

## **THE LIFE TRANSITIONS OF HIGH PERFORMANCE ATHLETES RETIREMENT FROM SPORT**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to examine the transition experience of Jordanian national athletes retirement from the sport. Also, to investigate reasons of retirement, difficulties faced by athletes during transition and strategies used to cope with retirement. Subjects were (N=53) athletes (M=33, F=19), representing the Jordan National teams in different sports. Data was collected through the use of the Athlete Retirement Questionnaire (ARQ), developed by (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993), which include (34) items divided into three variables ( reason of retirement, difficulties during transition, and coping strategies) and Personal Characteristics. Descriptive static, mean, standard deviation, percentage, and t. test were used to analyze the results.

Results showed that reasons of retirement was due to athletes struggles with coaches, problem with sport federation, athletes experienced difficulties during retirement, missing social aspect of sport, lack of self- esteem, keeping feelings to self. Speaking with a friend who listens, were used as coping strategies by athletes. Athletes experienced stress during and following retirement.

Finally, the quality of the sports career termination process depends on the freewill of athletes career termination. The study provides unique insight into the psychological effect of forced retirement from the sport. Therefore, it is recommended that more attention should be paid when to prepare and assist athletes during their transition to retirement, and, for the Jordanian Olympic committee to establish an (Athletic Service Center) to assist voluntaries athletes during their transition to career termination, and provide help after retirement.

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**Keyword:** Transition, Coping Strategies, Difficulties, Retirement,

## **Introduction**

The study of transitions is investigable and cannot be predicted. People's life is characterized by these different life changes, discontinuity or turning points. Every transition has the possibility to be a crisis, a relief, or a combination of both, depending on the individual's perception of the situation. Transitional events include such things as: career changes, the death of a spouse, having children, moving to another city, or getting married, loss of career aspiration and like an expected job promotion that never comes through (Lynch and Chickering, 1989; Schlossberg, 1984).

Transitions exist in every aspect of life, such as life transitions, career transitions, and social transitions to name just a few. The term transition can mean many things to many people. Schlossberg (1981, 1984), defined transitions as, "An event or nonevent resulting in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5; p. 43). Pearson and Petitpas (1990) stated that the term transition is found to be useful in describing and understanding how physical, psychological, and social change can affect an individual.

Change, whether wanted or unwanted, can create stress on an individual. Some individuals will make numerous career changes throughout their lives. Some will see their careers move forward on their own conditions, while others may not be as fortunate. Their change may be a result of poor performance, downsizing, or politics. Nonetheless, there are issues associated with career transitions that appear for both wanted and unwanted change. The emotions of an individual involved in a career change are a crucial part of the transition experience (Caplan, Vinokur, Price and Van Ryn, 1989).

Coakley (2001), stated that sport opportunities are short term. The average career in a team sport lasts between 3 to 7 years, and that means after one's sport career ends there are about 40 extra years in a person's work life. A career in sport is much shorter than most other careers or occupations, as most athletes, voluntarily or involuntarily retire during their mid to late 20's. All athletes, whether they compete internationally or professionally, eventually move from elite participation in sport into another major focus area.

One particular type of transition which has the potential to reveal these complex patterns of change and stability is retiring from high-performance sport. The event of retirement, or change, is a normal consequence of elite participation. The other focus area of career often requires entirely different skills than those learned, and perfected as an athlete and is one in which the individual rarely has the same competencies. Consequently, this transition, at a relatively young age, is often said to generate identity crises and coping

difficulties (Ogilvie and Howe, 1986; Orlick and Werthner, 1987; Sinclair, 1990; Sinclair and Orlick, 1993 ).

Schlossberg's (1981) model for analyzing human adaptation to transition focuses on three major aspects of an individual involved in a transition: 1) The individual's (health, past experience, social status); 2) The individual's perception of the transition (whether or not the transition was wanted); and 3) The characteristics of the setting (formal and informal support systems) (Pearson and Petitpas, 1990, p. 7).

Sport career termination contributes to the quality of adapting to post- sports life and is comprehended as both an antecedent factor (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994; Alfermann, 2000). Studies showed that voluntary career termination is correlated with a less difficult adaptation to post- sports life (Alfermann, 2000; Cecic Erpic, 2000). While involuntary retirement can lead to psychological difficulties such as low self- centered, lower self- respect, anxiety depression, and feelings of anger ( Werthner and Orlick, 1986; Crook and Robertson, 1991; Alfermann and Gross, 1997).

The make up of athletic transition is grounded in a "crisis" orientation. That is, the post active days of athletes have been described as traumatic and negative, as well as dysfunctional in terms of emotional or psychological disorders which can become obvious in behaviors like alcohol or drug addiction (Harris and Eitzan, 1971; Ogilvie and Howe, 1986; Hill and Lowe, 1974; McPherson, 1980).

McPherson (1984) stated that athletic transition has been looked at as an event that automatically causes shock or relief rather than as establishing a transitional process that each individual perceives differently and therefore adjusts to differentiate. According to (Werthner and Orlick, 1986) found that many behavioral patterns are associated with the athletic transition because individuals bring their own perceptions of stress, personal assets, coping strategies, and socialization experiences to their particular transition (Gorge, 1980; Schlossberg, 1981).

A study by Werthner and Orlick (1986) explained that the majority of high performance amateur athletes faced some degree of difficulty in leaving their sport careers. On the other hand, some studies have taken different views of the retirement that former athletes face adjustment difficulties, and that athletes may actually experience relief from the pressures and intense time commitment of sport as a result of their leaving. That is, leaving sport may be a pleasantly anticipated event because it allows opportunities for personal growth and development (Blinde and Greendorfer, 1985; Coakley, 1983).

Individuals involved in a career transition are typically on their own, because they are afraid to ask for support as they do not want to appear inadequate in a certain area. Individuals facing a career transition utilize that all people encounter self-efficacy depending on to the individual's ability to estimate his or her own advantages or limitations to any given situation, realizing one's own limitations or area of expertise is a component of career transitions that all people encounter (Freedman, 1998; Heppner, Multon, Gysbers, Ellis and Zook, 1998; Robbins et al., 1994). Self-efficacy becomes an important aspect of a career change as people decide which path is best for them. Some individuals may know exactly which direction is right for them, while others may have no idea which way to head. The reality is that everyone is responsible for their new environment and need to recognize potential advantages and risk associated with that environment (Robbine et al., 1994).

The most significant and potentially experience encountered by athletes is career termination. Career indecision appears to be a common thread among those who have more frequent career transitions. Using decision theory in an attempt to explain that the best decision comes from one trying to achieve a specific goal, and alternative decisions are always available, but an individual who is focused on a specific goal is more likely to make a sound decision rather than a person unsure of his or her goal direction (Taylor and Ogilvie, (2001); Gati Krausz, and Osipow, 1996).

According to Kaplan (2000) Norris and Pittman (2000) stated that the study of Health Promotions is based upon keeping up with the times in which we live. The practice of Health Promotion is based upon the transformation of society. The terms "Transitions' and "Health Promotions" clearly become connected by the ethics of our continuously changing world. Studying the transition of individuals becomes important to give Health Promotion practitioners a better understanding of modern society and the specific needs that these individuals will have as their life Change.

Grabber and Brooks-Gunn (1996) indicates that life changes occur at every stage in life and are both mental and physical, also individuals involved in Health Promotions and to be aware of a significant transitional event in a person's life, and the transition marks a turning point for the implementation of new behaviors. Researchers have begun to systematically investigate the effects of withdrawal from a sport role and the future reconciliation into alternative roles (Blinde and Greendorfer, 1985; Coakley, 1983; McPherson, 1984; Uvertaner and Orlick, 1986).

Alfermann, Stambulova, and Zemaityte (2004). In their overview of reactions to sport career termination in different social and cultural environments with athletes (n-254)

representing three nations. Researchers emphasize three causes of reaction to sport career termination: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences. The results showed that planning for retirement contributed to significantly better cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adaptation, high athletic identity contributed to the less positive reaction to retirement and to more problems in the adaptation process. The emotional reaction of the participants showed more positive and lesser negative emotions after retirement, and accepting the reality of retirement was the most often used coping strategy among all subjects.

Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) and Taylor and Ogilvie (1994, 1998) in their research of sport career termination stated four main causes of career termination: age, discharged, injury, and free choice. The first three causes of termination of athletes were unable to continue competition due to decreased performance, they have no choice about withdrawal, being forced to leave due to situations that are out of their control.

Cecis, Erpic, Wylleman, and Zupancic (2004) examined the effect of athletic and non-athletic factors on the sports career termination process. Subjects were (N=85) former elite Slovene athletes. Results showed that the quality of the sports career termination process depends on the voluntariness of career termination, participant's subjective evaluation of athletic achievements, the prevalence of athletic identity, educational status, and the occurrence of negative non-athletic transitions.

The European Federation of Sport Psychology (2000) defines the sports career as "the multiyear sports activities of the individual aimed at high level sports achievements and self-improvement in sport" (pp. 259-261). The sport career is composed of several stages. Each stage, including sports career transition and adaptation to post-sports life, is characterized by a set of specific demands requiring adjustment by athletes as a transition.

Any transition, whether smooth or rough, requires a degree of adjustments (Cokley, 1983). What becomes of athletes upon their exit from high performance sport? Do they leave sport satisfied with their memories of participation and enthusiastic about the new challenges that await them? Is retirement an event which allows the pursuit of other opportunities, or does it lead to negative outcomes such as unhappiness, obsession, and identity crises? What internal and external resources do athletes bring to the transition process, and how do these resources or characteristics relate to adaptive success and adaptive failure? Thus, how do individuals experience sport retirement?

Retirement from sports and adaptation to post-sport career life may be accompanied by difficulties at the psychosocial level including social and cultural loneliness, deficiency of

social contacts, and problem with building new relationships outside sports (Botterill, 1988; Danish et al 1993; Cecic Erpic, 1998). After retirement from sports, athletes may experience difficulties at the psychological level, including identity crisis, loss of self-worth, decrease of self-esteem, decline of self satisfaction, emotional problems, feelings of unaccomplished athletic goals, and alcohol and drug abuse (Ballie and Danish, 1998; Cecic Erpic, 1998; Werthner and Orlick, 1986; Wylleman et.al., 1993). And may also experience difficulties at a physiological level which may include injuries and health problem, dietary problem, and detraining problems (Werthner and Orlick, 1986; Cecic Erpic, 1998; Wylleman et.al., 1993).

There has been some interest in athletic career termination in the sport psychology field. From an organizational perspective many sport organizations often do not want a sport psychologist to address career termination and life after sport for fear of distracting the athlete from their competitive focus ( Taylor and Ogilvie, 2001).

The end of competitive sports involvement may be accompanied by difficulties at the occupational level, such as lack of an occupational career, lack of professional qualification, less suitable professional career choices, and a decline in financial income (Cecic Erpic, 1998; Wylleman et al., 1993; Werthner and Orlic, 1986).

The quality of the sport career transition and the adaptation to post-sports life depends upon athletic and non-athletic factors. Their influence can result in a successful, relatively smooth transition, or in more or less intense difficulties at the psychological, physical, psychosocial and occupational level.

Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaitye (2004) indicated that successful athletes tend to get high recognition, they do not necessarily profit economically from their investment in sport. No public support system is available for elite athletes after their sport career, and they are not privileged members of society. Instead, it is up to the athletes themselves to decide how and what they do after career termination.

The focus of this study was centered on the transition experience of Jordanian high performance athlete's retirement from the sport. Also to investigate the reasons of retirement, difficulties during retirement, and coping strategies, and other adjustments that may have an impact on the athlete's decision.

Research Question: Four main questions were addressed in this study:

- (1) What are the reason of athlete's retirement from sport?
- (2) What are the difficulties athlete's experience during transition?
- (3) What are the coping strategies athletes used during the transition of retirement?

(4) Are athletes response toward the Athlete Retirement Questionnaire variables different according to gender?

## Methods

### Participants

Participants were 52 former elite athletes (M =33 (63.46%); F=19 (36.54%)) with national and international competitive experience. Participants represented Jordan National teams in different events nationally and internationally (Pan Arab Games, Asian Games, West Asian Games, Arab Championship and Premier clubs). Forty four of the athletes (84.62%) competed at national and international level and 8 (15.39%) competed in the Premier Clubs. Sports participants were involved in (Football, Basketball, Team handball, Tennis, Track and Field, Swimming, and Badminton). Participants had been retired for longer than 2 years, but less than 8 years, to ensure that they had experienced life after retirement. Participant's level of education included college (25.38%), university (28.33%), and high school (46.29%). The distribution of participants sport involvements is shown in (Table 1)

**Table1.**Distribution of Participants (n=52) according to Sports Played

Sport Played	N	Percentage %
Football (soccer)	11	21.15
Basketball	7	13.46
Team handball	11	21.15
Tennis	5	9.62
Track and Field	5	9.62
Swimming	8	13.39
Badminton	5	9.62
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100.00</b>

### Procedures

For the purpose of this study, the names and addresses of all national teams' athletes who had formally retired from national and international competition for the year of 2006 were obtained from the Jordanian National Federations. Each federation was contacted to confirm the list of numbers and names of athletes retired from national and international competition. Each of the retired athletes who were available were contacted in person to explain the purpose of the study and to receive permission before completing the questionnaire.

### Instrument

The Athlete Retirement Questionnaire (ARQ) was employed to address the transitional experience of high-performance athletes. The ARQ was developed by (Sinclair and Orlick, 1993), based on a review of the sport science and transition literature, as well as pilot interviews with high-performance athletes. The ARQ consisted of self-assessment items

designed to obtain information about subject's national team career, their retirement transition, sport played, and years of playing. The questionnaire contains 35 items divided into three variables: Reason of retirement variable (11) items; Difficulties encountered during transition variable (11) items; and Coping strategies variable (13) items. Participant response was revealed on a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from (very high extent, to not at all). The questionnaire was translated into Arabic, because the native language of the participants was Arabic. The translation was modified by deleting and changing words in some items to ensure clarity for participants to understand, and finally the questionnaire contains (34) items. The reliability of the translated questionnaire variables, internal consistency measure of reliability was computed for the tool used in the study by calculating alpha coefficients, range from (0.79) of (0.86). The translated questionnaire was examined with 15 formally retired national players to clarify phrasing and to make sure of applicability, and proved the statistical validity of the questionnaire.

### **Data Analysis**

The responses of the participants to each item of the questionnaire were analyzed using the statistical package for social science (SPSS) program. The score for each item was obtained by assigning the following numerical values to each response: (very high extent = 5; high extent =4; moderate =3; low extent = 2; and, not at all = 1). From this, mean score and standard deviations were established for each item. A one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the differences in the life transition of high performance participants (male and female) retirement from sport toward each items of the questionnaire which includes: Reason of retirement, Difficulties encountered during transition and Coping strategies variables.

Descriptive statistics were employed as well as independent t-test using alpha (. 05) to determine differences by gender. These results will be discussed separately and related to the four questions of the study.

### **Results**

The results are presented in two sections. First, descriptive profiling the personal characteristics of participant transition; Second, participants' response to the Athlete Retirement Questionnaire (ARQ), see Table 2.

#### **Personal Characteristics of the Transitional Participants**

Participants were 52 former elite athletes (M-33, F-19). The majority of athletes (n=32) started playing the sport at age between (10-14) years old (61.54%), 14 athletes started at age between (8-9), and 6 athletes at age of 15years old (11.54). Athletes (n=22) years of playing with a club or federation were between (10-14) years (42.31%), 15 athletes



played for 5 years (28.85%), and 9 played for (6-9) years (17.31). Athletes (n=44) were starters in the national teams (84.62%), and 8 athletes were sub-starters (15.38%). Athletes (n=30) years of playing with the national teams were between (1-3) years (57.69%), 9 played for 4 years (17.31%), 8 played for five years (9.62%), and 5 played for six years (9.62%). A total of 39 athletes experienced stress (75%) during time playing with the national team, while 13 athletes did not experience stress (25.00%) while playing for the national team. Athletes (n=27) estimated their level of stress as moderate (51.93%), while 25 athletes estimated as high (48.07%).

Athletes (n=35) retired from the sport (67.30%) at age between (20-29), 9 athletes (17.31%) at age between (30- above), and 8 athletes (15.39%) at age between (17-19) years old. The majority of the athletes (n=45) experienced stress during the first 6 months following their retirement (86.54%). Athletes (n=35) estimated their level of stress as high (67.31%), 11 athletes estimated as moderate (21.15%), while 6 athletes estimated their level of stress as low (11.54%) following the retirement. Athletes (n=31) were not happy with their decision of retirement (59.62%), while 21 athletes (40.38%) were satisfied with their decision. Athletes (n=43) estimated their level of satisfaction as low (82.69%), 6 athletes as high (11.54%), and 3 athletes estimated their level of satisfaction as moderate (5.77%), after retirement. Participant's status: 32 working in different sectors (61.54%) with minimum wages ; 14 attending university (26.92%), and 6 having coaching jobs with clubs (11.54%).

**Table 2.** Mean and Standard Deviation of Participants  
(N=52)Response to (ARQ) Variables.

Variables	M	SD	R
Reasons of Retirement	2.80	0.64	3
Difficulties encountered during Transition	2.83	0.58	2
Coping Strategies	3.20	0.47	1

The mean score of participants toward athlete retirement questionnaire across the three variables were between (2.80-3.20), while the coping strategies variable received the highest score with a mean of (3.20).

To determine the differences in the life transition of high performance participants retirement from sport toward each items of the variables in the questionnaire mean and standard deviation will be used. These results will be addressed separately and related to the four research questions of the study.

#### 1. What are the reasons of athlete's retirement from sport?

The mean score reasons of participants retirement from sport across all items were (M=2.80, SD= 0.64) see Table 3.

**Table 3.** Mean and Standard Deviation of Participants (N=52)  
Response to Reasons of Retirement from Sport Items.

Items	M	SD	Rank
Tired of the lifestyle of sport and time to move	2.94	1.35	3
Accomplished my goals	2.54	1.02	6
Struggles with coaching staff	4.06	1.16	1
Time to build personal relationship	2.46	1.06	8
Agony's from injuries	2.27	1.35	9
Declining performance	2.50	1.26	7
Problems with Federation and Club	4.04	1.27	2
Start a Job	2.02	1.09	11
Lack of income	2.90	1.24	4
Tired of sitting on the bench	2.25	1.36	10
Lack of support from family and friends	2.60	1.24	5
<b>Reason of Retirement</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>0.64</b>	

Table (3) showed the mean score of each item. The main three reasons of athletes retirement were "Struggles with coaching staff" (M=4.06, SD=1.16;"Problem with Federation and Club" (M=4.04, SD=1.27, and "Tired of Lifestyle of sport and time to quit" (M= 2.94, SD=1.35). While the least three reasons of retirement were "Start a Job" (M= 2.02, SD= 1.09; "Tired of Sitting on the bench" (M= 2.25, SD= 1.36; and "Agony's from injuries" (M=2.27, SD= 1.35).

(2) What are the difficulties athletes experienced during transition?

The mean score of difficulties participants experienced during transition variable across all items were (M= 2.83, SD= 0.58), see Table 4.

**Table 4.** Means and Standard deviation of Participants (N=52)  
Response to Difficulties Experienced during Transition Items.

Items	M	SD	Rank
Missing social aspect of sport	4.25	1.01	1
School and work pressure	2.83	1.31	7
Low income	2.85	1.36	6
Relationship struggles with coaches	3.79	1.33	2
Loss of status between players	3.20	1.15	3
Feeling lack of ability in activities other than sport	2.90	1.03	5
Lack of self confidence	3.02	1.44	4
Suffering from injuries	2.06	1.20	10
Relationship difficulties with family and friends	2.62	1.09	8
Suffering illness in family	1.39	0.84	11
Personal illness	2.25	1.03	9
<b>Difficulties Experienced</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>0.58</b>	

Table (4) showed the mean score of participants response to each item of the difficulties experienced during transition. The three main difficulties experienced were "Missing social out look of sport (M=4.25, SD= 1.01); "Relationship struggles with coaches" (M=3.78, SD=1.33); and " Loss of status between players " (M=3.20, SD=1.15), While the

least response toward the items were "Suffering illness in Family" (M= 1.39, SD= 0.84); "Suffering from injuries" (M= 2.06, SD= 1.20), and "Personal illness" (M=2.25, SD= 1.03).

### (3) What are the Coping Strategies Athletes used During the Transition of Retirement?

The mean score of coping strategies variable participants responded across all items were (M= 3.20, SD= 0.47), see Table 5.

**Table 5.** Means and Standard Deviation of Participants (N=52) Response to Coping Strategies Items.

Items	M	SD	Rank
Keeping myself busy doing other things	3.71	1.09	3
Direct myself and interest on new things	3.62	0.89	6
Exercise and training for fun	2.75	1.17	10
Speaking with friends who listen	3.67	0.88	5
Staying in contact with my friend in sport	2.92	1.01	8
Ignoring my low income and difficulties	3.29	1.09	7
Keeping feelings to self	4.29	1.16	2
Reading about retired athletes life	1.58	1.09	12
I counsel myself with matters that concern me	3.69	0.90	4
I run my own business	2.88	1.35	9
I have a coaching job	1.73	1.07	11
Ridiculous things I see now days in sport	4.27	1.22	1
<b>Coping Strategies</b>	<b>3.20</b>	<b>0.47</b>	

Table (5) showed the mean score of participants response to coping strategies items. The three most coping strategies responded by athletes were "Ridiculous things I see in sport now days" (M= 4.27, SD= 1.22); "Keeping feelings to self" (M=4.29, SD= 1.16); and "Keeping myself busy doing other things" (M= 3.71,SD= 1.09), while the least response were "Reading about retired athletes life" (M= 1.58, SD= 1.09); "I have a coaching job" (M= 1.73, SD= 1.22); and "Exercise and training for fun" (M= 2.75, SD 1.17).

### (4) Are athlete's response toward the Athlete Retirement Questionnaire (ARQ) Variables different According to Gender?

To determine the differences between male and female athletes response toward the (ARQ) variables. An independent t-test using alpha (0.05) was used . The mean score male participants (n=33) were (M= 2.96, SD= 0.47) and female participants (n=19) were (M=2.91,SD= 0.29), see Table 6.

**Table 6.** Means and Standard Deviation and t-test of Male and Female Athletes (n=52) Response To (ARQ) Variables.

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	t-test	Significance
Reasons of Retirement	M	33	2.85	0.70	0.79	0.43
	F	19	2.71	0.51		
Difficulties Experienced During Transition	M	33	2.74	0.64	1.35	0.18
	F	19	2.97	0.43		
Coping Strategies	M	33	3.29	0.49	2.02	0.06
	F	19	3.03	0.40		
Total	M	33	2.96	0.47	0.36	0.71
	F	19	2.91	0.29		

Significant at Alpha(0.05).

Table (6) showed no significant differences found between male and female participants toward the (ARQ) variables. The mean scores of “reasons of retirement” variable for participants were (M=2.85,F=2.71) with t.test value of (0.79); “difficulties experienced during transition” variable for participants were (M=2.74, F=2.97) with t.test value of (1.35), and “coping strategies” variable for participants were (M=3.29, F=3.03) with t.test value of (2.02).

### Discussion

The purpose of the study was centered on the transition experience of Jordanian high performance athletes retirement from sport. Also to explore the reasons of retirement, difficulties during retirement, and coping strategies, that have impact on athletes retirements decision.

The personal characteristics of the transitional participants showed that the majority of athletes experienced stress (75%) while they were playing for the national teams, and estimated their level of stress as high (51.89%) and moderate (48.11%). The majority of athletes experienced stress (86.54%) during the first 6 months following retirement, and estimated their level of stress as high (67.31%)and (21.15%) as moderate. The majority of athletes (59.62%) were unsatisfied with their decision of retirement, while (40.38%) were satisfied with their decision. The majority estimated their level of satisfaction as low (82.69%), (11.54%) as high and (5.77%) as moderate. Results indicated that athletes were not pleased with their retirement possibly due to not achieving sport-related goals. Athletes experienced stress during their time playing on the national team, and following retirement in which, indicates that they were not prepared for retirement, and not accomplishing what they had set out to do in sport. This supports the finding of Sinclair & Orlick (1993), that athletes who had retired before, tended to feel more dissatisfied about their lives since retirement

versus those who had not made previous transition. Also to some extent, with finding of Taylor & Ogilvie,2001;Sinclair,1990, and Orlick & Werther,1987, who showed that the most traumatic experience encountered by athletes is career termination, and often generates identity crises and coping difficulties.

Based on descriptive statistics generated in the present study, response to questions across all items toward retirement summarized as moderate. These results will be discussed separately and related to the research questions of the study.

(1) What are the reasons of athlete retirement from the sport?

Responses toward reasons of retirement showed that athlete's felt their retirement was largely due to "struggles with coaching staff", "problems with the federation and clubs management", and also "tired of the lifestyle of sport". The researcher believes that these situations may have effects such as forcing athletes to retire from their sport, not being able to perform with the same intensity or skill level that may have been perceived as a breakdown in overall ability, and may have an impact upon the sense of self. They did not retire due to age, injury, or discharged, but in a way they were forced to retire, not by choice. The results of the present study disagree with the study of Taylor & Ogilvie (1994,1998), that four main causes of career termination: age, injury, discharged, and free choice. Athletes who felt they are no longer capable of maintaining their elite status due to struggles with the coaching staff or club management, may feel that they are not capable of doing anything well. These findings supported by Schlossberg (1984), that failing to adapt well to situations may negatively influence one's ability to cope with self fulfilling goals. The impact a head coach has on athletes' lives is strong, and it is clear that getting accurate information from them could be a challenge and athletes can simply provide information about their experience with coaches that lead them to think about retirement from the sport. Thus, coaches need to be accountable for identifying and understanding critical components of athletes transition and retirement from the sport, and should recognize their role and its impact on those athletes facing problems with the coaching staff, since the majority of athletes (67.31%) in this study retired from sport at age between (20-29) and the majority (86.54%) experienced stress during the first 6 months following their retirement. These indications could show that athletes were forced to retire from the sport, since (59.62%) of these athletes stated that they were not happy with their decision of retirement. These results are congruent with the finding of other studies (e.g. Crook & Robertson, 1991; Alfermann & Gross, 1997; Werthner and Orlick, 1986), that involuntary retirement can lead to psychological difficulties such as lower self-centered, lower self- respect, anxiety, depression, and feelings of anger.

(2) What are the difficulties athletes experienced during the transition?

The quality of athletic retirement is expressed as sport career termination difficulties, which consists of difficulties at the psychological, psychosocial level, as factors affects the quality of retirement from an active sports career process. Some of the difficulties experienced by athletes of this study were “missing the social aspect life of sport”; “relationship struggles with coaches”, and “loss of status between players”. The degree of athletic identity and its prevalence over social role has effects on the quality of the retirement process from sport, especially on the degree of psychological difficulties experienced by athletes. Athletes with strong athletic identity experience more intense and more frequent difficulties during the process of retiring from the sport. Experiences of severe and frequent negative life events affect the athletic retirement process, and relate psychological and occupational difficulties. The results support what searchers' stated that retirement from sports and adaptation to post-sport career life may be accompanied by difficulties at the psychosocial level including social and cultural loneliness, deficiency of social contacts, and problem with building new relationships outside sports (Botterill, 1988; Danish et.al 1993; Cecic Erpic, 1998). Taylor & Ogilvie (2001), from an organizational perspective many sport organizations often do not want a sport psychologist to address career termination and life after sport for fear of distracting the athlete from their competitive focus.

The way in which athletes retire from elite sports and adapt to life after sports is affected by athletic factors such as athletic identity and by events related to the athletes social roles and family.

The retirement process was not influenced by an individual's age at the time of career termination, which was not consistent with the finding of other studies (e.g. Werthner and Orlick, 1986). Difficulties of sports career termination depend on athletic factors choice of career termination.

(3) What are the coping strategies athletes used during the transition of retirement?

Athletes response to coping strategies showed that athletes used some strategies items to be helpful during the transition phase of retirement such as “keeping feelings to self”, “keeping myself busy doing other things”, while the majority of athletes was not pleased with the way the sport is treated when they expressed their response to item “ridiculous thing happening in sport”, which received the highest score ( $m=4.27$ ). These responses might indicate that athletes were forced to leave their sport, may be due to the lack of knowledge of sport organization and federation dealing with athletes retirement, in which, indicates that

athletes were not happy with their decision of retirement. Athletes reflection about unplanned retirement, can lead to a negative and more emotional reaction, social and economic problem, and less current life satisfaction. Athletes would feel more committed to the sport, have a higher athletic identity, and therefore, more negative and less positive feeling about the end of their sport career. It is expected that they would need a longer time period for adaptation to post- career, and would need more coping strategies.

An athlete who is at the top of their profession tending to have dedicated a very large portion of their lives to training and competing. This commitment in terms of time and personal energies often contributes to an imbalance of other activities in their lives. Researchers' mentioned that sport career termination contributes to the quality of adapting to post- sports life and is comprehended as both an antecedent factor (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994; Alfermann, 2000). Also studies showed that voluntary career termination is correlated with a less difficult adaptation to post- sports life (Alfermann, 2000; Cecic Erpic, 2000). While involuntary retirement can lead to psychological difficulties such as lower self- centered, lower self- respect, anxiety depression, and feeling of anger (Werthner and Orlick, 1986; Crook and Robertson, 1991; Alfermann and Gross, 1997).

As sport was an important way to help the country gain greater international status, athletes were rewarded with an extremely high reputation. Those athletes were no longer supported in a way that made sport a secure lifetime investment. Instead, athletes had to make their own choices for post – career and had to find a job by themselves. In addition, elite sport lost its high reputation.

Successful athletes tend to get high recognition, they do not necessarily profit economically from their investment in sport career. No public support system is available for elite athletes after sport career, and they are not privileged members of society. Instead, it is up to the athletes themselves to decide how and what they do after career termination. In addition, elite sport lost its high reputation. The findings support Robbine et.al., (1994), that every one is responsible for their new environment and need to recognize potential advantages and risk associated with that environment.

According to the results of the present study, the retirement process of male and female athletes was not influenced at the time career termination. Results revealed that male and female athletes expressions of life seem to be closely connected and mutually interdependent with regard to the career transition. It seems that male and female athletes experience the same feelings and difficulties toward their retirement, and coping strategies.

In order to fully understand an athletes career transition to post-sports life it is necessary for sport psychology practitioners to diagnose the aspect life of male and female athletes.

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