

Analysis of Burnout Levels of Judo Coaches in the COVID-19 Period: Mixed Method

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Abstract

This study was carried out to find out the burnout levels of judo coaches in COVID-19 period and to show how they will approach their profession and athletes in the period after the pandemic. 136 judo coaches from different coaching levels participated in the study. Maslach Burnout Inventory was used in the study. In addition, 3 qualitative questions were prepared by the researchers to find out the emotions of coaches during and after the pandemic and how they approached their athletes. IBM SPSS 22 statistical program was used to analyze the data in the study. Since the data were not normally distributed, non-parametric Mann Whitney U was used in paired group comparisons, while Kruskal Wallis H test was used for the comparison of more than two groups and significance level was taken as $p < .05$. Content

analysis method was used to analyze the 3 qualitative questions. As a result, burnout levels of the judo coaches in the study were found to be low. No significant difference was found between the variables of gender, age and coaching level and burnout level. In addition, while coaches stated that they missed their profession and were waiting excitedly for trainings to start, more than half of them stated that their approaches to athletes will change after the pandemic.

Keywords: Burnout, Coach, COVID-19, Judo, Pandemic, Stress, Mental toughness

1. Introduction

Novel severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which emerged in the last months of 2019, affected the countries in Asia, Oceania, North, Middle and South America as well as most European countries due to the increase in the rate of spread in the first months of 2020 (WHO, 2020). It has been reported that the transfer of COVID-19 will be quite easy in sports environments, especially in contact sports, due to its long incubation period, being viable, showing milder symptoms and transmission characteristics (Wong et al., 2020). Due to these characteristics of the virus, the postponement or cancellation of the events planned to be carried out in the national and international arena has become a current issue because protecting athletes' health and taking precautions to prevent them from being injured or getting sick is one of the main goals of sport. The measures to be taken for these purposes are important in terms of protecting athletes and preventing the virus from spreading (Aygün & Ünal, 2020). In addition to mass participation events such as marathon races, economically profitable football leagues were also either postponed or cancelled (Yeo, 2020). Even the Summer Olympic Games, which were not postponed due to any medical reasons in history and which were planned to be held in Japan in 2020 and considered as the world's largest sport organization, have been postponed until June 2021 (Dhillon, 2020).

It has been found that during the COVID-19 quarantine, communication ways of individuals (including coaches and athletes) have changed significantly (Dalton et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2020) and there has been an increase in the level of stress perceived by coaches (Santi et al., 2021). In addition to a study which found that the communication between coach and athlete was effective on burnout states (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2016), in another study which was conducted by Monfared et al. (2021) it was found that the level of saliva cortisol, which is a physiological indicator of stress, was also effective on the burnout states perceived by athletes. Considering these studies, the burnout levels of coaches, who are stakeholders of sport, during the pandemic period have been a matter of curiosity.

Maslach and Jackson (1981) grouped the perceived burnout state in three dimensions as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is defined as the emotional fatigue that occurs as a result of the negative situations individuals have experienced in their current jobs. Depersonalization is a situation in which individuals have decreased interest in their current job or the individuals they communicate with. Personal accomplishment is individuals' feeling unsuccessful in their current job. In addition, it was found that burnout has significant effects on team performance and coaches' health and well-being (Goodger, Lavalley, Gorley, & Harwood, 2007).

During the pandemic period, in addition to studies on physical characteristics of athletes (Baggish et al., 2020; Hull, Loosemore, & Schwellnuss, 2020; Yousfi et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2020; Raipal et al., 2021), studies have also been conducted which examine the psychological and sociological states of both coaches and athletes and provide recommendations for the pandemic period and post-pandemic period (Schinke et al., 2020; Håkansson, Jönsson, & Kenttä, 2020; Öktem, Şipal, Kul, & Dilek, 2020; Mehrsafar, Gazerani, Li, Gao, Liu, & Zhong, 2020; Zadeh & Sanchez, 2020; Tingaz, 2020; Rubio, Sanchez-Iglesias, Bueno, & Martin, 2021; Santi et al., 2021).

In addition, when studies conducted on burnout during the pandemic period were examined, it was found that a great majority were conducted in different countries of the world on healthcare professionals fighting on the forefront with coronavirus (Dincer & İnangil, 2020; Fessell & Cherniss, 2020; Janeway, 2020; Wu et al., 2020; Treluyer & Tourneux, 2021; Ismail, Shehata, & Mahrous, 2021; Varani et al., 2021). However, no studies were found which examined the burnout states of coaches who were seriously affected by the pandemic and who are one of the cornerstones of sport sector. As a matter of fact, in addition to the fact that there is no clear date about when we'll return to normal, restricted life conditions and compulsory physical isolation may have negatively affected the psychological health of coaches and supportive staff. It is also thought that coaches may feel professionally exhausted since they haven't been able to coach and spend time with their athletes for a long time due to the pandemic and since they have financial losses. Santi et al. (2021) reported that the recent global spread of COVID-19 pandemic affected the lives of people in many countries including athletes, coaches and supportive staff; coaches were included in the isolation just like everyone and this may have normally affected the psychological well-being of coaches since they had limited ability to be engaged in their profession and interact with athletes. In addition, the issue of burnout is important for judo coaches because when coaches begin to feel emotionally exhausted, they distance themselves from athletes and they begin to lose sense of their job; therefore, there is no doubt that burnout is considered as a factor that affects the quality of athletic experience both for coaches and also for athletes (S. Gencay & O. Gencay, 2011).

In the light of the information above, this study was carried out to find out the burnout levels of judo coaches in isolation days due to the present coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and to show how they will approach their profession and athletes in the period after the pandemic by using mixed method.

2. Method

This part of the study will give information about the research model, research group, data collection tools used in the research and data analysis.

2.1 Research Model

A mixed method was used in this study to find out the burnout levels of judo coaches from different coaching levels during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Mixed method research is a model used in health, social and behavioural science areas where the researcher integrates the

data sets by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data to understand the research problem and then draws conclusions by using the advantages of integrating these two sets together (Creswell, 2017). Parallel mixed method, one of the mixed method designs, was used in this study. The aim of parallel mixed method researches is to collect both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time, to combine these data and to use the results to understand a research problem (Fırat, Yurdakul, & Ersoy, 2014).

Phenomenology design was preferred for qualitative dimension. Phenomenology design is an inquiry strategy in which the researcher tries to define the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon explained by the participants (Creswell, 2003).

2.2 Participants

Convenience (random) sampling method was chosen in this study. Random sampling selection does not require a detailed study. Therefore, it is not possible to mention a systematic sampling process. The size of the sample generally depends on the preference of the researcher (Baştürk & Taştepe, 2013). In this context, the research group of the present study consists of a total of 136 judo coaches, 90 (66.2%) males and 46 (33.8%) females. These coaches cannot perform their profession due to the restrictions brought by the pandemic.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

2.3.1 Personal Information Form

A personal information form prepared by the researchers was used in the study to find out the demographic characteristics of judo coaches such as gender, age and coaching level.

2.3.2 Maslach Burnout Scale

Maslach Burnout Inventory developed by Maslach and Jackson in 1981 was used in the study. The inventory was adapted into Turkish by Ergin (1992). The inventory has three sub-dimensions as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

The scale is a 5 Likert type scale and while scoring, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization sub-dimension items are scored as 1 “Never”; 2 “Rarely”; 3 “Sometimes”; 4 “Mostly” and 5 “Always”, while the items are reversely scored in personal accomplishment sub-dimension. Cronbach alpha (α) values of the scale and its sub-dimensions are as follows: emotional exhaustion (.874), depersonalization (.718), personal accomplishment (.790) and the whole inventory (.880). The inventory can be said to be reliable since these values are very close to 1 (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011).

2.3.3 Semi-structured Interview Form

An interview form consisting of 3 open-ended questions was used to find out the approaches of judo coaches in the pandemic and post-pandemic period towards their profession and athletes. The form, which initially consisted of 4 open-ended questions, was edited as 3 open-ended questions in line with the opinions of field experts and partially supported Maslach Burnout Inventory. The open-ended questions in the form are as follows,

Question 1: Because I cannot perform my profession due to COVID-19 pandemic, I feel ...

Question 2: When the COVID-19 pandemic ends, while performing my profession, I will feel ...

Question 3: My approach to athletes before COVID-19 pandemic was ...; after the pandemic, it will be ...

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection tools prepared by the researchers were transferred to online platform, the form was sent to judo coaches and they were asked to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. IBM SPSS 22 program was used to analyze the data obtained in the study. As a result of the normality analysis, it was found that the data did not show a normal distribution (Table 1). Non-parametric Mann Whitney U was used for paired group comparisons, while Kruskal Wallis H test was used for the comparison of more than two groups and significance level was taken as $p < .05$. The answers given to qualitative questions were analyzed with content analysis method and they were gathered under appropriate headings by reviewing literature and presented in tables.

In the qualitative part of the study, content analysis method was used to analyze the responses of judo coaches to the open-ended questions. The order of content analysis is as follows: coding the data, finding the themes, organizing the data according to themes-codes and interpreting the results. The qualitative data set was coded according to coaching level, age range, gender and the sequence number given by the researchers.

For example: a 2nd level, 25-year-old female participant participated in the study in the 9th place. This data was coded as 2,2,F,9. The age interval was coded as 18-22 years of age (1), 23-27 years of age (2), 28-32 years of age (3), 33-37 years of age (4), 38 + (5).

Content analysis method was preferred for the analysis of qualitative data. In the study, the answers to the 3 open-ended questions and a total of 6 sub theme were obtained. As an internal measure of reliability, the consensus among the three researchers was calculated as marking “consensus” or “disagreement”, as proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (1994) and 85% consensus was reached on the data obtained from the open-ended questions.

2.4 Ethics Content

The document confirming that this study is in compliance with ethical rules was obtained from Kilis 7 Aralık University Ethics Committee (Issue: E-76062934-044 Date: 16.03.2021).

Table 1. Results of normality test of data

	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional Exhaustion	1.627	1.992
Depersonalization	1.813	-1.370
Personal Accomplishment	1.506	3.726
Total Burnout	1.516	.933

In Table 1, it was determined that the total of the scale and its sub-dimensions do not show a normal distribution since the skewness and kurtosis values are not between -1.5 and +1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). For this reason, nonparametric tests were preferred in this study.

3. Results

Table 2. Demographic characteristic of judo coaches

		n	%
Gender	Male	90	66.2
	Female	46	33.8
Age	18-22	13	9.6
	23-27	41	30.1
	28-32	31	22.8
	33-37	21	15.4
	38 age and +	30	22.1
Coaching Level	1st level	33	24.3
	2nd level	53	39.0
	3rd level	37	27.2
	4th level	13	9.6

As Table 2 is examined, it can be seen that the total number of judo coaches is 136. Of these, 90 (66.2%) are male, while 46 (33.8%) are female. 13 (9.6%) of the judo coaches are between 18 and 22 years of age, 41 (30.1%) are between 23 and 27 years of age, 31 (22.8%) are between 28 and 32 years of age, 21 (15.4%) are between 33 and 37 years of age and 30 (22.1%) are 38 years of age and older. When the levels of coaches were examined, it was found that 33 (24.3%) are first level coaches, 53 (39.0%) are second level coaches, 37 (27.2%)

are third level coaches and 13 (9.6%) are fourth level coaches.

Table 3. Score descriptive features of judo coaches to burnout scale

Scale	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Emotional Exhaustion	136	1.00	4.89	1.88	.760
Depersonalization	136	1.00	4.00	1.74	.695
Personal Accomplishment	136	1.25	4.50	2.16	.480
Total Burnout	136	1.18	3.86	1.95	.510

As Table 3, is examined, it was found that total burnout levels of judo coaches were low ($\bar{x} = 1.95$) and the most negatively affected aspect during the pandemic was personal accomplishment ($\bar{x} = 2.16$) sub-dimension.

Table 4. Mann Whitney U Test results according to gender variable of judo coaches

Scale Total and Sub-dimensions	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	Z	U	p
Emotional Exhaustion	Male	90	67.91	6112.00	-.244	2017.000	.807
	Female	46	69.65	3204.00			
Depersonalization	Male	90	69.29	6236.00	-.329	1999.000	.742
	Female	46	66.96	3080.00			
Personal Accomplishment	Male	90	68.14	6133.00	-.148	2038.000	.882
	Female	46	69.20	3183.00			
Total Burnout	Male	90	68.33	6150.00	-.069	2055.000	.945
	Female	46	68.83	3166.00			

Note. * $p < .05$.

As Table 4 is examined, it was found that as a result of the Mann Whitney U test, mean ranks of judo coaches' burnout inventory and sub-dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment) did not differ significantly in terms of the variable of gender.

Table 5. Kruskal Wallis H Test result according to the age variable of judo coaches

Scale Total and Sub-dimensions	Age	N	Mean Rank	df	X ²	p
Emotional Exhaustion	18-22	13	61.69	4	7.645	.105
	23-27	41	75.65			
	28-32	31	52.87			
	33-37	31	73.71			
	+38	30	74.18			
Depersonalization	18-22	13	52.85	4	4.983	.289
	23-27	41	73.29			
	28-32	31	73.50			
	33-37	31	73.57			
	+38	30	60.02			
Personal Accomplishment	18-22	13	67.50	4	6.024	.197
	23-27	41	80.55			
	28-32	31	65.23			
	33-37	31	63.02			
	+38	30	59.68			
Total Burnout	18-22	13	59.85	4	3.603	.462
	23-27	41	76.93			
	28-32	31	61.29			
	33-37	31	69.86			
	+38	30	67.23			

Note. * $p < .05$.

As Table 5 is examined, it was found that as a result of the Kruskal Wallis H test results, mean ranks of judo coaches' burnout inventory and sub-dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment) did not differ significantly in terms of the variable of age.

Table 6. Kruskal Wallis H Test results according to the grade variable of judo coaches

Scale Total and Sub-dimensions	Level	N	Mean Rank	df	X ²	p
Emotional Exhaustion	1.	33	63.02	3	6.781	.079
	2.	53	68.12			
	3.	37	64.72			
	4.	13	94.73			
Depersonalization	1.	33	64.15	3	.941	.816
	2.	53	72.25			
	3.	37	67.26			
	4.	13	67.77			
Personal Accomplishment	1.	33	73.27	3	1.258	.739
	2.	53	69.37			
	3.	37	62.95			
	4.	13	68.65			
Total Burnout	1.	33	66.03	3	4.941	.176
	2.	53	70.25			
	3.	37	61.12			
	4.	13	88.65			

Note. * $p < .05$.

As Table 6 is examined, it was found that as a result of the Kruskal Wallis H test results, mean ranks of judo coaches' burnout inventory and sub-dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment) did not differ significantly in terms of the variable of coaching level.

Table 7. The responses of judo coaches to the first qualitative question and the headings under which responses are grouped

Theme	Sub Theme	Codes	%
Mental or Physical Condition	Negative Mental or Physical Conditions	Sad	93.3
		Unhappy	
		Empty	
		Useless	
		Introvert	
		Desperate	
	Positive Mental or Physical Conditions	Mentally and physically rested	6.7
		Spared time for myself	
		Listened to myself	
		Spared time for my family and loved ones	

As Table 7 is examined, the responses of judo coaches who could not perform their professions given to the question “Because I cannot perform my profession due to COVID-19 pandemic, I feel ...” were analyzed with content analysis method. When the responses were examined, it was found that a coach coded as 2,1,M,49 said that he felt “unhappy”, while a coach coded as 4,2,F,52 said that she felt “sad” and similar responses could be expressed as “Negative situations caused by the quarantine practices due to the pandemic”. A coach coded as 1,1,M,31 responded “I have spared time for myself”. Another coach coded as 2,1,M,12 responded “I have rested”. Similar responses were expressed as “Positive situations caused by the quarantine practices due to the pandemic”.

Table 8. The responses of judo coaches to the second qualitative question and the headings under which responses are grouped

Theme	Sub Theme	Codes	%
Mental or Physical Condition	Positive Mental or Physical Conditions	Energetic	95.4
		Willing as if I had just started the profession	
		Happy	
		Excited	
		Longing	
		More motivated	
	Negative Mental or Physical Conditions	Estranged from my profession	4.6
		My efforts wasted	
		Exhausted	
		Physically tired	

As Table 8 is examined, to the question “When the COVID-19 pandemic ends, while performing my profession, I will feel ...”, 1,3,F,62 coded coach responded as “energetic and devoted to the profession”, another coach coded 3,4,M,75 responded as “more motivated. Such responses were collected by the researchers under the heading of “Positive situations caused by being away from the profession due to pandemic”. A coach coded as 2,1,M,12 responded to this question as “estranged from my profession”, while another coach coded as 3,3,F,88 responded as “my efforts wasted” . Similar responses were collected by the researchers under the heading of “Negative situations caused by being away from the profession due to pandemic”.

Table 9. The responses of judo coaches to the third qualitative question and the headings under which responses are grouped

Theme	Sub Themes	Codes	%
Approach	Stabil Approach	Moderate	48.2
		Positive	
		Attentive	
		Careful	
	Changing Approach	Performance oriented but it will be more humane because we've been through a serious process.	51.8
I insisted they be more willing. I'll be more thoughtful now.			

As Table 9 is examined, to the question “My approach to athletes before COVID-19 pandemic was ...; after the pandemic, it will be ...”, the coach coded 1,2,F,84 responded as “careful and it will be the same”, another coach coded as 3,4,M,103 responded as “moderate and it will be the same”. Such responses were collected by the researchers under the heading of “Sentences stating that there will be no change in their approach”. The coach coded as 3,5,M,123 responded as “performance oriented but it will be more humane because we've been through a serious process” and another coach coded as 4,5,M,44 responded as “insistent on their being more eager. I will be more thoughtful”. Such responses were collected by the researchers under the heading of “Sentences stating that there will be a change in their approach”.

4. Discussion

Life has come to a standstill due to COVID-19 pandemic and most sectors such as education, sport, tourism and trade, especially health, have been negatively affected. For about a year, coaches have been away from their athletes. As a result of this distance, their burnout perceptions and how their approaches to their profession and their athletes will be after the pandemic period have been a matter of curiosity. The present study has found both the burnout levels of coaches who cannot perform their profession and their post-pandemic approaches to their profession and athletes and has also contributed to the expansion of existing knowledge.

In order to be able to cope with negative situations or stress both during competitions and also outside competitions, to be able to maintain continuity in concentration and not to experience motivation loss, coaches also have to be mentally tough as well as athletes. According to Young (2014), although coaches who are mentally tough are faced with difficulties, loss, stress, problems, changes or negative life events, they develop an effective coping strategy or adapt to the existing situation. In the light of this information, it is thought that the reason why judo coaches have low burnout levels (Table 3) may be the fact that they

have developed an effective coping strategy due to having high mental toughness or they fight negativity by adapting to the existing situation. Although the majority of judo coaches who have been away from sport and athletes (93.3%) have negative emotions in the pandemic (Table 7), their burnout scores show that they cope with this negative process (Table 3). In addition, it is thought that the results are also affected by the fact that there are also coaches who have turned the pandemic into an opportunity by resting and allocating more time to their loved ones (Table 7). It can also be said that another reason why judo coaches had low burnout levels may be the fact that since a great majority (95.4%) had positive emotions about their approaches to their profession in the post-pandemic process such as “energetic, longing, excited as the first day” (Table 8), this may have contributed to their mental toughness and prevented them from having burnout. Finally, it is also thought that the reason why coaches had low burnout levels may be the fact that more than half of the coaches (51.8%) had the opportunity to question their behaviors before the pandemic and decided to change these gave them the chance to develop themselves personally instead of having negative emotions. According to the results of a study by Santi et al. (2021) in the pandemic period, it was found that although coaches had high perceived stress level, they used emotion regulation strategies intensely.

It was found that the variables of gender, age and coaching level did not cause a significant difference on burnout perception. It is thought that since the restrictions in the pandemic period are not stretched according to demographic characteristics such as gender, branch, age, coaching level and no one is given privileges, burnout perceptions of judo coaches did not differ significantly in terms of the aforementioned variables (gender, age, coaching level). When studies conducted during the pandemic period (2019-2021) which examined the burnout states of different branch coaches are examined, there are studies which did not find a significant difference between burnout perceptions and the variables of gender (Doğan & Akandere, 2019; Aka, Sajedi, & Karataş, 2020; Kayğusuz & Karagün, 2021), coaching level (Aka, Sajedi, & Karataş, 2020) and age (Aka, Sajedi, & Karataş, 2020) and their results are in parallel with the results of the present study. There are also studies which have found that burnout levels of coaches differ significantly in terms of their age (Pehlivan, 2020) and gender (Akbulut, 2018). These results are different from the results of the present study. The reason for this may be that the studies were carried out on different branches (wrestling and boxing) and the data were collected at different times.

As a conclusion, burnout levels of judo coaches during the pandemic period were found to be low. No significant differences were found in the perceived burnout states of coaches in terms of the variables of gender, coaching level and age. When the total burnout scores were examined, it was found that female coaches, those who were between the ages of 23 and 27 and those who were 4th level coaches felt higher burnout than the others.

5. Recommendations

It can be seen that there are few studies carried out on coaches, who are within the sport sector, a sector considered as the greatest sectors of the world and affected seriously by the current pandemic. Studies can be carried out which focus on how coaches or athletes cope

with this negative process, their concerns and mental toughness and recommendations can be made accordingly. Studies can be conducted which provide suggestions that will enable stakeholders in the sports community to spend this process efficiently.

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