

Research on the Correlation Between Life Satisfaction and Physical Health of Retired Female Athletes

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Abstract: This review article focuses on the correlation between life satisfaction and physical health among retired female athletes during their post-career life. Combining a thorough literature review, this article highlights growth factors relevant to life satisfaction and physical health after retirement. Research findings reveal that this association is quite intricate, and psychological, behavioral, and social factors all play major roles in influencing these elements. However, understanding this relationship is very important for the health of retired female athletes. The findings underline the significance of goal-oriented policies that should be used to help female athletes adapt to retired life and maintain, or even improve, their quality of life. Nevertheless, further efforts must be made to fill the gaps in this research review and construct better strategies for the optimization of retirement benefits offered to retired female athletes.
Keywords: Retired Female Athletes, Life Satisfaction, Physical Health.

1. INTRODUCTION

The demographic of retired female athletes is in itself unique. Thus, after active sports participation and then proceeding into retirement, there may be both opportunities and challenges lying ahead. The importance of life satisfaction is increasingly acknowledged in sports science nowadays; therefore, it is necessary to understand the relationship between life satisfaction and the physical health of retired employees. The most prominent examples of this include female athletes who, in comparison to their male counterparts, have gone through different processes and challenges upon their retirement and hence, require special attention regarding their life following sports. Life satisfaction and physical health

are some of the most important factors when talking about retirements, which in turn affect the standard of living and lifelong health of former athletes. Nevertheless, these issues among retired women athletes are focused only on a small pool of research. This review article aims to fill the gap of the existing ones by producing an idea that can serve as a guide to most of these problems. This review explores the link between adapting life satisfaction and health after retirement by studying the various factors that impact these elements. Understanding this relation is vital for giving the basis for planning effective intervention procedures that will lead retired female athletes to a healthy post-retirement life. This review article intends to enhance the understanding of the diversified nature of life satisfaction and physical health outcomes in retirement among female sportspeople, stressing the importance of this uncovered theme. The paper will focus on relevant studies and the correlation between life satisfaction and physical health while hinting at the management strategies for improving the overall improvement of these subjects.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Retired women athletes most notably face some distinct challenges within their transition to post-sport life. Studies have shown that self-identity and physical appearance play major roles in this stage (Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Senior sportswomen are usually seen to retire at the age of adolescence. However, this is the crucial phase of identity growth and maturation of their body. The retirement of these players tends to have a "pervasive effect" on their normal lives as they must often cope with considerable variations in their pre and post-transition environments (Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). This transition might be difficult as the retired females will have to explore new ways of trying to maintain their health and satisfaction levels (Horton et al., 2018). Many studies have pointed out that regular exercise and sports participation give older women the emotional feeling of meaning, interaction, and better physical and mental health (Horton et al., 2018), as shown in Figure 1. Nonetheless, retired female athletes are more likely to encounter specific obstacles that can hinder them from actively living healthy lives, such as the loss of their athletic identity and the physical changes that accompany the natural process of aging. Something must be done to tackle this problem and to ensure the life satisfaction and physical health of retired female players after spending their lives doing competitive sports.

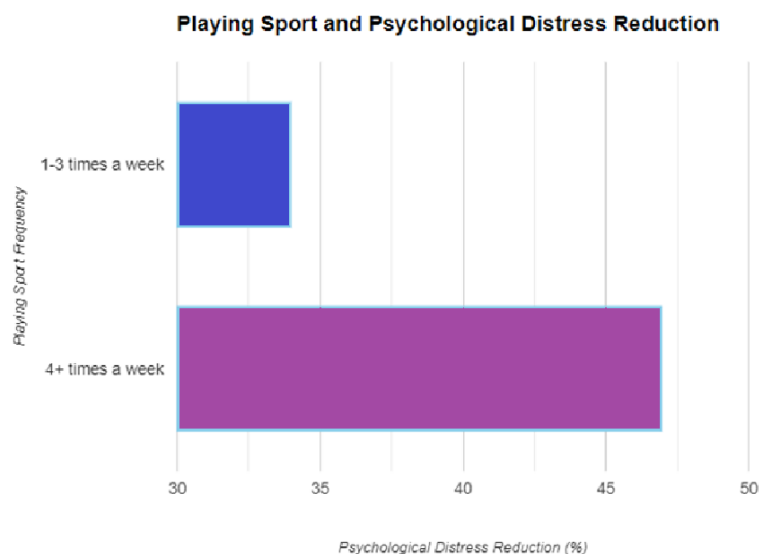


Figure 1: Relationship Between Playing Sports and Stress

Research has revealed that female former athletes, in particular, are prone to several challenges that threaten their physical and emotional well-being. After reviewing the findings in past studies, factors like the adaption to a new identity, physical health, and the finding of fulfillment outside the sport are key elements for gaining life satisfaction for retired female athletes. One study examining the retirement of retired sportswomen showed that the loss of the athletic identity and the physical self was a hard obstacle that made these athletes feel less secure about their personality and worth (Zhu, 2023). Moreover, satisfaction among the women who are still active, as well as athletes who have retired, has proved that the capacity to manage stress and maintain relationships are the principal factors that determine the life satisfaction of retired athletes. Another study on the after-career problems of Chinese senior female athletes discovered that a majority of them underwent a period of low-status recognition, self-evaluation, life satisfaction, and interpersonal communication while larger anxiety and lonesomeness were found (Zhu, 2023). This underlines the fact that one has to concentrate on the psychological and social emphasis of retired female athletes to improve their level of satisfaction during their retirement period.

3. STUDYING THE PHYSICAL HEALTH OF RETIRED FEMALE ATHLETES

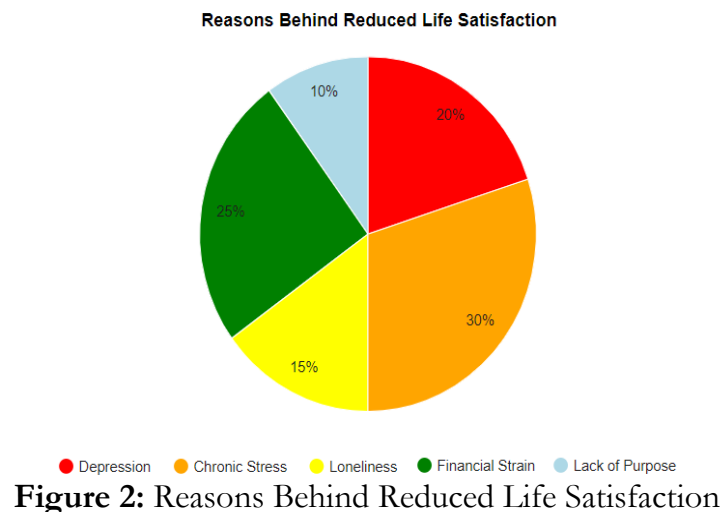
A study found that the physically healthy advantages of playing sports for older women are determined by the flexible activities, as they are able to participate in different sports irrespective of their level of physical

abilities (Jenkin et al., 2018). One study stressed that the most significant positive effects of sport for these women were social health and physical health, as well as mental health (Jenkin et al., 2018). The influence of these physical activities and body image on sportswomen, especially those participating in activities placing a high level of importance on appearance and fitness, defines them to receive psychological help from professionals to overcome the negative consequences that may follow from too much focus on their body image (Mosur-Kaluza & Guskowska, 2015). Only limited literature is available related to the effects of retirement on the physical well-being of former female athletes. However, recently some relevant research has explored the elements that impact the physical health of retired female athletes. Research related to the connection between body image and physical activity in female athletes reveals that women engaged in leisure sports are likely to have a much more positive body image in contrast to those who compete professionally (Mosur-Kaluza & Guskowska, 2015). Therefore, the severity of the input and the competition among athletes during their training might hinder their physical and mental health status after retirement. Another study that analyzed the factors that affect physical activity in elderly white women found that walking for exercise was associated with better health behaviors (Walsh et al., 2001). This evidence suggests that keeping a regular moderate-level physical activity training routine may be beneficial for the long-term physical health of retired female athletes. Furthermore, a study revealed the gap in knowledge regarding the effects of pregnancy and postpartum on the life and performance of both pro and recreational female athletes (Santos-Rocha & Szumilewicz, 2024). This indicated that the elements associated especially with family planning and delivery may also influence the physical health of retired female sports persons.

4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFE SATISFACTION AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Various studies have shown the positive impact of satisfaction on physical health, especially among adults and older demographics. A study on older women showed that the level of physical activity was significantly correlated with the degree of health status (Sigmund et al., 2014). Moreover, another research on satisfaction among university students revealed that an active lifestyle and physical activity are associated with life satisfaction, health, self-evaluation, and overall better quality of life

(Klaghofer et al., 2011). In addition, research has shown that depression and chronic stress may be the reasons behind the reduction in life satisfaction (Klaghofer et al., 2011). This finding indicates that the health of the body and an active way of life can be vital factors in increasing life satisfaction, particularly for older adults and those prone to mental health issues. In particular, the research points to the existence of a strong association between mental and physical well-being (Figure 2).



The physical health of retired female athletes being interwoven with life satisfaction can be understood by studying a complex mechanism that involves multiple factors.

4.1 Psychological factors

Studies have shown that the ability of athletes to deal with stress, which had been developed throughout years of training and competing, turns out to be important for maintaining high levels of satisfaction and well-being (Lewandowska et al., 2017). Along with social relationships, the importance of social relationships has also been highlighted as a fundamental factor in the psychological well-being of retired athletes (Lewandowska et al., 2017). The interconnections of several motivational factors, as well as those linked to the participation of female athletes in institutional sports, may have an impact on their life satisfaction after retiring (Pacheco et al., 2012). Additionally, the successful overcoming of age-related and career-related crises in sports may result in the improvement of the psychological and physiological indices of athletes as well (Kuznetsov et al., 2020).

4.2 Behavioral factors

Social relationships have been proven to be one of the major factors in

maintaining the subjective well-being of retired female athletes (Lewandowska et al., 2017). Former athletes who continue with exercise and participate in physical activities tend to be happier in life and achieve a higher level of satisfaction (Kang & Bae, 2020). This implies that the ability to continue the adaptation of the transitional life process of retirement, including physical and social activities, should be considered an important one for the overall well-being of retired female athletes (Kang & Bae, 2020). Furthermore, studies have revealed that taking care of one's well-being through regular exercising and proper nutrition helps improve both physical health and the level of enjoyment for retired athletes (Bendikova & Bartík, 2015).

4.3 Social factors

Previous research has shown that social relations and social inclusion through sports recreation are one of the key determinants of healthy lifestyles among elderly sportspeople (Bendikova & Bartík, 2015). Particularly, proper social connection, as well as physical activity, seem to be the most important factors in ensuring that both active and retired athletes have a sufficient feeling of happiness and general well-being (Lewandowska et al., 2017). In the context of sports participation, the physical health benefits, like flexibility and the possibility to exert different levels of intensity, can be among the important contributors to life satisfaction in the post-sport life of retired female athletes (Jenkin et al., 2018). The social, mental, and physical factors interplay complicates the existence of the relationship between physical health and life satisfaction among retired sportswomen (Jenkin et al., 2018). Furthermore, studies have also suggested a number of different influential factors that can mediate the relationship between life satisfaction and physical health in retired female athletes.

4.4 Age

Age is directly related to less social engagement and less physical activity, which can cause a loss of self-esteem and thus, a decrease in mental satisfaction (Kim & Lee, 2016). However, it also means that physical activity done after retirement can be important for the improvement of life satisfaction among older people (Kang & Bae, 2020). Additionally, it has also been evidenced that psychological well-being plays an important role in the relationship between participation in physical activities and the quality of life among retired athletes (Kim & Lee, 2016). The role and

significance of sports participation as a part of older women's lives, including retired female athletes, is also important to consider (Horton et al., 2018). For older adults, both regular activities and positive attitudes toward life could be crucial for sustaining mental health and physical well-being (Bendikova & Bartík, 2015).

4.5 Socioeconomic status

The findings from the research indicate the presence of a close relationship between socioeconomic status and the physical health of a person, where low socioeconomic status often means poorer health (Hart-Johnson, 1997). Furthermore, other studies have established that social relationships are important for the emotional and psychological states of both former and active athletes (Lewandowska et al., 2017). Lower socioeconomic women will face even more obstacles for regular physical activity and thus, to be able to remain healthy in their retirement. The social factor has also been known as an equally effective moderator with stronger social relationships, leading to higher well-being in both active as well as retired athletes (Lewandowska et al., 2017). Aspects like self-esteem and psychological attitude towards physical activity are some other factors at play, where increased self-esteem is associated with more involvement in physical activity (Kim & Lee, 2016). The main point of this factor is to uncover the complex connections of these moderators, which will lead to increasing life satisfaction and physical health of retired female athletes. Moreover, personal factors such as self-esteem and participation in physical activities can also influence the future of the physical health of older women (Kim & Lee, 2016).

4.6 Type of sport

The type of game that the retired athletes in question play has also been shown to be an important variable moderating the relationship between their life satisfaction and health (Figure 3). Studies have revealed that the structure of the sports discipline can shape the satisfaction and well-being of professionals during active as well as post-career life (Kang & Bae, 2020). Moreover, self-confidence and attitude are also found to be influential in contributing to the active engagement of older women in physical activity regularly, which may result in improved life quality and physical well-being (Vaughn, 2004). Furthermore, community support networks and access to the specialized healthcare services provided for players of that sport are also some components necessary to improving the

health and long-term welfare of retired female athletes.

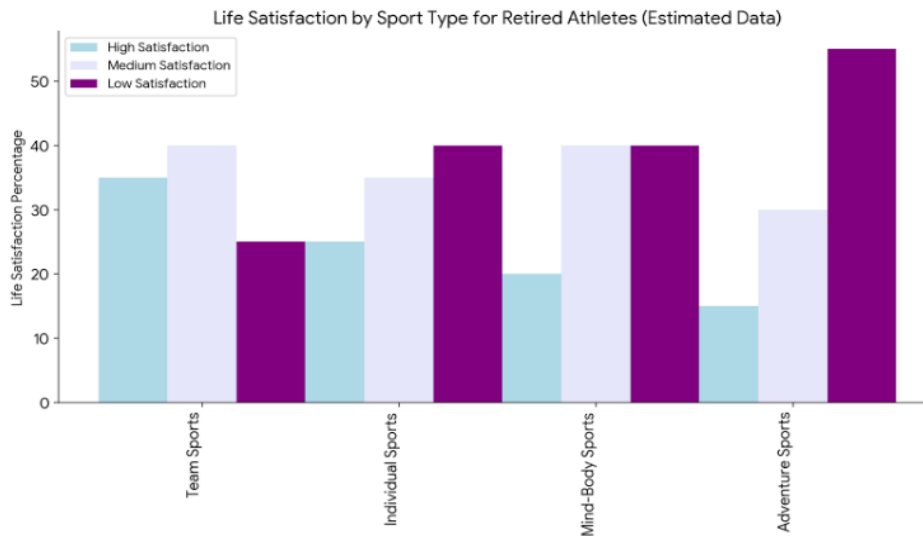


Figure 3: Relationship Between Life Satisfaction and Different Types of Sports

This demonstrates the significance of a holistic approach to their care beyond their careers. The spirit and purpose of sports in the lives of older women, including former female athletes, is multifaceted and shaped by dominant cultural narratives about aging, gender, and health (Horton et al., 2018).

5. CONCLUSION

This review article has explored the relationship between life satisfaction and the physical health of retired female athletes. The study of multiple research papers and articles has revealed the multifarious dimensions of the link between these two factors, highlighting the influence of mental, psychological, and social factors. The importance of recognizing the link present between life satisfaction and physical health of former women players cannot be overemphasized as it will inform direct interventions and support programs for them during and after their transition into the retirement phase. The insights and findings provided by this review reinforce the importance of intensified research in this area, as well as individualized strategies to respond to the unique situations and challenges experienced by former female athletes. Further research in the future needs to address more deeply the underlying mechanisms of the relationship as well as take into consideration the effect of time by conducting longitudinal studies. Also, evidence-based interventions should be developed, the purpose of which is to improve the overall quality of life for this population. This will allow the increase in our knowledge of the specificities

of the processes to help take better care of the overall health of the retired female athletes and help them perform the post-career transition process better.

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