



Original Article

# The mediating role of fear of negative evaluation in relation to communication patterns and motivation to progress in professional athletes

Farnaz Abhar Zanjani<sup>1</sup>; \*Hassan Touzadeh Jani<sup>2</sup>; Parisa Amani<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Eqbal Institute of Higher Education, Mashhad, Iran.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of psychology, Neyshabur Branch, Islamic Azad University, Neyshabur, Iran.

<sup>3</sup>M.Sc. in Clinical Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Branch of Birjand, Birjand, Iran.

---

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Two of the most important psychological structures that affect the quality of performance of professional athletes are the motivation for progress and the fear of negative evaluation. The current study was conducted to investigate the mediating role of fear of negative evaluation in relation to communication patterns with the motivation for progress of professional athletes.

**Materials and Methods:** The statistical population of this descriptive-correlational study included all professional athletes exercising in sports clubs in Mashhad in 2018. Among them 400 cases were selected. They filled the revised scale of Richie and Fitz Patrick's (1990) communication patterns, the Lori Negative Negative Assessment Fear Questionnaire (1983), and the Hermans Progress Motivation Questionnaire (1970). Data was analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient test and structural equation modeling.

**Results:** The findings indicated that 59% of the variance of the fear of negative evaluation and also 62% of the variance of the motivation for progress are explained by the fear of negative evaluation but communication patterns can directly explain 55% of the variance in the intention of progressing.

**Conclusion:** The results of the present study showed that the fear of negative evaluation has a mediating role in the relationship between communication patterns and motivation of professional athletes. Also, there is a significant relationship between fear of negative evaluation and communication patterns with motivation to progress.

**Keywords:** Athletes, Communication, Fear, Motivation.

---

## Please cite this paper as:

Abhar Zanjani F, Touzadeh Jani H, Amani P. The mediating role of fear of negative evaluation in relation to communication patterns and motivation to progress in professional athletes. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health* 2020 May-Jun; 21(3):163-168.

---

## Introduction

Attention to psychological structures in professional sports has slowly gained a special place in twentieth-century culture, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this slow movement has gained momentum. In the professional sports environment, places and moments are marked

with psychological issues; such as developing psychological activities and interventions in sports clubs, developing psychological research on professional athletes, and creating organization can connect sports with psychology (1). The allocation of part of professional athletes' time to engage in

---

## \*Corresponding Author:

Department of psychology, Neyshabur Branch,  
Islamic Azad University, Neyshabur, Iran.  
h.touzandehjani@ymail.com

Received: Dec. 01, 2019

Accepted: Mar. 25, 2020

psychological activities and interventions in recent years shows that professional sports managers pay more attention to mental health in the athletic abilities and achievements of professional athletes in the professional era and the specialization of sports (2).

One of the essential effective psychological structures on the quality of performance of professional athletes is the motivation for progress. Today, motivation for progress has become one of the exciting topics of healthcare in sports. There are increasing number of studies which report and review the relationship between achievement motivation and athletic self-efficacy, potential development motivation to prevent fear of failure, and its role in dealing with environmental pressures (3). In the recent years, the motivation for progress as one of the significant and influential variables on professional athletes' behavior and mental states has attracted the attention of many behavioral scientists as far as some have identified motivation as a critical factor in the success of athletes (4).

One of the factors that affect people's motivation for progress is the family communication patterns in which the person has grown. In the family, human grows physically and mentally, learns how to speak, learns the basic norms of social behavior, learns basic ideas about the world, and finally, his/her attitudes, morals, and spirits are formed, and in other words, they socialize. Thus, the patterns of communication that a person can socialize in the family have an essential effect on the development of social motivations and his development in adulthood (5).

Another factor that affects people's motivation for progress is the fear of negative evaluation. Fear of negative evaluation by catastrophizing how others evaluate him/her and his/her abilities determines how a person deals with the challenges of the outside world, past, and future and causes symptoms such as rumination, pessimistic predictions, and concerns about the future (6). Fear of negative evaluation of others or social evaluation is an essential factor in causing anxiety in professional athletes. People concerned about the negative evaluation of others believe that when they are in a situation where they may make a mistake or fail, their negative evaluation begins, and their performance weakens. They may also avoid being in social situations because they are more likely to be vulnerable (7). However, how much

people trust, and care for their abilities is related to how they feel about evaluating others about themselves (8).

Alan Carr, in a study entitled "the relationship between healthy communication patterns on increasing emotional response capability and motivation for progress", found that families with desirable patterns solve problems on schedule and grading differently; these families avoid drying and blocking of interactive processes in the family. In such families, conflict and argument are positively assessed because they reinforce developmental processes, and their children can respond emotionally and are more motivated to progress (9). Frost (10) hypothesized that focusing on mistakes and the possibility of negative social evaluation may cause athletes to lose focus on task-related behavior immediately after a professional competition. In other words, the lack of focus ultimately leads to a cessation of performance level, and given the flawless performance in sports, it is rare for professional athletes with perfectionism to be satisfied with their performance or consider themselves as a failure. Therefore, the fear of negative evaluation, which is itself influenced by communication patterns, can motivate people's progress (11). According to the above, although various studies have pointed out the importance of motivation for progress and its effects on athletes' psychological state, so far in Iran, research has not examined the mediating role of fear of negative evaluation of communication patterns with the motivation of professional athletes. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the mediating role of fear of negative evaluation about communication patterns with the motivation of professional athletes.

### Materials and Methods

In the present study, according to Morgan's table, 400 cases among 700 professional athletes working in sports clubs of Mashhad city (the second populous city of Iran) in 2018 and interested in participating in the research were selected by using the convenient sampling method. The inclusion criteria included doing at least six months of professional sports, and the exclusion criteria included the physical disability and incurable diseases. After selecting the members, they consented verbally and written to participate in the research. The questionnaires were administered individually, and it was

explained to the subjects that the information in the questionnaire would be completely confidential.

Research instrument

A) *The Revised Scale of Richie and Fitz Patrick's Communication Patterns (1990)*: In this scale, participants read 26 items related to family communication and determine to what extent each sentence applies to them. This scale includes two dimensions of dialogue (the first 15 words "My parents encourage me to express my feelings") and empathy (the following 11 words "My parents often say something like that: my opinion is correct and you should not argue about it"). This tool measures family relationships in a range of 5 points from completely similar (5 points) to completely different (1 point) (12). Koorosh Nia reported the Persian version of the narrative scale as desirable and reported the Cronbach's alpha for the direction of dialogue and conformity are 0.87 and 0.81, respectively (13).

B) *Hermans Progress Motivation Questionnaire (1970)*: Hermans created the questionnaire in 1970 based on existing theoretical and empirical knowledge about the motivation for progress and examining relevant research in this field. The questionnaire has 29 questions. The questionnaire questions are in the form of incomplete sentences, that there are several options after each sentence. To unify the value of the questions, four options are written for every 29 questions of the questionnaire. These options are scored based on whether academic motivation is from high to low or vice versa. Some questions are graded positively, and some others are negative. In questions 1, 4, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 20, 23, 27, 28, and 29, selecting A1, selecting B2, selecting C3, and selecting D4, and answering questions 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 25 and 26 are given to A4 to B3, C2 and Dall 1 and the range Grade changes range from 29 to 116. The psychometric properties of this questionnaire in Iranian population reported acceptable ( $\alpha= 0.80$ ) (14).

C) *Lori Negative Evaluation Questionnaire (1983)*: The purpose of the Negative Assessment Fear Questionnaire is to measure people's fear of negative assessment (experienced anxiety). The abridged version of the fear scale of negative assessment has 12 questions that can measure people's experienced anxiety or negative assessment. In the study of Gravand et al. (2011), the results of exploratory factor analysis using

obligation rotation showed that the short version of the scale of fear of negative evaluation consists of two factors. A significant correlation between the overall score and subscales of fear of negative evaluation with subscales and the overall score of the Interpersonal Difficulties and Social Anxiety Scale of Adolescents confirmed the convergent trend of BFNE. Cronbach's alpha coefficients and retesting coefficients with a distance (two weeks) of the overall score and BFNE scales showed that this scale has acceptable reliability. Cronbach's alpha ratios for the overall score, BFNE, and the subscales of the positive scores and the negative scores, respectively, are 0.80, 0.82, 0.81, and the retrospective coefficients (two weeks) for the overall score, BFNE And the subscales were found to be between 0.77 and 0.79 (15). Data analyzed through descriptive tests, Pearson correlation coefficient, and LISREL statistical software.

Results

The sample group of the present study included 400 professional athletes working in the sports clubs of Mashhad, and the research questionnaires were performed on them. At this stage, the demographic information of the sample members is examined. The study's average age in the study is 24.93 years, and their age range is from 18 to 32 years.

Table 1. Frequent distribution of exercise for exemplary members

Sports	cumulative frequency	Percentage frequency	frequency
Swim	9.5	9.5	38
Volleyball	29.5	20.0	80
body building	70.0	40.5	162
Soccer	96.0	26.0	104
Track and Field	100.0	4.0	16
Male	57.0	57.0	228
Female	100.0	43.0	172

Table 2. Descriptive indicators

Variable	N	SD	M
Dialogue	400	7.77603	33.6400
Symphony	400	7.71873	26.0875
Fear of negative evaluation	400	11.22295	41.5725
Motivation for progress	400	12.02007	62.8150

**Table 3.** Parameters of the research measurement model in the confirmatory factor analysis

Hidden variables-indicator	P	SE	$\beta$	b
Dialogue	2.09	0.041	0.49	1.82
Symphony	1.77	0.032	0.44	2.04

As Table 3 shows, the standard operating loads of all markers are higher than 0.32. According to Tabachnik and Fidell, operating loads are less than 0.32 weak. Moreover, it can be said that such markers do not have the necessary power to

measure their latent variable, and the highest load is a factor belonging to dialogue ( $\beta= 0.49$ ), and the lowest load is a factor related to counteraction ( $\beta= 0.44$ ). Based on the above table results, it can be said that all indicators have the necessary capability to measure the latent variable of psychosocial factors. The Table 4 shows a significant direct relationship between the communication model and the motivation for progress, and also, there is a significant relationship between the communication pattern and the motivation to progress.

**Table 4.** Correlation between research variables Pearson correlation coefficients

Variables	Pearson correlation coefficients			
	1	2	3	4
1-Communication pattern of dialogue	1.00			
2-Conformity pattern	*0.38	1.00		
3-Fear of negative evaluation	0.35-**	0.33-**	1.00	
4-Motivation to progress	**0.50	**0.34	0.52-**	1.00

## Discussion

This goal-oriented research was designed and implemented in a descriptive-correlational way in which the mediating role of fear of negative evaluation about communication patterns was motivated by the motivation of professional athletes.

The present study results showed that the mediating role of fear of negative evaluation about communication patterns with the motivation of athletes' progress is significant and has a flattering fit. Therefore, it can be concluded that the fear of negative evaluation is the mediator between communication patterns and motivation of professional athletes. Therefore, the central research hypothesis is confirmed. These findings are consistent with the findings of Carreiras (16), Sapina et al. (17), and Falconer, King, and Berwin (18). The relationship between communication patterns and motivation has been noted to be consistent.

In terms of social assessments and environmental impacts, the characteristics of perfectionism lead to the person perceive the environment as threatening. Such interpretation of the environment can impose a feeling of fear and grave concern, negative thoughts and perception of failure, and insufficiency perception on the athlete, and it may fail (19,20). The professional athletes who are frightened of negative evaluation cannot compete with competing sports situations in which they feel inexperienced or perceive a

significant difference between their ability and others. They are faced with the task and use the avoidance mechanism. This self-avoidance paves the way for a tendency to isolate and prepare for dysfunctional coping styles and withdraw and reduce these individuals' expression, which in turn leads to a decline in motivation (21). In contrast, high tolerance for negative evaluation causes professional athletes to use creative problem-solving methods to cope with the tasks and problems of professional sports, and to turn problems and tasks into opportunities for growth and self-expression, so professional athletes experience less stress and subsequently show more expression and motivation for higher progress (22). According to Gilbert's theory of social development (23), appropriate communication patterns in the family, by eliminating the fear of negative evaluation and improving people's self-concept, cause them to use every moment of their lives to achieve the desired progress. Obstacles to progress should be kept away. Research literature shows that motivation for progress is related to people's perceptions of having a good self-concept and satisfactory progress in this self-concept (24). Feeling ready for the tasks of professional sports, which determine the motivation for progress, depends on one's view about oneself and one's abilities. Also, this view depends on the quality of family communication, as individuals, especially in adolescence and youth, attach great importance



to the family's view and position in the family. In other words, one's view about oneself which determine the fear of negative evaluation is rooted in the family and affects the sense of readiness for the tasks of professional sports that determine the motivation for progress. Good communication patterns in the family make a person experience the desired self-confidence in the face of the problems and tasks of professional sports and be able to show more expression and courage and show the motivation for high progress. Therefore, it is predictable that the fear of negative evaluation will be mediated between communication patterns and motivation of professional athletes (24). Limited cases to a specific geographical area and the sampling method are some limitations of this study.

To increase the motivation of professional athletes, it is suggested that some training programs for coaches are provided.

### Conclusion

The results of the present study showed that the fear of negative evaluation has a mediating role in the relationship between communication patterns and motivation of professional athletes. Also, there is a significant relationship between fear of negative evaluation and communication patterns with motivation to progress.

### Acknowledgement

The authors thank all athletes who participated in this research. They also declare any conflict of interests and financial support.

### References

1. Bergeron DP. The relationship between body image dissatisfaction and psychological health: An exploration of body image in young adult men. Ohio: Ohio State University; 2014: 55-59.
2. Bethany B, Lorne C. Adult attachment, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction: A study of married couples. *Personal Relationships* 2018; 15(1): 141-54.
3. Falconer CJ, King JA, Brewin CR. Demonstrating mood repair with a situation-based measure of self-compassion and self-criticism. *Psychol Psychother* 2015; 88(4): 351-65.
4. Epstein NB, Ryan CE, Bishop DS, Miller IW, Keitner GI. The McMaster model: A view of healthy family functioning. In: Walsh F. (editors). *Normal family processes*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Guilford Press; 2010: 581-607.
5. Gilbert P, Clarke M, Hempel S, Miles JNV, Irons C. Criticizing and reassuring oneself: an exploration of forms, styles and reasons in female students. *Br J Clin Psychol* 2004; 43: 31-50.
6. Marin KA, Bohanek JG, Fivush R. Positive effect of talking about the negative: Family narrative of negative experiences and preadolescents' perceived competence. *J Res Adolesc* 2008; 18: 573-93.
7. Thompson T. Self-worth protection in achievement behavior: A review and implications for counseling. *Aust J Psychol* 2004; 31: 41-51.
8. Ryan RM, Brown KW. Why we don't need self-esteem: On fundamental needs, contingent love, and mindfulness. *Psychol Inq* 2013; 14: 27-82.
9. Kar A. [Positive psychology (the science of happiness and its forces)]. Pasha Sharifi H, Najafi J. (translators). Tehran: Sokhan; 2016. (Persian)
10. Frost RO, Marten P, Lahart C, Rosenbalt R. Dimensions of perfectionism. *Cogn Ther Res* 2018; 14: 449-68
11. Yamaguchi S, Greenwald AG, Banaji MR, Murakami F, Chen D, Shiomura K, et al. Apparent universality of positive implicit self-esteem. *Psychol Sci* 2014; 18: 498-500.
12. Ritchie LD, Fitzpatrick MA. Family communication patterns: Measuring intrapersonal perceptions of interpersonal relationships. *Commun Res* 1990; 17(4): 523-44.
13. Koorosh Nia M, Latifian M. [Assessment the validity and reliability of the Revised Scale of Communication Patterns]. *Quarterly journal of family research* 2007; 12: 855-75. (Persian)
14. Akbari B. [Validity and reliability of Hermans Progress Motivation Questionnaire in high school students of Guilan province]. *Research in education planning* 2007; 21: 73-96. (Persian)
15. Garavand F, Shokri O, Khodaei A, Omaraei M, Toolabi S. [Normalizing, validity and reliability of the short form of fear of negative evaluation questionnaire in adolescents aged 12-18 years in Tehran city]. *Psychological studies* 2011; 7(1): 65-95. (Persian)
16. Carreiras D. The toxicity of the self: Developing a new measure and testing a comprehensive model of the nature of self-disgust. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Coimbra, 2014.
17. Sapina M, Widmer ED, Iglesias K. From support to overload: Patterns of positive and negative family relationships of adults with mental illness over time. *Soc Networks* 2016; 47: 59-72.
18. Falconer CJ, King JA, Brewin CR. Demonstrating mood repair with a situation-based measure of self-compassion and self-criticism. *Psychol Psychother* 2015; 88(4): 351-65.

19. Lipton MF, Qasimeh N, Racz SJ, Weeks JW, De Los Reyes A. The Fears of Evaluation about Performance (FEAP) Task: Inducing anxiety-related responses to direct exposure to negative and positive evaluations. *Behav Ther* 2020; 51(6): 843-55.
20. Kuipers J, Henrichs J, Evan K. A comparison of the fear of childbirth scale with the Tilburg pregnancy distress scale to identify childbirth-related fear in a sample of Dutch pregnant women: a diagnostic accuracy comparative cross-sectional study. *Int J Nurs Stud* 2020; 109: 103615.
21. Labuhn AS, Zimmerman BJ, Hasselhorn M. Enhancing students' self-regulation and mathematics performance: The influence of feedback and self-evaluative standards. *Metacogn Learn* 2010; 5(2): 173-94.
22. Duarte C, Stubbs J, Pinto-Gouveia J, Matos M, Gale C, Morris L, et al. The impact of self-criticism and self-reassurance on weight-related affect and well-being in participants of a commercial weight management program. *Obes Facts* 2017; 10(2): 65-75
23. Gilbert P, Clarke M, Hempel S, Miles JNV, Irons C. Criticizing and reassuring oneself: an exploration of forms, styles and reasons in female students. *Br J Clin Psychol* 2014; 43(Pt1): 31-50.
24. Cox WM, Klinger E. *Handbook of motivational counseling: Goal-based approaches to assessment and intervention with addiction and other problems*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: John Wiley and sons; 2019.