

Coping strategies of student-athletes with different level of emotional burnout

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Abstract

Objective of the study was to reveal the relationship between coping strategies and the level of emotional burnout among student-athletes.

Methods and structure of the study. The following research methods were used: the questionnaire "Emotional burnout" (author V.V. Boyko); method "Coping behavior in stressful situations" (authors S. Norman, D. Endler, D. James, M. Parker, adapted by T.A. Kryukova), method for determining the psychophysical potential of the body (authors G.V. Rudenko, Yu .A. Dubrovskaya, I.V. Bobrov). The study involved 92 2nd-4th year students of St. Petersburg universities aged 19 to 22 who actively participate in sports competitions in swimming and cross-country skiing.

Results and conclusions. A high risk of developing a symptom complex of emotional burnout in student-athletes was determined. Relationships between the used coping strategies and the level of emotional burnout of students are revealed. The results of the study indicate that the mechanisms of coping strategies and stress resistance of an individual are inter-related and affect the adaptive potential of an individual. The use of problem-oriented coping strategies as a mechanism for coping with stressful situations is more effective than the use of "emotionally oriented", "distraction" and "avoidance" coping strategies, which give the individual temporary relief, but are not aimed at eliminating the stressful situation.

Keywords: *coping strategies, emotional burnout, stress, stress factors, stress resistance, behavior patterns.*

Introduction. Modern concepts of emotional burnout interpret it as a multidimensional phenomenon, as a specific form of personality deformation, as a complex of psychological, psychophysiological and behavioral components caused by prolonged stress and adverse reactions to them [3]. Coping with stress is a key mechanism for human adaptation to changing social conditions and requires active, flexible, effective ways of coping. The psychological significance of coping (overcoming mechanism) is to adapt the individual to difficult situations as effectively as possible through mastering, weakening or mitigating the requirements of the situation, thereby reducing the stressful impact of the situation.

In modern psychology, three models of coping behavior of a person are popular. The first model is based on the psychoanalytic tradition of analyzing coping behavior and searching for an effective adaptive response of the individual to stressful situations

(Haan, 1977). The second model (Antsiferova, 1994) interprets coping behavior from the standpoint of personality psychology. In this model, coping mechanisms are relatively stable strategies for coping with the situation, which are greatly influenced by the individual psychological characteristics of the individual [4]. The third, situational model is based on the theoretical principles of cognitive psychology, where copings are considered as strategies for overcoming behavior in a stressful situation, that is, the situation is decisive in considering coping [6]. Each of the models of coping behavior is characterized by certain shortcomings, which creates the need for further research that will expand our understanding of the features of the formation and use of the psychological mechanisms of coping behavior.

As you know, sports activity is associated with many stress factors (increased physical and emotional stress, high training intensity, preparation for



competitions, the desire to win, control of emotions, etc.), which have a negative impact on the results and efficiency of activity [5]. Long-term stress experienced by athletes negatively affects their well-being, performance, social contacts, which can lead to exhaustion of the body, the risk of diseases, and withdrawal from sports [4].

In modern scientific literature, issues related to the influence of adaptation mechanisms on the risk of emotional burnout in athletes remain poorly understood. In this regard, the study of adaptive coping strategies of athletes, the relationship between coping mechanisms and the risk of emotional burnout in them seems relevant.

Objective of the study was to reveal the relationship between coping strategies and the level of emotional burnout among student-athletes.

Methods and structure of the study. The study process was attended by students studying at various faculties of universities in St. Petersburg and actively participating in sports competitions in swimming and skiing. The study covered 92 students aged 19 to 22 (55 boys and 37 girls).

The study of the level of emotional burnout of students was carried out using the questionnaire "Emotional burnout" by V.V. Boyko. According to the concept of V.V. Boyko, emotional burnout is interpreted as "a psychological defense mechanism developed by a person in the form of a complete or partial exclusion of emotions in response to selected psycho-traumatic influences" (Boiko, 1999). The first phase of burnout - the phase of "tension" - "starts the mechanism" of the formation of the symptom complex of emotional burnout, is characterized by dynamics, constancy and increased exposure to psychotraumatic factors. This phase is expressed in the following symptoms: 1) experiencing psycho-traumatic circumstances - a process when events related to studies have a psycho-traumatic effect on the student; 2) dissatisfaction with oneself - a symptom that manifests itself in a sense of one's own insolvency, in a feeling of dissatisfaction with one's specialty, position, work performed; 3) "driven into a cage" - a feeling of hopelessness among students, a state of "intellectual-emotional impasse"; 4) anxiety and depression caused by educational activities [1, 2, 3].

The second phase is "resistance", that is, resistance to the growing influence of psycho-traumatic factors. At this phase, according to V.V. Boyko, the following symptoms appear: 1) selective and inad-

equated emotional response (when an individual has a reduced ability between adequate expression of emotions and inadequate emotional response); 2) emotional and moral disorientation (the inability of the student to show his emotions in time or to show them sufficiently, which manifests itself in some detachment, rudeness and coldness towards people associated with studies); 3) "expansion of the sphere of saving emotions" (expansion of the sphere of emotional indifference beyond professional or educational activities to personal relationships (family, friends, etc.); 4) "reduction of professional duties", that is, removal from duties that require emotional costs.

The third phase - the phase of "exhaustion" - is the final link in the formation of the burnout syndrome. This phase is associated with a decline in the student's physical and moral strength, as well as with a weakening of the nervous system, and is characterized by the following symptoms: 1) "emotional deficit" - lack of compassion, empathy and complicity for other people (especially those associated with study), a rarity of receiving positive emotions, as well as the inability to emotionally support other people; 2) "emotional detachment" - the almost complete removal of emotions from learning activities; 3) "personal detachment (depersonalization)" - dehumanization, complete or partial lack of interest in the problems or requests of other people; 4) "psychosomatic and psychovegetative disorders" - symptoms that adversely affect the psyche and physical condition of the student [3].

Using the methodology "Coping behavior in stressful situations" (S. Norman, D. Endler, D. James, M. Parker, adapted by T.A. Kryukova), coping behavior strategies used by students in difficult and stressful situations were studied. In the methodology, the authors identify five main personality coping strategies: emotionally oriented (aimed at the manifestation of emotions in stressful situations); problem-oriented (associated with solving the problem and changing the current situation); avoidance-oriented (characterized by the denial of the problem); coping strategies of "distraction" (associated with abstracting from the problem and directing one's forces and emotions to another kind of activity); search for social support (aimed at communication with close and surrounding people) [4].

Results of the study and their discussion. With the help of the questionnaire "Emotional burnout" V.V. Boyko calculated the levels of emotional burnout. It



was revealed that only 48.6% of students do not show symptoms of emotional burnout. The other half of the students either have initial symptoms of "burnout", or the symptoms of "burnout" are at the stage of formation. Thus, the "tension" phase with its characteristic anxiety state was formed in 27% of students, in 24.3% of students it is in the formative stage. The phase of "resistance" with the corresponding symptoms was formed in 16.2% of students and is at the stage of formation in 18.9% of students. The final phase of burnout - "exhaustion", with its characteristic symptom complex, was found in 10.8% of students, in 16.0% of students it is in the formative stage.

Since, based on the test indicators [5], the arithmetic mean values of the levels of emotional burnout among students involved in cross-country skiing and swimming are quite close to each other, we divided the entire sample of respondents participating in the study according to the number of points scored into three approximately equal groups - students with high, medium and low levels of emotional burnout.

Using the Pearson correlation coefficient, we analyzed the relationship between the levels of emotional burnout and coping strategies of students.

Students without burnout symptoms are dominated by problem-oriented coping strategies ($R=0.45$, $p \leq 0.05$) and coping strategies seeking social support ($R=0.43$, $p \leq 0.04$), which are characterized by cognitive processing of information, focus on changing situations, communication with others and loved ones.

Students with high and medium levels of emotional burnout are dominated by coping strategies focused on avoidance ($R=0.42$, $p \leq 0.05$) and distraction ($R=0.65$, $p \leq 0.03$), which indicates about their desire to avoid the problem, to abstract from it, to avoid responsibility for its solution. Negative correlations were found between a high level of emotional burnout and coping strategies aimed at seeking social support ($R=-0.42$, $p \leq 0.01$) with a predominance of emotionally-oriented coping strategies ($R=0.36$, $p \leq 0.05$), which are characterized by pronounced manifestations of emotions, thoughts and actions in order to reduce the impact of stress factors. However, such actions give a temporary sense of relief and are not aimed at changing the stressful situation.

Conclusions. Students with a high level of emotional burnout show a tendency to passively adapt to stressful factors of activity and prefer to use emotionally oriented copings, as well as copings focused on

avoiding situations and distracting from them, as coping strategies. Students who do not have symptoms of emotional burnout, and with a low propensity for it in difficult and stressful situations, tend to use problem-oriented coping strategies and social support coping.

Thus, close relationships were found between the stress resistance of a person and the mechanisms of coping used by him: the higher the stress resistance of an athlete, the more often he uses active coping strategies - problem-oriented and the search for social support. In this regard, an important link in the psychological preparation of athletes is the formation and development of proactive coping strategies, effective behavior patterns, and the ability to search for resources to help overcome stressful situations.

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