



A STUDY ON QUALITY OF LIFE OF RETIRED ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken to understand the quality of life of retired athletes. The study further explored the reasons and perception of athletes retirement from sports. The study was conducted on 150 retired athletes within the age group of 18-30 years. The participants were administered WHOQOL-BREF questionnaire and were also asked to provide reasons and perception towards retirement from sports. Results showed that majority of the participants retired from competitive sports due to education. Injury, work-life balance and financial barrier also emerged as other reasons for retirement. A large number of participants considered their retirement as voluntary. The results on WHOQOL-BREF questionnaire showed that among those who retired due to education and financial barrier there was a significant difference in the physical, psychological, social relationships and environment domains of quality of life. In the voluntary and forced retired groups, there was a significant difference in the psychological and environment domains of quality of life.

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INTRODUCTION

A sport cannot be defined as just a game or an activity. "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand (and creates) hope where once there was only despair" (Mandela, 2000). The magic, excitement and sheer joy, spontaneous burst of applause, strangers hugging each other like long lost friends and the unconcealed emotions of a crowd are unrehearsed and revealed in a sport. It has the capacity to bring out the enthusiasm that lives in everybody. However, playing a sport involves a lot of zeal and fervor than just watching it (Power, 2013). Although a number of people unite and connect with sports, only a minor population takes it a step further and engages in competitive sports. J. Coakley defined competitive sports as "any organized sport activity in which training and participation are time-consuming and in which the level of performance meets relatively high standards of expectation" (1983, p.1).

Research findings in the past decades have shown contrasting effects of athletic participation and its impact on an athlete's life. Although there is a wide spread view that participation in sports, exercise or physical activity results in high psychosocial benefits, there are studies which indicate detrimental effects owing to sports participation. Wilson and Pritchard (2005) study showed that athletes and non-athletes varied in the type of stress they experienced. The athlete population experienced more stress in handling relationship conflicts, not getting enough time to sleep and having too many external demands. Santos (2013) assessed Quality of Life index on professional, semi-professional and amateur level Brazilian athletes. The findings suggested that

professional athletes were more satisfied from a socioeconomic and psychological or spiritual perspective when compared to the amateur group.

Although competitive sports play a fundamental role in an athlete's life, one cannot compete forever as a career in sport is short-lived. McPherson (1978) found that an average career span of a professional athlete was anywhere between five to 10 years and their survival is based on their performance in the first two years. Further, career length seems to vary across sports. Sugawara (1972) examined the careers of top sportsmen in Japan and found that they were longest for baseball players and shortest for swimmers. Accordingly, retirement is an inevitable aspect of an athlete's life, it happens to all, winners, losers, veterans and rookies (Moore, 2012). However, athletes resist conversing about retirement as it might affect their mindset and performance (Hill & Lowe, 1974). Further, they avoid thinking about retirement due to the fear of venturing into an unprepared world where the athletic talent and flair they cultivated would be of little use (Andrews, 1981).

The sheer irony in retirement is although a taboo due to its association with terms such as 'social death', 'withdrawal' and 'retreat'; it is an unspoken fact (J. Coakley, 1983, p. 1). Adding on to the perplexity is the contradictions and inconsistency surrounding the definitions. Some define it as relief and liberation and others describe it as disruption and traumatic. J. Coakley defined retirement from sports as "the process of transition from participation in competitive sport to another activity or set of activities" (1983, p. 1). Lo and Brown (1999) considered retirement as significantly stressful event and generally conceptualized it as a major life crisis. According to Sinclair and Orlick (1993), every transition could be seen as crisis, relief, or a combination of both depending on the individual's appraisal of the situation.

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Further, studies by Blinde and Stratta (1992), Warriner and Lavelle (2008) have shown that retirement from sport could lead to disruption and trauma and affect the well being of athletes. Unanticipated exit from sport affects readjustment to life. However, contrasting results were yielded by Lerch (1982) and Allison and Meyer (1988), they found athletes were satisfied with life after retirement from sports. A number of athletes looked forward to life after sports to pursue new interests.

Retirement from sports is a new area of investigation and researchers do not have consensus about the experiences of athletes as they are varied and diverse. It is also central to understand that departure from sports alone is not the only cause for transitory issues experienced by athletes (J.Coakley, 1983). Retirement is a multi-dimensional phenomenon; one has to approach it by understanding and exploring the various factors associated with it.

Research studies have provided a number of causes that results in retirement from sports - age, deselection, injury and free choice (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), job related or for educational purpose (Hastings, Meyer & Kurth 1989), lack of motivation, family and injury/ health related reasons (Moesh, Mayer & Elbe, 2012).

However, career ending injuries are extensively researched upon; some researchers hold consensus that injury is a forced transition. There appears to be a strong correlation between injury and the amount of difficulty experienced in adaption to life after retirement (Webb, Nasco, Riley & Headrick, 1998). Additionally, those who are injured are likely to be dissatisfied with their lives (Tenenbaum & Eklund, 2007). Apart from studies on injuries, researchers have found that athletes who retire due to declining performance face difficulty in transition as they experience decrease in self-confidence.

Taylor & Ogilvie (1994) classify the causes into voluntary (free choice) and involuntary retirement (age, deselection and injury). Webb *et al.* (1998) said that athletic career terminations fall broadly into two categories: retirements that are freely chosen and those that are forced by circumstances. Voluntary retirement is freely chosen by an individual. It is the one where an individual stops (competing) out of one's own will. Involuntary/ forced retirement is brought on by circumstances which are beyond an individual's control (Lowe, 1991).

Previous research studies found athletes retire voluntarily due to family reasons, job responsibilities, financial issues and lack of motivation (Hastings et al., 1989; Mc Pherson, 1978). Athletes may be forced to retire for an array of reasons like being cut from the team, conflict with management, career-ending injury and chronological age (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Although research has shown that the cause for retirement plays an important role in adaptation to life after sports, one should not categorize causes as voluntary or forced without considering an athlete's perception. This makes it all the more important to consider the circumstances and the perceived control of an individual to understand the quality of transition. Andrews (1981) found that the athlete's perception of considering the sports career as success or failure impacts the course of retirement. A study on professional amateurs from Australian sports shows that internality and perceived control was higher among those who said their retirement was voluntary. The extent of social and emotional adjustment required was also significantly lower for voluntarily retirees,

thus indicating that people who retire involuntarily might experience psychosocial distress and may need therapeutic help (Lavelle, Grove & Gordon, 1997). Further, it was pointed that freedom of choice contributes to emotional adjustment, coping process and life satisfaction. It also eases transition and leads to smooth adaptation (Tenenbaum & Eklund, 2007). This may be because voluntary withdrawal from competitive sports is associated with a greater number of options for moving into other occupations, enabling an athlete to play new roles with fewer problems and less stress (McGown & Rail, 1996)

Research Questions

What are the reasons for athletes' retirement from sport?
What is the perception of athletes towards retirement?
What is the quality of life of retired athletes?
Is there a difference in the quality of life for the cause of retirement?
Is there a difference in the quality of life based on the perception of retirement?

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 150 retired athletes from all over India (30 participants being chosen from 5 sport disciplines such as cricket, hockey, tennis, swimming and athletics). Males 95 (63.3%) F=55(36.7%]. The time frame since participants' retirement was between 2years to 5 years from their sport. The mean age for the participants was 23.13 (SD= ±3.0313) years. In terms of self-reported marital status, the sample was 94% single, 5.3% married and 0.7% separated. With respect to educational qualification, the sample was diverse with 5.4% pre-university completed, 66.2% under graduates and 28.4% post graduates. The occupation of distribution for the participants was 36.9% students, 28.8% sports professionals, 42.3% other professions. The sample characteristics also showed that 63.5% participants had competed in national level competition and 36.5% competed in state level competitions. Although the years since athletes retired from competitive sports career varied from 2 years to 5 years, a large number reported that it was more than two years and less than three years since they retired.

A demographic questionnaire was used to obtain the information regarding the gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, level of participation, years since retirement from competitive sports, reason for retirement and perception towards retirement.

Procedure

The participation was voluntary. The participants were asked to complete informed consent document, demographic details, reason and perception of their retirement and WHOQOL-BREF questionnaire. Further, the participants they were grouped and assessed for the quality of life on two criterions-

- On the predominant cause that led to their retirement from sports
- On the perception of retirement (Voluntary/ Involuntary)

Sampling technique- Purposive and snowball sampling

Instrument

World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF) – was used to assess the quality of life of retired athletes. The WHOQOL- BREF instrument consists of 26 items, which measure the following broad domains: physical health, psychological, social relationships and environment. It is an abbreviated version of WHOQOL-100 quality of life instrument, and is used widely as it is more convenient for larger research studies or clinical trials. It has good properties of reliability and validity. The WHOQOL-BREF produces a quality of life profile. It is possible to derive four domain scores. There are also two items that are examined separately: Question one asks about an individual’s overall perception of quality of life and question two asks about the individual’s overall perception of health. The four domain scores denote an individual’s perception of quality of life in each domain. Like the WHOQOL-100, all items in the WHOQOL-BREF are scaled in the positive direction (i.e. higher scores denote a higher quality of life with the highest possible score being 100).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 15.0) for windows.

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean and SD was used.

One way repeated measures ANOVA was used to study the significant differences in the four domains of quality of life within the group.

Independent sample’s t test was used to study if there was a significant difference in the quality of life between the voluntary and forced retired group.

RESULTS

Table 1 Reasons for retirement from sports

(N=150)		
Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Achievement of sports goals	3	2.0%
Injury	25	16.7%
Education	58	38.7%
Financial Barrier	13	8.7%
Performance related	4	2.7%
Family and Interpersonal reasons	8	5.3%
Organization related reasons	11	7.3%
Work life balance	17	11.3%
Health related reason	2	1.3%
Lack of motivation	5	3.3%
Lack of facilities	4	2.7%

Table 2 Perception of retirement

(N=150)		
Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Voluntary	101	67.3%
Forced	49	32.7%

The causes and perception of retirement are presented in table 1 and 2. The mean and SD for the group on WHOQOL-BREF is presented in Table 3. Table 4 contains the frequency and percentage scores for quality of life and health on WHOQOL BREF questionnaire.

From Table 1, it was seen that education, injury, financial barrier and work life balance emerged as main reasons for retirement from sports.

Table 3 Mean and SD for the group on WHOQOL-BREF Questionnaire

Group (N=150)		
	Mean	SD
Physical Health	71.34	±13.428
Psychological	67.22	±14.376
Social Relationships	70.71	±17.661
Environment	70.97	±16.702
Overall Perception on Quality of Life	3.90	±0.721
Overall Perception on health	3.59	±0.913

Table 4 Overall Perception of Quality of life and Health

	Group (N=150)			
	Quality of life		Health	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very Poor	2	1.33%	3	2%
Poor	4	2.67%	17	11.3%
Neither poor nor good	23	15.33%	36	24%
Good	99	66%	76	50.67%
Very Good	22	14.67%	18	12%

Table 5 Difference in Quality of Life on WHOQOL-BREF Questionnaire

	Quality of life	Mean	SD	F	Sig
Education (N=58)	PH	72	±13.107	3.271	.023*
	PS	67.57	±12.316		
	SO	72.29	±14.815		
	EN	72.88	±15.951		
Injury (N=25)	PH	71	±14.445	.785	.506
	PS	70.96	±10.11		
	SO	69.48	±19.457		
Financial Barrier (N=13)	EN	74.12	±14.632	2.939	.046*
	PH	72.77	±10.043		
	PS	67.31	±15.446		
	SO	76.31	±13.622		
Work Life Balance (N=17)	EN	67.46	±18.653	.395	.757
	PH	68.12	±13.09		
	PS	69.24	±16.581		
	SO	68.88	±24.472		
	EN	65.94	±15.622		

Level of Significance: *= P<0.05, NS= Not Significant

Table 6 Comparison of scores for the two groups on WHOQOL-BREF Questionnaire

	Voluntary (N=102)		Forced (N=48)		t-value	Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Physical Health	72.61	±12.698	68.65	±14.638	1.696	.092
Psychological	69.33	±13.085	62.73	±16.029	2.678	.008**
Social Relationships	72.07	±16.761	67.81	±19.302	1.381	.169
Environment	73.39	±15.587	65.81	±17.956	2.644	.009**
Overall Perception on Quality of Life	3.95	±0.750	3.79	±0.651	1.265	.208
Overall Perception on health	3.68	±0.834	3.42	±1.048	1.635	.104

Level of Significance: **=P < 0.01, NS= Not Significant

The WHOQOL-BREF scores of participants from these groups were further analyzed using One Way Repeated Measures ANOVA to determine if there was a significant difference in the quality of life within the each cause for retirement. As shown in Table 4, there was a significant difference in the physical, psychological, social relationships and environment domains of quality of life of the groups which stated education and financial barrier as the reason for retirement.

The participants were divided into voluntarily retired and forced retired groups, based on their perception of retirement. The WHOQOL-BREF scores of participants from these groups were analyzed using t test. From Table 5, it was seen that there was a significant difference between the voluntary and forced retired group in the psychological and environment domains of quality of life.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to understand the quality of life of retired athletes. The study further explored the reasons and perception of athletes towards retirement from sports. The results of the study would be discussed pertaining to the research questions.

Reasons for retirement from sports

In the present study, majority of the participants reported that education was the main reason for their retirement. Significant number of participants also reported injury, work life balance and financial barrier; the least reported reason was health related reasons. Research has shown contrasting evidence about the reasons that emerge as the most stated reason for retirement from sports. Moesch, Mayer and Elbe (2012) found lack of motivation, family and injury/ health related reasons as top three reasons for retirement. Sinclair found achievement of goals, problems with sports federation and tired of lifestyle as main causes (1990). The contradictions in findings may be attributed to the culture in which the study was conducted.

Perception of retirement

In the present study a large number of participants perceived their retirement to be voluntary from sports. Rintaugu and Mwisukha's study (2011) also found similar results thus supporting the current findings.

Quality of Life

A greater fraction of the participants felt that they had good quality of life and health. The results of the study could be supported by Lerch (1982) and Sinclair (1990) who also found that on the whole the retired athletes were quite satisfied with their life and experienced very few adjustment difficulties in the life after retirement.

Quality of Life based on the cause of retirement

On WHOQOL BREF questionnaire education and financial barrier groups had significant difference in the domains of quality of life. In Desjardin's study (1991) junior elite hockey players experienced problems after their retirement from sports as their primary focus was hockey as opposed to academic learning. Education probably was not an interesting option for these athletes, thus indicating the probable reason for their low mean score on psychological domain.

Studies showed that finance had significant impact on perceived quality of life. Low finances brought emotional misery and low life evaluation (Ma & McGhee, 2013). Thus, indicating the probable low score on their psychological domain.

However, for the groups which stated injury and work-life balance as the reason for retirement there was no significant difference in the physical, psychological, social relationships and environment domains of quality of life. Smith & Mc

Manus (2008) found that those athletes who retired due to injury deserted a sense of personal control to certain extent and this protected their self-esteem from the damaging message that they weren't good enough. Vijaya & Hemamalini (2011) explained that problems commonly encountered in the role performance often gave rise to stress. Since the athletes who retired due to work-life balance no longer had to balance a career in sports and work there possibly was no difference in the domains of quality of life. Additionally, 82.35% of the respondents in this group felt they voluntarily retired providing a sense of control for their decision.

Quality of Life based on the perception of retirement

There was a significant difference between the voluntary and forced retired group in the psychological and environment domains of quality of life. The results of the study could be supported by Lavelle, Grove and Gordon (1997) who found internality and perceived control was higher among those who stated voluntary reasons for retirement. They also indicated that voluntary retirement reduced the trauma involved in transition process. Blinde and Stratta (1992) found involuntary retirement caused difficulty in transition among athletes.

However, there was no significant difference in the physical health and social relationships domains of quality of life and also in overall perception of quality of life and health between the groups. This could be supported by Lerch (1981) who found perception of retirement did not affect the quality of transition, however, variables such as health, current income, and education predicted the quality of retirement. Furthermore, McLaughlin (1981) indicated that it was not just involuntary retirement; even the decision to retire voluntarily was one of the toughest choices an athlete could make. Thus indicating that perception of retirement alone did not determine the process of career transition.

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