Among UUM SUKIPT Athletes

To determine the relationship between coaches' leadership styles and athletes' burnout among UiTM Perlis athletes, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted. The results presented in Table 3 show a negative significant relationship between training and instruction and athletes' burnout, r (116) = -.229, p = .001. This study reported that the strength of the relationship was classified as weak as it falls between the range of .10 -.39 (Schober, Boer, & Schwarte, 2018).

Next, the results in Table 3 showed that there was no significant relationship between coaches' democratic behaviour, r (116) = -.123, p = .188, social support, r (116) = -.051, p = .585, positive feedback r (116) = -.165, p = .076, coach leadership style and athletes' burnout. However, the strength of these relationships was classified as weak.

Overall, the results in Table 3 indicated that the relationship between coaches' leadership styles and athletes' burnout was not significant r (116) = -.162, p = .083.

Table 3: Correlation Between Coaches' Leadership Styles and Athletes' Burnout

		Athletes' Burnout
Training and Instruction	Pearson Correlation	-.229
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013
Democratic Behavior	Pearson Correlation	- .123
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.188
Autocratic Behavior	Pearson Correlation	-.090
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.337
Social Support	Pearson Correlation	-.051
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.585
Positive Feedback	Pearson Correlation	-.165
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.076
Total (Coaches' Leadership Styles)	**Pearson Correlation**	**-.162**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.083**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

DISCUSSION

Preferred Coaches' Leadership Styles among Universiti Utara Malaysia Athletes

According to the results, the most preferred coaches' leadership style among UUM SUKIPT athletes was positive feedback (M = 4.12, SD = 0.62). This means that most UUM SUKIPT athletes prefer their coaches to always give words of encouragement and appreciation for them to become better. Coaches who provide positive feedback help athletes develop not just for the short term but also for the long term. They create an environment in which athletes can continue to grow and reach their full potential over time. This current finding is consistent with previous studies that showed positive feedback was the most preferred coaching behaviour (Bakri et al., 2022). Furthermore, Sherman et al. (2000) administered the athletes preference version of the LSS to Australian football players, netball players, and basketball players found that Australian athletes preferred more positive feedback, followed by training and instruction, democratic behavior, social support and autocratic behavior the least.

Based on the result, the least preferred coaches' leadership styles among UUM SUKIPT athletes were "autocratic behavior" with the lowest mean score (M = 3.28, SD = 0.83). This means that the UUM athletes do not prefer autocratic styles during their SUKIPT 2022. This finding is in line with previous studies that showed autocratic behaviour was the least preferred coach leadership style (Bakri et al., 2022; Rasyid et al., 2020). The researcher can assume that the majority of the UUM SUKIPT athletes in this study did not prefer their coaches to exhibit autocratic coaching because it will reduce intrinsic motivation among athletes. For example, when athletes are not given a say in the training methods, tactics, or goals, they may become less engaged and enthusiastic about their sport. In fact, this authoritarian nature of coaching can create a stressful and fear-driven environment for athletes. They may be afraid to make mistakes or express their concerns, which can hinder their performance and overall well-being. One study by Chang et al. (2019) stated that an autocratic leadership style would create a negative environment which subsequently leads athletes to feel the tension and develop a negative attitude toward the coaches.

Relationship Between Coaches' Leadership Styles and Athletes' Burnout Among Universiti Utara Malaysia Athletes.

In the present study, the result indicated that there was a negative significant relationship between coaches' leadership styles of training and instruction and athletes' burnout. This current finding is in line with previous studies that showed a negative correlation between coaches' leadership behaviour of training and instructions and athletes' burnout (Altahayneh, 2013; Altahayneh, 2003). This indicated that coaches who exhibit less positive feedback and provide less training and instruction were associated with athletes who reported higher levels of burnout and anxiety (Altahayneh, 2013). A previous study by Chee et al. (2018) found that training and instruction leadership styles are associated with task-oriented skill development and appear to have been recognized by elite players as important coaching behaviour to improve their performance and subsequent chance of success. However, the result from the previous study was in contrast with this study. Salehian and Mojtaba Sheikh Moghaddasi (2021)revealed that training and instruction leadership styles had a positive and significant relationship that caused burnout. In this current study, researchers assume that the way coaches conduct training and provide instructions can either contribute to athlete burnout or help prevent it. For example, coaches who prioritize a balanced training approach that includes adequate rest, recovery, and personal life can help prevent burnout. Athletes need a balance between training and rest to maintain their overall well-being. Besides that, the way coaches provide instruction during training sessions is crucial. Coaches who are overly critical, provide constant negative feedback, or create a highly stressful learning environment can contribute to burnout by undermining athletes' confidence and increasing anxiety.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, leadership styles play a fundamental role in shaping the success and well-being of athletes in various contexts. Different leadership styles such as autocratic, positive feedback, democratic, training and instruction, and social support have distinct impacts on motivation, performance, and overall satisfaction. Coaches who understand the needs and preferences of their athletes and adapt their leadership style accordingly can create a more effective and harmonious sports environment. A balanced approach that incorporates elements of various leadership styles is often the most successful, as it allows leaders to leverage the strengths of each style while mitigating its potential drawbacks.

As the findings of this study showed that UUM SUKIPT athletes prefer their coaches to apply a positive feedback leadership style where it tends to create a healthier and more sustainable athletic environment. Such styles can foster motivation, self-confidence, and ultimately lead to improved performance and long-term development. However, it is essential for coaches to recognize that athletes are individuals with diverse preferences and requirements. Flexibility in leadership is key, as no single style is universally effective. Tailoring leadership to meet the specific needs of athletes, understanding their goals, and promoting their well-being are the cornerstones of successful leadership in the world of sports.

Lastly, the key to preventing athlete burnout is to create a training and instruction environment to foster a positive, supportive, and balanced atmosphere. Coaches should consider the physical and mental well-being of their athletes alongside the physical and mental well-being of their athletes alongside performance goals. Effective coaching should not only focus on enhancing athlete performance but also safeguarding their health and long-term development.

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