

**NATIONAL SPORTS ACADEMY
„VASSIL LEVSKI“**

**DEPARTMENT „PSYCHOLOGY, PEDAGOGY AND
SOCIOLOGY**



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**THE INFLUENCE OF THE COACH'S
PERSONALITY STYLE ON ATHLETE BURNOUT**

A B S T R A C T

Sofia, 2025

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A B S T R A C T

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INTRODUCTION

Professional sports demand high performance, consistency, and adaptability in the context of intense competition. These factors often lead to the accumulation of physical and psychological strain, which—if not addressed through effective support and recovery—can develop into burnout, a condition characterized by emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion. Within this context, increasing attention is being directed toward the role of the sporting environment, and particularly the figure of the coach.

The coach's personality style, expressed through behavioral and leadership characteristics, has a significant impact on athletes' motivation, satisfaction, and psychological well-being. Leadership behavior—whether authoritarian or supportive—can either increase stress levels or contribute to the development of resilience and intrinsic motivation. In this regard, the coach's interaction style is not merely a personal trait but a strategic tool that influences the long-term development of athletes.

The motivational climate shaped by the coach and the sports organization also plays a critical role. A mastery-oriented and effort-based environment tends to reduce the risk of athlete burnout, whereas a climate emphasizing competition and performance outcomes may intensify pressure and dissatisfaction. The interrelation between athlete satisfaction, goal orientation, and perceived motivational climate highlights the necessity of a holistic approach to the study of sport psychology.

The present study examines the influence of the coach's personality style on manifestations of burnout among athletes from various sports. The aim is to analyze the interaction between the coach's leadership approaches, the perceived motivational climate, satisfaction with the sport, and the state of burnout, with a particular emphasis on the importance of psychological support and an individualized approach in creating a sustainable and development-oriented sporting environment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The dissertation titled "The Influence of the Coach's Personality Style on Athlete Burnout" is structured into an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion, and practical recommendations based on the research findings.

CHAPTER ONE – “Theoretical Framework of the Empirical Study” consists of four sections.

The first section presents a multifaceted examination of the concept of personality style as a fundamental construct, with a focus on its role within the sports environment and in the behavior of the coach as a leader.

I.1. Personality Style – Key Characteristics

Personality style represents a stable behavioral pattern through which an individual perceives and responds to the surrounding world. It encompasses how people think, feel, and interact with others, manifesting both in everyday decision-making and in professional functioning. Its core components include cognitive approaches, emotional regulation, and social preferences.

The development of the concept of personality style begins with the recognition that individuals employ different strategies for adaptation and coping with life's challenges. These strategies are not random; rather, they form a coherent style that is both stable and malleable—subject to change under the influence of personal experience and environmental factors. In this sense, personality style is a dynamic structure that evolves throughout the lifespan.

Recent research indicates that personality style is associated with both internal resources—such as emotional intelligence and stress resilience—and external factors, including social support and the professional context (Kandler et al., 2016). It plays a direct role in the quality of interpersonal relationships and overall effectiveness in the workplace, including the domain of sports.

Understanding personality style supports not only personal development but also the capacity for flexible adaptation to diverse social and professional situations. In the sporting context, this is particularly relevant, as coaches—through their interaction style—have a direct influence on the emotional climate and motivation of their athletes (Goleman et al., 2013).

I.1.2. Personality Style and Leadership in Social and Professional Contexts

Personality style is closely linked to leadership, as it reflects how an individual influences others, makes decisions, and builds relationships. In this sense, leadership can be viewed as a natural expression of personality style within social and professional environments.

Leadership is not limited to inherent personality traits; it also encompasses the ability to adapt to specific contextual demands. Leadership is a process of influence through which shared goals are achieved, with effectiveness depending on both the leader and the surrounding environment (Yukl, 2013). It is a form of social interaction that motivates and guides the group toward strategic objectives (Chemers, 1997).

Contemporary perspectives emphasize the transformational leadership style, in which the leader inspires and cultivates the potential of their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Within this framework, adaptability and the ability to build sustainable relationships are considered key factors for effective leadership. The absence of these qualities may limit the leader's impact and hinder the development of a positive organizational culture.

Viewing leadership as a multidimensional process allows for a deeper understanding of various leadership styles and their role in fostering an effective and supportive environment.

I.1.3. Gender Differences in Leadership

Leadership cannot be examined in isolation from gender, as men and women often exhibit distinct leadership and interaction styles. According to Eagly and Johnson (1990), leadership effectiveness is not determined by gender, but rather by the leader's ability to adapt to the context and meet the needs of the group.

Research indicates that men are more likely to adopt an authoritarian leadership style, while women tend to employ a democratic and cooperative approach that encourages collaboration and emotional support (Eagly & Sczesny, 2019). In the context of sports, these differences are reflected in communication and management strategies—female coaches are more likely to emphasize

individualized approaches, whereas male coaches tend to focus on performance outcomes and discipline.

Despite existing stereotypes and the challenges faced by women in sports leadership, contemporary research shows that they demonstrate high levels of effectiveness and contribute to a more supportive and balanced environment. Eagly & Heilman (2016) emphasize that a leader's success is not determined by gender, but by the ability to combine strategic thinking with interpersonal sensitivity.

I.1.4. The Relationship Between Sports Leadership and the Coach's Personality Style

Leadership is an integral component of personality style, shaping the way individuals influence their environment and build relationships. In the realm of sports, this connection is particularly pronounced, as coaches not only manage tactical and strategic aspects of training but also shape the psychological mindset of their athletes. The way a leader communicates, motivates, and inspires is closely tied to their characteristics and their approach to fostering an effective and sustainable environment.

The coach plays a central role in organizing and managing the athletic process. Beyond planning and adjusting training, the coach is responsible for motivating and guiding athletes throughout their development, working to establish effective communication and a positive psychological climate. Different interaction styles within the training process can foster growth and satisfaction, but may also contribute to stress and the risk of burnout (Mutafova-Zaberska, 2007).

Research in sport psychology confirms that the coach's role is particularly significant during the early and critical stages of athlete development. S. Cotterill and R. Cheetham (2017) emphasize that up to 60% of athletic progress may be attributed to the coach's influence. A coach's ability to identify individual needs, adapt their approach to the athlete's psychophysiological profile, and support personal growth is essential for achieving high-level performance.

Effective leadership is a key factor in shaping an optimal sporting environment, promoting athlete satisfaction, team cohesion, and performance success. In this context, leadership extends beyond formal authority or technical expertise—it encompasses strategic planning, psychological support, emotional

regulation, and the development of trust-based relationships (Domuschieva-Rogleva, 2023b).

Special attention should be given to the coach–athlete relationship, which plays a pivotal role in shaping athletes’ emotional resilience. A supportive approach—grounded in participation, fairness, and open communication—leads to increased motivation and engagement, whereas an authoritarian style may weaken the sense of belonging and foster emotional detachment (Mutafova-Zaberska, 1996).

Contemporary sport science increasingly examines the dynamics of leadership roles in relation to contextual factors such as individual vs. team sports, athlete age, and stage of athletic career. Successful coaches do not rely solely on standardized methods; instead, they demonstrate flexibility and adaptability, creating a training environment in which athletes feel understood, supported, and encouraged to grow.

When the coaching approach is aligned with the individual characteristics of the athlete, it significantly enhances athletic performance (Parvanov & Todorov, 2001). In cases where there is a mismatch between interaction styles and personal needs, conflicts, decreased motivation, and developmental difficulties are frequently observed.

In conclusion, the coach’s leadership skills are not merely a supplement to sport methodology—they are an essential component of the effective functioning of any sports system. Effective sport leadership combines technical expertise with a deep understanding of human psychology, interpersonal dynamics, and contemporary principles of organizational management. Attention to these dimensions is crucial for building a sustainable sports environment focused not only on performance outcomes but also on athlete well-being and long-term development.

I.1.5. The Coach’s Leadership Style

The coach’s role extends beyond technical training—it influences athletes’ motivation, psychological resilience, and the interpersonal dynamics within the team. An effective leader fosters trust, promotes self-confidence, and encourages collaboration (Cotterill & Fransen, 2016).

P. Chelladurai and H. Riemer (1998) emphasize that leadership in sport is a behavioral process aimed at enhancing athletes’ performance and satisfaction, rather than merely issuing directives. Vella and colleagues (2010) further argue that

leadership is a function of the coach–athlete relationship, and is shaped by personality traits, communication patterns, and the broader environmental context.

Three primary leadership styles are most commonly identified:

- Authoritarian – characterized by strict discipline, but with the risk of suppressing athlete autonomy.
- Laissez-faire – offers freedom, but often results in a lack of control and tends to be less effective.
- Democratic – encourages participation and engagement; considered the most balanced approach, particularly in team sports.

The most successful coaches apply a flexible combination of styles, adjusting their approach based on the team’s composition and specific needs.

Leadership Models

Chelladurai’s Multidimensional Model of Leadership includes three key components:

- **Required behavior** – determined by situational demands;
- **Preferred behavior** – shaped by athletes’ expectations;
- **Actual behavior** – the coach’s real actions and leadership practices.
- **Effective leadership** results from achieving balance among these three dimensions.

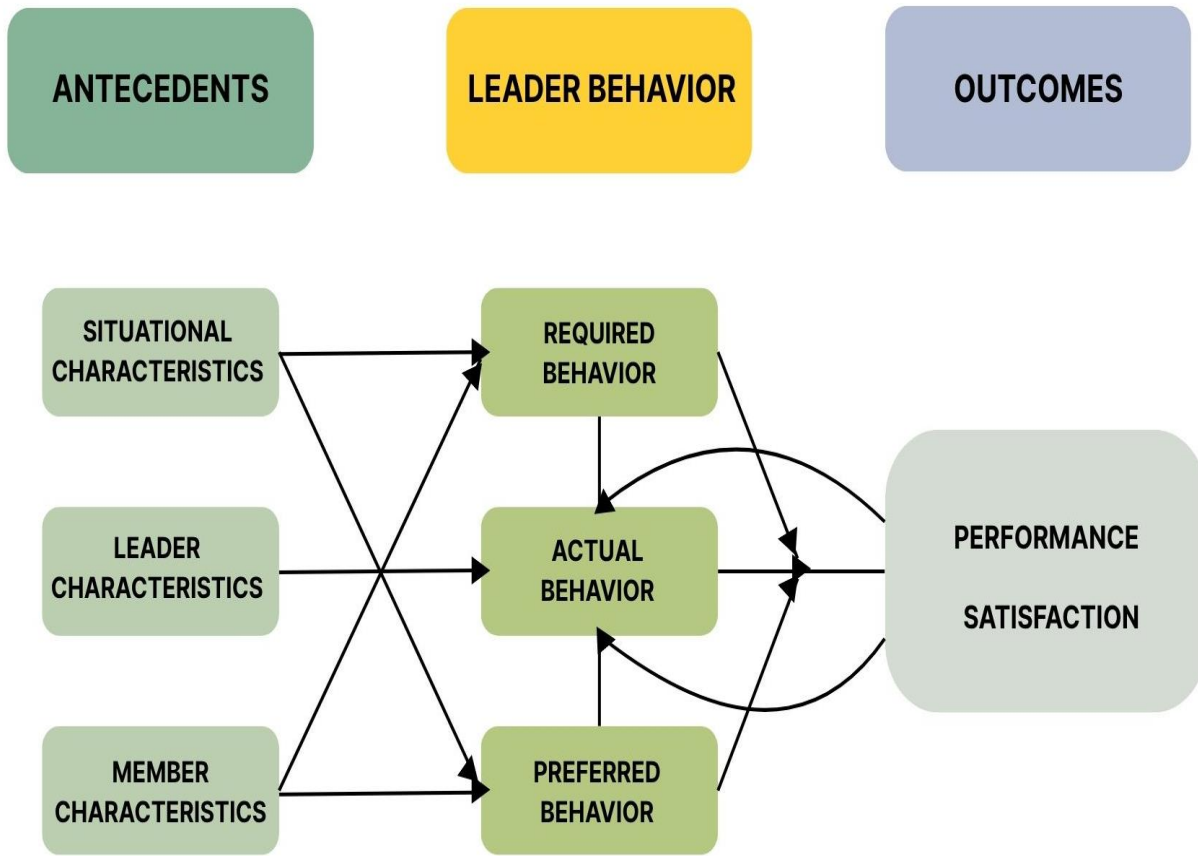


Figure 1. Multidimensional Model of Leadership Style in Sport
(Cox, 2012, p. 383) based on a figure by Chelladurai (1993)

The Psychological Dimension of Leadership

Another key aspect of the leadership process is reflected in the coach–athlete relationship model, which emphasizes the importance of emotional support and the development of mutual trust. Effective interaction between coach and athlete is essential for enhancing motivation and resilience in the face of challenges. In team sports, coaches play a central role in helping athletes reach their desired level of performance and achieve success. To fulfill this role effectively, coaches must possess the skills necessary to guide and support athletes in overcoming difficult tasks and challenges during both training and competition.

Contemporary Approaches

Authentic Leadership – emphasizes sincerity, morality, and transparency.

Transformational Leadership – creates an inspiring vision and supports personal development (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

In modern sport, the coach is a multifaceted figure who combines leadership, communication, emotional support, and strategic management—a key to achieving sustainable success.

I.1.6. Coach–Athlete Relationships

The quality of the coach–athlete relationship is a key factor in the effectiveness of the training process and the overall development of athletes. Trust, respect, and open communication enhance motivation, engagement, and resilience in sport.

This type of interaction is built through social-psychological motivation, which involves synchronized actions, coordinated decision-making, and behavioral alignment during training sessions (Gheron & Mutafova, 2007).

According to the motivational model proposed by G. Mageau and R. Vallerand (2003), the coach's interaction style directly influences athletes' intrinsic motivation and performance. Autonomy-supportive behaviors foster greater self-confidence and long-term sport participation. When athletes are involved in the decision-making process, it promotes independence and a sense of responsibility (Quested et al., 2021).

N. Popov (2002) notes that a coach's ability to understand and manage group dynamics contributes to higher levels of athletic achievement. In a later work, Popov (2018) emphasizes that the key objective for the coach is to develop a "metacompetence"—the conscious use of one's own experience and internal resources in problem-solving and in establishing effective interactions.

It is essential for the coach to recognize the individuality of each athlete and to adapt their approach accordingly, going beyond traditional methods by applying strategies that promote psychological well-being (Moen, Hoigaard & Peters, 2014).

The coach–athlete interaction affects not only sports performance but also the athlete's mental health. T. Yancheva (2004) emphasizes the importance of the psycho-pedagogical dimension of coaching, which includes motivation, personal

development, and effective communication. The coach's approach should be fair, inclusive, and supportive of all team members.

Z. Zhelyazkova (2004) points out that the coach's positive attitude fosters goal orientation, motivation, and resilience in athletes, whereas pessimism can suppress ambition.

S. Jowett's (2007) Coach–Athlete Relationship Model provides a useful framework for understanding the link between emotional closeness, mutual commitment, and motivation.

THE SECOND SECTION of the theoretical analysis presents research related to motivation in sport. It examines the major theoretical approaches concerning goal orientation, motivational climate, and the role of significant others in shaping athletic motivation.

I.2. Motivation in Sport

Motivation is a central element in sport psychology, as it influences discipline, resilience, and the drive for self-improvement. It is not a static process, but one that evolves depending on the athlete's age, stage of athletic career, and the influence of the coach (Yancheva, 2007; Domuschieva-Rogleva, 2023a).

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation stems from internal satisfaction, interest, and enjoyment derived from sport participation. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), it develops when the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. Athletes driven by this type of motivation tend to demonstrate greater resilience and long-term engagement (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001). The coach's autonomy-supportive style plays a crucial role in strengthening intrinsic motivation (Domuschieva-Rogleva, Mutafova-Zaberska, & Yancheva, 2014b).

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation is driven by external incentives—such as rewards, recognition, and social approval. While it can be effective in the short term, it is

highly dependent on external conditions. H. Andonov and R. Hristov (2008) note that extrinsic motivation is a major driving force behind performance in large-scale sporting events. When external goals are perceived as personally meaningful, motivation tends to be stronger.

Amotivation

Amotivation arises when athletes perceive no connection between their efforts and outcomes—often due to repeated failure or a lack of support. It can lead to withdrawal from participation and a decline in mental well-being (Weinberg & Gould, 2015). Prevention strategies include setting achievable goals, providing positive feedback, and maintaining consistent coaching support (Smith & Smoll, 2007).

The Role of the Coach

The coach is not merely a supervisor, but an inspirational figure responsible for creating a supportive and motivating environment. Y. Mutafova-Zaberska (2004a) emphasizes that internally driven motives, when nurtured by the coach, form the foundation for high athletic achievement. Striking a balance between intrinsic motivation and external incentives is essential for sustainable development in sport.

I.2.1. Goal Orientation in Sport

Goal orientation is a key concept in sport psychology, used to explain motivation and the way athletes perceive success. Achievement Goal Theory, originally introduced in the educational context (Nicholls, 1984), distinguishes between two primary types of motivational orientation: task orientation and ego orientation.

Task orientation is characterized by a focus on personal development, improvement, and consistent effort, whereas ego orientation emphasizes demonstrating superiority and outperforming others. In the sport context, this means that some athletes are motivated by the desire to improve themselves, whereas others strive to be better than their opponents. As noted by E. Gheron and Y. Mutafova-

Zaberska, the theory centers on "the individual's perception of their own abilities and the goals they intend to achieve" (2004, cited in Doneva, 2023).

Research shows that task-oriented athletes tend to be more resilient, exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation, and derive satisfaction from the process of participation itself. In contrast, those with strong ego orientation are more dependent on external validation, prone to anxiety, and more vulnerable to failure. Ego orientation is often linked to maladaptive behaviors such as aggression, cheating, and fear of making mistakes (Duda et al., 1991; Rogleva-Domuschieva, 2023a).

An important factor influencing the development of motivational orientation is the perceived team climate. When the environment supports personal growth and acknowledges effort, it fosters task orientation. Conversely, a climate focused on outcomes and social comparisons tends to reinforce ego orientation. According to G. Domuschieva-Rogleva (2011b), a mastery-oriented environment is associated with high intrinsic involvement and satisfaction from participation, whereas an emphasis on performance can lead to boredom, stress, and maladaptive behavior.

Establishing a motivational climate that emphasizes personal improvement is essential for maintaining long-term engagement and psychological well-being in athletes. In this sense, goal orientation is not merely a psychological trait, but a strategic factor in the management of the training process and in achieving athletic success.

I.2.2. Motivational Climate in Sport

The motivational climate in sport refers to the social and psychological atmosphere created by coaches, teammates, and the broader sporting culture, which significantly influences athletes' motivation, confidence, and engagement. It is the context in which attitudes toward success, responses to challenges, and the desire for improvement are shaped (Curran et al., 2015).

In sport psychology, the motivational climate is typically viewed through two primary dimensions: a mastery-oriented climate and a performance-oriented climate. The former encourages effort, personal growth, and learning, where mistakes are seen as opportunities for development. The latter emphasizes results and comparisons between athletes, often leading to increased pressure and vulnerability in the face of failure.

As noted by G. Domuschieva-Rogleva and M. Georgiev (2005), task-oriented athletes feel more engaged, confident, and resilient when they are in an environment that values personal improvement and intrinsic motivation. In contrast, a performance-oriented climate often fosters dependence on external validation and increases the risk of stress, anxiety, and even burnout.

The motivational climate also shifts depending on the phase of preparation. While the training process typically emphasizes learning and teamwork, during competition the focus often shifts to individual performance and comparison with opponents (Domuschieva-Rogleva, 2008c). This can have a positive effect by mobilizing effort, but it may also heighten pressure and increase the risk of reduced self-confidence.

Coaches need to foster a mastery-oriented environment that promotes autonomy, effort, and intrinsic engagement. As demonstrated by G. Domuschieva-Rogleva and colleagues (2003), such an environment not only enhances performance but also supports athletes' psychological well-being and long-term development.

Ultimately, a balanced motivational climate—one that combines the pursuit of success with a focus on personal growth—provides the most favorable conditions for both athletic and personal development.

I.2.3. The Role of Significant Others in Shaping Athletic Motivation

Motivation in sport is closely linked to the social environment and the relationships athletes form with significant figures—such as coaches, parents, and teammates. It is not a static construct but evolves under the influence of emotional support, a sense of belonging, and social approval (Vazou, Ntoumanis & Duda, 2006).

The family plays a crucial role in this process, providing the foundation upon which athletes build confidence and commitment. As emphasized by Y. Mutafova-Zaberska and E. Guntas (1995), emotional and moral support from parents strengthens young athletes' resilience and self-esteem, thus creating favorable conditions for long-term development and sustained engagement in sport.

The role of the team is equally important. Team cohesion, overcoming challenges together, and mutual encouragement help to create a motivational atmosphere that fosters engagement and achievement. R. Smith and F. Smoll (2007)

emphasize that emotional support within the team is a critical factor for athletes' psychological well-being and their resilience during competition.

Coaches also play a decisive role—not only as technical instructors, but as key figures who shape the motivational climate through their communication style and leadership. According to R. Keegan and colleagues (2009), coaches who build trusting and supportive relationships enhance athletes' intrinsic motivation and promote long-term commitment to sport.

In conclusion, sport motivation is formed through the combined influence of family support, team dynamics, and the coach's leadership role. Creating a balanced, supportive, and respectful environment is a critical condition for personal growth and sustainable athletic development (Domuschieva-Rogleva, 1998).

THE THIRD SECTION of the theoretical analysis examines the relationship between sport satisfaction and autonomous behavior.

I.3. Motivational Factors and Satisfaction in Sport Activities

Motivational climate and goal orientation play a crucial role in athletes' engagement and resilience. A supportive sport environment—one that encourages effort, development, and intrinsic motivation—contributes to a positive attitude toward training. In contrast, an environment focused on competition and external evaluation often leads to anxiety and loss of motivation (Xanthidis & Yancheva, 2007).

Satisfaction, in this context, serves as a key psychological indicator of athletes' overall experience. As noted by I. Tosheva and colleagues (2007), the alignment between expectations, needs, and reality determines not only motivation but also long-term commitment to sport. High levels of satisfaction are associated with a sense of competence, autonomy, and social connectedness, all of which sustain the drive for improvement.

Satisfaction is not merely an emotional response, but rather a combination of subjective experience and cognitive evaluation of personal progress. According to S. Ilieva (1989), satisfaction contributes to increased self-esteem, confidence, and psychological well-being—factors of critical importance in a dynamic domain such

as sport. This sense of fulfillment fosters personal growth and resilience in the face of challenges.

In the sporting environment, satisfaction is often associated with coach support, positive peer relationships, and objective recognition of effort. When these factors are present, athletes exhibit higher levels of motivation and engagement, which positively impact their performance and long-term athletic careers (Nedelchev, 2014).

In conclusion, satisfaction is a dynamic, context-dependent process that integrates individual experiences, social interactions, and personal goals. It lies at the core of motivation and mental resilience in sport, while also playing a vital role in the development of sustainable and fulfilling athletic careers.

I.3.1. Satisfaction in Sport

Satisfaction is a central factor in sport psychology, closely related to athletes' motivation, engagement, and performance. It is not merely an emotional state but rather the outcome of the interaction between cognitive evaluations, personal experiences, and social support, which together shape the athlete's perception of personal progress, team dynamics, and the broader sport environment (Mitsova, 2020a).

Defined as a positive cognitive state that arises when expectations align with reality, satisfaction in sport depends on factors such as the training process, the athlete-coach relationship, and opportunities for personal growth (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1997). It is also influenced by the degree of team belongingness, social support, and perceived competence—all of which contribute to the athlete's sustained participation and commitment to sport (Tasheva, 2022).

According to M. Eys and colleagues (2003), intrinsic motivation and interpersonal relationships are critical for experiencing satisfaction and achieving high performance. However, excessive pressure and constant comparison with other athletes can diminish both satisfaction and engagement. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate a supportive and balanced environment that incorporates constructive coach feedback and realistic goal setting.

Research by G. Domuschieva-Rogleva, M. Yancheva, and M. Georgiev (2019) shows that the perceived motivational climate has a strong impact on satisfaction: a mastery-oriented climate—focused on effort, improvement, and

cooperation—is positively associated with satisfaction, whereas a performance-oriented and competitive climate tends to reduce it.

Satisfaction not only reflects the quality of the athletic experience but also serves as a predictor of long-term motivation, resilience, and sport performance. When athletes feel satisfied, they are more likely to exhibit self-regulated motivation, engage in personal growth, and sustain long-term involvement in sport.

I.3.2. Autonomous Behavior in Sport

Autonomous behavior is a vital component of athlete development, as it fosters intrinsic motivation, personal responsibility, and self-regulation. According to Deci and Ryan (2008), three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—form the foundation of personal well-being and effective functioning. When these needs are satisfied, athletes are more likely to act based on internal drives, which leads to more sustainable motivation and greater satisfaction.

In the sport context, autonomy is expressed through the athlete's involvement in decision-making processes and having choice within the training and competitive environment. This behavior is best developed in a supportive climate that promotes independence, thereby encouraging the internalization of external rules and their transformation into personal values (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Self-evaluation and the sense of control are closely linked to autonomy. Athletes who perceive their successes and failures as the result of personal effort—i.e., who possess an internal locus of control—demonstrate greater resilience and confidence. Z. Ganeva (2010) adds that while self-evaluation and perceived control are related, they are distinct psychological constructs that influence the perception of success in different ways.

The way athletes experience social connectedness is also crucial. In individual sports, solitude is sometimes perceived as a resource for concentration and inner focus, whereas in team sports, a sense of belonging and positive relationships enhances engagement and emotional stability.

Autonomous behavior, when combined with a sense of control and a positive social environment, forms the foundation for satisfaction in sport. It supports not only athletic performance, but also contributes to mental health and long-term athlete engagement.

THE FOURTH SECTION presents the essence of burnout as a phenomenon and outlines the main directions for its study. A brief retrospective is provided on the emergence and development of scientific research related to professional burnout, highlighting the primary professional groups among which these studies have been conducted, both in international and Bulgarian literature.

I.4. Key Manifestations of Burnout

The development of an athlete depends on a number of psychological and organizational factors—including leadership, motivational climate, satisfaction, and goal orientation. These elements form the basis of athletes' internal resilience and support the achievement of high-level performance. When the environment is supportive and engaging, athletes display consistency, intrinsic motivation, and a drive for self-improvement. Conversely, excessive pressure, unclear expectations, and lack of psychological support can lead to emotional exhaustion and withdrawal from sport.

In this context, burnout is considered one of the most serious negative conditions resulting from prolonged and intense involvement in sport. According to H. Freudenberger (cited in Tosheva, 2012), burnout is a process in which the individual begins their activity with enthusiasm, but eventually develops fatigue, discouragement, and a sense of meaninglessness. The author describes burnout as the result of "too much effort for too long a time without adequate reward" (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980).

Professional exhaustion is not merely fatigue—it is a complex condition that affects physical, emotional, and mental well-being. In a context of high competition and constant pressure, athletes often find themselves in situations where their efforts do not lead to the expected results, placing them under chronic stress. As noted by M. Stefanova (2008), "nine out of ten workers are exposed to constant high engagement and tight deadlines," creating a form of "human race" that is equally relevant in the sporting environment.

Recognizing and preventing burnout is essential for maintaining athletes' performance, health, and motivation. Balancing personal effort with realistic expectations, combined with support from coaches and emotional stability, is the key to a sustainable athletic career.

I.4.1. The Nature of Professional Burnout

The term “burnout” was introduced by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974 to describe a state of demoralization and exhaustion caused by prolonged stress in a professional context. Initially used in the field of medicine, the concept was later adopted in psychology to refer to a condition affecting psychologically healthy individuals exposed to intense emotional demands (Freudenberger, 1974; cited in Tosheva, 2012).

In the following decades, research has defined burnout as a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, accompanied by a loss of motivation and a negative attitude toward oneself and one’s professional role (Pines & Aronson, 1988; Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996). According to I. Tosheva (2012), this condition has become an explanatory framework for numerous problems related to decreased effectiveness and alienation in the workplace.

Burnout is most commonly observed among professionals in the “helping professions”—such as medical personnel, social workers, police officers, and teachers—where emotional involvement is an integral part of the job. Research shows that chronic stress, especially in healthcare settings, leads to increased error rates and decreased professional motivation (Schanafelt et al., 2010).

Burnout differs from ordinary stress in its duration and intensity—it is a cumulative, persistent condition that does not subside with short-term rest. It is important to note that the consequences of burnout affect not only psychological and physical health but also the quality and efficiency of professional performance.

Despite increased awareness today, many individuals ignore the symptoms due to fear of stigma or loss of status. However, this often results in the worsening of symptoms and long-term impairment of professional functioning. The burnout syndrome remains a pressing psychological and social issue, particularly in the modern world of high expectations and limited coping resources.

I.4.2. Symptoms and Coping Strategies for Stress and Burnout

Stress and professional exhaustion (burnout) are among the most significant challenges to mental and physical health in today’s work and sport environments. When exposure to pressure is prolonged, these conditions can lead to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, chronic fatigue, and a decline in both motivation and

performance. They are often accompanied by somatic symptoms, such as sleep disturbances and frequent illness, which affect not only professional functioning but also personal life.

The causes of burnout often lie in work overload, role conflicts, lack of control, and unclear expectations. Accumulated stress—especially in high-demand professional or athletic settings—can disrupt interpersonal relationships and lead to social isolation and professional dropout. According to I. Tosheva (2012), when working conditions hinder the normal functioning of the individual, stress becomes a serious risk factor for mental health.

Symptoms of burnout include both physiological manifestations—such as exhaustion, fatigue, and health problems—and psychological changes, including irritability, a sense of hopelessness, and demotivation (Schaufeli, De Witte, & Desart, 2020). On a social level, withdrawal and difficulties in communication are often observed.

Neglecting these symptoms over the long term can lead to serious personal and professional breakdown. Burnout is a state of combined physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion, which significantly impairs work capacity and quality of life.

Recognizing early signs and implementing appropriate coping strategies—such as psychological support, workload adjustments, and improving the environment—are essential for effective prevention and recovery.

I.4.3. Burnout in Sport

In modern sport—characterized by intense competition and the relentless pursuit of achievement—the issue of burnout has become increasingly relevant. Burnout, as a state of professional exhaustion, manifests as physical, emotional, and mental fatigue, accumulated through prolonged exposure to stress and high demands. In the sporting context, it is often the result of excessive training, constant pressure for top performance, and expectations from coaches and spectators.

As R. Smith (1986) emphasizes, stress arising from both training and competition can trigger negative psychological responses. According to G. Dale and R. Weinberg (1990), it is the intensity of training regimens and the continuous need to compete that create the conditions for burnout. Excessive fatigue and emotional exhaustion often lead to demotivation, decreased performance, or even premature termination of an athletic career.

S. Jackson and C. Maslach (1982) note that constant workload and high demands within sports teams can lead to emotional detachment and a sense of reduced effectiveness. This creates an environment where pressure outweighs satisfaction, particularly when there are limited opportunities for development or variation in the training process.

Burnout affects not only athletes but also coaches, especially in the early stages of their careers. H. Freudenberger (1974) points out that the initial phase of professional development carries an increased risk of burnout due to a lack of experience in managing stress. This is supported by I. Tosheva and colleagues (2008), who report that young coaches frequently experience emotional exhaustion and withdrawal from the profession during the early stages of their careers.

In conclusion, burnout in sport is a serious psychological issue that emerges as a result of ongoing pressure, high expectations, and insufficient support. Its prevention requires awareness, an adaptive training environment, and emotional support—for both athletes and their coaches.

I.4.4. Symptoms of Exhaustion – How Burnout Affects Athletes and Coaches

Burnout in sport manifests through physical and emotional exhaustion, loss of motivation, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and a decline in athletic performance. R. Weinberg and D. Gould (1999) emphasize that “chronic fatigue and lack of motivation are key indicators of burnout onset.” The issue affects both athletes and coaches, particularly in environments characterized by high workloads and elevated expectations.

Injuries, even when not severe, often lead to emotional withdrawal and withdrawal from competition. R. Rotella and colleagues (1991) note that some athletes discontinue participation not due to physical limitations, but because of emotional exhaustion. Among coaches, as shown by A. Wright et al. (2023), high levels of disengagement predict depressive symptoms and deteriorating mental health.

Social support and the quality of team relationships are critical protective factors. The lack of recognition and weak coach–athlete relationships often result in feelings of isolation and sport withdrawal. M. Georgiev and colleagues (2010) highlight the role of group dynamics and coaching leadership as key buffers against

burnout. Similarly, Y. Choi and JungKooIn (2020) emphasize the importance of effective communication and mentoring support in mitigating the negative effects of burnout.

I.4.5. Research on Burnout in Sport

Research on burnout in sport plays a crucial role in understanding the phenomenon and in developing strategies for its prevention. As noted by J. DeFreese, T. Raedeke, and A. Smith (2015), “the knowledge derived from such research is critically important for addressing sport-related burnout.”

Particularly noteworthy are studies funded by the New Zealand Rugby Union, in which S. Cresswell and R. Eklund (2006) used the Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ) to demonstrate that burnout among elite athletes is a distinct construct from depression and is often associated with less self-determined forms of motivation. They also found that emotional exhaustion varies depending on the stage of the competitive season and the athlete’s role within the team.

These studies contribute not only to the theoretical framework but also offer practical value by identifying risk factors and intervention strategies. As a result, the topic of professional burnout is increasingly emerging as a central focus in sport psychology, with a growing body of publications and specialized research across various sports disciplines.

I.4.6. Athlete Burnout – Causes and Consequences

In modern sport, high levels of competition and the relentless pursuit of success often expose athletes to prolonged stress and physical overload, leading to professional exhaustion or burnout. According to T. Raedeke (1997), extended training cycles with limited time for recovery create conditions for both emotional and physical exhaustion. Additional pressure arises from demanding competition schedules and high performance expectations, making it difficult to maintain motivation and mental well-being.

The burnout syndrome frequently manifests in declines in athletic performance, increased anxiety, irritability, and a general sense of depletion. R. Smith (2006) notes that today’s athletes face ever-increasing demands, which result in chronic stress. H. Gustafsson and colleagues (2011) emphasize that athlete

burnout stems from chronic stress without sufficient physical and psychological recovery.

The causes of burnout can be both external—such as coaching pressure and organizational conditions—and internal, including excessive personal ambition. R. Eklund and S. Cresswell (2007) note that athletes with high intrinsic motivation often contribute to their own emotional burnout. This exhaustion affects not only athletic performance but also the overall quality of life, and in severe cases, may lead to withdrawal from sport (Gould, 2013).

Symptoms include physical fatigue, cognitive impairments, weakened immune function, and emotional instability. T. Raedeke (1997) and R. Eklund & S. Cresswell (2007) emphasize that physiological and cognitive changes are typical of this condition. Early recognition of these symptoms by coaches and medical teams is essential for preventing more serious consequences (Raedeke & Smith, 2001).

The coach's personality style and the motivational climate also have a substantial impact. Supportive, autonomy-enhancing, and adaptive approaches promote athletes' resilience, whereas authoritarian leadership and excessive performance orientation increase the risk of burnout. Goal orientation—whether mastery- or performance-based—further influences mental well-being and resilience.

According to K. Goodger and colleagues (2007), time spent away from sport contributes to recovery and mental health by supporting the development of personal and social resources. Therefore, effective burnout management requires a multidisciplinary approach involving collaboration among coaches, psychologists, medical professionals, and administrators.

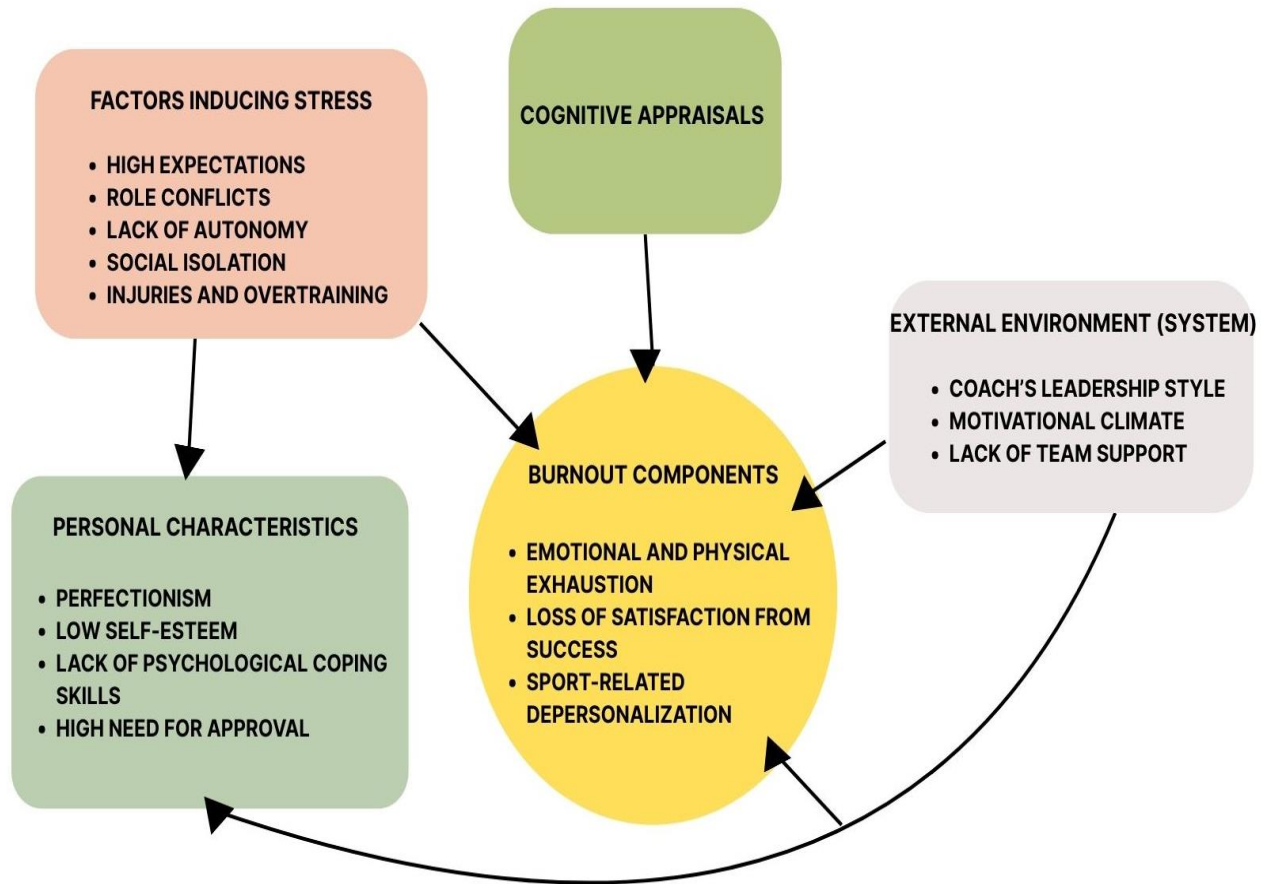


Figure 4. Integrated Model of Athlete Burnout (Gustafsson et al., 2011)

THE SECOND CHAPTER includes the working hypothesis, the aim and objectives, the methodology and methodological tools, and the organization of the study.

II.1. Research Working Hypothesis

The present study is based on the following working hypothesis:

We assume that the coach's personal style—determined by their leadership style, the established motivational climate, positive feedback, personal attitude, and support for autonomous behavior—has an impact on athlete burnout.

II.2. Aim and Objectives of the Study

Aim of the Study:

The aim of this study is to experimentally explore the influence of the coach's personal style on athlete burnout.

Research Objectives:

- To identify the degree of expression of the psychological variables included in the empirical study.
- To establish the presence of statistically significant differences in the studied variables based on the factors of gender, age, type of sport, and athletic experience.
- To determine the influence of psychological variables on the components of burnout.
- To examine the combined influence of leadership style, motivational climate, and satisfaction on the components of burnout, as well as the direct and indirect effects through a structural model of cause-and-effect relationships.

Object of the Study:

The empirical study includes 161 individuals practicing individual sports, team sports, and combat sports. The participants are differentiated according to gender, age, and athletic experience (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the surveyed participants by sport type, gender, age, and athletic experience.

Type of Sport	Gender		Age			Athletic Experience		
	WAMEN	MEN	14 - 17	18 - 20	21 - 29	1 - 6	7 - 10	11 - 19
Individual	34	18	29	17	6	18	20	14
Team	31	48	21	37	21	17	39	23
Combat Sports	10	20	13	12	5	11	17	2
Total	75	86	63	66	32	46	76	39

II.3. Methodology and Methodological Tools

Theoretical and logical analysis of literature sources.

Empirical research methods: A comprehensive methodology was applied, including the following components:

- Theoretical analysis aimed at operationalizing the used concepts through comparison, synthesis, and interpretation of the literature sources.
- Experimental method, implemented through a set of test instruments designed to measure the relevant psychological variables.
- Statistical methods for the analysis and interpretation of the experimental data. The empirical data analysis was carried out using the software SPSS_25.

METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS:

1. Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS)

The test consists of 46 items grouped into five subscales:

- Training and Instruction (10 items) – Focuses on enhancing athletes' sport-specific skills, conducting intensive and demanding training sessions, explaining methods and tactics, and structuring and coordinating team members' actions.
- Democratic Behavior (7 items) – Involves athletes in decision-making regarding team operations, training methods, and game strategies and tactics.
- Autocratic Behavior (6 items) – Involves independent decision-making by the coach and an emphasis on personal authority.
- Social Support (7 items) – Reflects concern for each team member's well-being, the psychological climate, and interpersonal relations within the team.
- Positive Feedback (7 items) – Timely and positive reinforcement of athletes' achievements.

The scale uses a four-point Likert-type rating to assess the degree of expression for each item. The test was adapted for Bulgarian conditions by Fenerova, Tosheva, and Georgiev (2011).

2. Sport Climate Questionnaire – SCQ

The questionnaire consists of 15 items measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale. It assesses the extent to which athletes perceive their coach as supportive of their autonomous behavior. A total score is calculated, with higher values indicating a greater level of perceived autonomy support from the coach.

The method was adapted for Bulgarian conditions by Georgiev and Savcheva (2023).

(Source: <https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/pas-sportclimate/>)

3. Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire – ASQ

The Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire is a multidimensional tool designed to assess athlete satisfaction. The original version includes 56 items grouped into 15 subscales, each corresponding to a component of satisfaction. It uses a seven-point Likert-type scale to evaluate the degree of satisfaction. Its comprehensive structure allows researchers to select only the subscales relevant to the specific goals of their study.

In the current study, the adapted version consists of four subscales:

- Training and instruction (3 items)
- Team performance (3 items)
- Individual performance (3 items)
- Coach's personal treatment of the athlete (5 items)

Two of the subscales reflect satisfaction with the training process, while the other two focus on satisfaction with achievements. The total number of items used is 14. Each item is evaluated using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("not at all satisfied") to 4 ("completely satisfied").

The method was adapted for Bulgarian conditions by M. Georgiev, D. Fenerova, and I. Tosheva (2011).

4. Athlete Burnout Questionnaire – ABQ

The Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ) is a standardized tool designed to assess burnout in athletes. It consists of 15 items divided into three subscales:

- Emotional and physical exhaustion
- Devaluation of sport participation
- Reduced sense of accomplishment

Each subscale contains 5 items. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, reflecting the frequency with which the respondent experiences certain feelings:

Almost never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Almost always.

The ABQ allows for the evaluation of burnout symptoms by capturing emotional, cognitive, and motivational components relevant to sports contexts.

The instrument was adapted for Bulgarian conditions by Tosheva, Georgiev, and Fenerova (2001).

5. Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire – 2 (PMCSQ-2)

The PMCSQ-2 is a diagnostic instrument designed to assess the motivational climate perceived by athletes. It consists of **33 items**, rated on a **5-point Likert scale** ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. The questionnaire measures two main dimensions:

- **Performance-oriented climate (Ego-involving climate) – 16 items, subdivided into:**
 - Unequal recognition (7 items)
 - Punishment for mistakes (4 items)
 - Intra-team rivalry (4 items)

- **Mastery-oriented climate (Task-involving climate) – 16 items, subdivided into:**

- Role importance (7 items)
- Effort/improvement (6 items)
- Cooperative learning (4 items)

The questionnaire is used to explore how the training environment supports either competitive comparison or personal development.

The PMCSQ-2 was validated for use in Bulgaria by G. Domuschieva-Rogleva (2007).

II.4. Organization and Stages of the Study

The empirical research and development of the dissertation were carried out in stages, progressing through three key phases that included the execution of corresponding activities.

1. Preliminary Phase

Clarification of the main focus areas and scope of the research topic, analysis of scientific literature related to the issue, and formulation of a preliminary hypothesis based on the reviewed theoretical sources.

2. Main Phase

Selection of appropriate methodologies for conducting the research, administration of the testing procedures, observation of the training process within the studied youth teams and athletes, and preparation and structuring of the theoretical framework required for Chapter One of the dissertation.

3. Final Phase

Initial analysis of the collected empirical data, application of statistical methods for data processing and interpretation of the results, creation of graphical and tabular representations for visualizing the key findings, and development of the content for Chapters Two and Three of the dissertation.

CHAPTER THREE of the dissertation includes the analysis and interpretation of the results from the empirical study.

The research hypothesis, objective, and specific tasks guide the analysis of the empirical data.

To determine the appropriate statistical methods to be applied in data analysis, a univariate distribution analysis was performed — specifically, the distribution of variables from the empirical matrix. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used.

The results of the analysis indicated the suitability of applying non-parametric methods for hypothesis testing and correlation analysis.

The comparative analysis was conducted based on the factors of gender, age, athletic experience, and sport type.

Since the results of hypothesis testing are significantly influenced by sample size, the effect size—Cohen's r coefficient—was also calculated. In some cases, the presence of p -values indicating the rejection of the null hypotheses was not supported by the corresponding effect sizes.

The results of hypothesis testing justified further analysis of the entire empirical matrix using variance, correlation, and regression analyses.

These types of analyses are more closely aligned with the research tasks. They were conducted using methods from traditional statistics, which, however, do not allow for the identification of the combined influence of the studied variables on the components of athlete burnout.

To test the research hypothesis, the **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** method was applied. This approach allows for the simultaneous analysis of the entire data matrix.

Unlike traditional statistical methods, which can only identify **direct effects**, SEM enables the identification of both **direct and indirect effects**, making it possible to uncover the **mediating role** of various variables.

The initial structural model includes **four exogenous variables** and **three endogenous variables**. The exogenous variables are represented by the following factor groups:

- **Athlete satisfaction,**
- **Coach's leadership style,**
- **Mastery-oriented motivational climate, and**
- **Performance-oriented motivational climate.**

Support for autonomous behavior is modeled as an independent endogenous variable.

The three core **endogenous variables** represent the components of burnout:

- **Devaluation of interest in sport,**
- **Emotional and physical exhaustion**
- **Reduced sense of personal accomplishment.**

The model is **recursive**, incorporating only **direct and indirect influences** on the endogenous variables (see Figure 13).

Hypotheses regarding the direct influence of exogenous variables:

H1 – The coach’s leadership style has a direct influence on the components of athlete burnout.

H2 – A mastery-oriented motivational climate has a direct influence on the components of athlete burnout.

H3 – A performance-oriented motivational climate has a direct influence on the components of athlete burnout.

H4 – Athlete satisfaction has a direct influence on the components of athlete burnout.

H5 – Perceived support for autonomous behavior has a direct influence on the components of athlete burnout.

Hypotheses regarding indirect effects:

H7 – The coach’s leadership style has an indirect effect on athlete burnout through athlete satisfaction.

H8 – The coach’s personality style has an indirect effect on athlete burnout through a mastery-oriented motivational climate.

H9 – The coach’s personality style has an indirect effect on athlete burnout through a performance-oriented motivational climate.

H10 – A mastery-oriented motivational climate has an indirect effect on athlete burnout through athlete satisfaction.

H11 – A performance-oriented motivational climate has an indirect effect on athlete burnout through athlete satisfaction.

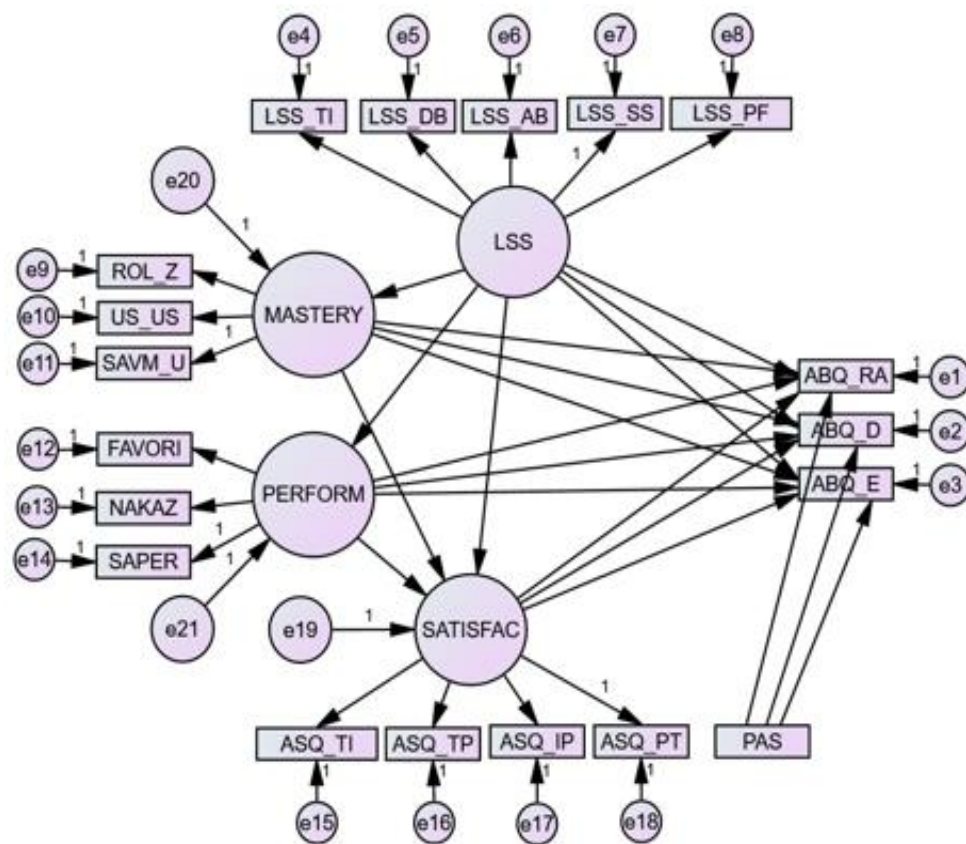


Figure 13. Initial structural model of the determining factors of burnout

Legend:

- **LSS** – Leadership Style of the Coach
 - **LSS_TI** – Training and Instruction
 - **LSS_DB** – Democratic Behavior
 - **LSS_AB** – Autocratic Behavior
 - **LSS_SS** – Social Support
 - **LSS_PF** – Positive Feedback
- **MASTERY** – Task-Oriented Motivational Climate
 - **ROL_Z** – Role Importance
 - **US_US** – Effort/Improvement
 - **SAVM_U** – Cooperative Learning
- **PERFORMANCE** – Ego-Oriented Motivational Climate
 - **FAVORI** – Favoritism
 - **NAKAZ** – Punishment for Mistakes
 - **SAPER** – Intra-team Rivalry

- **SATISFAC** – Athlete Satisfaction
 - **ASQ_TI** – Training and Instruction
 - **ASQ_TP** – Team Performance
 - **ASQ_IP** – Individual Performance
 - **ASQ_PT** – Personal Treatment by the Coach
- **PAS** – Perceived Autonomy Support
- **ABQ_RA** – Reduced Sense of Accomplishment
- **ABQ_D** – Devaluation of Sport Participation
- **ABQ_E** – Emotional and Physical Exhaustion

For the evaluation of the structural model, standardized regression coefficients, factor loadings, multiple correlation coefficients, and the residual covariance matrix were used.

The **initial analysis** indicated that the variable autocratic coaching style (LSS_AB) had a low factor loading ($\lambda = -.32$). Moreover, the autocratic style showed the lowest mean value among the leadership style components (**M = 2.47**). Due to its low level of participation in the factor family, this variable was excluded from the model (see **Figure 14**).

The influence of the **mastery-oriented motivational climate** on depersonalization ($\beta = .14$) and on emotional and physical exhaustion ($\beta = .07$) was also minimal. Consequently, these two regression paths were excluded from the model.

Similarly, **the direct effect** of perceived autonomy support on the burnout components was weak:

- **PAS** → **ABQ_RA** – $\beta = .19$
- **PAS** → **ABQ_D** – $\beta = .14$
- **PAS** → **ABQ_E** – $\beta = .17$

As a result, these three regression paths were removed. A **new regression path** was introduced from **perceived autonomy support to athlete satisfaction**:

- **PAS** → **SATISFAC**

The **impact of the performance-oriented motivational climate** on athlete satisfaction was found to be very weak ($\beta = -.09$), leading to the exclusion of this regression path from the model.

The effect of the **mastery-oriented motivational climate** on **athlete satisfaction** was also relatively weak ($\beta = .28$), which justified the removal of this path from the model as well.

The **influence of the coach's leadership style** on athlete satisfaction was similarly weak ($\beta = -.12$). Therefore, athlete satisfaction **does not function** as a mediator in the relationship between leadership style and the components of burnout, as indicated by the following insignificant mediation effects:

- **Leadership Style \rightarrow Satisfaction \rightarrow Reduced Sense of Accomplishment** – $z = .76$
- **Leadership Style \rightarrow Satisfaction \rightarrow Devaluation** – $z = .67$
- **Leadership Style \rightarrow Satisfaction \rightarrow Emotional and Physical Exhaustion** – $z = .75$

The regression path "**coach's leadership style \rightarrow athlete satisfaction**" was excluded from the structural model due to its low influence.

To **improve model fit, modification indices (MIs)** were employed. Residuals between indicators from the **same latent construct (factor family)** with the **highest MI values** were **successively freed for estimation**, as follows:

- **e12 – e14** \rightarrow MI = 29.828, Parameter Change = .171
- **e16 – e17** \rightarrow MI = 29.263, Parameter Change = .148
- **e14 – e13** \rightarrow MI = 25.746, Parameter Change = .159
- **e15 – e17** \rightarrow MI = 7.057, Parameter Change = .048
- **e13 – e12** \rightarrow MI = 4.993, Parameter Change = .072

These adjustments contributed to enhancing the structural model's overall **fit and parsimony**.

Analysis of the standardized residual covariance matrix revealed that the variable perceived support for autonomous behavior produced residuals exceeding a value of 4.0. According to empirical guidelines, standardized residuals greater than 2.58 are considered abnormal, indicating a lack of fit between the observed and model-implied covariance matrices for the respective variable. Another rule suggests that values should remain below 2.5.

Residuals exceeding 4.0 are considered indicative of substantial measurement error and signal that the model may not be fitting this part of the data well. Residuals between 2.5 and 4.0 warrant closer attention, but do not necessarily require model adjustments unless supported by additional model misfit evidence.

Given this, and based on the assumption that perceived support for autonomous behavior may conceptually function as a component of athlete satisfaction, the variable was incorporated into the satisfaction factor family within the model.

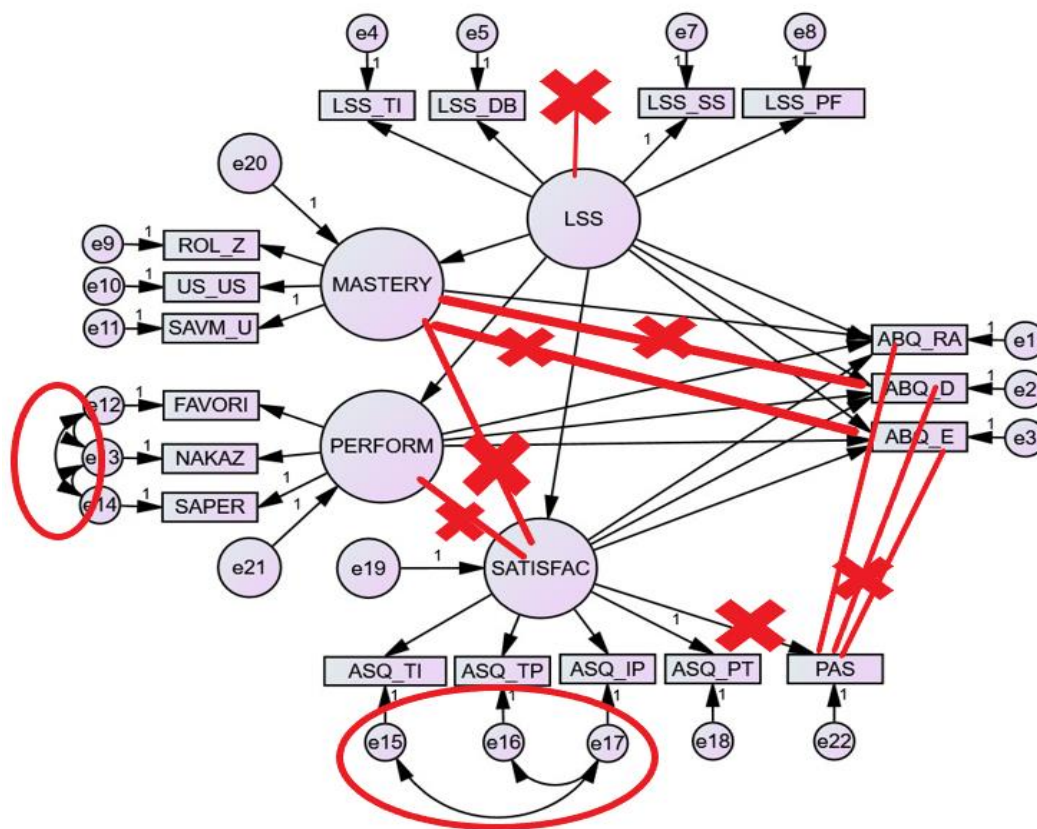


Figure 14. Structural Model of the Determining Factors of Burnout, Highlighting the Removed Paths and Freed Residuals of the Indicators

In the modified structural model, the main change involves the removal of regression paths with low regression coefficients, the freeing of residuals for evaluation, and the inclusion of perceived autonomy support as part of athlete satisfaction, as well as the addition of a regression path from the coach's leadership

style to perceived autonomy support. The model contains ten direct regression paths to the components of burnout, seven indirect paths, and one with double mediation – coach's leadership style >> mastery-oriented motivational climate >> athlete satisfaction >> components of burnout. It is assumed that there are direct, indirect, and total effects (see Figure 15).

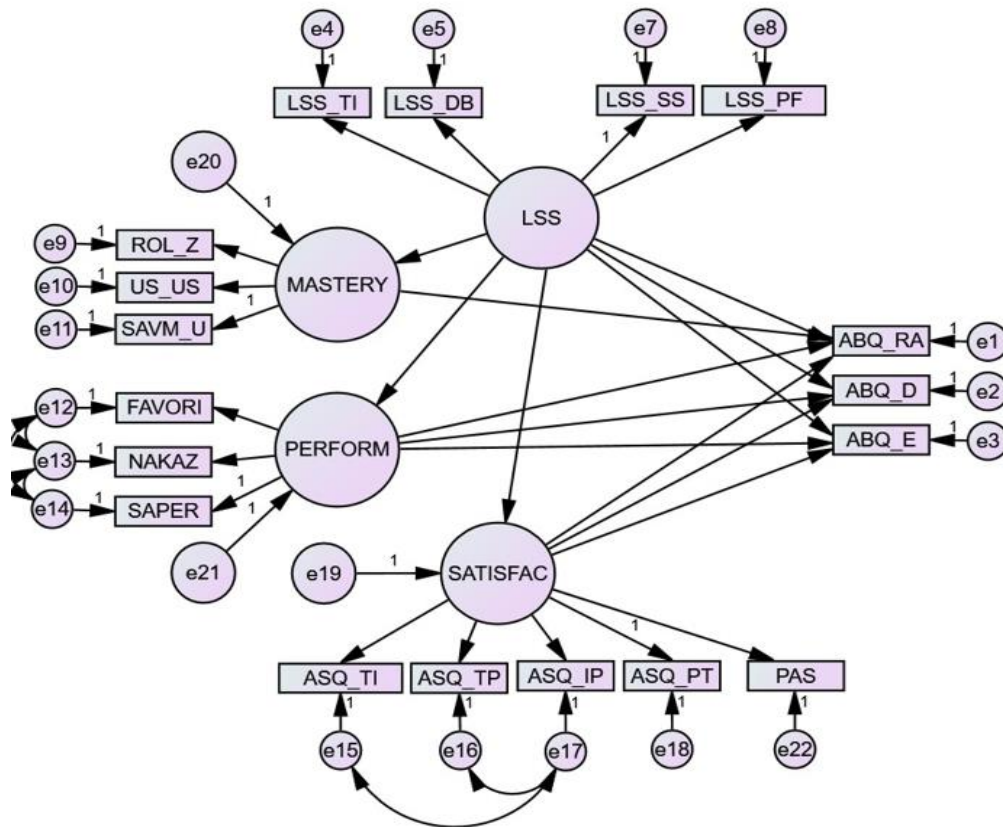


Figure 15. Modified Structural Model of Burnout

The model fit indices support the conclusion that the modified structural model corresponds well to the actual relationships and dependencies between the examined variables. RMSEA = 0.075 with PCLOSE > 0.05; CFI = 0.9; CMIN/DF is within the range of 1 to 2 (2.454). With RFI = 0.803, it can be assumed that the proposed structural model is 80% along the path from the null model to the saturated model (see Table 9)

Table 9. Model Fit Indices

Measure	Estimate	Threshold	Interpretation
CMIN	289.526	--	--
DF	118.000	--	--
CMIN/DF	2.454	Between 1 and 3	Excellent
CFI	0.902	>0.95	Acceptable
SRMR	0.070	<0.08	Excellent
RMSEA	0.075	<0.06	Acceptable
PClose	0.15	>0.05	Excellent

The fit indices indicate that the model demonstrates an acceptable fit to the data from the empirical matrix. It is stable, interpretable, and suitable for explaining the theoretical structure.

The obtained results confirm the validity of the theoretical assumption that the coach's leadership style, the motivational climate, and satisfaction with sport are determining factors in the manifestation of burnout in athletes. The performed modification of the initial structural model is justified and significantly improves the model's fit to the empirical data, while preserving its logical sequence and conceptual integrity.

The results of the factor analysis, which reveal the significance of the indicators within the factor families included in the structural model, demonstrate that the conceptual structure of the studied model is well-supported empirically—especially in the parts related to leadership style and mastery orientation. The indicators are reliable, with high factor loadings, confirming their validity and consistency.

The results concerning athlete satisfaction are particularly important. Satisfaction is most strongly determined by perceived autonomy support and the coach's personal treatment, rather than by objective athletic performance—a finding with significant practical and applied implications. It underscores the need for a humanistic and supportive coaching approach that respects the individuality and intrinsic motivation of athletes.

Analysis of Direct, Indirect, and Mixed Effects

The proposed structural model includes both direct and indirect regression pathways.

The direct influence of the coach's leadership style on the components of burnout is strong:

- **reduced sense of accomplishment – $\beta = -1.34$**
- **devaluation of sport participation – $\beta = -1.31$**
- **emotional and physical exhaustion – $\beta = -1.38$**

Its impact on the three exogenous variables that mediate the relationship with the components of burnout is also strong:

- **mastery-oriented motivational climate – $\beta = .77$**
- **performance-oriented motivational climate – $\beta = -.85$**
- **athlete satisfaction – $\beta = .89$**

In turn, the mastery-oriented motivational climate has a significant influence on reduced sense of accomplishment – $\beta = -.54$.

It can be expected that the mastery-oriented motivational climate serves as a mediator in the relationship between the coach's leadership style and the reduced sense of accomplishment.

The performance-oriented motivational climate has a significant effect on the components of burnout:

- **reduced sense of accomplishment – $\beta = 1.01$**
- **devaluation of sport participation – $\beta = 1.66$**
- **emotional and physical exhaustion – $\beta = 1.48$**

We assume that this exogenous variable also serves as a mediator in the relationship between the coach's leadership style and reduced sense of accomplishment.

The regression coefficients for athlete satisfaction on the components of burnout are lower:

- **reduced sense of accomplishment – $\beta = -0.47$**
- **devaluation of sport participation – $\beta = -0.22$**
- **emotional and physical exhaustion – $\beta = -0.35$**

These regression paths will be retained in order to assess the mediating role of the athlete satisfaction variable.

Some of the regression coefficients are greater than one. This is acceptable and can be attributed to various factors – a relatively small sample size, deviations from normal data distribution, strong inter-variable relationships, and the presence of latent influences that may distort the results.

The analyzed structural model presents a large number of direct and indirect paths of influence. Particular importance is given to identifying the mediating role of the constructs included in the model. Table 11 presents the direct, indirect, and total effects of the exogenous variables on the components of burnout.

To assess the strength of indirect effects—specifically, whether a variable acts as a mediator in the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, and whether this effect is statistically significant—the z-criterion (Standard Deviation) was applied, with a critical significance level of 1.96. If $SD > 1.96$, the construct is considered a mediator between the other two constructs (Zero, 2015).

Table 11 presents the direct, indirect, and total effects of the exogenous variables on the components of burnout. It outlines the influence of the coach's leadership style on the components of burnout through various mediating variables—namely, motivational climate (task-oriented and ego-oriented) and athlete satisfaction. The table includes direct, indirect, and combined effects, with the z-value indicating the statistical significance of the mediating effect.

Example:

Coach Leadership Style → Task-Oriented Climate → Reduced Sense of Accomplishment: $z = 1.35$.

Table 11. Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects in the Structural Model

Variables	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	z	Mediator
Leadership Style → Mastery Climate → Reduced Sense of Accomplishment	1.35	.42	1.77	3.89	Yes
Leadership Style → Performance Climate → Reduced Sense of Accomplishment	1.35	.86	2.21	2.27	Yes
Leadership style → Performance Climate → Devaluation	1.32	1.41	2.73	2.34	Yes
Leadership Style - Performance Climate- Emotional Exhaustion	1.39	1.26	2.65	2.33	Yes
Leadership style → Satisfaction → Reduced Sense of Accomplishment	1.35	.41	1.76	2.06	Yes
Leadership style → Satisfaction → Devaluation	1.32	.18	1.49	9.18	Yes
Leadership style → Satisfaction → Emotional Exhaustion	1.39	.32	1.70	1.51	Yes

1. All regression paths, except for the last one, demonstrate a significant mediating role ("Mediator" column = "Yes"), meaning that the coach's impact on the components of burnout is exerted through other variables.
2. The strongest total effect is observed in the regression path: Coaching Style → Performance Climate → Devaluation – Total Effect: 2.73. This highlights that the performance-oriented motivational climate has a strong mediating influence between the coach's style and the devaluation of interest in sport.
3. Significant effect through satisfaction: Coaching Style → Satisfaction → Reduced Sense of Accomplishment – Total Effect: 1.76, $z = 2.06$. This indicates that the athlete's emotional experience (satisfaction) is an important mediator that helps reduce the risk of declining self-confidence and performance.
4. No mediating effect is found in the final regression path: Coaching Style → Satisfaction → Emotional Exhaustion – $z = 1.51$, below the threshold of significance. This means that in this case, satisfaction is not a sufficient mediator, despite the overall influence of the coach's style

The results highlight that the effect of coaching style on athlete burnout is significantly mediated by the motivational climate and athlete satisfaction. This indicates that the coach does not directly influence exhaustion and amotivation, but rather impacts athletes through the type of environment they create and how it is perceived by the athletes.

It is particularly telling that a performance-oriented motivational climate intensifies negative manifestations of burnout—such as devaluation and emotional exhaustion—while a mastery-oriented climate has a more protective effect. This emphasizes the need to promote intrinsic motivation, collaboration, and personal development.

Athlete satisfaction also proves to be a key buffering variable, especially in preventing a decline in personal accomplishment. However, it does not always protect against exhaustion—the last row in the table shows a lack of mediating power in this case.

Coaching style matters, but its influence on burnout is not direct. The results confirm a complex, mediated structure of influence, where the motivational environment and satisfaction experiences play a critical role. This has strong practical implications for coaching approaches and the organizational climate in sports settings.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the conducted study on the influence of the coach's personality style on athlete burnout provide grounds for the **following general conclusions**:

- No statistically significant differences were found in the examined variables based on gender, age, or years of sports experience.
- Athletes in individual sports exhibit higher levels of burnout components compared to athletes in team sports.
- Athletes in combat sports show higher values for reduced sense of personal accomplishment compared to those in team sports.
- Athletes in team sports report the lowest levels of burnout components.
- Athletes in team sports and combat sports are more strongly oriented toward mastery and cooperative learning than those in individual sports.
- Athletes in combat sports are more likely to perceive their coaches as demonstrating a democratic leadership style compared to athletes in individual and team sports.
- The effects of the coach's leadership style and athlete satisfaction contribute to a reduction in burnout levels. In contrast, a performance-oriented motivational climate contributes to an increase in these levels.
- A mastery-oriented motivational climate affects only the reduction of personal accomplishment.
- The mastery-oriented motivational climate, the performance-oriented motivational climate, and athlete satisfaction act as mediators of the coach's leadership style. The coach's leadership style has significant direct and indirect effects on the components of burnout.

In terms of scientific research, we recommend that perceived autonomy support be included as a **component in the structure** of athlete satisfaction.

Regarding practical application, the following key recommendations are proposed to reduce **athlete burnout** through targeted actions:

- The coach's leadership style significantly influences burnout prevention in athletes, especially when it involves support, positive feedback, and a developmental orientation. Coaches are encouraged to adopt such a leadership approach, as it can effectively reduce the risk of burnout and contribute to higher athletic performance.
- A mastery-oriented motivational climate should be a priority in sports training because it has a protective effect on athletes' mental health.
- A performance-oriented motivational climate is associated with higher levels of exhaustion and devaluation of sports activity. Therefore, excessive competition and punitive practices should be limited.
- From a coaching perspective, building relationships based on trust and creating a supportive environment is recommended to achieve sustainable athletic development, as athlete satisfaction mediates the relationship between leadership style and burnout risk.
- Promoting personal initiative and providing opportunities for autonomous decision-making should be a guiding principle in training, since autonomy support is the most significant indicator of satisfaction.
- When working with female athletes and younger age groups, an individualized approach is recommended, taking into account their greater sensitivity to emotional load and social evaluation.
- Less experienced athletes are more vulnerable to burnout. Therefore, in the early stages of a sports career, programs for psychological support and adaptation should be implemented.
- Based on the results, it is recommended to implement coach training programs focused on emotional intelligence, positive communication, and motivational climate management.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION WORK:

1. Theoretical Contribution

An integrated conceptual framework has been developed, linking coaching behavior styles, motivational climate, and athletes' burnout experiences, with an emphasis on the socio-psychological interactions within the sports environment.

2. Methodological Contribution

Validated psychometric instruments have been adapted and applied to assess coaching behavior, motivational climate, and burnout, tailored to the cultural and age-specific context of Bulgarian athletes.

3. Empirical Contribution

Significant correlations have been identified between the perceived coaching style, athlete satisfaction, levels of emotional exhaustion, and the devaluation of interest in sports. It has been established that supportive leadership and mastery orientation act as protective factors against burnout.

4. Practical Contribution

Concrete recommendations are proposed for coaching practice and sports pedagogy, focusing on building a positive motivational climate, promoting autonomy, and providing emotional support to athletes, especially youth.

5. Model Contribution

A structural model of the determinants of burnout has been constructed and empirically validated, tracing both direct and indirect influences of various organizational and personal factors on athletes' experiences.

6. Applicability in Education and Prevention

Guidelines have been formulated for the development of training programs for coaches, focusing on emotional intelligence, effective communication, and motivational climate management, aiming at the prevention of burnout in sports.

PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION TOPIC

1. Kapitanski, A. (2022). *Characteristics of the Coach's Leadership Style in the Different Types of Sports*. Annual of NSA, Issue 2, pp. 210–220.
2. *Coach's Leadership Style and Burnout in Team Sports*. XII INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE of the Department of "Football and Tennis", 2024, pp. 141–147.