



A person-oriented approach to sport and school burnout in adolescent student-athletes: The role of individual and parental expectations[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The present study aimed to examine what kind of burnout profiles exist among student-athletes based on their sport and school burnout symptoms. Moreover, it was investigated whether athletes' expectations of success in sport and school, on the one hand, and parental expectations, on the other hand, were predictors of the likelihood of the athlete to show a certain profile, after taking into account the effects of gender, grade point average, type of sport, and level of competition.

Design and methods: The participants were 391 student-athletes (51% females) from six different upper secondary sport schools in Finland, and 448 parents (58% mothers). The athletes filled in questionnaires about burnout and success expectations at the beginning of the first year of upper secondary school. At the same time point, parents were asked to answer a questionnaire on their success expectations for their child. Structural equation modeling and latent profile analysis were used to analyze the data.

Results: Four burnout profiles were identified: well-functioning, mild sport burnout, school burnout, and severe sport burnout. Athletes' and parents' expectations of success seemed to protect against burnout in the same domain, but this protection did not extend to the other domain. Moreover, high success expectations in one domain seemed to increase the risk for burnout in another domain.

Conclusions: Burnout needs to be investigated within and across context in order to gain a holistic understanding of student-athletes' wellbeing.

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Combining an athletic career with education is demanding for talented student-athletes (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015). Since only few athletes ever obtain a professional status, student-athletes need to strive for success in both school and sports in order to facilitate transition into labor market. It has been shown that junior elite athletes are susceptible to stress and burnout (e.g., Cresswell &

Eklund, 2006; Hill, Hall, & Appleton, 2010; Raedeke & Smith, 2001), and that adolescents feel particularly pressured during the transition to upper secondary school (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, & Nurmi, 2008). Examination of burnout in student-athletes is essential not only from the viewpoint of social costs associated with dropping out from school and sport, but also from the viewpoint of student-athletes' mental health and wellbeing. Thus far, sport and school burnout has not, however, been examined simultaneously in a single study. Consequently, little is known about the co-occurrence of different types of burnout among student-athletes. Furthermore, although it has been suggested that athletes' and parents' success expectations in sport might be important predictors of sport burnout (Hill, Hall, Appleton, & Kozub, 2008; Lemyre, Hall, & Roberts, 2008), no empirical evidence exists where success expectations in school were investigated in relation to school burnout, nor have sport and school success expectations been investigated in a dual context. The present study aimed to examine what kind of burnout profiles based on both sport and school

^{*} In the present article the term sport burnout was used instead of athlete burnout to refer to burnout symptoms in sport context. The term 'sport burnout' was selected because a) this term was grammatically consistent with the term school burnout used to refer burnout symptoms in school context; b) the participants in the present study were athletes and, thus, the term 'athlete burnout' may refer to burnout that athlete experiences also in another context than sport, such as school, whereas the term 'sport burnout' refers directly to athletes' experiences in the sport context; c) the term has consistently been used parallel to school burnout in the authors' previous work (incl. a sport burnout inventory validation article; Sorkkila, Ryba, Aunola, Selänne & Salmela-Aro, submitted).

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burnout symptoms can be identified among student-athletes at the beginning of upper secondary school. Moreover, student-athletes' sport and school success expectations, on the one hand, and parental success expectations of their child, on the other hand, were examined as predictors of the burnout profile of the student-athlete, after gender, grade point average (GPA), level of sport competition, and type of sport (individual vs. team sports) were controlled for.

1. Burnout among student-athletes

The pressure associated with competitive sports and progressively increasing training load may predispose talented and elite adolescent athletes to sport burnout (Gotwals, 2011; Gustafsson, Hill, Stenling, & Wagnsson, 2015; Hill et al., 2010). Sport burnout is defined as a multidimensional construct that encompasses emotional and physical exhaustion, sport devaluation, and a reduced sense of accomplishment (Raedeke & Smith, 2001). Whereas exhaustion is a stress-related variable, the other two components reflect a negative attitude towards one's ability to perform effectively as an athlete. Emotional and physical exhaustion occur as a result of the intense demands of competition and training. A reduced sense of accomplishment refers to an athlete's feelings of inadequacy in relation to his or her skills and abilities in sport. Sport devaluation refers to a situation where an athlete stops caring about the sport and his or her own performance.

Even though sport burnout has attracted the attention of researchers in the field of sport psychology, the causes of it are not fully understood (Gustafsson et al., 2015). According to Smith (1986)'s cognitive-affective model, sport burnout develops as a result of chronic stress, when an individual constantly feels that his or her resources (e.g., social support; perceptions of competence) are inadequate to meet the situational demands (e.g., high training load; external pressure). Smith (1986) proposed that the development of burnout is process where burnout and stress evolve in parallel, under the influence of personality and motivational factors, leading finally to withdrawal from sport (see Smith, 1986). Although Smith's model has been criticized for not differentiating between sport burnout and sport withdrawal or drop out (Raedeke & Smith, 2001), the model provides a heuristic understanding of athletic burnout and has gained considerable empirical support in the context of sport (e.g., Gould, Uldry, Tuffey, & Loehr, 1996; Kelley, Eklund, & Ritter-Taylor, 1999; Raedeke & Smith, 2004).

In addition to the athletic setting, burnout can also occur in the academic setting. School burnout has been described as a continuous phenomenon that starts with minor school-related stress and ends in major burnout (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Pietikäinen, & Jokela, 2008). According to Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Leskinen, and Nurmi (2009), school burnout consists of three components that are similar to those in job burnout: school-related exhaustion (i.e., chronic fatigue due to overtaxing school work), school-related cynicism (i.e., distant or indifferent attitude towards school and loss of interest in school work), and feelings of inadequacy (i.e., reduced feelings of competence and less success in school). It has been shown that 10% of adolescents in Finland experience severe school burnout (Salmela-Aro & Näätänen, 2005). However, although some studies have examined school burnout in Finnish students (e.g., Salmela-Aro & Näätänen, 2005; Salmela-Aro et al., 2008, 2009), none have examined school burnout among student-athletes. Moreover, to our best knowledge, no previous research has *simultaneously* investigated both sport and school burnout symptoms in student-athletes, even though both athletic and educational pursuits in upper secondary school have been separately shown to be stressful for adolescents (Hill et al., 2010;

Salmela-Aro & Näätänen, 2005).

Drawing on Smith (1986)'s assertion that burnout is a consequence of a mismatch between situational demands and available resources, it can be hypothesized that the dual career demands faced by adolescent athletes participating in elite sport training programs may be greater than the demands faced separately in school or sport, and therefore, the dual demands may result in more severe deprivation of resources in some individuals (see Ryba et al., 2016). It is also possible that situational demands and available resources in the domains of sport and school differ for different individuals, although no empirical evidence exists investigating this proposition. For example, some athletes may have access to more resources, such as social support or perceptions of competence, in one domain and fewer resources in another domain, and therefore show symptoms of burnout only in one domain. On the other hand, some other athletes may have access to resources in both domains and find the demands of both domains manageable, and therefore show no symptoms of sport or school burnout. However, because burnout has thus far been mainly examined using a variable centered-approach (i.e., the focus has been on the relationship between different variables; for a review, see Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2016), little is known about the possible individual differences in burnout profiles. It has been argued that the variable-oriented approach may have limitations for examining processes in individual functioning, since it is difficult to translate the description of variables into the properties of distinct individuals (Gotwals, 2011; Gustafsson et al., 2015). Hence, when examining burnout, a person-centered approach may be more appropriate than a variable-centered approach, as burnout has been identified as a phenomenon that affects individuals and not variables (Gotwals, 2011). Consequently, the first aim of the study was to determine what kind of burnout profiles based on sport and school burnout symptoms exist among student-athletes and how are these profiles distributed in the studied population. By applying a person-centered approach, we aimed to investigate different subgroups of student athletes who have similar symptom profiles.

2. Role of athletes' and parents' success expectations in burnout

Previously, many individual characteristics have been examined as antecedents of sport burnout. For example, reduced intrinsic motivation, high perceptions of stress and anxiety, and avoidance-related goals have been associated with burnout symptoms in sport (Goodger, Gorely, Lavalley, & Harwood, 2007). In contrast, high self-expectations have been shown to be negatively related to burnout in sport (Hill, 2009). High athletic success expectations have been examined mainly in relation to multidimensional perfectionism: it has been proposed that when high success expectations and standards are imposed by one self (i.e., self-oriented perfectionism), they are negatively associated with sport burnout (Hill et al., 2008, 2008; Lemyre et al., 2008), but when they are imposed by others (i.e., socially prescribed perfectionism), they are positively associated with sport burnout (Appleton, Hall, & Hill, 2009; Hill et al., 2008), although some contradictory evidence also exists (Flett & Hewitt, 2005; Hill, 2009). Less is known about the relationship between success expectations and school burnout. Previous research has shown that higher grade point average (GPA) and growth-related goals are negatively associated with school burnout (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009, 2008; Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, & Niemivirta, 2008). Therefore, it can be expected that high success expectations in school would be negatively associated with school burnout, although empirical evidence is needed to support this notion. Consequently, the second aim of the study was to

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