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Quality of Performance of Attention-Demanding Task and Emotional Reactivity During a Task of Type A Individuals

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to assess quality of performance of attention-demanding task of Type A and Type B individuals and their emotional reactivity during the task. 38 individuals were selected to participate in a study from 226 undergraduate students and classified as Type A (n=19) or as Type B (n=19) on the basis of their scores on the Adolescent/Adult Type A Behavior Scale – 3. They performed ABQ test to measure their focus and attentiveness in three different situations: when giving basic instructions, when giving the instructions with time limitations and stimulus to compete and when criticizing while doing the task. The emotional reactivity during the performances of the task was evaluated using Emotional Assessment Scale. The results of the study showed better Type A students' performance on tasks in all three situations comparing to Type B students. Students having Type A behaviour pattern reported higher level of competitiveness when being given the instructions of time limitations and stimulus to compete and when criticizing their performance than Type B students. Moreover, Type A students reported having more anger while performing the task when being criticized than Type B students.

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1. Introduction

Formally introduced by two American cardiologists more than five decades ago (Friedman and Rosenman, 1959), type A behavior pattern are described as „an action-emotion complex that can be observed in any person who is aggressively involved in a chronic, incessant struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time“ (Friedman, Rosenman, 1974, p, 69). Individuals having type A behavior pattern are very ambitious, impatient, hostile,

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aggressive, work long hours under constant deadlines and pressure, often take work home, constantly compete with others and themselves and are always tensed (Brief et al., 1981; Jamal, 2007). Contrary, Type B individuals are more relaxed, non-competitive, less stressed (Mellem, 2002).

According to N.S. Erden, D. Toplu, M.M. Yashoglu (2013), due to increasing competition in a marketplace, type A behavior individuals are often reinforced and rewarded for their dedication, ability to work in more demanding and intense work conditions. Moreover, it was found that job demands act as a mediator between Type A personality and workaholism.

On the one hand, individuals having Type A behaviour pattern could be successful and useful in organizations, but on the other hand by leading an intense way of life they harm themselves.

It is thought that Type A individuals have higher physiological reactivity to stressors and because of that they are more likely to suffer from coronary heart diseases. Some researchers found that Type A behaviour pattern is related with coronary heart disease, independently of the traditional risk factors such as smoking, hyperlipidaemia and hypertension (Rosenman et al., 1976; Haynes et al, 1980; Kawachi et al, 1998). However, not all studies confirm that relation (Shekelle et al., 1985, Ikeda et al, 2008).

Studies show, that type A behaviour pattern is also related with some psychiatric problems, for example depression ((Light K.C, 1991), burnout syndrome (Raya, et al., 2010). It is hypothesised, that those relations could be explained by higher psychological reactivity during stressful situations of type A individuals. D. A. Granger et al (2006) and M. R. Gunnar et al (2009) found that physiological response to stressors is associated with negative affective states. For example, elevated cortisol responses were related to feeling more tensed, anxious, depressed and aroused.

In the literature more attention is given analyzing physiological reactivity to stressors of Type A individuals and there are lack of studies evaluating their emotional reactivity. C. D. Jenkins et al (1977) stated that type A individuals do not feel negative emotional affectivity in stressful situations, because they tend suppress the recognition of physiological discomfort associated with the behavioural pattern. However, some studies revealed that Type A behaviour pattern is related with emotional distress and neurotism (Cramer, 1991; Moriana, Heruzo, 2005). That also could explain the relationship between emotional problems and type A behaviour pattern.

According to the Type A behaviour concept, given the level of competitiveness and high achievement orientation, it should be reasonable to think that individuals having type A behaviour pattern would work harder at various tasks and would perform at higher levels than Type B's (Greenberg, Barron, 1995). However, R.J. Kriegal and M.H. Kriegal (1984) states that type As use achievement only to justify their behaviour and usually they accomplish little quality because they try to do too much and too quickly.

Ch. A. Ovcharchyn, H. H. Johnson, T. P. Petzel (1980) found that type A students achieve higher performance levels. R. L. Frei, B. Racicot and A. Travagline (1998) reported that professors having type A behavior pattern had more publications than their type B counterparts. J.T. Kunnanatt (2003) added that highest performers among managers were the ones who had more type A behavior pattern. However, in Jamal (1985) study type B employees outperformed type As in performance quality at a large manufacturing firm.

Matthews (1982) suggests that individuals having Type A behavior pattern have high attention concentration and while doing a task show minimal sensitivity to peripheral cues and can ignore everything that is not relevant to the task. However, there are inconsistent results about the quality of performance of the tasks of type A individuals. J.L. Freedman, D.R. Edwards (1988) found that Type A behavior was associated with better performance of anagram solving task under time pressure, while D. Bingham and B.J. Hailey (1989) reported that Type As made more errors comparing to type Bs. Moreover, under conditions of no time pressure, performances of type A and type B individuals were equal. T. Li-Ping Tang, H. Liu (2001) also didn't find any differences between type A and type B individuals in their performance of anagram-solving task.

Some researchers have provided evidence that type As perform better during a serial subabstraction test (Sausen, Lovallo, Wilson, 1991) and responded to signals faster during a simple reaction time task than type B individuals (Juszczak, Andreassi, 1987). However, N. Sato's et al (1998) study suggest that even sympathetic nervous system in Type A females was found to be more stimulated by the task than in Type Bs, there were no significant differences in subjects performance of psychomotor task.

G.J.Faunce, P.K. Mapledoram, R.F.S. Job (2004) and A. Pérez-García et al (2002) suggest that inconsistencies between results might appear because type A individuals are affected by the characteristics of the task, such as content and given instructions.

Some studies suggest that individuals having Type A behavior pattern have higher quality performance and

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