

# Research of aggression in the relationship among athletes in figure skating and their coaches

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## ABSTRACT

Hrázská GZ. Research of aggression in the relationship among athletes in figure skating and their coaches. *J. Hum. Sport Exerc.* Vol. 7, No. Proc1, pp. S1-S7, 2012. In this article, the author writes about problems of the occurrence of aggressive behaviour in interpersonal relations of figure skaters and their coaches. This study of the issue is a part of research in the forthcoming dissertation. In this study, the author investigates the frequency of verbal and physical aggression of coaches against skaters during their training sessions and looks at the connection between the application of authoritative approach in sports training and manifestation of aggressive behaviour of coaches towards athletes during these conflicts. **Key words:** AUTHORITATIVE APPROACH, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP, TRAINING.

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Figure skating and interpersonal relationships*

Figure skating is a specific sport because it combines sport and art. Figure skating ranks among the aesthetic coordination sport. Skaters are required to be able to show wide range of movement. Hrázská (2006) is considered to be one of the most beautiful figure skating sports, but also the most challenging because it requires a high level of versatility from the athletes. In addition to excellent physical qualities, skaters must be equipped with the ability to interpret the character of music. The uniqueness of this sport is in perfect harmony demanding sport performance with perfect artistic expression carried to the ice and adapted skating movement. The international figure skating includes four competitive disciplines: singles (men and ladies), pairs, ice-dancing, synchronized skating.

In figure skating, like in other sports, there are important training aspects that limit not only the performance, but also influences other side of their personality. The most important factor, among others, are interpersonal relationships among figure skaters and their coaches. The relationship of the unit is "dyado". It means a very close cooperation between the two people. This relationship is mentally very challenging

According to Leška (Sekot et al., 2004) a coach is defined as *"teaching staff specialized in sports team leadership in a particular sport, in order to increase their athletic performance, achieving the best results with teams or individuals. Coach plans, manages and evaluates the training process, its content, methods and results by age, gender, performance and interests of the athletes."* Filling all dimensions of the role of a coach depends not only on the knowledge of coaching, but also on the capabilities and properties of a coach. Direct interaction with the athlete is very important, the capacity to stimulate and interpersonal characteristics (Vaněk, 1984).

Interpersonal conflicts between an athlete and their coach and aggression in their relationship is nothing unusual. These significantly affect not only the performance, but also psychological state of the athlete and also the psychological state of the coach. According to Vaničková et al. (1995) there are two kinds of psychological changes while the incidents of aggressive behaviour occur. First, it changes the current emotional response to aggression - fear, pain, resentment, helplessness, etc., and it can also lead to permanent changes in personality. Repeated aggression also affects self-esteem.

### *Aggression and classification of aggression*

According to Lovaš (In Slaměnik, 2008) aggressive behaviour is a natural part of social behaviour and it is also part of behaviour aimed at satisfying the needs and objectives. There is a complex character, appearance and conditions of occurrence. Vágnerová (2002) defines aggressive behaviour as a violation of social norms that restrict rights and distort the integrity of living beings and inanimate objects. It is either symbolic or real reduction, injury and destruction. Aggression can be understood as a tendency for such behaviour. Aggression refers to the actual manifestation of such behaviour.

There are many other definitions of aggression however; each theory tries to explain a certain cause of aggression, conditions and circumstances of its occurrence. *"The causes leading to aggressive action can be divided into innate (biological) and obtained (social). Every person has the innate disposition of aggression that are necessary and useful for self-defence and preservation of its own territory"* (Fischer & Škoda, 2009). According to Lovaš (Slaměnik, 2008), most cases of aggression are provoked by changes in the environment. In this context, he refers to variables that incite aggression, or the stimuli that provoke

aggression. Overall, these stimuli are referred to as aversive stimuli. Their common denominator is a condition causing the discomfort.

Generally, we recognize direct and indirect aggression, verbal and physical. These types of aggression are mingled. Direct aggression can be physical (assault, kick, and slap) or verbal (raised voice, curses, and insults). Indirect aggression can be physical (the aggressor feels that the situation would hurt him alone, so he transfers the aggression to objects, which are somehow connected with the victim, such as property) or verbal (slander and inappropriate jokes).

Čermák (1999) takes into account the dimension of activity and passivity and their combinations given eight kinds of aggression: direct physical activity (hitting), indirect physical activity (hired killer), physical passive direct activity (interference with someone in achieving their goals), physical passive indirect activity (refusal to fulfil the requirements), verbal active direct activity (offense), verbal active indirect activity (gossip), verbal passive direct activity (refusal to talk to someone), verbal passive indirect activity (criticizing someone). A. H. Buss and A. Durkee (Nakonečný, 1997) gave the following inventory of aggression: attack - physical violence, assault; indirect aggression - intrigue, gossiping; irritability - alert to the affective explosion; negativism - rout; indignation, resentment - hatred, animosity; suspicion - projection of hostility on the other; verbal aggression – slurs.

There are various tools to diagnose aggression. The most used personality tests include: Rorschach's test (ROR), Rosenzweig's frustration test image, Hand Test, Freiburg Questionnaire, B-D-I. It's also possible to deal with issues of aggression through Caprar's aggression tests. Each of these tools has its advantages and disadvantages (Šafář, 2003).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

This article shows a study of our research of aggression in interpersonal relations between athletes in figure skating and their coaches. On the basis of studying the available materials on this issue, a goal was set to write a pilot study and research questions.

### *Goal of the study and questions of the research*

The goal of the study is to determine in which frequencies there are various forms of aggressive behaviour and the relationship between the implementation of authoritative approach of a coach in sports training and manifestations of aggressive behaviour towards athletes with interpersonal conflict.

The following questions had been set for the study:

- How frequently does verbal aggression of coach towards athletes in the interpersonal conflict in sports training occur?
- How frequently does physical aggression of coach towards athletes in the interpersonal conflict in sports training occur?
- Is there a connection between the application of an authoritative approach of a coach in sports training and verbal aggressive behaviour towards athletes in the interpersonal conflict?
- Is there a connection between the application of an authoritative approach of a coach in sports training and verbal aggressive behaviour towards athletes in the interpersonal conflict?

### *Methods and research sample*

For the study, we chose the empirical method. The data collection technique we chose is a written inquiry. Research tool in our questionnaire had been in written form which contains a set of pre-prepared questions and statements to measure the attitudes of certain groups. We used a standardized questionnaire containing thirteen questions, concerning the role of a coach in sports training of figure skaters. The questionnaire was based on answers in the form of closed and semi-enclosed selections of items. The data obtained were processed using the tools of statistics.

Groups of tested people (GTP) in the research were obtained by deliberate choice. We have defined the following relevant characteristics: athletes from one of the figure skating disciplines at the high and top level of performance (the participants of national and international competitions); male and female; athletes between the ages of thirteen to thirty years old.

A total of fifteen (15) active athletes from some of the figure skating disciplines had been chosen for the research. The total number of people were seven (7) male athletes and eight (8) female athletes. The arithmetic average age of tested groups was 18.3 years, of which 19.1 years for men and 17.5 years for women. The youngest group was athletes at the age of 13, the oldest group was 23 years old. All groups in the research sample fulfilled the relevant pre-defined characteristics.

## **RESULTS**

Nine (60%) athletes answered that their head coach was a male, six (40%) athletes answered that it was a female. Four (27%) athletes reported that their head coach is at the age group of 30 - 39 years old, two (13%) at the age group 40 - 49 years old, five (33%) athletes reported their coach is at the age group of 50 - 59 years and four (27%) at the age group of 60 - 69 years old.

One of the questions was about the pedagogical approach to coaching in sports training. Athletes in each of the approaches - authoritative, democratic and liberal - marked degree of approach of their coach to figure skater in the sports training. Four athletes (27%) marked the occurrence of an authoritative approach with "yes, absolutely", the degree of "yes, partly" was marked by six athletes (40%) and the degree of "not at all" by five (33%) of them. The average election range of attitudes to the question concerning the presence of an authoritative approach had a coefficient of 1.9 and it marked a degree of "yes, partly" on a scale of attitudes. Six athletes (40%) marked the occurrence of a democratic approach with "yes, absolutely", the degree of "yes, partly" seven athletes (47%) and the degree "not at all" by two (13%) athletes. The average election range of attitudes towards the democratic approach had a coefficient of 2.27 and it marked a degree of occurrence "yes, partly". Two athletes (13%) marked the occurrence of a liberal approach with a degree of "yes, absolutely", the degree of "yes, partly" by three (20%) athletes and degree "not at all" by ten (67%) of them. The average election range of attitudes towards the liberal approach had a coefficient of 1.47 and marked degree of occurrence "not at all".

We also asked whether the coach gets upset easily during sports training. Seven (47%) athletes responded positively, eight (53%) replied that the coach gets upset and loses his patience, nobody (0%) said that the coach does not get upset during sports training. The average election range of attitudes to the question concerning the presence of "being upset", the coach had a coefficient of 2.47 and it marked the occurrence of this phenomenon in the case of "he lost his patience".

The coach being upset in sports training can cause a change in behaviour and expressions of aggression, verbal (coarse language and raising voice) or physical (slaps and shaking). Four athletes (26.6%) admitted the occurrence of verbal aggression and marked it as a degree of “yes, often”, the degree of “yes, sometimes” was admitted by four (26.6%) athletes as well and the degree “not at all” by seven (46.6%) of them. The average election range of attitudes to the occurrence of verbal aggressive behaviour of coach towards athlete had a coefficient of 1.80 and it marked the occurrence of this form of aggressive behaviour closer to the level of “yes, sometimes”. By the test chi-square we investigated whether the differences between the frequencies of attitudes to verbal aggression of the coach towards athlete are statistically significant. The calculated value of the test criteria was smaller than the critical value, and therefore we accepted the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ : Frequencies of attitudes of athletes to the degrees of verbal aggressive behaviour of their coaches are the same.). The research demonstrated that there was no difference in the levels of verbal aggression of coach toward athletes. The results made it possible to explain the effects of things happening by a chance.

One athlete (6.6%) marked the occurrence of physical aggression as a degree “yes, often”, the degree of “yes, sometimes” was also marked by one (6.6%) athlete and degree “no” was marked by thirteen (86.6%) of them. The average election range of attitudes in occurrence of physical aggressive behaviour of coach towards athlete had coefficient 1.20 and it marked the occurrence of this form of aggressive behaviour closer to the level of “no”. As with verbal expressions of aggression, we used the test chi-square and we investigated whether the differences between the frequencies of attitudes of physical aggression of a coach toward an athlete are statistically significant. The calculated value of the test criteria was greater than the critical value, and therefore we rejected the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ : Frequencies of attitudes of athletes to the degree of physical aggressive behaviour of their coaches are the same.) and we accepted the alternative hypothesis ( $H_A$ : Frequencies of attitudes of athletes to the degree of physical aggressive behaviour of their coaches are different). Because we rejected the null hypothesis, the results are statistically significant and can't be explained by chance. It is shown that between the degrees of physical aggression of coach towards athlete, there were differences.

In the research, we further test independence based on the chi-square contingency table investigating the relationship between the application of authoritative approach of a coach in sports training and the occurrence of aggressive behaviour of coach towards athlete in the interpersonal conflict. First, we examined the relationship between the application of authoritative approach of a coach in sports training and verbal aggression towards athlete in the interpersonal conflict. When comparing the calculated values of the test criteria with the value of the critical criteria for the chosen significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , we found that the calculated value is lower, and therefore cannot reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ : The application of an authoritative approach of a coach in sports training and verbal aggressive behaviour towards athlete in the interpersonal conflict is not connected.). Among the application of authoritative approach a coach in sports training and verbal aggressive behaviour towards athlete in the interpersonal conflict, there was no evidence of a statistically significant connection. The same procedure we chosen for investigation of the relationship between the applications of authoritative approach of a coach in sports training and physical aggression towards athletes in the interpersonal conflict. Because the value of expected frequency was in the table in more of their fields less than 1, it was not possible to test the independence by chi-square. The relationship between the applications of authoritative approach of a coach in sports training and physical aggression towards athlete in the interpersonal conflict and was not examined.

The tested athletes were also asked in the questionnaire whether his or her coach is a good psychologist in sports training (able to reassure athletes before competition, motivate them, solve conflicts, etc.). Six (40%) athletes stated that “the coach is a very good psychologist”, four (27%) answered that “the coach is partly a psychologist”, and five (33%) answered that “the coach is not a good psychologist”. The average election range of attitudes to the psychological effect of a coach to athlete had coefficient 2.07 and it marked on a scale of attitudes closer degree of occurrence “the coach is partly a psychologist”.

## DISCUSSION

The study worked with a very small research sample results and thus cannot be generalized. We just suggest, on the basis of this study, several recommendations that would increase the importance of the issue and may be beneficial for like-minded researchers.

We recommend expansion of a questionnaire on issues about the causes of conflicts between the athlete and the coach and the beginning of aggressive behaviour. Conflicts between athlete and coach can often arise due to lack of sports performance (readiness for competition) and failure in sports training. A frequent trigger can also be physical or mental fatigue of athletes, as well as mental fatigue of coaches, even their physical fatigue. The relationship and the occurrence of disagreements with elements of aggressive behaviour can significantly affect the common failures in competitions, attitudes of the coach, stress before competitions, sports training interruptions caused by injury or illness, etc. The benefits for research can be also extending the questionnaire about issues of interpersonal conflict solutions and also consequences. In addition, the questionnaire could also include questions with more opportunities to allow athletes to express themselves.

It would be appropriate to add some further standardized questionnaire to the research focusing on the occurrence of aggression, which would help to determine the aggression of coaches, as well as to test their personality, for athletes and coaches alike. On this basis, it would be possible to identify combinations of risk personality (athlete - coach), which are prone to conflicts in sports training and the aggressive behaviour. It would also be beneficial to detect coach's success in his or her coaching practice, in relation to the level of his or her aggression.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the study, we examined the issue of aggression in interpersonal relations among figure skaters and their coaches. The introductory theoretical part has been discussed for figure skating as a sport that combines sports and artistic expression, the specifics of interpersonal relationship, aggression and the classification.

In the empirical part, we used a questionnaire and with the selected research methods and research sample we got the necessary set of data that we have summarized, analysed and interpreted. Based on evaluation of data, we have answered the first and second research question concerning the frequency of skaters' attitudes to verbal and physical aggression by their coach through the interpersonal conflicts in sports training. We examined the response of the third research question concerning the dependencies between the application of an authoritative approach of a coach in sports training and verbal aggressive behaviour towards athlete in the interpersonal conflict. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, we could not investigate the answer to the fourth question regarding the relationship between the application of an authoritative approach of a coach in sports training and physical aggressive behaviour towards athlete in

the interpersonal conflict. Based on the study, we were also able to give recommendations for further research of these issues.

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